

CAO GIA AN

JOB'S WISDOM

WHEN ETHICS AND AESTHETICS COLLIDE

PEETERS

JOB'S WISDOM

ANALECTA BIBLICA – DISSERTATIONES

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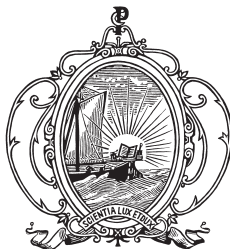
ANALECTA BIBLICA – DISSERTATIONES 243

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WHEN ETHICS AND AESTHETICS COLLIDE

by

CAO GIA AN



PEETERS

LEUVEN – PARIS – BRISTOL, CT

2025

*Vidimus et approbamus ad normam Statutorum
Pontificii Instituti Biblici de Urbe*

*Romae, die 10 mensis decembris anni 2024
Prof. R.P. Michael F. KOLARCIK, S.J.
Prof. R.P. Dominik MARKL, S.J.*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-90-429-5556-1
eISBN 978-90-429-5557-8

doi: 10.2143/9789042955578

D/2025/0602/36

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PREFACE

My grandmother had three sons. Two of them were killed during the civil war between the South and the North of Vietnam. The third one fled to a remote and mountainous area when the Communist North conquered the country. There he lived a life of seclusion and anonymity. Three years later, he was assassinated during the Communist revenge campaign, as he and his family had finished Sunday Mass and were returning home by motorcycle. A bullet went through the body of his first daughter, who was sitting in front of him, pierced his chest and injured his second daughter, who was seated behind him.

My grandmother accepted all that happened with extraordinary calm. No complaints or blame escaped her mouth. Nor did she charge God with any wrongdoing. When someone in the family mentioned these calamities, she would reply: “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord”. As such, my grandmother was an exceptional model for us to live our faith in the midst of suffering and loss.

It happened only in the last three months of her life, when she could no longer move and had to lie down in the hospital bed, that my grandmother began to lament. Only then did she address God directly, blaming God for the death of her beloved sons. She passed away in sorrow and mourning. The entire family were shocked by this complete transformation of her character. It seems that in the last stage of her life she had to live with what she had not dared to live with before. Had my grandmother had the occasion to face the losses in her life sooner and be sincere with the pain in her heart, perhaps she would have been more at peace with God in her last hours.

As I began the journey of biblical study, I recognised my grandmother’s story in the story of Job. I often have asked myself what could and should be an appropriate attitude of a pious and righteous sufferer before God. After exploring this question in my licentiate thesis on the subject “La Contestazione di un Mortale”, an exegesis of chapter 14 in the Book of Job, I decided to continue my research on the final stance of Job, the pious sufferer, the biblical Everyman.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a slightly revised version of my doctoral dissertation at the Pontifical Biblical Institute. For being able to complete this work, I owe a debt of profound gratitude to many people.

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to Rev. Fr. Michael Kolarcik, S.J., supervisor of my doctoral thesis, for his constant guidance and help, as well as for his unfailing patience and utmost care for me. Special thanks go to Professor Dominik Markl, S.J., second reader of my thesis, who has been both a critic and friend to me. I also thank the two other stimulating members of my doctoral defence committee, Professor Benedetta Rossi and Professor Nuria Caldich-Benages, whose comments and suggestions were of great help to me in improving my work.

Special mention should be made of Fr. Michael Mullaney, President of St. Patrick's College, the Maynooth College community, as well as the Jesuit community on Gardiner Street, in Dublin, who welcomed and sponsored my two semesters of research at Maynooth University. My deep gratitude goes to Fr. Thomas Carrol, S.J., Fr. Martin X. Moleski, S.J., and Fr. Robert Althann, S.J., who spent their time proofreading the English text of my dissertation.

My intellectual journey in Rome, which included two years of work at Vatican Radio, three years of theological training at the Gregorian University, and then both the licentiate and doctorate at the Biblicum, would not have been possible without the spiritual and financial support I received from the Interprovincial Roman Houses and Works of the Society of Jesus (DIR). I am grateful to my Jesuit superiors and companions in the communities of San Pietro Canisio, Collegio Internazionale del Gesù, and especially the community of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, who have given me unceasing encouragement.

I am grateful to my superiors of the Jesuit Province in Vietnam, who trusted me and sent me to Rome for biblical studies. I am also grateful to many of my friends both in Vietnam and in the various Vietnamese communities in Europe, whose expectations have been my motivation and whose constant prayers my strength.

Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to my family, to my grandparents for their examples in life and faith, to my parents for their love and sacrifice, to my brothers and sisters who are always there for me. This book is dedicated to them with much love and gratitude.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAJR	American Academy for Jewish Research
AARCRS	The American Academy of Religion. Classics in Religious Studies
AARSR	American Academy of Religion. Studies in Religion
AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ABR</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ACCSOT	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament
<i>AJ</i>	<i>The Asbury Journal</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATM	Altes Testament und Moderne
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDB	Brown, F. – Driver, S. – Briggs, C., <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford 1962)
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BiBi	Biblioteca Biblica
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
<i>BibSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BMW	The Bible in the Modern World
<i>BR</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAT	Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBSC	The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina
<i>CJT</i>	<i>Canadian Journal of Theology</i>
ComBib	Commenti Biblici
<i>Conc</i>	<i>Concilium. Revue internationale de Théologie</i>

<i>ConJud</i>	<i>Conservative Judaism</i>
CSHB	Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible
<i>CTR</i>	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
DTV	Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag
<i>ExAu</i>	<i>Ex Auditu</i>
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by Emil Kautzsch. Translated by Arther E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.
<i>Greg</i>	<i>Gregorianum</i>
<i>GTJ</i>	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HBMS	Hebrew Bible Monographs Series
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HCEUSA</i>	<i>Health Care Ethics USA</i>
<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>The Heythrop Journal</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>IntB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Bible</i>
<i>ITQ</i>	<i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i>
IVBS	International Voices in Biblical Studies
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JATS</i>	<i>Journal of the Adventist Theological Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JC</i>	<i>Journal of Creation</i>
<i>JETHS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSem</i>	<i>Journal for Semitics</i> . <i>Tidskrift vir Semistiek</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Old Testament</i>

JSOTS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTAK	<i>Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa</i>
JTSA	Jewish Theological Seminary of America
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KHKAT	Kurzer Hand-Kommentar zum Alten Testament
LR	Le Livre et le Rouleau
LTh	<i>Literature and Theology</i>
NAC	The New American Commentary
NCB	The New Century Bible
NCBC	The New Century Bible Commentary
NIB	New Interpreter's Bible
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
PIBA	<i>Proceedings of Irish Biblical Association</i>
PSB	<i>Princeton Seminary Bulletin</i>
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RevExp	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RTR	<i>The Reform Theological Review</i>
SB	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBLit	Studies in Biblical Literature
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature. Resources for Biblical Study
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature. Semeia Studies
SHBC	Smyth – Helwys Bible Commentary
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SR	<i>Studies in Religion</i>
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
SubBi	Subsidia Biblica
SwJT	<i>Southwestern Journal of Theology</i>
TBT	<i>The Bible Today</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006
THB	Text of the Hebrew Bible
ThTo	<i>Theology Today</i>

<i>ThWAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> . Edited by George W. Anderson, G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Stuttgart 1973-2016
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by Ernst Jenni, with assistance from Claus Westermann. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
<i>VE</i>	<i>Verbum et Ecclesia</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VT.S	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>W&W</i>	<i>Word and World</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WBCom	Westminster Bible Companion
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>WO</i>	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
WSPhL	Warwick Studies in Philosophy and Literature
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theology Journal</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

INTRODUCTION

This book aims to offer a contextual and literary reading of the final poem of the book of Job (42:1-6). It is not unusual to read a book, as it were, from the end to its beginning. In a book in which “a narrative world evolves within the structuration of the diverse speech-acts”,¹ such as the book of Job, an interpretive process of not only reading but also re-reading is necessary. The final poem of the book of Job, in fact, deserves to be considered an essential key for this interpretive process, a key without which the understanding about the protagonist and the meaning of the book remains distorted and obscured. Understanding the meaning of this poem, however, still remains a daunting challenge. Characterised not only by brevity but also by a striking ambiguity, the poem challenges any attempt to simplify it, i.e., to compel the text to say only one thing or to subtract all of the possibilities of understanding except one.²

There have been various attempts at articulating Job’s ultimate stance as presented in the final poem of the book. This work, however, is an effort to face the challenge in a different way.

1. Narrative Questions and Thematic Focus

“Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil” (1:8; 2:3). This description comes directly from the mouth of YHWH. Accordingly, there is no one like Job in the Bible, even Abraham or Moses, who was described by such a double cluster of adjectival phrases: תם וישר and ירא אלהים וסר מרע. If wisdom is to be identified with the fear of God (cf. Prov 1:7; Job 28:28), the wisdom ascribed to Job is perfect.

The tension comes, however, when this way of description is challenged by the Adversary, who calls into question the authenticity of Job’s fear of God. The Adversary predicts that Job would curse God if YHWH were to stretch out his hand and touch all that Job possesses (1:9-11; 2:4-5). YHWH

¹ T.F. DAILEY, “The Aesthetics of Repentance: Re-Reading the Phenomenon of Job”, *BTB* 23 (1993) 64-70, here 64.

² Cf. D. PENCHANSKY, *The Betrayal of God. Ideological Conflict in Job* (Louisville 1990) 9.

accepts the Adversary's challenge. All of Job's possessions are dramatically withdrawn from him, even his health. Nevertheless, despite all the disasters inflicted on him, Job blesses God instead of cursing (1:20-21; 2:8-10). The narrator insists that "in all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing" (1:22; cf. 2:10), in such a way as to confirm YHWH's appraisal of Job and to discredit the Adversary's prediction. Job's moral integrity is seemingly unblemished, and the traditional ethics remain intact.

Why, then, does the book continue? And why does it continue in such a way as to portray its protagonist so differently in comparison with what was ascribed to him before? Does the prologue present a seemingly naïve tale by depicting Job as a piously righteous person, or is it an ironic exaggeration of the concept of conventional piety? How can one integrate the continuing parts of the book with what has been presented in the prologue? Do the continuing parts attempt to add, to remove, or to modify something regarding the attitude of Job before God? Does the author intend to reveal something that had been deeply hidden under the very traditionally pious responses of his protagonist?

In the continuing parts, moreover, all the characters speak in poetry. So does YHWH. Why does the book need poetry to continue? Does the shift from narrative prose to poetry bring about any changes or give rise to any special values which would contribute to the meaning of the book? Does this shift attribute something peculiar to the progress of its characters? How do Job's last poetic responses, directly addressing YHWH, correspond with his first pious declarations at the beginning? And how do these responses correspond with Job's poetic disputes with his friends?

In brief, what is the final stance of Job, an innocent sufferer, before God? The purpose of my study is to address this very issue. This work is an attempt to prove that the final stance of Job, as artistically wrapped up in the final poem, displays a sapiential attitude which can only be properly understood when one takes into account the collision between the two essential viewpoints supported by the book as a whole, that is, ethics and aesthetics.

2. Terminological Clarifications

2.1 Ethics

The term “ethics”, as employed in this study, is not meant to designate a systematically philosophical theory of morality. Rather, the term is understood simply as a certain system of conventional assumptions that govern one’s behaviour concerning right or wrong, good or evil. These assumptions can be technically articulated in moral principles, by which any particular person is guided, or in rules of conduct recognised in a particular area of human life.³

Etymologically, the term “ethics” derives from the Greek word ἦθος, “character or personal disposition”,⁴ or ἠθική, relating to customs or habits. The term, therefore, shares the same field of meaning with “morals” which derives from Latin *mós*, relating also to customs.⁵ Both terms are frequently used interchangeably, concerning right and wrong or good and bad conduct. In this book, however, these two terms are understood and used with discernible differences. Ethics is understood as accepted beliefs shared by a particular group or culture, thus principally reflecting collective and external assumptions. Instead, morals and morality will be used to refer to beliefs with a more personal and internal nuance. Therefore, while morals and morality refer to concrete and practical values, ethics refers to abstract and guiding principles.

Furthermore, what is of interest in this book is not merely general ethical beliefs but rather biblical ones. Biblical ethics are implicit guidelines found in the biblical texts that influence the behaviour, attitudes and the way of living of a community.⁶ In biblical exegesis, indeed, it is difficult to understand the Bible’s fundamental structures of meaning without being aware of the text’s basic assumptions.⁷ Alternatively, it is biblical narratives,

³ Cf. L. BROWN (ed.), *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. Vol 1 (Oxford 1993) 865.

⁴ Cf. E. WEEKLEY, *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London 1921) 526; C.T. ONION (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford 1966) 329.

⁵ Cf. WEEKLEY, *An Etymological Dictionary*, 949.

⁶ Cf. J. SINCLAIR, et al. eds., *COBUILD Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (Glasgow 2014) 529.

⁷ Cf. J. GERIKE, *The Hebrew Bible and Philosophy of Religion* (SBLRBS 70; Atlanta 2012) 9.

laws, poetry, wisdom sayings, parables, and other literary forms of the Bible that constitute the sources of its ethical concepts.⁸ Therefore, as John Barton argues, biblical ethics can be understood as concerned with meta-ethical assumptions which are usually expressed through implicit patterns or paradigms that form the basic beliefs of God's faithful.⁹

The main pattern that will be examined in this study is that of the ethics of retribution, which principally presuppose a correspondence between reward and right action, as well as between punishment and wrongdoing. Accordingly, two main dimensions of the same ethics will be examined. The dimension that focuses on rewards will be treated as constructive, thus reflecting a correspondence between prosperity and piety. The dimension that focuses on punishments is destructive, reflecting a correspondence between adversity and sin.

2.2 Aesthetics

The term "aesthetics" as used in this study is not concerned with a science or branch of philosophy or Alexander G. Baumgarten's concept of a "criticism of taste".¹⁰ Neither does it relate to the Kantian understanding of it as a "science which treats the conditions of sensuous perception".¹¹ Instead, the term is intended both according to its etymological meaning and in accordance with its modern use.

Etymologically, the term "aesthetics" derives from the Greek verb αἰσθῆσθαι. The Greek verbal stem αἰσθε- usually designates "feel, apprehend by the senses".¹² Deriving from the same stem are the two substantives αἰσθητά, "things perceptible by the senses" and αἰσθησις,

⁸ Cf. A.L. MITTLEMAN, *A Short History of Jewish Ethics*. Conduct and Character in the Context of Covenant (Chichester 2012) 16-17.

⁹ Cf. J. BARTON, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics*. Approaches and Expectations (Louisville 2003) 46-54.

¹⁰ A.G. Baumgarten is usually mentioned as a pioneer in the modern study of aesthetics for his two volumes *Aesthetica* (Frankfurt an der Oder 1750-1758). According to him, aesthetics is defined as the "science of cognition by the sense" – *scientia cognitionis sensitivae*. Cf. R. VILADESAU, *Theological Aesthetics*. God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art (New York 1999) 6. For a recent publication of this work, see A.G. BAUMGARTEN, *Ästhetik* (trans. and ed. D. MIRBACH) (Philosophische Bibliothek 572; Hamburg 2007).

¹¹ Cf. J.A.A. MURRAY, et al. (eds.), *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford 1933) 147-148.

¹² Cf. MURRAY, et al. (eds.), *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 147.

“perception of external world by the senses”.¹³ “Aesthetics”, therefore, relates to perceiving the world through one’s senses, with a special focus on how particular individuals experience and perceive particular realities.

As applied by various modern authors, however, the term is more pertinent to “the appreciation or criticism of the beautiful”,¹⁴ and thereby is usually employed “to talk about beauty and about humanity’s appreciation of beautiful things”.¹⁵

As a result of this basic analysis, the term “aesthetics” is now understood in two ways. Firstly, it denotes sensory perception in a generalised way, therefore relating to existential experiences of human life. In this way, one may discuss the aesthetic aspect of human wisdom from an empirical and sensory perspective. Secondly, the term is understood in a specific way as relevant to appreciation of the beautiful. In this way, beauty is considered as the proper object of aesthetics. It should be noted that the experience of beauty is not primarily an intellectual but also an immediate and aesthetic judgment.¹⁶ The aesthetic aspect of human wisdom, therefore, could be defined as one’s ability to recognise and to appreciate the beautiful.¹⁷ Richard Viladesau captures both dimensions: “The ‘aesthetics’ is the area of integration of the human faculties: it designates the condition of spirit (das Gemüt) in which sensation and reason are active at the same time”.¹⁸

¹³ Cf. BROWN, *The New Shorter*, 34.

¹⁴ Cf. MURRAY, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 148. Cf. also BROWN, *The New Shorter*, 34.

¹⁵ Cf. SINCLAIR, *COBUILD Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 24.

¹⁶ D. PENCHANSKY, “Beauty, Power, and Attraction: Aesthetics and the Hebrew Bible”, *Beauty and the Bible* (eds. R.J. BAUTCH – J.-F. RACINE) (SBLSS 73; Atlanta 2013) 47-67, here 63.

¹⁷ This way of understanding is very close to that of BAUMGARTEN, as described in one of his famous sayings: *Aesthetices finis est perfectio cognitionis sensitivae, qua talis. Haec autem est pulchritudo* – “The aim of aesthetics is the perfection of sensitive cognition, as such. This perfection is beauty” – Quoted from R. VILADESAU, *Theological Aesthetics. God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (New York 1999) 6.

¹⁸ VILADESAU, *Theological Aesthetics*, 7.

3. Method of Approach

This study develops a contextual and literary reading of Job's final stance in the book of Job.

A contextual reading means that the text in question (Job 42:1-6) will not be considered as an isolated world, even though its legitimate independence is recognised. Job's final stance represents the culmination of an arduous journey of maturation and transformation in his understanding of God, as well as in his relationship with God and with himself. In this journey Job goes through different stages of development, starting with an initial integration, passing through different levels of disintegration, and achieving reintegration at the end.¹⁹ The destination cannot be well understood without proper consideration of the different stages of the journey. The text concerned, therefore, will be read in the light of its literary framework formed by both its immediate and remote context in the book as a whole.

A literary reading means paying attention to the synchronic structures of the story, though not ignoring some remarkable textual difficulties. The literary analysis depends on a flexible synthesis of semantic, syntactic, rhetorical, structural, and intertextual analyses that will help readers to penetrate the literary construction of the text and to appreciate the different possibilities of meaning it offers. This does not mean that the poetic text will be measured solely by the technical standards of formal elements and of

¹⁹ The articulation of the transformation of Job in the sequence integration-disintegration-reintegration is inspired by the tripartite scheme of Walter Brueggemann's typology of the function of the Psalm. In an article published in 1980, Brueggemann proposes the sequence of orientation-disorientation-reorientation as a way to classify and understand the use and function of the Psalm. Cf. W. BRUEGGEMANN, "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function", *JSOT* 17 (1980) 3-32, here 6. In a later publication the same author changed this sequence slightly to orientation-disorientation-new orientation. Cf. W. BRUEGGEMANN, *The Message of the Psalms. A Theological Commentary* (Augsburg 1984) 10-11. The understanding of the book of Job according to the scheme of three successive stages had in fact been suggested a little earlier by Roderick A.F. MacKenzie in an article published in 1979. MacKenzie labelled the tripartite scheme as "the Theme of Transformation": (1) a hero is presented in a state of privilege, (2) the hero is overwhelmed by some crisis or disaster, and (3) God's intervention by words or action to give a new direction and meaning to the hero's existence. Cf. R.A.F. MACKENZIE, "The Transformation of Job", *BTB* 9 (1979) 51-57. In my study, these three successive stages are employed as an integration-disintegration-reintegration sequence, focusing on the process of transformation of Job's internal dispositions when external events affect him.

strict exegetical disciplines. Indeed, a poetic work suggests more than it expresses.²⁰ Words in poetry, strictly speaking, are significant not merely for their denotation, but also for their connotation.²¹ A literary reading is, therefore, an attempt to let the text speak in multiple voices and to see how it works on different levels. We will pay attention to the artistic character and aesthetic value of the text in order to evaluate and appreciate its poetic beauty.

4. Scope of the Study

This study is developed in five chapters.

The first chapter will present a concise study of the *status questionis* about the different interpretations of the final stance of Job before YHWH and show how these interpretations remain unsatisfying.

The next three chapters will deal with the book of Job in its literary wholeness and will proceed in three steps. The first step (chapter 2) will examine Job's original integration as expressed by his traditional faith in the narrative prologue (Job 1–2). This step aims to see how the exposition for the entire book is established and how the ethics of retribution is implanted in this exposition. The second step (chapter 3) will analyse Job's disintegration as affected by the ethics of retribution. I will discuss the different ethical standpoints of the main characters in the poetic disputations (Job 3–31). At the same time, I will also try to figure out how the ethics of retribution brings the various arguments of the book to a dead end. Consequently, the third step (chapter 4) will deal with the climax of the book, considering the emergence of the aesthetics as suggested by the speeches of YHWH (Job 38–41). The focus of this chapter will be how the shift of perspectives, from ethics to aesthetics, brings about Job's reintegration.

The fifth chapter will expound the final stance of the protagonist of the book of Job by means of a close reading of the last poem (42:1–6). This will be developed in two stages:

²⁰ Cf. E.G. KRAELING, *The Book of the Ways of God* (New York 1939) 244.

²¹ Cf. R. GORDIS, *The Book of God and Man* (Chicago 1965) 196.

- (1) Job 42:2-3: an interpretation of Job's confession of ignorance, as an aesthetic manifestation of an illuminated wisdom. The importance of this short strophe is critical for the interpretation of the whole poem 42:1-6. I will show that an independent reading of the first strophe (42:1-3) will supply the second (42:4-6) with a decisive interpretative orientation.
- (2) Job 42:4-5: an interpretation of Job's aesthetic perception, especially from the auditory and visual perspectives. Job 42:6 suggests that Job's submission is an aesthetic manifestation of his reconciliation with God and of the consolation with humanity.

The book will conclude with a summary reflection based on the fruits of the research. First, the summary aims to offer an answer to the main question about the final stance of Job, a righteous sufferer, before God. Second, it indicates how this understanding of Job's final stance is relevant to the current study of the book of Job.

CHAPTER 1

THEOLOGICAL STANCE OF A BIBLICAL SUFFERER. A HISTORICAL SURVEY

1. Job in Biblical Traditions

Outside the book that bears his name, Job was mentioned explicitly in two different contexts, one in the Hebrew Bible and another in the New Testament. In Ezekiel, Job was mentioned together with Noah and Daniel as three persons who were known for their righteousness (בצדקתם) (cf. Ezek 14:14, 20).¹ In the Letter of James, Job was praised for his patience or endurance (ὑπομονήν) and was called blessed (μακαρίζομεν) (cf. James 5:7-11). In both cases, the literary contexts suggest that the authors are preparing their readers for certain trials in their lives and their faith. James recommends being patient in sufferings. Ezekiel praises Job for his righteousness, although emphasising that such a righteousness can only save the righteous person, not his descendants.

Not yet entering into a detailed discussion about what these qualities ascribed to Job could possibly mean, it is sufficiently clear that Job is praised for his positive qualities. His way of living and struggling had become some sort of model of faithful living, particularly for those who are in difficult situations. Righteousness and patience, therefore, were two principal characteristics ascribed to Job according to different biblical traditions.

2. Job, the Penitent

The “righteousness” and “patience” or “endurance” of Job were continuously mentioned in the patristic writings. Throughout different traditions, however, the portrayal of Job was characterised by a notable variety, mostly grounded on varied ways of understanding Job’s final response to YHWH. A very short survey will sketch the reception of the

¹ For a further discussion about the identity of these three names, as well as their common characteristics so as to be mentioned in Ezekiel, see S. SPIEGEL, “Noah, Danel, and Job: Touching on Canaanite Relics in the Legends of the Jews”, *Louis Ginsberg Jubilee Volume* (eds. A. MARX – S. SPIEGEL) (AAJR; New York 1945) 305-356; M. NOTH, “Noah, Daniel, and Hiob in Ezechiel XIV”, *VT* 1 (1951) 251-260.

portrayal of Job, a biblical sufferer, in various writings of the patristic authors.

Origen (184-253) was the first author who offered a well-ordered interpretation of the book of Job in a set of twenty-two homilies.² As a representative of the Alexandrian school, Origen moved toward an allegorical interpretation and considered Job to be “a prototype of the Christian martyr and symbol of the righteous person who submitted to tribulations”.³ By the late fourth century and at the beginning of the fifth, John Chrysostom from the Antiochian school verged upon a rigorously moral and literal interpretation.⁴ Chrysostom’s interpretation sees in Job a model of the wise and righteous person who resists temptation.⁵ Accordingly, Job’s final stance in front of God is marked by a full penitence and self-condemnation. “It is when Job has condemned himself that God justifies him”.⁶

Around 400, Augustine of Hippo wrote a very short commentary designated as *Annotationum in Job liber unus*.⁷ It is a literal interpretation in which Augustine concentrated on the humble submission of Job to the judgment of God. From Augustine’s view on the universality of sin, Job was presented as the one who was well aware of his intrinsic sinfulness, despite his righteousness.⁸

Between 382 and 405, Jerome brought about a significant innovation with his new Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate, one of the most influential of all the Western translations. Jerome translated Job’s last words before YHWH thus: “Idcirco ipse me reprehendo et ago paenitentiam in

² Cf. M. SIMONETTI – M. CONTI, *Job* (ed. T.C. ODEN) (ACCSOT 6) (Madison 2006) xviii. Cf. also GEROLAMO, *Gli Uomini Illustri. De Viris Illustribus* (ed. A. CESERA-GASTALDO) (Biblioteca Patristica; Firenze 1988) 206.

³ SIMONETTI – CONTI, *Job*, xviii.

⁴ For a more profound understanding of John Chrysostom’s interpretation of Job, see R.C. HILL (ed.), *Commentary on Job* (St. John Chrysostom: Commentaries on the Sages 1; Brookline 2006).

⁵ Cf. SIMONETTI – CONTI, *Job*, xxi.

⁶ SIMONETTI – CONTI, *Job*, 218.

⁷ AUGUSTINUS, “Annotationum in Job liber unus”, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Augustini, Hipponensis Episcopi, Opera Omnia* (ed. J.-P. MIGNE) (Patrologia Latina 34; Paris 1887) 825-886.

⁸ Cf. SIMONETTI – CONTI, *Job*, xxiii.

favilla et cinere”.⁹ According to this translation, Job’s final stance was described by his double submission, namely, the reproach of himself, “therefore, I despise myself”, and the penitence, “and repent in dust and ashes”.

Following Jerome’s reading, Gregory the Great commented, between 578-595, in *Moralia, sive Expositio in Job*, as follows:¹⁰

The less a person sees himself, the less he displeases himself; and the more he perceives the light of greater grace, the more blameworthy does he recognise himself to be. [...] This rule blessed Job acknowledges more thoroughly and learns from his suffering; and by a great self-reproach he dissents from himself, saying: “Therefore I reproach myself”. But here there is no knowledge of reproach if the lamentations of penitence do not also follow, it is rightly added after the reproach, “And do penitence in dust and ashes”.¹¹

In Gregory’s commentary, the nuance of a moral penitence attributed to Job is decisive. Indeed, according to the immediately following context, the author connected the act of Job with the repentance in sackcloth and ashes that the people of Tyre and Sidon were supposed to do (cf. Mt 11:21). He then continued thus:

“For ‘sackcloth’ represents the roughness and the puncture of sin, and ‘ashes’ the dust of the dead. And therefore both of these are customarily used in penitence, in order that by the piercing of sackcloth we may know what we have done through sin, and that in the dust of ashes we may consider what we have become through judgment”.¹²

More explicitly, regarding the last judgment of God (Job 42:7), Gregory notes this: “Behold, we know that according to your judgment blessed Job

⁹ This reading is also found in Jerome’s prologue to Job, in which he delimited the poetic section of the book of Job in this way: “Porro a verbis Iob in quibus ait: ‘Pereat dies in qua natus sum et nox in qua dictum est: Conceptus est homo’ usque ad eum locum, ubi ante finem voluminis scriptum est: ‘Idcirco ipse me reprehendo et ago paenitentiam in favilla et cinere’”. Cf. R. WEBER – R. GRYSON, *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*. Editio quinta (Stuttgart 2007) 731.

¹⁰ Usually known as *Magna Moralia*, one of the longest patristic works, published in three volumes. Cf. GREGORII MAGNI, *Moralia in Iob* (ed. M. ADRIAEN) (CCSL 143; Torino 1985). For an English translation, see. GREGORY THE GREAT, *Morals on the Book of Job* (eds. J.H. PARKER – J. RIVINGTON) (Oxford 1844).

¹¹ GREGORII MAGNI, *Moralia in Iob*. Libri XXIII-XXXV, 1777. The English quotations here are my translation with reference to GREGORY THE GREAT, *Morals on the Book of Job*, 665-666.

¹² GREGORII MAGNI, *Moralia*, 1778.

is victorious, whom we believed to have sinned against you by his words”.¹³ Thus, in Gregory’s point of view, Job’s final stance can be expressed as a sincerely moral conversion. The recognition of his own blameworthiness leads Job to the reprehension and repentance of sin.

This penitent nuance has been followed by varied commentators from then on. For instance, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), in *Expositio super Iob ad Litteram*,¹⁴ did not hesitate to equate Job’s last words, “therefore I reproach myself”, with a recognition of a guilt which eventually necessitates a personal act of penitence.¹⁵ Similarly, the author of the Wycliffite’s Prologue,¹⁶ around 1382-1395, stated that Job repented in the end and was forgiven of his little sin. Job’s sin, as is indicated, consisted in the fact that he spoke excessively of his good deeds and justified himself excessively.¹⁷ The penitent nuance has also been prevalent in various English translations of modern times.¹⁸

This brief survey of interpretations of a few well-known authors cannot claim to be comprehensive. On the one hand, it does not venture to examine the whole of the available material on the patristic writings on Job. On the other, it is clear that far from being systematic and holistic commentaries, the different patristic interpretations of Job are basically pastoral readings conditioned by the particular circumstances in which the authors found themselves. Nevertheless, the survey effectively helps to underscore some characteristic features of the understanding of Job in the patristic traditions. Job was portrayed as a pious sufferer who finally makes a complete

¹³ GREGORII MAGNI, *Moralia*, 1778-1779.

¹⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, “Expositio super Iob ad Litteram”, *Opera Omnia*, 26 (ed. Leonis XIII) (Roma 1965). For an English translation, see A. DAMICO – M.D. YAFFE, *Thomas Aquinas, The Literal Exposition on Job. A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence* (AARSR 7; Atlanta 1989).

¹⁵ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, “Expositio super Iob ad Litteram”, 228.

¹⁶ Usually known as *General Prologue of the Wycliffe Bible* and consensually attributed to John Purvey, the leading follower of Johannes Wycliffe. The Prologue was in Middle English and was articulated in fifteen chapters. See J. WYCLIFFE et al., *The Old and New Testaments. With the Apocryphal Books*, 1 (eds. J. FORSHALL – F. MADDEN) (Oxford 1850) 1-60.

¹⁷ Cf. J. WYCLIFFE, *The Old and New Testaments*, 37.

¹⁸ Cf. for example, King James Version (KJV 1611), Revised Version (RV 1885), American Standard Version (ASV 1901), New English Bible (NEB 1961), Jerusalem Bible (JB 1966), New American Bible (NAB 1970), New International Version (NIV 1978).

submission to YHWH, expressing at the same time both self-reproach and sincere repentance.¹⁹ This survey, however, also brings to light a problem. It seems that, in various patristic readings of the book of Job, many authors concentrated much on affirming the repentance of the protagonist as a matter of fact but paid less attention to explaining why Job repents. For this reason, the repentance of Job has continued to be questioned by several scholars.

3. Avoidance of Job's Repentance

It cannot be claimed that it is only in modern times that the repentance of Job has created uneasiness among scholars. There are many traces of evidence of such uneasiness in various ancient versions, in which terms indicating repentance were tendentiously avoided.

The LXX, which is one of the first for this tendency, reads:

διὸ ἐφάυλισα ἐμαυτὸν καὶ ἐτάκην ἥγημαι δὲ ἐμαυτὸν γῆν καὶ σποδόν

"Therefore, I despise myself, and melt away, and I esteem myself dust and ashes".

This reading intentionally avoids the term "repent", replacing it with the translation, "I esteem myself dust and ashes". The avoidance is nevertheless partial. A direct object, ἐμαυτὸν, is added to the first verb, ἐφάυλισα, rendering the first phrase as "I despise myself". In this reading, therefore, the innocence of the protagonist seems to be saved, but his self-respect is not.

The avoidance of nuances of repentance becomes more apparent in some later versions, in which one can identify a trend not only to sidestep the term "repent" but also to defend the self-respect of the protagonist and to protect

¹⁹ Indeed, this trend has been the majority position through a long tradition. Here are some among the numerous modern authors who understand Job to have repented of wrongdoing: E. DHORME, *Le Livre de Job* (Paris 1926); KRAELING, *The Book of the Ways of God*; V.E. REICHERT, *Job* (London 1946); L.J. KUYPER "The Repentance of Job", *VT* 19 (1959) 91-44; R. GORDIS, *The Book of Job* (New York 1978); N. SNAITH, *The Book of Job* (SBT 11; Naperville 1968); M.H. POPE, *Job* (AB 15; New York 1973); D. PATRICK, "Short Note: The Translation of Job XLII 6", *VT* 26 (1976) 369-371; H.H. ROWLEY, *Job* (NCBC; Grand Rapids 1981); B.L. NEWELL, "Job: Repentant or Rebellious?" *WTJ* 46 (1984) 298-316; E.M. GOOD, *In Turns of the Tempest* (Stanford 1990); A. WOLTERS, "A Child of Dust and Ashes", *ZAW* 102 (1990) 116-119.

him from humiliation. The Syriac on Job is one of the extreme witnesses for this trend, as it keeps a distance both from the self-loathing and from the idea of repentance, rendering instead, “Therefore I am silent and rise again from dust and ashes”.²⁰ Two other examples of evidence worthy of consideration are found in the Qumran Targum of Job (11QTgJob) and the Targum on Job.

11QTgJob reads as follows:²¹

על כן אתנסך ואתמא ואהוא לעפר וקטם
 “Therefore, I poured out and dissolved.
 I have become dust and ashes”.

This is the text in the Targum on Job:²²

מטול דהיכנא מאסית עתרי ואיתנחמית מבניי דהינון עפרא וקטם
 “Therefore, I despise my wealth
 and I console myself for my sons who are dust and ashes”.

Unlike the LXX, the complement “myself” does not appear in the first part of the sentence in these readings. The Targum on Job has עתרי, “my wealth”, thus exempting the protagonist from the idea of self-loathing. Similarly, 11QTgJob offers a double translation, “I poured out and dissolved”, avoiding both the terms “repent” and “despise”. Additionally, in the second part of the sentence, while the 11QTgJob still gives a sombre ending, “I have become dust and ashes”, in the Targum on Job the

²⁰ Cf. P.A.H. DE BOER, “Does Job Retract?”, *Selected Studies in Old Testament Exegesis* (ed. C. VAN DUIN) (OtSt 27; Leiden 1991) 179-195, here 193. Of course, as indicated by the author, it is an interpretation rather than a literal rendering. “Syriac uses the same (verbal) stem as Hebrew, and in Syriac literature this verb is also used to refer to the rising from the dead, the resurrection into life, the awakening from sleep, the continuation of life” (ibid., 193-194).

²¹ Cf. J.P.M. VAN DER PLOEG – A.S. VAN DER WOUDE, *Le Targum de Job de la Grotte XI de Qumrân* (Leiden 1971) 84-85; F. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ – E.J.C. TIGCHELAAR – A.S. VAN DER WOUDE, “11QTargumJob”, *Qumran Cave 11. II* 11Q2-18, 11Q20-31 (DJD 23; Oxford 1998) 77-180, here 168. The English translation follows that in J.A. FITZMYER – D.J. HARRINGTON, *A Manual of Palestinian Aramaic Texts* (BibOr 34; Rome 1978) 11-47, here 45. Cf. also E.G. CLARKE, “Reflections on some Obscure Hebrew Words in the Biblical Job in the Light of XI QTg Job”, *Studies in Philology in Honor of Ronald James Williams* (eds. G.E. KADISH – G.E. FREEMAN) (Toronto 1982) 19-20.

²² Cf. P. DE LAGARDE (ed.), “Targum on Job”, *Hagiographa Chaldaice* (Lipsiae 1873) 85-118, here 117.

appearance of consolation replaces the customary idea of an expression of guilt.²³

In brief, although there are notable variations among the versions mentioned above, as well as differences between them and the MT, the convergence of these ancient versions is remarkable.²⁴ It shows that there had been a noteworthy trend of interpretation that saw Job's final stance as other than an act of repentance and self-abasement.

4. Job, a Modern Insolent Rebel

The trend of ancient versions turns into explicit reactions in modern commentaries. Indeed, the understanding of Job as repentant is now directly challenged by various authors and has become a hotly debated topic.²⁵ R. David Robertson was one of the first biblical scholars who protested such an understanding and who did not recognise Job's last response as a sincere confession. In one of his articles published in 1973, Robertson stated: "In order to calm God's whirlwind, he [Job] has to declare his guilt by his own mouth. He makes his confession, then, tongue-in-cheek".²⁶ According to such a reading, God is characterised as a tyrant and becomes the object of a bitter irony.²⁷

²³ The reading of the last phrase, "my sons who are dust and ashes", is followed by A. WOLTERS, "A Child of Dust and Ashes", 116-119, who translated the first phrase: "I recant and relent". The argument of Wolters then is followed by P. VAN DER LUGT, *Rhetorical Criticism and the Poetry of the Book of Job* (OtSt 32; Leiden 1995) 407.

²⁴ It may be conjectured, of course, that these versions have been translated from texts different from the MT. However, this conjecture is not really convincing. It is "just as easy to argue that they found the MT so perplexing that they rendered a paraphrase rather than a translation". Cf. J.B. CURTIS, "On Job's Response to Yahweh", *JBL* 98 (1979) 497-511, here 501, n. 13.

²⁵ "The patience of Job has become a cliché, sometimes the only thing people are aware of about Job. As chapter 3 begins, Job emphatically ceases to be patient. Perhaps James never read beyond chapter 2", comments E.M. GOOD in "The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job", *The Voice from the Whirlwind* (eds. L.G. PERDUE – W.C. GILPIN) (Nashville 1992) 50-69, here 54.

²⁶ R.D. ROBERTSON, "The Book of Job: A Literary Study", *Soundings* 56 (1973) 446-469, here 466. This argument was developed more fully in Robertson's work four years later; see R.D. ROBERTSON, *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic* (Philadelphia 1977) 33-54.

²⁷ Cf. ROBERTSON, "Job", 469. Indeed, the understanding of God as a tyrant is not totally new and neither is Robertson's original reading. In 1952, Carl Gustav Jung published his

The reading of Robertson was challenged by Edwin M. Good, who doubted that a book of such magnitude, scope, and profundity as the book of Job finally could tell its readers that both of its principal subjects, namely, God and Job, are frauds.²⁸ Job's repentance, therefore, must be read as a sincere and as a real change of position. According to Good, the repentance of Job can be read in several ways, but it is neither a blind submission nor a tongue-in-cheek acquiescence. "Every interpretation that fails to deal with Job's repentance fails to come to grips with the book".²⁹ A good insight which emerged from the commentary of Good is the claim that a reading that takes Job's repentance sincerely must take seriously also the shifting of the issue of the book from morality to something else.³⁰

Going in the same direction as did Robertson, John B. Curtis presented a provocative commentary on Job's response in 1979, which radically reverses traditional interpretations.³¹ On the one hand, Curtis maintained that Job's choice of being silent after the first divine speech must be read as "a bitter sarcasm, slashing out against a god who is irrelevant".³² On the other, he noted that Job's response after the second divine speech does not contain even the slightest suggestion that he either recants his previous position or shows remorse for all that he has said. What Job renounces, states Curtis, is properly the deity who could be so contemptuous of his most

famous book, *Antwort auf Hiob*, in which he offered a reading of the book of Job from a psychological approach. According to Jung's analysis, the God of Job is absolutely amoral ("amoralisch"), Job clearly saw that God is at odds with himself, and what he acknowledges in God is an antinomy, a totality of inner opposites ("eine Antinomie, eine totale innere Gegensätzlichkeit"). Cf. C.G. JUNG, *Antwort auf Hiob* (DTV 35171; München 2001) 14-19. For an English translation, see C.G. JUNG, *Answer to Job* (trans. R.F.C HULL) (London – New York 2002). The influence of Jung was visible also in the interpretation of James G. Williams, who wrote, "Job 'repents', of course, but this is clever of him in the circumstances; it is the only way to deal with one who is rather easily threatened and who does not observe covenants". Cf. J.G. WILLIAMS, "You Have not Spoken Truth of Me", *ZAW* 83 (1971) 231-254, here 247.

²⁸ E.M. GOOD, "Job and the Literary Task: A Response", *Soundings* 56 (1973) 470-484, here 479.

²⁹ Cf. GOOD, "Job", 478.

³⁰ Cf. GOOD, "Job", 479.

³¹ According to CURTIS' own evaluation, his interpretation is "a rendering far removed from the traditional view that Job in abject penitence wallows in filth before the overwhelming display of divine arrogance". Cf. CURTIS, "On Job's Response", 501.

³² Cf. CURTIS, "On Job's Response", 507.

faithful devotee.³³ Therefore, Job does not repent. Rather, he is sorry for human beings who must tolerate such an arrogant and contemptuous god, and consequently he “totally and unequivocally rejects God”.³⁴ Thus Curtis paraphrased Job’s last words:

“Therefore, I feel loathing contempt and revulsion
[toward you, O God]
And I am sorry for frail man”.

For Curtis, Job is more insolent than repentant. The protagonist of the poetic section is consistent with himself from the beginning to the end concerning his denunciations of God.

Despite diverse positive contributions, one of the main problems in the interpretation of Curtis, according to my view, lies in his way of reading Job’s final response fragmentarily. Curtis ignores the importance of the first part of Job’s final response (42:2-3) and its potential influence on the meaning of the second part (42:4-5). An interpretation that ignores a part of the text fails to grasp the meaning of Job’s last response as a whole.³⁵

It remains true, however, that the repentance and submission of the protagonist created uneasiness for many modern scholars. For example, D.J. O’Connor commented that the major element that constitutes the greatness of the poem of Job was the defiant cries of a noble man of sorrow against his friends and against his God, but that, when this voice finally fades away, “the listener is left with a certain sadness that the mighty has fallen, the brave and honest human has been broken by superior force”. The same author expressed this puzzlement:

³³ Cf. CURTIS, “On Job’s Response”, 498.

³⁴ The same line of thought was reaffirmed in another article which Curtis published three years later, saying: “a god so remote from human thoughts and ways is to be rejected; he is not worthy of being god. And the author of the Job dialogue has Job totally reject this god in his final speech”. Cf. J.B. CURTIS, “On Job’s Witness in Heaven”, *JBL* 102 (1983) 549-562, here 562.

³⁵ The article of Curtis was therefore heavily criticised by B. LYNNE NEWELL as “subjective speculation” which “cannot be sustained”, NEWELL asserting that “his conclusions are based on too little evidence and reveal a strong subjective bias”. Cf. NEWELL, “Job: Repentant or Rebellious?”, 312, 314.

The poet had all through the long poem won his listeners over to sympathise with the innocent sufferer. How then at the final scene could the same poet expect us to acquiesce in the humiliation and self-loathing of the hero?³⁶

Among those who share the same point of view as O'Connor, it is sufficient here to consider two representatives. Ellen van Wolde wrote thus:

The ordinary readers who in their own lives have experienced grief or unacceptable injustice, and who struggle with the concept of a credible God in a world filled with inequitable suffering, are often disappointed by the end of the Book of Job; after all, the militant Job finally backs down and admits his guilt.³⁷

Similarly, K.J. Dell comments:

And yet Job repents. He admits his fault [...]. The reader has been in agreement with Job all long [...] and yet here Job loses all his grandeur and repents in dust and ashes.³⁸

In brief, the final stance of Job, an innocent sufferer in front of his God, remains a daunting challenge for scholars today. Finally, is Job a humble penitent or an insolent rebel? Besides a clear choice for either the one or the other position, there is a notable trend among modern scholars who favour recognising a deliberate ambiguity in the expression of Job's final stance.

5. A Deliberate Ambiguity

Though the ambiguity in the final response of Job has been observed by various commentators,³⁹ William Morrow speaks of an ambiguity that is deliberate. In his article "Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job

³⁶ D.J. O'CONNOR, "Job's Final Word – 'I Am Consoled...' (42:6b)", *ITQ* 50 (1983-1984) 181-197, here 181.

³⁷ E. VAN WOLDE, "Job 42,1-6: The Reversal of Job", *The Book of Job* (ed. W.A.M. BEUKEN) (BETL 114; Leuven 1994) 223-250, here 223.

³⁸ K.J. DELL, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (BZAW 197; Berlin 1991) 207-208.

³⁹ Beginning with the article of PATRICK, "Job 42:6", 369-371, there has been much discussion about the exact meaning of the last line in the response of Job to the YHWH, as well as the possibilities of understanding Job's final stance as something ambiguous; Cf. also L.J. KAPLAN, "Maimonides, Dale Patrick, and Job xlii 6", *VT* 28 (1978) 356-357; J.G. JANZEN, *Job* (Int; Atlanta 1985) 255; N.C. HABEL, *The Book of Job. A Commentary* (Philadelphia 1985) 576.

42:6", Morrow offered a new proposal, suggesting that the varying interpretations of Job's final stance can be best explained in terms of an ambiguity that has been deliberately worked into Job's response by the Joban poet.⁴⁰ Job's words "have a number of nuances that allow for more than one interpretation". According to the same author, instead of giving an explicit resolution, the poet of the Book of Job "created a situation that can be interpreted in several ways according to the theological inclinations of the reader".⁴¹ Among the remarkable contributions of this proposal, the two more valuable points include a thorough discussion of the grammatical issues of the last sentence of Job's response and an honest openness to a legitimate variety in readers' interpretations. These two points were followed up and elaborated by several other authors.

From the grammatical point of view, E. van Wolde, by her well-founded syntactical and semantical analysis, has demonstrated that Job's final response is syntactically an ambiguous text. "The number of syntactic possibilities for such a short text is very large and accordingly the freedom of the reader to make a choice among these possibilities is considerable".⁴² As a matter of fact, the variety of syntactic possibilities permits also different semantic interpretations. Her conclusion regarding the analysis of the last verse is similar: "It is even possible that this verse, every word of which offers totally different meanings, deliberately presents a plurality of semantic possibilities".⁴³ The notable contribution of van Wolde, however, consists not only in a thorough grammatical analysis which highlights the ambiguity in the text of Job's final response, but also in her approach to considering both the function of this ambiguity and the way the abundance of syntactic possibilities opens to a variety of interpretations of the text as a whole.⁴⁴

Seeing the ambiguity from the perspective of the readers' interpretation is developed by Carol A. Newsom, who recognised that "the ambiguity is perhaps strategic. By making Job's reply enigmatic, the poet requires readers to assume a more active role in construing the meaning and

⁴⁰ W. MORROW, "Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42:6", *JBL* 105 (1986) 211-215, here 224.

⁴¹ MORROW, "Job 42:6", 225.

⁴² VAN WOLDE, "The Reversal", 233.

⁴³ VAN WOLDE, "The Reversal", 245.

⁴⁴ Cf. VAN WOLDE, "The Reversal", 234.

significance of the divine speeches and how they might resolve the conflict between Job and God”.⁴⁵ Following in the same direction as Morrow, Newsom stated that “more than one legitimate interpretation is possible”, for “the ambiguities inherent in the divine speeches and Job’s reply resist every attempt to reduce them to a single, definitive interpretation.” Therefore, “asking which possibility is correct misses the interpretive significance of the ambiguity of Job’s reply”.⁴⁶

Indeed, there are many modern authors who recognise a certain ambiguity in the final stance of Job.⁴⁷ Dermot Cox can be considered exemplary for this trend:

There are almost as many interpretations of this last ‘submission’ as there are exegetes – and this may well be the deliberate intention of the author. For this is a carefully written piece of poetry, and it shows all the signs of a writer who knew what he was doing. It would appear, from this text and from several others in the book, that the author likes to present statements that could be interpreted in a variety of ways, depending on how a particular reader understood a particular text.⁴⁸

In sum, the increasing recognition of ambiguity in the final stance of Job reads his final response within its own literary genre, i.e., as poetry. This trend shows itself to be a coherent approach given the general characteristic of the whole book of Job, which “embodies a powerful example of the

⁴⁵ C.A. Newsom, *The Book of Job*. Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections (NIB 4; Nashville 1996) 627.

⁴⁶ NEWSOM, “Job”, 629. The same author continues to support arguments for the ambiguity in her later publications, see C.A. NEWSOM, “The Book of Job as Polyphonic Text”, *JSOT* 97 (2002) 87-108; C.A. NEWSOM, *The Book of Job*. A Contest of Moral Imaginations (Oxford 2009).

⁴⁷ “Job’s final attitude or stance is not apparent”, cf. WILLIAMS, “You have not spoken Truth of Me”, 233; “The exact meaning of Job’s response to YHWH is unclear, perhaps intentionally so. [...] His second concession is capable of several interpretations”, cf. J.L. CRENSHAW, “Job”, *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford 2001) 331-355, here 353-354; “It is a commonplace among experts that Job’s final words are quite ambiguous. This is true not only about their semantic meaning but also with regard to their pragmatic function”, cf. T. KRÜGER, “Did Job Repent?”, *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen*. Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.-19. August 2005 (eds. T. KRÜGER – M. OEMING) (ATANT 88; Zurich 2007) 217-229, here 217.

⁴⁸ D. COX, *Man’s Anger and God’s Silence*. The Book of Job (Middlegreen 1990) 109-110.

disparate text, an act of literature”.⁴⁹ The recognition of an ambiguity embodied in the text, therefore, manifests a reasonable sensibility, one which ought to be developed, regarding the poetic value of Job’s final response.

However, recognising the function of ambiguity in the text does not mean that all interpretations have an equal validity in the context of the entire book.⁵⁰ The ambiguity in the final response of Job cannot be the final solution for the various questions of the book.⁵¹ Rather, the ambiguity is a literary device of which interpreters must be aware, a poetic manoeuvre through which the author of the book of Job brings readers to reconsider their understanding about the final stance of the protagonist before YHWH. To reach a clearer appreciation of Job’s final stance, further exegesis of the final poem of the book of Job is necessary in the context of the literary framework formed by both its immediate and remote contexts of the book as a whole.

⁴⁹ PENCHANSKY, *The Betrayal of God*, 9.

⁵⁰ Cf. WOLTERS, “Job 42,6b”, 117.

⁵¹ Cf. also C. MUENCHOW, “Dust and Dirt in Job 42:6”, *JBL* 108 (1989) 597-611, here 598: “The suggestion of an originally deliberate polysemy here cannot help but give pause”.

CHAPTER 2

EXPOSITION OF A PERFECT MORALITY

The two following chapters offer an examination of the varied articulations of the ethics of retribution in the narrative prologue (chapters 1–2) and the poetic disputes between Job and the three friends (chapters 3–31). We will show how the narrative prologue establishes the exposition for the entire book and how the seeds of the ethics of retribution are implanted in this exposition. We will then analyse and synthesise the various arguments attributed to Job and to his three friends regarding the ethics of retribution. Before that we will consider how the prose of the prologue and the poetry of the argument among the friends contribute to the literary integrity of the book.

1. The Book of Job as a Whole

1.1 Artistry of a Parallelism

The book of Job, in its present form, is characterised by a particular structure. Its prose tale consists of two narrative units, a prologue (chapters 1–2) and an epilogue (42:7-17), serving as the framework for the poetic speeches in the centre (3:1–42:6). The common structural parallelism between the prosaic prologue and the prosaic epilogue is, therefore, widely recognised by several scholars.¹ This parallelism depends exclusively on narrative prose and bases on two details of the narrative texts. The first detail concerns the description of Job's blessed state: the initial prosperity (1:1-5) is seen as corresponding to the final restoration (42:10-17). The second concerns Job's three friends, who come from afar to console Job in the prologue (Job 2:11-13) and who are rebuked by Yhwh in the epilogue (42:7-9). However, this simple parallelism between the two elements of the

¹ "The epilogue (42:7-17) in prose is basically a counterbalance to the prologue", G.W. PARSONS, "The Structure and Purpose of the Book of Job", *BibSac* 138 (1981) 139-157, here 142. For scholars following a similar proposal see, for example, HABEL, *The Book of Job*, 54; D.J.A CLINES, *Job 1–20* (WBC 17; Nashville 1989) xxxv; J. BARR, "The Book of Job and Its Modern Interpreters", *Bible and Interpretation. The Collected Essays of James Barr. Volume II: Biblical Studies* (ed. J. BARTON) (Oxford 2013) 93-106.

narrative prose does not take into account the heavenly discussions between Yhwh and the Adversary (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7), nor the two sets of disasters befalling Job, nor Job's two brief responses (Job 1:13-22; 2:8-10). In other words, the common structural parallelism between the prose prologue and the epilogue leaves the section of Job's trials (1:6-2:10) out of the parallelism.

In fact, this very section of Job's trials in the prologue finds its distinct parallelism in the two speeches of Yhwh and the two responses of Job (38:1-42:6). Yhwh is the main speaker in both parallel sections, who discusses with the Adversary in the narrative accounts, and who addresses Job in the poetic speeches. Each part of the narrative sections and each part of the poetic speeches end with Job's own words (1:21, 2:10; 40:3-5, 42:1-6). Thus, the parallelism of the book as a whole is achieved through the author's deliberate paralleling both narrative and poetic texts together. A surface structure of the book can be described as a concentric structure (cf. Table 1).

First, the restoration of Job at the end of the story (42:10-17) (A') is carefully described in a manner parallel to his original state in the beginning (1:1-5) (A), as follows:

- (1) The prose tale starts with the affirmation of the blameless and upright state of Job (1:1) (a.1) and ends with his being blessed with death at a ripe old age (42:16-17) (a.1').
- (2) The visible realisation of Job's blessed life in the prologue (1:2-3) (a.2) is echoed in the blessings reported in the epilogue (42:12-15) (a.2')

both in the number of Job's children:

(1:2) ויולדו לו שבעה בנים ושלוש בנות
(42:13) ויהי לו שבענה בנים ושלוש בנות

and in the precise doubling of the number of his cattle:

	(1:3)	(42:12)	
(7.000 sheep)	שבעת אלפי צאן	ארבעה עשר אלף צאן	(14.000 sheep)
(3.000 camels)	ושלשת אלפי גמלים	וששת אלפים גמלים	(6.00 camels)
(500 yoke of oxen)	וחמש מאות צמד בקר	ואלף צמד בקר	(1.000 yoke of oxen)
(500 donkeys)	וחמש מאות אתונות	ואלף אתונות	(1.000 donkeys)

- (3) The motif of “a house of feasting” is present both in 1:4 and in 42:11 with deliberately selected vocabulary.

והלכו בניו ועשו משתה בית איש לאכל ולשתות עמהם 1:4 (a.3)

ויאכלו עמו לחם בביתו 42:11 (a.3')

- (4) The role of Job as intercessor is emphasised both at the beginning (1:5) (a.4), in which he offers burnt-offerings for the sake of his children, and at the end (42:10) (a.4'), in which he prays for his friends.

Table 1.
Structure of the Book of Job

1:1-5	A. Job's original state
1:1	a.1 Job's uprightness
1:2-3	a.2 Visible realisation of Job's blessed life
1:4	a.3 A house of feasting
1:5	a.4 Job as intercessor
1:6-12	B. YHWH's appreciation for his servant, Job
1:13–2:20	C. Integration
1:13-22	c.1 First attack: the collapse of Job's surrounding world. Job's first response (1:21)
2:1-10	c.2 Second attack: affliction of Job's own body. Job's second response (2:10)
3–37	D. Disintegration – Job's three friends – Three cycles of poetic disputations (3–31) – Elihu's intervention (32–37)
38:1–42:6	C'. Reintegration
38:1–40:5	c.1' First divine speech: the beauty of the world. Job's first response (40:3-5)
40:6–42:6	c.2' Second divine speech: Job's individualisation. Job's second response (42:1-6)
42:7-9	B'. YHWH's vindication of his servant, Job
42:10-17	A'. Job's restored state
42:10	a.4' Job as intercessor
42:11	a.3' A house of feasting
42:12-15	a.2' Job's restored blessing
42:16-17	a.1' Job's death at a ripe old age

Second, Yhwh's appraisals of Job appear at the beginning and at the end of the narrative prose. At the beginning, YHWH highly appreciates Job's integrity in the discussion with the Adversary (B). At the end, YHWH vindicates Job against the three friends by reproaching Eliphaz and his two friends (B'). In both moments, YHWH is consistent in calling the protagonist, "my servant, Job" (cf. 1:8; 2:3; 42:7, 8a.b.c).

Third, the two narrative accounts of Job's trials (C) find their correspondence in the two poetic speeches of YHWH and Job's responses (C'). The correspondence is emphasised in the manner in which both narrative accounts and poetic speeches progress. The progression moves from the outer world of Job to the very core of his being.

In the narrative accounts, the Adversary instigates attacks on Job in two steps. The first step (c1) involves a series of disasters that tears down everything around Job in a rapid succession of four catastrophes: his oxen and donkeys were robbed and his slaves killed by the Sabeans (1:15), his sheep and servants were burnt by the fire of God (v.16), his camels were sacked and his servants were slaughtered by the Chaldeans (v.17), all his sons and daughters perished in the collapse of the house caused by a great wind (1:19). Instead, the second step of the progress (c2) affects Job in the very core of his being, touching his entire body and bringing him to the fringe of death. The two attacks on Job are thus recounted from the peripheral layer of the world surrounding him to the core of his own individuality.

YHWH's speeches in response to Job proceed in a similar manner. The first speech (c1') presents a vast and mysterious universe on the panoramic level of the natural cosmos (38:4-38) and of the wild animals (38:39-39:30). If the first attack of the Adversary collapses Job's surrounding world, the first speech of YHWH represents an invitation for Job to contemplate the universe surrounding him so as to reconstruct its meaning. The second speech (c2') then zooms in on more concrete and individual subjects, Behemoth (40:15-24) and Leviathan (40:25-41:26). Behemoth is clearly linked with Job in YHWH's description "which I made along with you" (אשר-עשיתי עמך, 40:15), emphasising the similarity between Job and Behemoth in their creatureliness. Leviathan corresponds distinctly to Job in YHWH's assertion: "no one on earth is his equal" (אין-על-עפר משלו, 41:25a), just as YHWH honours Job with superlatives at the beginning of the story: "no one is like him on earth" (אין כמנו בארץ, 1:8; 2:3). These literary

elements highlight the fact that the images of the two liminal creatures serve to reflect an individualisation of Job himself. If the Adversary's second attack affects Job in a more personal way, the second speech of YHWH provides Job with the two creatures of YHWH's pride and appreciation in a way that suggests to Job the personal transformation YHWH intends to achieve in him.

In the first step of the narrative account, the shattering of the world surrounding Job is not enough for him to abandon or to curse God. For the Adversary, the first test of the loss of Job's property and family proves only that Job had not been tested to the limit. The Adversary, therefore, was not satisfied with Job's blessing God, and so instigated the second attack. The double trials launched by the Adversary against Job thus serve to intensify the plot by pushing Job to the utter extreme of his limit to test the authenticity of his piety. Similarly, in the first divine speech, the aesthetic qualities of creation and the mysterious characters of wild animals are not enough to open Job's horizon and transform his perspective. Job has not yet been challenged by YHWH to the limit, and YHWH's expectation for Job has not yet been achieved. If the first test in the prologue was insufficient to prove Job's piety, so too the first speech of YHWH is not enough to elicit Job's authentic response to YHWH. Just as the Adversary does not accept Job's blessing God after the first series of disasters (Job 1:20-21), YHWH does not accept Job's elusive concession after the first divine speech (Job 40:4-5). A second test is needed in the narrative account to challenge Job to confront the very limit of his existence, so too a second speech is needed in YHWH's poetic response to address the liminal aspects of creation that will shatter Job's limited worldview so as to open him to a new and different perspective.

Admittedly, there could be challenges to the argument of parallelism between Job's two trials and the two poetic speeches of YHWH and Job's responses. Three major objections can be mentioned. First, the literary styles of the two sections are quite different. Second, no details of Job's sufferings in the two prosaic accounts of the trials are mentioned in the two poetic speeches. Third, the quantitative difference between the two sections should also be noted: the two divine speeches occupy practically five chapters, while Job's two trials in the prologue make up barely two.

Firstly, as the immediate section concerning the integrity of the book of Job will demonstrate, the interaction between prose narrative and poetic

speech, as well as the cooperation between narrative and poetry, are characteristic of the book of Job. It is the same writer of the book of Job who deliberately shifts from narrative to poetry and vice versa to bring the whole work to its present completion. The difference in literary style, therefore, cannot be a real objection to the parallelism between Job's two trials and YHWH's two speeches.

Secondly, the lack of direct acknowledgement of Job's suffering in the two divine speeches is not an effective objection to the author's paralleling Job's two trials and YHWH's two speeches. As several scholars have argued, the fact that YHWH completely ignores issues concerning Job's suffering is a strong suggestion that Job's suffering in itself is not the central concern in the book of Job. Rather, the book is more concerned with Job's and the readers' response to the suffering.²

Thirdly, the section of Job's two trials is shorter than YHWH's two speeches, just as proportionately Job's two responses to the trials (1:20; 2:10) are shorter than Job's two responses to YHWH's speeches (40:3-5; 42:1-6). Therefore, instead of seeing the quantitative difference between Job's two trials and YHWH's two speeches as opposition to their parallelism, I see the length of the divine speeches as a complementary exposition to the issue of the prologue's wager. This parallelism can effectively mitigate the apparent incongruity between the two trials of Job and the supposed irrelevance of the divine speeches.

In this structure the disputes between Job and his three friends, as well as the intervention of Elihu, are situated at the centre of the book (D). The advantage of this structure is that it enables us to recognise the three principal movements in Job's character development. The prose account of the two trials of Job (C) presents the ethical integration of Job, the righteous sufferer (Job 1-2). The poetic disputes between Job and his friends (D) portray the disintegration of various beliefs about traditional ethics (Job 3-31). The poetic speeches of God and Job's responses (C') represent a process

² According to Andrew E. Steinmann, for example, Job's suffering is merely a foil for a larger issue. Suffering is "merely the factor that brings Job into struggle to maintain his integrity and the faith that lies behind it". A.E. STEINMANN, "The Structure and Message of the Book of Job", *VT* 46 (1996) 85-100, here 91. For scholars moving in the same direction, see H. MCKEATING, "The Central Issue of the Book of Job", *ExpT* 82 (1971) 244-247; R. LAURIN, "The Theological Structure of Job", *ZAW* (1972) 86-89; R. POLZIN, "The Framework of the Book of Job", *Int* 28 (1974) 182-200.

of reintegration and a new orientation for Job (Job 38–42). The first movement will be covered in this chapter, while the next two movements will be considered in the two following chapters.

1.2 Integrity of the Book of Job

Any reading of the book of Job cannot escape questions about its integrity. That the prologue and the epilogue correspond to each other and that together they form a prose narrative of a single literary work are generally accepted.³ However, the relationship between the prose narrative and the poetic speeches is usually considered as “the thorniest problem” of the book.⁴ It is said that these two parts are contradictory due to a number of discrepancies, regarding not only their literary styles but also the theological assumptions upon which their arguments are constructed. Radical differences are also posited about how the character of Job and God appear in the poetic section in contrast to how they appeared at first in the prose of the prologue.⁵ Other minor, but not insignificant, inconsistencies frequently

³ Cf. J.J. OWENS, “The Prologue and the Epilogue”, *RevExp* 68 (1971) 457-467; N.M. SARNA, “Epic Substratum in the Prose of Job”, *JBL* 76 (1975) 13-25; Y. HOFFMAN, “The Relation Between the Prologue and the Speech-Cycles in Job”, *VT* 31 (1981) 160-170; “The Mutual Relation between the Prologue and the Dialogues in the Book of Job”, *Proceedings of the 7th World Congress of Jewish Studies* (ed. Y. GUTMAN) (Jerusalem 1981) 53-61; A. PINKER, “The Core Story in the Prologue-Epilogue of the Book of Job”, *JHS* 6 (2006) 1-27; M.V. FOX, “Reading the Tale of Job (Job 1:1–2:13 + 42:7-17)”, *A Critical Engagement. Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum* (eds. J.D. CLINES – E. VAN WOLDE) (HBMS 38; Sheffield 2011) 162-179.

⁴ Cf. R.D. MOORE, “The Integrity of Job”, *CBQ* 45 (1983) 17-31, here 17. For extensive discussions on the relationship between the prose narrative and poetic speeches of the book of Job, see R.H. PFEIFFER, “The Book of Job”, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London 1953) 660-707, here 667-675; ROWLEY, “The Book of Job and Its Meaning”, *From Moses to Qumran. Studies in the Old Testament* (New York 1963) 141-186, esp. 151-162; R. POLZIN, “The Framework of the Book of Job”, *Int* 28 (1974) 182-200; POPE, *Job*, xxiii-xxx; HOFFMAN, “The Relation”; E. HARTLEY, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids 1988) 20-33; T. WAGNER, “Contingency or Divine Justice: What Matters in Job’s Fate? Synchronic Perspectives on Prologue and Dialog in the Book of Job”, *Religions* 10 (2019) 1-15.

⁵ On different theological assumptions, see NEWSOM, *A Contest*, esp. “The Impregnable Word: Genre and Moral Imagination in the Prose Tale”, 32-71 and “Consolation of God: The Moral Imagination of the Friends”, 90-129. On differences in the personality of the protagonist see H.A. FINE, “The Tradition of Patient Job”, *JBL* 74 (1955) 28-32; J.K. ZINK, “Impatient Job: An Interpretation of Job 19:25-27”, *JBL* 84 (1965) 147-152; H.L. GINSBERG, “Job the Patient and Job the Impatient”, *Congress Volume Rome 1968* (eds. G.W. Anderson

mentioned are the use of divine names, the infrequent appearance and function of the Adversary, and the themes intended by the author.⁶ These alleged discrepancies have led several scholars to speculate that the prose narrative and the poetic speeches may have come from different stages of composition.⁷ Some suggest that the poetic speeches were composed first, which would make both the prologue and the epilogue later additions. Others argue for the pre-existence of the narrative prose as a *Volksbuch*, which was adopted by the Joban poet as the narrative framework.⁸

– P.A.H. de Boer, et al.) (VT.S 17; Leiden 1969) 88-111; C. WESTERMANN, “The Two Faces of Job”, *Job and the Silence of God*. Concilium 169 (eds. C. DUQUOC – C. FLORISTAN) (Edinburgh 1983) 15-22; R.W.E. FORREST, “The Two Faces of Job: Imagery and Integrity in the Prologue”, *Ascribe to the Lord*. Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie (eds. L. ESLINGER – G. TAYLOR) (JSOTS 67; Sheffield 1988) 385-398. On the differences in the character of God, see for instance M. BUBER, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York 1949) 189-197, who assumes that the book offers four different visions of God in the prose narrative, the Friends’ speeches, Job’s speeches and the divine theophany. Each of these intends to improve and replace its predecessor. Jeffrey Boss describes God with different portrayals: as creator and destroyer in the prose prologue, as the self-concealing, as the desired one, and as the holy one in the poetic speeches, and finally as the destination in the prose epilogue. J. BOSS, *Human Consciousness of God in the Book of Job*. A Theological and Psychological Commentary (New York 2010) 241-246. Cf. also R.L. HARRIS, “The Book of Job and Its Doctrine of God”, *GTJ* 13 (1972) 3-33; L. MARE, “The God of Job”, *VE* 33 (2012) 1-6.

⁶ For the different uses of divine names see A. LACOCQUE, “Job or the Impotence of Religion and Philosophy”, *The Book of Job and Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics* (Semeia 19; Chico 1981) 33-52, here 37-39; D. WOLFER, *Deep Things out of Darkness*. The Book of Job, Essays and a New English Translation (Grand Rapids 1995) 75-77. Questions about the function of Satan, see K. FULLERTON, “The Original Conclusion of the Book of Job”, *ZAW* 42 (1924) 116-136; A. ALT, “Zur Vorgeschichte des Buches Hiob”, *ZAW* 55 (1937) 265-268; G. FOHRER, “Zur Vorgeschichte und Komposition des Buches Hiob”, *VT* 6 (1956) 249-267; WOLFER, *Deep Things*, 201-208. On different themes of the book see for example CLINES, *Job 1–20*, xxxvii-xxlvii; NEWSOM, *Job*, 334-338; C.L. SEOW, *Job 1–21*. Interpretation and Commentary (Grand Rapids 2013) 87-108.

⁷ “Modern interpreters find contrast rather than continuity between the prose story and the poetic dialogues”, J.W. WATTS, “The Unreliable Narrator of Job”, *The Whirlwind*. Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse (eds. S.L. COOK – C.L. PATTON – J.W. WATTS) (JSOTS 336; London 2001) 168-180, here 174.

⁸ Richard Simon (1638-1712) is one of the first critics who separated the prose narrative from the poetic speeches. In his classical work, *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* (Paris 1678), he regarded the prologue of the book of Job as a historical addition, similarly to the later additions of short introductions to the Psalms. Cf. also A. BERNUS, *Richard Simon et son Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* (Lausanne 1869) 80. For the English translation of his work, see R. SIMON, *A Critical History of the Old Testament* (London 1682). Among

Robert Polzin argues that it is the courageous integration of contradictions and inconsistencies, not their avoidance, that makes the journey of reading the book of Job insightful and profitable.⁹ Instead of construing these differences in line with the historical criticism and investigating the hypotheses about different stages of formation of the book, I will follow a literary approach that takes the final form of the book seriously and deals with it as a coherent literary whole in its present form.¹⁰ I accept the overall integrity of the book as a work of literature because of the mutual interdependence of its prose and poetry. It is necessary to treat the work as a whole in order to appreciate the author's original design that highlights the collision between the two main views inherent in the whole work.

those who followed this trend see K. KAUTZSCH, *Das sogenannte Volksbuch von Hiob* (Berlin 1900); R.H. PFEIFFER, *Le problème du livre de Job* (Geneva 1915); S.R. DRIVER and G.B. GRAY, *The Book of Job* (Edinburgh 1921) xxxv; G. FOHRER, "Zur Vorgeschichte und Komposition des Buches Hiob", 249-267. Instead, among those who argue for the antecedence of the narrative tale, see T.K. CHEYNE, *Job and Solomon* (London 1887) 66f.; D.B. MACDONALD, "The Original Legend of Job", *JBL* 14 (1895) 63-71; K. BUDDE, *Das Buch Hiob*. Übersetzt und erklärt (HAT 2; Göttingen 1896) xii-xiv; B.L. DUHM, *Das Buch Hiob* (KHKAT 16; Freiburg im Breisgau 1897) vii-viii; M. TSEVAT, "The Meaning of the Book of Job", *HUCA* 73 (1966) 73-106, here 73.

⁹ Cf. POLZIN, "The Framework", 200.

¹⁰ There are many modern authors who attempt to prove that the inconsistencies are essential to the message of the book. Any attempts to remove the book's inconsistencies rather than to discern their functions seem ultimately to destroy the message(s) of the book, and moreover make it impossible to understand how the book, in its present form, "has affected men so profoundly down through the ages". Cf. POLZIN, "The Framework", 186. Among those who consider the book as a whole, see A. GUILLAUME, "The Unity of the Book of Job", *Annual of the Leeds University Oriental Society* 4 (1965) 26-46; G.B. GRAY, "The Purpose and Method of the Writer", *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of the Book of Job*. A Collection of Critical Essays (ed. P.S. SANDERS) (Englewood Cliffs 1969) 36-45; T.M. BENNET, "When a Righteous Man Suffers: A Teaching Outline of the Book of Job", *SJT* 14 (1971) 57-64; C.T. FRANCISCO, "A Teaching Outline of the Book of Job", *RevExp* 68 (1971) 511-520; J.A. BAKER, "The Book of Job: Unity and Meaning", *Studia Biblica* 1978 (ed. E.A. LIVINGSTONE) (Sheffield 1979) 17-26; D.N. FREEDMAN, "Is It Possible to Understand the Book of Job?", *BR* 4 (1988) 26-33; D. TIMMER, "God's Speeches, Job's Responses, and the Problem of Coherence in the Book of Job: Sapiential Pedagogy Revisited", *CBQ* 71 (2009) 286-305; R. ALTER, "Between Narration and Dialogue", *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York 2011) 63-87; T. WAGNER, "Contingency or Divine Justice", 1-15.

1.2.1 Interaction between the Prose Narrative and Poetic Speeches

The hypothesis that excludes the prose narratives from the book can hardly stand, since it is unlikely that only poetic speeches can form a complete literary work on their own. The mutual correlation between these two parts can manifest itself in different ways.

As a matter of fact, both the prologue and the epilogue narrative are indispensable for a solid understanding of what is presented in the poetic disputes. It is true, as Manfred Oeming and Konrad Schmid note, that “the prologue provides not only an exposition of the problem of the book, but also presents its solution”.¹¹ As soon as the exposition of Job’s calamities is presented, the narrator also makes known to readers a sort of “proleptic solution”, giving a clear explanation that the protagonist is actually being subjected to a heavenly test. This means that the innocence of the protagonist, as affirmed by the narrator (Job 1:1) and reaffirmed by YHWH (Job 1:8; 2:3), certainly remains intact despite all the calamities that have befallen him. There can be no doubt about the moral integrity of Job, who is unparalleled on earth (Job 1:3, 8; 2:3). Therefore, the privileged knowledge granted is essential to orient readers during the complex and confused debate in the poetic speeches. It ensures that the sympathy of readers remains on the side of Job and that the position of the friends is criticised from the outset. In this way, the prologue is an indispensable backdrop to the story of Job as a whole and is the key to a correct understanding of the dispute between Job and his friends. “It serves as the vital platform for the story”.¹² Together both the narrative prologue and the poetic speeches must be taken as “essential and original components in one integral artistic work”.¹³

¹¹ M. OEMING – K. SCHMID, *Job’s Journey*. Stations of Suffering (Winona Lake 2015) 15. The term “exposition” here can be understood as explained by J.L. SKA, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*. Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narrative (*SubBib* 13; Roma 2000) 21: “The exposition is the presentation of indispensable pieces of information about the state of affairs that precedes the beginning of the action itself. These details are necessary for the understanding of the narration.” According to SKA, the exposition provides readers with background information about (1) the setting of the narrative, (2) the main characters, and (3) a key to understanding the narrative.

¹² G.W. PARSON, “Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming the Book of Job”, *BibSac* 151 (1994) 393-413, here 398.

¹³ HOFFMAN, “The Relation”, 160.

The epilogue is also necessary for a solid interpretation of the poetic speeches. Because it is the friends, not Job, who appear to be on God's side, defending God and arguing on God's behalf, readers of the poetic disputes may be perplexed and perhaps even led astray until the end of the book. The epilogue, therefore, equips readers with a critical interpretative key through the final judgment of YHWH, according to which the friends' view is criticised and that of Job is upheld (cf. Job 42:7). This judgment is crucial in conveying the revolutionary message that the author of the book wishes to transmit. From this perspective, therefore, it is clear that the epilogue cannot be treated as a later addition, but rather as a coherent conclusion and an integral part of the received text.¹⁴ The author of the poetry is clearly responsible for the content of the prologue and epilogue as we have them now, providing readers with all that is necessary to properly resolve Job's conflict with his antagonists.

Yair Hoffman convincingly argues that there are various elements of the narrative framework whose meaning and function can be reasonably explained only in the light of the poetic debates.¹⁵ The superlative description of Job's righteousness can be seen as a necessary preparation for understanding the disagreements in the poetic debates. "The abstract and theoretical problem in the dialogues [...] necessitates an axiomatic presupposition about Job's absolute righteousness. Any other starting point would inevitably weaken the essence of Job's argument and favour that of his friends".¹⁶

Moreover, it is true that the shift from prose to poetry seems to be abrupt and disjunctive in terms of literary style. This shift, however, is anticipated in the prologue. Hoffman interprets the prediction of the Adversary, "he will curse you to your face" (1:11; 2:5), as foreshadowing the transition in the work from deeds to words. Job's personality will be examined from then on mainly through his words rather than in his deeds. A perfect bridge, therefore, is built from the brief prose narrative to the extended poetic speeches.¹⁷

¹⁴ Cf. B. EHRLICH, "The Book of Job as a Book of Morality", *JBQ* 34 (2006) 30-38, here 32.

¹⁵ Cf. HOFFMAN, "The Relation", 165-167.

¹⁶ HOFFMAN, "The Relation", 166.

¹⁷ Cf. HOFFMAN, "The Relation", 167.

In brief, both the prose and the poetry of the book of Job belong to each other. The prologue and the epilogue contain “critical pieces of information which are absolutely necessary to understand the protagonist”, without which the book would be converted to “an abstract philosophical or theological discussion”.¹⁸ The poetic debates bring about some new and revolutionary insight, with which the folk-like narrative conveyed by the prologue and the epilogue is questioned, deepened, and transformed into a platform for innovation.

1.2.2 Cooperation between Narrative and Poetry

The cooperation between poetry and narrative is not an infrequent phenomenon of ancient literature. The constant shifting between these two styles is a familiar device in ancient Near Eastern literature.¹⁹ According to James W. Watts, the art of mixing prose and poetry is a “distinctive literary feature of the Hebrew Bible”.²⁰ Similarly, Tod Linafelt points out that when needed, the biblical authors bring together these two forms to “make use of the distinctive literary resource of each”, as well as to “exploit the possibilities of each”.²¹ The book of Job exemplifies this cooperation. The large number of critics who make a clear-cut distinction between the prose and poetry of the book neglect the unifying vision of the author that ties them together. Their mutual interdependence is deliberately cultivated by the author.

On the one hand, all the poetic speeches are not juxtaposed one after another but that they are well-connected among themselves by a typical formula of narrative, ויען + [x] + ויאמר. The repetitive formula is a continuous thread running all through the poetic speeches. It ensures that all the spoken words in the corpus of poetry, from chapter 3 into chapter 42, remain in a

¹⁸ EHRlich, “The Book of Job”, 31.

¹⁹ Cf. W. VOGELS, “Job’s Empty Pious Slogans (Job 1:20-22; 2:8-10)”, *The Book of Job* (ed. W.A.M. BEUKEN) (BETL 114; Leuven 1994) 369-376, here 369.

²⁰ “A distinctive literary feature of the Hebrew Bible is its propensity for mixing prose and poetry. Books containing primarily prose interrupt their narrative sequence with poems at irregular intervals, while most poetic books contain prose superscription and occasional narratives”. J.W. WATTS, *Psalm and Story*. Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative (JSOTS 139; Sheffield 1992) 11.

²¹ T. Linafelt, *The Hebrew Bible as Literature*. A Very Short Introduction (Oxford 2016) 69.

narrative text.²² It is the narrative style itself that is used to conjoin the various poetic speeches and to convey the various arguments expressed via the poetic style.

On the other hand, a careful investigation of the literary style of the prologue and the epilogue shows that indeed “the narrative is not written in prose throughout but consists of a mixture of prose and verse”, as Moses Bottenwieser maintains.²³ This insight is then developed by Nahum M. Sarna with a thorough analysis of the stylistic, linguistic, and literary characteristics of the narrative framework.²⁴ Sarna points out numerous instances in which the prose narrative employs varied poetic phenomena such as assonance and alliteration, parallelism, poetic vocabulary and phrases peculiar to poetry, and elements of repetition and of rare instances of morphology or syntax.²⁵ The author, therefore, demonstrates that the supposed rigid differentiation between prose and poetry in case of the book of Job is perhaps not so convincing and that what is usually considered as “pure prose” is in fact “saturated with poeticisms”.²⁶

Thus, the collaboration between poetry and narrative is irrefutable throughout the book of Job. As the book is considered from the standpoint of the poet as an integral whole, the question arises as to why poetry and narrative are brought together in the book of Job.

The first possibility is based on the progression of the narrative plot. As Hoffman says, faced with the Adversary’s stark prediction that Job will curse YHWH to his face, it is reasonable to expect that Job would express his innermost emotions. The need to discover what he thinks is not satisfied during the narrative prologue. Job’s two short responses (1:21; 2:10) seem to be merely conventional.²⁷ They can simply be treated as “empty pious

²² Cf. J.P. FOKKELMAN, *The Book of Job in Form* (SSN 58; Leiden 2012) 3-4.

²³ M. BOTTENWIESER, “The Typical Form of the Job-Narrative”, *The Book of Job* (London 1922) 12-16, here 12.

²⁴ Cf. SARNA, “Epic Substratum”, 13-25.

²⁵ Cf. SARNA, “Epic Substratum”, 15-18.

²⁶ Cf. SARNA, “Epic Substratum”, 15.

²⁷ Various critics argued that Job’s short responses are not uniquely his; instead, they are conventional and are attested in Israel’s wisdom tradition and liturgy. For example, C.L. Seow, considered Job first response, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will return there” (1:21), as a “popular saying” given its similarity to Eccl 5:14 and also to Sir 40:1. Cf. C.L. SEOW, *Ecclesiastes. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*

slogans”, as Walter Vogels and many others have held.²⁸ Even after having heard Job’s two responses, regular readers may still wonder what the protagonist is truly thinking. The narrator, therefore, needs to take a step back, refraining from describing Job in the third person and instead allowing him to speak for himself. In such a way readers can hear his voice. This is a good explanation of why the prose narrative gives way to poetic debates.

Tod Linafelt agrees that the author of the book requires poetry in order to “give the reader access to the inner life of Job”, but also see that the author needs poetic-figurative language “to express the complexity of Job’s emotions”.²⁹ Poetry reveals the depth of the conflict between Job and his antagonists, allowing all the characters to develop their different moral beliefs. Hebrew prose is conventionally concise and compressed, concentrating on characters, actions, and plot and not well suited to the expression of emotion and inner thoughts.³⁰ Had the writer chosen to write the story only in narrative prose, readers would have known principally what had happened to Job, rather than what was happening within him. The book needs poetry, therefore, to reveal to readers the depths of Job’s anguish.

It is also conceivable that the writer of the book of Job deliberately avoided giving direct answers to the question of suffering and justice that he himself raised in the prose narrative. If this is so, then shifting from prose narrative to poetry is a clever strategy, on the grounds that poetry allows

(AB 18C; New York 1997) 221. T. Linafelt and A.R. Davis alike point out another similarity between the second part of the response, “Let the Name of YHWH be blessed”, and the praising formula in Psalm 113:2, and therefore conclude that Job’s statements in this verse offer no special insight into his inner qualities: “it is a failure to get beyond conventionalities”. Cf. T. LINA FELT and A.R. DAVIS, “Translating נָחַם in Job 1:9 and 2:3: On the Relationship between Job’s Piety and His Interiority”, *VT* 63 (2013) 627-639, here 633-634.

²⁸ Cf. VOGELS, “Job’s Empty Pious Slogans”, 369-376.

²⁹ LINA FELT, *The Hebrew Bible as Literature*, 81.

³⁰ In a recent article, Tod Linafelt argues that the shift from prose to poetry is a formal feature of the book of Job. The same author further explains why the book needs poetry to do what it does: “Unlike biblical prose narrative, biblical poetry has no qualms about giving access to inner lives. Poetry is, in fact, the preferred mode for the expression of feeling and of thought [...]”. Therefore “The poetry affords Job the opportunity to give full expression to his emotional experience and his intellectual questioning of God’s justice, both of which – emotions and intellect – are part of one’s interiority”. T. LINA FELT, “Why Is There Poetry in the Book of Job?”, *JBL* 140 (2021) 683-701, here 689, 692.

sharing an experience rather than providing a concrete answer.³¹ The magic of poetry, as described by Robert Gordis, lies in its power to “evoke images, ideas, and moods beyond its explicit content; its nuances are more potent than its declarations”.³² What is specific about poetry is that, instead of saying all things comprehensively, it strives to say just a few things in an impressive manner.³³ By choosing to continue the book in poetry, therefore, the writer deliberately and skilfully takes a step forward in the original literary design, which includes both prose and poetry alongside their mutual pervasiveness. With narrative and poetry, readers are invited to be more actively involved in the process of reading and appreciating the book of Job.³⁴

To conclude, the shift from prose narrative to poetry in the book of Job is far from signifying any accidental disjunction. Poetry and prose narrative, through their collaboration, are shown to be two powerful literary devices with which the same writer shifts the perspective from the general level of conventional belief and traditional ethics to that of personal perceptive imaginations and argumentations. Thus, in order to answer the question regarding Job’s final stance, it is necessary to examine the various attitudes of Job presented throughout the book. The first step is to study the narrative prologue to see how the exposition for the entire book is established and how the ethics of retribution are implanted in this exposition.

2. Job’s Prologue: Exposition of a Perfect Morality

2.1 An Ambiguous Juxtaposition

The prologue of the book of Job begins with twin pieces of information on the happy status of its protagonist, who is superlatively described as righteous (1:1) and blessed (1:2-3).³⁵ The connection between these two

³¹ LINAFELT, *The Hebrew Bible as Literature*, 85-86.

³² GORDIS, *The Book of God and Man*, 195.

³³ Cf. KRAELING, *The Book of the Ways of God*, 244.

³⁴ For more discussions among modern authors on the cooperation between prose and poetry in the Hebrew Bible, see J.P. FOKKELMAN, “The Collaboration of Prose and Poetry”, *Reading Biblical Narrative. A Practical Guide* (Leiden 1999) 171-187; R. ALTER, “Between Narration and Dialogue”, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York 2011) 79-110.

³⁵ That Job’s piety and prosperity are described in a superlative manner is widely agreed among the scholars. Nonetheless, their ways of understanding this superlative feature and its

pieces of information is by means of a *waw* consecutive at the beginning of verse 2. David J.A. Clines states that this connection is not just a temporal sequence but a sequence of logic, turning the simple *waw* consecutive into what he calls *waw theologiae contractualis* or *waw retributionis*.³⁶ It means that the blessed state of Job is read as a reward for his righteousness: Job is righteous, *and therefore* he is blessed. This, however, is a biased reading that is unfair to the text itself. In reality, what is presented here is simply that Job is both righteous *and* blessed. Readers do not have sufficient evidence to decide whether the protagonist is righteous because God has blessed him or whether he is blessed because he has been righteous. Any equation which follows either of the paradigms, “righteous, therefore blessed” or “blessed, therefore righteous”, would be considered a forced conjecture and a failure to do justice to the text.³⁷

Now, what is apparent is that the narrator cautiously emphasises the perfect morality of the protagonist. Job’s morality is manifested not only through his personal quality of being “blameless and upright” but also in his theological attitude, that is, he “fears God and turns away from evil”. Appropriately, there is no one like Job in the Bible, even Abraham or Moses, who was described by such a double cluster of phrases: *תם וישר* as well as *ירא אלהים וסר מרע*. If wisdom is to be identified with the fear of God (cf. Job 28:28; Prov 1:7), the wisdom ascribed to Job is perfect.

Moreover, after the first three verses of information on the moral status of Job (1:1-3), the next two verses work on describing his pious behaviour in daily life from the ritual perspective (1:4-5). As patriarch of his household, Job is also scrupulously sensitive to the well-being of the members of his clan, particularly his children.³⁸ These descriptions

purpose are very different. For instance, A. BRENNER, “Job the Pious. The Characterisation of Job in the Narrative Framework”, *JSOT* 43 (1989) 37-52, reads the superlative description to Job as an “ironic exaggeration of the concept of conventional piety”. The character Job, according to her reading, is an “impossible example”, since it is “too good to be true”. This, however, is not the only nor the best way of interpreting this superlative feature. I am in agreement with Y. HOFFMAN and M.V. FOX in taking the superlative descriptions of the protagonist’s morality as a requisite for the development of the story.

³⁶ Cf. D.J.A. CLINES, “Quarter Days Gone: Job 24 and the Absence of God”, *God in the Fray* (eds. T. LINAFFELT – T. BEAL) (Minneapolis 1998) 242-458, here 29.

³⁷ Cf. POLZIN, “The Framework”, 199.

³⁸ Job’s preoccupation and his way of taking care of his children are interpreted by some critics as a sign of his inner complexity. For instance, CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 15, named it

deliberately place him alongside the righteous and blessed patriarchs, who themselves occasionally played the role of priestly mediators for the sake of their own beloved.³⁹ More than any other patriarch, Job played this role “all the days, continually” (כל־הַיָּמִים). He is a paradigm of piety.

Thus, the opening sentences of the prologue establish the case for an ideal protagonist who is not only incomparably pious but also extraordinarily prosperous. The link between his piety and his prosperity, nevertheless, still remains ambiguous, perhaps deliberately so. It is the Adversary who overtly brings this link into question.⁴⁰

2.2 Incitements of the Ethics of Retribution

2.2.1 The Adversary

The Adversary does not raise any doubt about the fact of Job’s piety. The ultimate source of Job’s prosperity is also beyond question, since the Adversary recognises that no one else but God vigilantly defends Job and bestows abundant blessings on him (1:10).⁴¹ When YHWH declares the

“obsessional *manie de perfection*, a hypersensitivity to detail”; while SEOW, *Job 1–21*, 255, considered it a religious scrupulousness and noted that it may be a “parody of religiosity”. Cf. also GOOD, *In Turns of Tempest*, 48–49. In any case, the scrupulousness of a father for the sake of his children and his assumption of responsibility for their behaviour in front of God are not really something extraordinary or unreasonable. Nothing prevents readers from understanding Job’s scrupulousness as a self-manifestation of his moral perfection, in accordance with what was reported by the narrator in the immediately previous context. Cf. S. MITCHELL, *The Book of Job* (New York 1992) 5.

³⁹ “No matter that he was a foreigner, Job was righteous and blameless like Noah (Gen 6:9), God-fearing like Abraham (22:12), and blessed like Isaac (26:12–14)”, thus noted C.L. SEOW, *Job 1–21*, 254.

⁴⁰ The term “Adversary” is deliberately used here, instead of “Satan” or “the Satan”, to avoid the popular misunderstanding of this term as designating a personal name or a personification. The fact that this term appears in the book of Job with the definite article suggests that “the Satan” be considered as a function rather than a person. “Adversary” fits well the function of the one who was collocated among the sons of God (בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים) and incited God against a human being (cf. Job 2:3). In the whole story, the Adversary is presented as a minor figure, one who surely cannot be regarded as the opposite of God but rather as subservient to God, one who cannot act without God’s permission. Cf. also SEOW, *Job 1–21*, 299.

⁴¹ The emphatic use of “you”, אַתָּה, in Job 1:10 is noteworthy. It emphasises the recognition by the Adversary that God is the guarantor of Job’s blessed and prosperous state. Read with its following context, this emphatic use may also allude to the intention of the

appreciation for Job – “There is no one like him on earth” (1:8) – it provokes the Adversary to raise the crucial challenge: “Does Job fear God for naught?” (1:9).⁴² Rather than being just a simple question about the sincerity of Job’s piety, this represents an affirmative assumption on a basic tenet of biblical wisdom theology that there must be some reciprocal connection between one’s prosperity and his or her piety. Conforming to such an assumption, Job’s fear of God must have something to do with his blessed state. Read in its literary context, this assumption functions as a direct negation of God’s appreciation of Job’s integrity. In fact, the Adversary’s argument is that Job lived as he did “not simply with the result that he had become outwardly prosperous, but in order that he might prosper”, as Gray argued.⁴³ If so, YHWH has nothing to be proud of regarding Job, for Job is not really doing anything for God. In other words, the Adversary apparently presumes that Job’s prosperity is the origin of his exceptional piety. If Job accomplishes good deeds for God by being righteous, blameless, fearing God, and avoiding evil, it is only to ensure that God might favour him with even better rewards. The Adversary’s fundamental assumption, therefore, is none other than the utilitarian principle of *do ut des*, in whose light Job’s relationship with God is interpreted. Thus, it is the way by which the ethics of retribution are incorporated in the narrative progression.

Supposing that Job’s piety is tied to his prosperity, the Adversary wagers that once this prosperity is removed, Job’s piety will also collapse. The Adversary incites YHWH to find out whether this assertion is true: “Stretch your hand now, touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face” (1:11). This short sentence consists of two parts: the first suggests a test which is conveyed by two verbs in the imperative, namely, *שָׁלַח* and *גַּע*,

Adversary: God must be the one responsible if it is shown that Job is indeed spoiled by his good fortune and that he conditionally follows a pious life driven by selfish motivations. If so, the one the Adversary tends to accuse is actually not Job, but God. Cf. FOX, “Reading the Tale of Job”, 149.

⁴² According to many commentators, this verse presents the basic problem of the book. S. TERRIEN, *The Book of Job*. Introduction and Exegesis (*IntB* 12; Nashville 1954) 913: “Here is the starting point of the discussion, the nerve of the drama, the basic verse in the whole book”. Cf. PARSONS, “Guidelines”, 393-413. It is, however, worth mentioning that the Adversary’s question is not absolutely new, for it echoes the traditional belief that the fear of the Lord has its reward. Cf. E.W. NICHOLSON, “The Limits of Theodicy as a Theme of the Book of Job”, *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*. Essays in Honour of J.A. Emerton (eds. J. DAY – R.P. GORDON – H.G.M. WILLIAMSON) (New York 1998) 71-82.

⁴³ GRAY, G.B., “The Purpose and Method of the Writer”, 37.

while the second part presents a prediction, יִבְרַךְ. Thus, on the basis of his assumption the Adversary makes a prediction that if YHWH changes Job's fate, Job will make a volte-face. The Adversary's argument is now fully exposed: Job is merely moving under the guidance of the ethics of retribution, and consequently does not serve God or fear God for God's sake. Ergo, he is not capable of pure devotion to God. The suggested test, therefore, is meant to pinpoint the source of Job's piety and the real motivation for Job's fear of God.

In addition, discerning readers would see that the suggested test might not only help to prove Job's integrity but could also serve as a test for God.⁴⁴ The Adversary's assumption has the potential to raise serious theological questions, for example: "Is God intrinsically worshipful?", as articulated by J. Gerald Janzen.⁴⁵ Is God, as King of heaven and earth, able to create creatures who freely and maturely worship God for God's own sake and do not merely use God for their own purposes? Could there be any true devotee for whom God is more important than his or her own selfish priorities? Could there be any human being, even a model as paradigmatic as Job, who is able to relate to God with wholehearted integrity, rather than being conditioned by the system of reward and punishment?⁴⁶ According to the Adversary, who predicts that even an extraordinary person like Job will

⁴⁴ The presentation of the test or wager, in the sense of bringing sufferings to the blameless Job, disturbs many modern readers. Several questions are raised about God's identity and God's way of behaving. For instance, "What kind of divinity is this who is so easily enticed into unjust action against a loyal servant?" "What kind of God is capable of allowing the innocent to suffer for no valid reason?" "What kind of God could allow himself to be tricked into making such a wager?" Cf. COX, *Man's Anger*, 15-16, 25-26. However, what happened to Job should be read in the light of its biblical milieu in which there was no shortage of presentations of testing experiences as a part of human existence, particularly in the lives of servants of God (for example Gen 12 or Gen 22). "A faith that is not tested is not fully valid". M.P. MATHENEY, "Major Purposes of the Book of Job", *SwJT* 14 (1971) 17-42, here 34. For a parallel reading of the test of Job and the trial of Abraham, see for example D.S. SHAPIRO, "The Book of Job and the Trial of Abraham", *Tradition* 4 (1962) 210-220; J. VAN RUITEN, "Abraham, Job and the Book of Jubilees: Intertextual Relationship of Genesis 22, Job 1:1-2:13 and Jubilees 17:15-18:19", *The Sacrifice of Isaac*. The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and Its Interpretations (Leiden 2002) 58-85.

⁴⁵ JANZEN, *Job*, 39. Cf. also S.E. BALENTINE, *Job* (SHBC; Macon 2006) 74.

⁴⁶ Cf. D.R. JACKSON, "Cosmic Bully or God of Grace? The Book of Job as Mašal", *WTJ* 78 (2016) 65-73, here 68.

curse God if all of his prosperity is removed, answers to these questions are undoubtedly negative.

The Adversary is thus presented as a cynical character who both evokes doubts about the authenticity of Job's fear of God and simultaneously provokes different questions about God in the mind of readers. The Adversary's viewpoint, on which all his arguments are built, is deeply rooted in the ethics of retribution. This character, therefore, is a literary device, functioning as propaganda for the ethics of retribution that the author wishes to call into question. Another literary device used for this purpose is the character of Job's wife.

2.2.2 Job's Wife

Job's wife is an unnamed minor character in the prologue narrative, the only woman who speaks in the whole story. She appears and disappears in an abrupt manner, uttering just one short sentence which consists of only six words: עֹדךָ מִחַיִּיק בְּתַמְתֵּךְ בֵּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים וּמָת. These words are highly ambiguous, and therefore have caused her function and position to be the subject of long debates. There are ancient versions which read these words positively and have reimagined Job's wife sympathetically.⁴⁷ Yet, there are also various

⁴⁷ The *Septuagint* and *The Testament of Job* are the two most obvious pieces of evidence for this direction. The *Septuagint* expands considerably the speech of Job's wife, giving her more opportunities to express her suffering in all that has happened, cf. J. ZIEGLER, *Job* (Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum XI/4; Göttingen 1982). Whereas *The Testament of Job* adds varied details to the narrative. According to the additions, she was called a "humble wife" who faithfully cared for Job after all the adversities had befallen him, went to work as a slave to earn their living, and even sold her hair to buy bread for her husband, cf. R.A. KRAFT et al. (eds.), *The Testament of Job according to the SV Text* (Texts and Translations 5, Pseudepigrapha Series 4; Missoula 1974) 46-49; R. THORNHILL (trans.), "Testament of Job", *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (ed. H.F.D. SPARKS) (Oxford 1984) 617-648, esp. 631-633. In general, the elaborations of both texts confirm her remarkable sympathy. Among modern authors, especially among feminist scholars, the impact of these versions is noticeable. See for example: V. SASSON, "The Literary and Theological Function of Job's Wife in the Book of Job", *Bib* 79 (1998) 86-90; F.R. MAGDALENE, "Job's Wife as Hero: A Feminist-Forensic Reading of the Book of Job", *BiblInt* 14 (2006) 209-258; E. RUNIONS, "Ms Job and the Problem of God: A Feminist, Existentialist, Materialist Reading", *From the Margins. Women of the Hebrew Bible and Their Afterlives* (eds. P.S. HAWKINS – L.C. STAHLBERG) (BMW 18; Sheffield 2009) 174-189; R. SCHOLTZ, "'I Had Heard of You... But Now My Eye Sees You': Re-Visioning Job's Wife", *OTE* 26 (2013) 819-839; K.G. WILCOX, "Job, His Daughter and His Wife", *JSOT* 42 (2018) 303-315.

authors who have interpreted these words in a completely negative way.⁴⁸ For a better understanding of this character, a close reading of the sentence uttered by her is needed.

The short sentence uttered by Job's wife consists of two phrases rather than one. The first three words form a phrase of their own, עֹדֶךָ מַחְזִיק בְּתַמְתֶּךָ. This is almost a verbatim repetition of God's approval for Job's integrity in the context in which God reproaches the Adversary for his incitement (cf. Job 2:3). Nonetheless, the meaning of this first phrase is strictly interdependent with that of the second phrase, which is a sequence of two imperative forms, בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים וּמָת. The first word of this second phrase takes up the last word of the Adversary's prediction (cf. Job 1:11; 2:5). At first glance, therefore, Job's wife seems to be aligned both with God and with the Adversary, and her short sentence can be seen as encapsulating the two different considerations on the morality of Job. Thus, there can be several ways to interpret this sentence in its entirety.

Of course, one may read the first phrase as a simple assertion, according to which what Job's wife considers him is meant to be congruous with what God has observed about him, affirming his unshakable fidelity to God (Job 2:3).⁴⁹ Accordingly, Job's wife is taken positively as an agent of comfort and compassion or a mediatrix of divine grace.⁵⁰ If this is so, then the last three words, "Bless God and die!", can be read not as a blasphemous

⁴⁸ An often-repeated note on the role of Job's wife is that of Augustine, who entitled her *diaboli adjutrix*, "devil's helper". Cf. S.A. AUGUSTINI, "Sermo I. De Symbolo", *Opera Omnia*. Operum Pars V. Opera Moralia (Paris 1839) 33. Likewise, in one of his sermons on Job in 1574, John Calvin named Job's wife *organum satani* "instrument of Satan". Cf. J. CALVIN, *Sermons on Job*. Volume One: Chapters 1–14 (trans. R.R. MCGREGOR) (Edinburgh 2014). While Thomas Aquinas commented that she is the only one the Adversary has left to survive calamities for his purpose, i.e., to irritate the just sufferer. Cf. AQUINAS, *the Literal Exposition on Job*, 94. Among modern commentators who follow this trend, see for example: HABEL, *Job*, 96; N. WHYBRAY, *Job* (Sheffield 1998) 34; J.A. WHARTON, *Job* (WBCom; Louisville 1999) 22; D. PENCHANSKY, "Job's Wife: The Satan's Handmaid", *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Right?* (eds. D. PENCHANSKY – P. REDDITT) (Winona Lake 2000) 223–228; C.M. MCGINNIS, "Playing the Devil's Advocate in Job: on Job's Wife", *The Whirlwind*. Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse (eds. S.L. COOK – C.L. PATTON – J.W. WATTS) (London 2001) 121–144.

⁴⁹ Cf. BALENTINE, *Job*, 63.

⁵⁰ Cf. C.L. SEOW, "Job's Wife – With Due Respect", *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen* (eds. T. KRÜGER et al.) (ATANT 88; Zurich 2007) 351–373.

disposition, but rather as a “theological euthanasia” out of love for her husband.⁵¹

However, I would read the first phrase as an unmarked interrogative, in line with what is commonly agreed among interpreters. In addition, I also contend that a certain sense of irony is discernible when the sentence is considered in its entirety. Now, it is noteworthy that the basis upon which the intervention of Job’s wife is constructed is the two key words of the narrative prologue: תַּמַּת, “integrity”, and בֵּרַךְ, “bless”.

The first term תַּמַּת, a noun in the feminine singular, derives from the same root as does תָּם, an adjective in the masculine singular. This root generally conveys “the notion of completeness, a totality without any diminution”, and therefore, denotes “an attitude or action found to be praiseworthy”.⁵² The term תָּם occurs three times in the descriptions of the personal qualities of Job in the prologue (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). Both תַּמַּת and תָּם convey “what is complete, entirely in accord with truth and fact”, and therefore, are used to denote a person who behaves in perfect conformity with contemporary moral and religious norms, a blameless person.⁵³ From the two heavenly scenes (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6) readers learn that all the sufferings of the protagonist do not stem from his sins or misdeeds, but rather from his integrity. God’s praise for Job’s integrity (Job 1:8) indirectly causes the first series of calamities that befall his properties and his children. When God praises Job a second time and recognises that Job still persists in his integrity (Job 2:3), it leads to a second trial that he suffers in his own body. Following these narrative sequences, an inevitable question that comes to the mind of readers, therefore, must be that of the functionality of Job’s integrity. Had Job’s integrity not failed to spare him, along with his properties and his children, from every adversity? If this is so, is it not unwise for Job to continue to assert his integrity?

Certainly, Job’s wife is not as assured as are readers regarding Job’s integrity, seeing that she is ignorant of the heavenly scenes and therefore of God’s appreciation for Job. Having her repeat God’s words of appreciation, therefore, should probably be understood as an ironic interrogative

⁵¹ Cf. S.L. TERRIEN, *Job* (CAT 13; Neuchâtel 1963) 60.

⁵² B. KEDAR-KOPFSTEIN, “תַּמַּת”, *ThWAT* VIII, 687-701, here 691, 695.

⁵³ Cf. BDB, 1071; NEWSOM, *Job*, 365.

regarding the integrity of Job, rather than a serious affirmation of it.⁵⁴ Accordingly, in the first phrase Job's wife casts doubt on Job's own integrity. The two occurrences of the pronominal suffix ך -, "you", second person singular, in such a short sentence can be seen as an emphatic use that affirms this reading.

The second term, ברך , is a verbal form in the imperative. The root ברך occurs six times and plays a crucial role in the prologue. Apart from two occasions in 1:10 and 1:21, in which the verb is part of idiomatic formulations and therefore must surely be read literally as "bless",⁵⁵ the other four occurrences (Job 1:5, 11; 2:5, 9) are most probably to be understood as euphemisms. In reality, in these four cases all the verbal forms of ברך have God as the direct object. Since the first occurrence (1:5), a negative connotation of this verb is already very clear in the context of Job's inner thought about his children: $\text{אולי חטאו בני וברכו אלהים בלבבם}$ ("Maybe my children have sinned and "blessed" God in their hearts"). In this construction, the formula "bless the Lord" functions as an apposition, and therefore a complement, to the phrase "my sons have sinned". Thus, the verb must be seen as a euphemism. Likewise, on two other occasions, 1:11 and 2:5, in which the Adversary predicts that Job will "bless" God to his face, the verb can hardly be taken literally, but rather as a euphemism for a serious immoral act, namely, "to curse God". If this is the case, the fourth

⁵⁴ In one of his articles, O'Connor argues that the real intention of Job's wife is not to solicit her husband to bless God, seeing that he has already blessed God after the first set of calamities (1:21) and this blessing brings him nothing but another disaster. Continuing like this, he will surely die. Therefore, even in using the verb "die", Job's wife does not indeed want him to die. The irony indicates the opposite, which is to say that Job's wife, in fact, wishes to save him from death. O'Connor also transforms the consequence of the two imperative verbs into a hypothetical phrase, reading it in this way: "(if you) bless God, and you will die". Cf. D. O'CONNOR, "'Bless God and Die' (Job 2:9): Euphemism or Irony", *PIBA* 19 (1996) 48-65. In fact, the ironic connotation can be recognised in the sentence. However, in my view, the method of rendering both imperative verbs into a hypothetical phrase is not really faithful to the original text itself. The imperative mood of the verbal form ומת is a "given" in the text, whereas in order to be read as apodosis of a hypothetical phrase (you will die), the verbal form here needs to be a *wayyiqtol* ותמת .

⁵⁵ In fact, in 1:10, the construction "bless the work of one's hand", מעשה יד ברכ , is very typical of Deuteronomic expressions (see Deut 2:7; 14:29; 15:10; 16:15; 24:19; 28:12); while in 1:21, the construction "blessed be the name of the Lord", יהי שם יהוה מברך , is a psalmic formulation, as attested in Ps 113:2. In these two occurrences, therefore, the verb connotes positive meanings.

occurrence in 2:9 cannot be an exception. To be consistent with other occurrences in the same literary context, the verb used by Job's wife indicates a strongly negative connotation: "Curse God and die!"

Consequently, the imperative sequence *ברך אלהים ומת* appears to be a counsel of despair, orienting Job to the unhappy ending of an inevitable death, however the last imperative, *ומת*, may be read as an advice, a recommendation, or an urge. Moreover, this imperative sequence also sheds light on the ironic nuance of the first phrase. The counsel of despair is a negation of Job's integrity. It means to show Job that he actually has no integrity with which to persist. His suffering and his imminent death are already obvious evidence of his moral failure. Thus, when read together both phrases underscore the absurdity of Job's integrity, as well as the futility of his persistence in such integrity. The short intervention in its entirety manifests that Job's wife is actually aligned with those who believe in the nexus between piety and prosperity and that her standpoint closely resembles that of the Adversary.

As with the Adversary's question, the question posed by Job's wife raises questions about God's behaviour. If the failure of Job's integrity deprives him of God's blessing, as Job's wife implies, does God's blessing not follow the paradigm of retribution? That there is a parallel between the role of the Adversary in the heavenly court and that of Job's wife on earth is undeniable. If in the heavenly scene the Adversary explicitly puts the question to God about the selflessness of Job's piety, in the earthly scene Job's wife implicitly puts the question to Job about the selflessness of God's goodness. In other words, if the challenge raised by the Adversary can be articulated as questioning whether Job's piety is gratuitous, now the challenge raised by Job's wife can be understood as questioning whether God's blessing, manifested in human prosperity, is indeed gratuitous. In the heavenly scene, God is incited by the Adversary to "curse" Job by taking away all that he possesses, in order to see whether Job will continue to bless him. In the earthly scene, Job is provoked by his wife to "curse" God and to accept death as the inevitable result. Both provocateurs reason on the basis of the ethics of retribution, which presume the utilitarian character of the human-divine relationship.

To conclude, through the two minor characters, the Adversary and Job's wife, the narrator introduces to readers the key question of the narrative prologue, the validity of the ethics of retribution and its application to the

relationship between Job and God. Both minor characters serve as antagonists, the Adversary to God and Job's wife to Job, within the overall scene of a wager. It is, therefore, Job's reaction amid calamities that will prove whether the Adversary or God wins the bet.

2.3 Beyond the Ethics of Retribution

If Job's moral quality has been carefully described to function as a paradigmatic exemplar, so also is his way of expressing his faith in God amidst his own calamities. Job's two brief responses in the prologue show his acceptance of divine sovereignty and his submission to divine freedom. They thereby both authenticate Job's moral integrity and vindicate God's approval of him.

2.3.1 Acceptance of Divine Sovereignty

Job's reaction to the first series of calamities is conveyed by both verbal (1:21) and non-verbal means (1:20). His non-verbal expressions are highly symbolic and are well-attested in various biblical texts relating to ritual gestures of mourning. Job tears his robe, an external gesture that commonly represents the interior state of the ones who suddenly receive heart-breaking information or find themselves in a vulnerable situation (cf. Gen 37:34; Judg 11:35; 2 Sam 1:11; 13:31). He shaves his head, a familiar practice commonly associated with the acts of weeping and mourning (cf. Isa 22:12; Jer 7:29; Amos 8:10). In addition, Job also adopts postures of submission and worship, such as falling to the ground (cf. Josh 7:6; Exod 18:7; 1 Sam 25:23) and prostrating himself (cf. Gen 24:52; Exod 34:8; 2 Chr 7:3). Job's non-verbal expressions, therefore, contain both anthropological and theological dispositions, reflecting not only Job's act of mourning for his misfortune but also his fundamental choice to remain faithful to God.

In a similar way, Job's verbal expression is a short response that can be articulated in two cadences, progressing from an anthropological wisdom to a theological submission. His final position, then, is expressed by a liturgical formula that asserts divine sovereignty (cf. Table 2).

Table 2.
Linear parallelism in Job 1:21ab

B		A		Job's anthropological wisdom (1:21a)
b' אשוב שמה	a' וערם	b יצאתי מבטן אמי	a ערם	
Naked I shall return there		Naked I came from my mother's womb		
לקה b'	ויהוה a'	נתן b	יהוה a	Job's theological submission (1:21b)
and YHWH has taken away		YHWH has given		
B'		A'		
יהי שם יהוה מברך Blessed be the name of YHWH				Job's position (1:21c)

In the first cadence, Job's response seemingly appropriates a widely held expression of wisdom: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there" (1:20a). A similar form of this saying is attested to in Eccl 5:15 and Sir 40:1. In their literary context, Sir 40:1 describes the heaviness of human labour and therefore the wretchedness of human life, whereas Eccl 5:15 stresses the vanity of human labour and therefore the futility of worldly human wealth. Job 1:21a, however, is a significantly different version. The verse is composed of two poetic cola that demarcate the two poles of humanity's life journey, birth and death.⁵⁶ Both cola are set in motion by the same adjective, ערם, "naked", forming a poetic couplet with a linear parallelism. The adjective signals a certain equivalence in the two images of the vulnerability of a human being at life's two extremes: an empty-handed infant and a lifeless corpse.⁵⁷ It presents an anthropological perspective that all human prosperity is ephemeral. Human hands cannot grasp any possessions at the beginning nor keep them at the end of their journey. The repetition of this adjective is very suggestive because "nakedness" is an appropriate metaphor for the current situation of Job, who has just been stripped of all his property and all of his children.

⁵⁶ Indeed, the use of the two contrasting verbs in these phrases, יצא, "to go out", and שוב, "to come back", can be read as a merism that refers to the journey of life in its entirety.

⁵⁷ Cf. NEWSOM, *Job*, 352.

Thus, in the first cadence Job has not yet directly reached the point predicted by the Adversary and expected by readers, namely, to curse or to bless God. Rather he speaks like a sage contemplating all his losses in the light of the inevitable truth about the existential nakedness of human life, accepting them as part of a regular phenomenon inherent in human existence.

The second cadence of Job's response is composed of another poetic couplet: "YHWH has given, YHWH has taken away" (1:20b). Structurally speaking, this couplet is constructed in the same way as the previous. Two parallel phrases are now set in motion by the identical term, יְהוָה. In this couplet, merism is also employed. That is to say, by using the two contrasting verbs, לָקַח and נָתַן, Job alludes to the totality of all that God does, whether favourable or unfavourable from a human perspective.⁵⁸ Accordingly, God is acknowledged as the one who is solely responsible for all that happens in the span of a human life.

The correspondence between the two poetic couplets (AB//A'B') is indicative of the interrelation of their connotations. One may say that Job's response puts the entire fluctuation of human existence in parallel with the totality of God's activities. In this way, the latter explains the former: it is YHWH's act of "giving" that causes a human being to "come out from the mother's womb" and YHWH's act of "taking away" that causes human beings to "return". God's action thus constitutes the ultimate origin of all events throughout human existence. Recognising that this is so, in the first couplet Job points out the vulnerability of human existence, a journey from the womb to the tomb, whereas in the second couplet he accepts such a state as an integral part of the manifestation of divine sovereignty.

Job's acceptance is revealed by the last words of his response: "Blessed be the name of YHWH" (1:21c). Job uses the very verb that the Adversary

⁵⁸ It is worth mentioning here the insightful reading of Søren Kierkegaard. According to him, in this short sentence Job manifests the profundity of his faith by not fixing primarily on what he lost, what YHWH has taken away, but beginning with what YHWH had given. The primacy of divine grace is acknowledged before dealing with any misfortune. Moreover, Job does not say something like: YHWH has given and the Sabeans, the Chaldeans, the lightning and the whirlwind have taken away as was well reported to him by his servants in the narrative. For Job, it is YHWH who is the only one responsible for all what happens to his life, both blessings and adversities. Cf. S. KIERKEGAARD, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (eds. H.V. HONG – E.H. HONG) (Princeton 1990) 15-17.

has been expecting, but his intention is totally contrary to what his antagonist predicted. The verb בִּרַךְ appears in a liturgical formula (cf. Ps 113:2), in which the verbal syntax is formed by the jussive יְהִי and the *Pual* participle מְבָרֵךְ, therefore primarily expressing a wish⁵⁹ that YHWH's name be blessed, not according to the Adversary's intention but rather according to the true sense of the term. Despite all vicissitudes, Job's fundamental choice is to persist in his attitude of reverence towards God. YHWH's name is blessed not because of the giving or the taking away, but rather for the totality of what God has meant to Job throughout his life.⁶⁰ In this way, Job overtly reveals his position, which can be seen as an absolute acceptance of divine sovereignty. This position is further affirmed by the narrator: "in all this Job did not sin, nor did he ascribe any folly to God" (1:22).

In sum, Job does not curse God even when all his blessings have been withdrawn. Neither does he consider the first set of calamities that befell him as signs of God's curse. The ethics of retribution presupposed by the Adversary do not function in Job's case.

2.3.2 Submission to Divine Freedom

It is remarkable that, before reporting Job's reaction to the second set of calamities, the narrator describes Job's personal affliction in Deuteronomic language (Table 3).⁶¹

Table 3.
Job 2:7 as reference to Deut 28:35

Deut 28:35	Job 2:7
<u>יִכְכֶּה יְהוָה בְּשַׁחֲיוֹ רֶעַ</u> <u>מִכַּף רִגְלֶךָ וְעַד קִדְקֹדֶךָ</u>	<u>וַיֵּצֵא הַשָּׂטָן מֵאֵת פְּנֵי יְהוָה וַיִּךְ אֶת־אִיּוֹב בְּשַׁחֲיוֹ רֶעַ</u> <u>מִכַּף רִגְלוֹ וְעַד קִדְקֹדוֹ</u>
The Lord will strike you [...] with a loathsome sore [...] from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.	The Adversary [...] struck Job with a loathsome sore [...] from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

⁵⁹ Cf. GKC §109.

⁶⁰ CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 39-40.

⁶¹ For some more discussion on the relationship between Job and the Deuteronomic Covenant, see WOLFERS, *Deep Things*, 111-118.

The similarities between these two sentences are too obvious to be accidental. The same verb נָכָה is employed, the same phrasal noun בְּשָׁחִין רַע is used to name the personal illness, and the same expression, “from the sole of one’s foot to the crown of one’s head”, describes the severity of the affliction. What has changed is the subject of the sentence, namely, the main agent of the affliction, from “God” in Deut 28:35 to “the Adversary” in Job 2:7. The pronominal suffixes are modified, from the second person (ךָ-) to the third (וּ-), so as to apply the Deuteronomic description to the personal case of Job. In reality, Deut 28:35 belongs to the literary context which describes various curses as presumptive punishments God reserves for the wicked who do not listen to God’s voice and do not observe God’s commandments (cf. Deut 28:15-68). The recurrence of such a formulaic description in Job 2:7 can be seen as a deliberate strategy by which the narrator brings into question a dimension of the conventional ethics of retribution, namely, the link between suffering and sin in the case of the righteous Job.⁶² Despite Job’s perfect morality, the very same suffering depicted by Deuteronomy as punishment for sin is now inflicted on his body. The affliction turns Job’s appearance into that of the one who is punished by God according to the Deuteronomic perspective. How will Job finally consider himself and how will he behave?

Job’s non-verbal gestures are considerably reduced in comparison with those described after the first set of calamities. First “Job took a potsherd to scrape himself” (2:8a), an act that can be literally considered a therapeutic action to smooth out the physical affliction on his skin.⁶³ However, this act could also be taken as a highly symbolic gesture in tune with the miserable situation of Job. The potsherd with which Job tries to mitigate his intolerable pain once belonged to a whole object, but now is only a broken and abandoned piece. Job’s life is now shattered like that. Job scrapes his broken

⁶² Thanks to the well-founded preparation of the prologue regarding Job’s innocence, readers certainly do not consider Job’s affliction as divine punishment. The case, however, is different with the three friends of Job who come from afar. Job’s sufferings are taken by them as some kind of proof of Job’s moral failures. Indeed, what the narrator calls into question will turn into affirmation in their arguments, as will be shown later.

⁶³ Indeed, the identification of Job’s bodily illness, בְּשָׁחִין רַע, is not so certain. The term בְּשָׁחִין is usually used for designating various kinds of skin disease such as ulcer or boil (cf. Exod 9:9, 10; Lev 13:18, 19, 20), a loathsome sore or severe inflammation that causes itching and may be somehow attenuated by the act of scratching. For a short discussion on this illness, see for example ROWLEY, *Job*, 36.

body with a broken piece of pottery.⁶⁴ He associates himself, then, with brokenness and desertion. This association is also manifested in Job's second gesture, as he "sat among the ashes" (2:8b). Job's location is not specified, but the term אפר is indicative, as ashes are what remain after everything has been burned, accumulating in a dung-heap located outside the city, set apart from normal life and society.⁶⁵ Moreover, sitting among ashes is traditionally a posture for mourners (cf. Esth 4:3; Isa 47:1; 61:3; Jonah 3:6).⁶⁶ Job's gesture of sitting in ashes could be seen as a symbolic manifestation of his vulnerability "as a mere mortal before God".⁶⁷ If so, in both responses, Job's non-verbal expressions are consistent in that they both refer to the contingency of human life and give evidence of the humble position of an authentic God-fearing person, or, one may say, of a person who was wise according to the traditional biblical worldview.

Job's verbal expressions are set forth in the context of his response to the incitement of his wife. Firstly, Job disapproves of his wife's words, stating that she speaks like a foolish woman (2:10a). The feminine adjective נבלות, "foolish", here most probably does not convey an intellectual quality, but rather a moral and religious deficit. Indeed, the term נבל frequently relates to the wicked ones who deny the existence of God (cf. Ps 14:1; 53:1), who blaspheme and mock God's name (cf. Ps 74:18, 22), and who hold the righteous in contempt (cf. Ps 39:8). The first part of Job's response, therefore, is a direct denial of the incitement to curse God. Simultaneously, it is an attempt to reiterate the reasonableness of Job's persistence in his integrity despite all the calamities that have assaulted him and notwithstanding all the afflictions that make him seem, in the eyes of those who follow the ethics of retribution, a person punished.

⁶⁴ Cf. BALENTINE, *Job*, 62.

⁶⁵ The LXX not only identifies the term with "dung-hill" but also locates it "outside the city" in its reading: καὶ ἐκάθητο ἐπὶ τῆς κοπρίας ἔξω τῆς πόλεως. This reading presents Job as a scrupulously faithful person who actively withdraws himself from the city because of his disease, in accordance with the law (cf. Lev 13:46).

⁶⁶ B. VAWTER, *Job and Jonah*. Questioning the Hidden God (New York 1983) 34, links Job's posture with the literary context of Jonah 3:6 and reads it as an act of penitence. This interpretation is not really convincing, seeing that the posture of sitting among ashes could be associated, but not necessarily identified, with the act of penitence. Cf. also M. JASTROW, "Dust, Earth, and Ashes as Symbols of Mourning among the Ancient Hebrews", *JAOS* 20 (1904) 133-150.

⁶⁷ SEOW, *Job 1-21*, 304.

Job concludes his expressions with another formula of wisdom: “We accept good from God, and shall we not accept evil?” (2:10b). The point Job would like to make concerns the human submission to divine freedom.

Table 4.
Job 2:10b, a parallel structure

מאת האלהים	נקבל	את הטוב	גם
	לא נקבל	ואת הרע	

As in the first response, Job’s final words are also a poetic couplet, arranged in a parallel structure (cf. Table 4). The verbal form **נִקְבַּל** is repeated exactly in both cola, and therefore it functions as a unifying element for the whole expression. Moreover, both the poetic cola are arranged in an irregular word order so as to underline the two direct objects, **את הטוב** and **את הרע**, good and evil. The combination of these two contrasting terms can be considered a merism that indicates not only the good and the evil, but rather the totality that lies between them. Thus, the statement suggests that everything which happens in a human life should be accepted. Alternative choices would be considered “foolish”. In addition, it can be seen that the motivation for Job’s acceptance lies in his conviction that everything that happens in his life, whatever it may be, has its origin in God, **מאת האלהים**.⁶⁸ It is the one and the same God who dispenses both good and evil. God is surely free to do so.⁶⁹ A person of integrity, therefore, should be able to accept the entirety of all that God sends into his or her life.

The employment of merism, **הטוב** and **הרע**, refers back to all that has happened to Job up to this point. It recapitulates not only the abundant graces bestowed upon him, realised in his sons and daughters (1:2), his possessions

⁶⁸ The fact that the phrase “from God” does not recur in the second colon is read by some interpreters as a way in which Job intentionally exonerates God from being responsible for evil things. However, the parallel structure of this couplet does not apparently sustain such a reading. In its entirety, the poetic construction implicitly indicates that it is God who is considered the same author of both good and evil things. The origin of evil things, therefore, Job “places fairly and squarely on Yahweh and not on some secondary divine power”, HABEL, *Job*, 96.

⁶⁹ This belief is by no means foreign to biblical thought. It is attested in various texts that God is the one who kills and makes alive, wounds and heals (cf. Deut 32:39); who forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates calamity (cf. Isa 45:7); “He is God, he is free to do what seems good to him” (cf. 1 Sam 3:18).

(1:3), and the prosperous and happy lifestyle of his family (1:4), but also the numerous misfortunes that befall his cattle and his flock (1:14-17), his children (1:18-19), and his own well-being (2:7). The revolutionary point of view, however, is that Job does not consent to interpret them as conforming to some presumptive principle. He does not attempt to restrict the will and acts of God so as to treat God as “the predictable rewarder of virtue and punisher of vice”.⁷⁰ Job does not think of his fate as retribution. The response to his wife makes clear his confidence that good or bad things may happen to a person of integrity and that they may have nothing whatsoever to do with the integrity of a person. Personal integrity, therefore, is not a guarantee that only good things will happen to us. Job has learned from experience that the various events that have befallen him seem to stem from a certain arbitrariness of divine freedom. As a person of integrity, Job submits to such freedom. In all of his expressions, Job is coherent in his theological stance, accepting divine sovereignty and submitting to divine freedom. In such a way Job vindicates God’s high esteem for him.

3. Concluding Remarks: Wisdom of an Unshakable Faith?

In the prologue, the narrator shows how Job’s words and deeds answer the Adversary’s question as to whether Job fears God for naught.⁷¹ Job is portrayed as an exemplary hero whose manifestation of faith in God appears unshakable despite all the vicissitudes of his life. The greatness of Job is made manifest by virtue of his ability to go beyond the boundaries of the principles of retribution and not to be conditioned by a utilitarian perspective. He continues to fear God even when the alleged “rewards” for his piety have been removed and various presumptive “punishments” have befallen him for no reason.⁷² In this manner, the protagonist of the prologue is characterised as an excellent illustration of wisdom according to the

⁷⁰ MOORE, “The Integrity of Job”, 19.

⁷¹ Cf. D.J.A. CLINES, “Deconstructing the Book of Job”, *The Bible and Rhetoric. Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility* (ed. M. WARNER) (WSPPhL; London 1990) 65-80, here 74.

⁷² Cf. also D.J.A. CLINES, “Does the Book of Job Suggest that Suffering is not a Problem?”, *Weisheit in Israel. Beiträge des Symposiums “Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne”* anlässlich des 100. Geburtstag Gerhard von Rads (1901-1971), Heidelberg, 18.-21. Oktober 2001 (eds. D.J.A. CLINES – H. LICHTENBERGER – H.-P. MÜLLER) (ATM 12; Münster 2003) 93-110.

original sense of biblical tradition, a true sage in the sense of being an authentic fearer of God. To such a degree, it can be affirmed, as Rick D. Moore states, that the prologue does not embody a justification or approval of the ethics of retribution, but rather an abrogation of it.⁷³

However, as argued by various critics, being exemplary does not mean being representative. Throughout the prologue, the narrator presents such a perfect and idealised character that actually no one on earth can be like him (cf. 1:8). In MacKenzie's words: "Job is the one that anyone can admire but no one can identify with".⁷⁴ From a realistic point of view, such a character like Job can be seen as too pious and patient to be believable,⁷⁵ too aloof from normal experience and too distant for ordinary humans.⁷⁶ Moreover, Job's way of effortlessly manifesting his faith is also considered puzzling, as it lacks any trace of an existential struggle.⁷⁷ Job's exceptional piety therefore might be judged a legendary exaggeration or even "a caricature of undeviating piety".⁷⁸

The problem is to determine whether the narrator really intended to present Job as a protagonist characterised by an unshakable faith. Is the story told in the prologue only a naïve tale about a heroic and unrealistic faith? Does Job actually remain unshaken even though he personally experiences all the dreadful misfortunes? There are literary details that suggest attentive readers answer these questions negatively. In reality, it should be noted that Job's second response (2:10ab) is not quite the same as the first (1:21). So also is the narrator's second recapitulation (2:10c) compared to the first (1:22). There are four substantial differences that require attention.

Firstly, the wisdom formula Job employs in his second response is much shorter and more ambiguous than the first. Before, Job used three phrases to express his faith: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21abc). After, he uses only one: "We accept good from God, and shall we not accept evil?" (2:10b). While the first response is conveyed by firmly declarative sentences, the second response is expressed

⁷³ MOORE, "The Integrity of Job", 20.

⁷⁴ Cf. MACKENZIE, "The Transformation of Job", 52.

⁷⁵ Cf. BRENNER, "Job the Pious", 40.

⁷⁶ Cf. FOX, "Reading the Tale of Job", 147.

⁷⁷ Cf. MACKENZIE, "The Transformation of Job", 52.

⁷⁸ CURTIS, "On Job's Response", 510.

in an interrogative tone. Admittedly, one may say that Job's second response can be read as a rhetorical question whose purpose is to emphasise a point rather than to seek an answer. Nonetheless, as noted by Janzen, rhetorical questions are a "tricky business".⁷⁹ Questions can be a simple way to avoid giving a direct statement or be used as a way of hiding oneself so as not to reveal one's inner uncertainty. Job's way of responding therefore can be suggestive of the fact that he is now less convinced than he had been in the first response. Faced with an intensely harsh experience, Job is perhaps no longer willing to speak in a firmly declarative tone. While in the first response Job summarises God's action only in a general way, as "giving" and "taking away", in the second response he classifies God's action in specific terms as "good" or "evil". Job's full acceptance of God's action in the first response is explicitly manifest in his blessing of God's name. This aspect of blessing is missing in the second. Job now presents no conclusion, and his question is left unanswered. All these differences can be read as signs of a certain wavering of Job's faith in the second stage of his trial.

Secondly, in Job's first response the subject of the confession of faith is the first person singular "I", thus reflecting a personal level of conviction, whereas Job's second response is more general as he uses the plural form "We". To be sure, one may argue that this plural subject is due to the literary context of the dialogue between Job and his wife. However, it is important to note that Job's wife has just directly addressed Job in the second person singular "you" (1:9). Therefore, Job's deliberate choice to switch to the plural form in response cannot fail to raise questions among readers. This plural form can reflect a conventional attitude of a group, and thus may allow Job to avoid expressing his real feelings. Compared to the full and personal acceptance of the first response, Job's submission in the second response is general and involves the risk of unhinging his self-awareness before an anonymous collective consciousness. Readers cannot discern now Job's position as clearly as in the first response. Job's way of responding, therefore, indicates that the constant adversity that befell him may have begun to take a toll on him and his personal faith.

Thirdly, another significant change in Job's second response compared to the first concerns the divine names. In the first response, Job invokes the proper name of God (יהוה) three times. In the second response, he employs

⁷⁹ Cf. JANZEN, *Job*, 51.

the generic name אֱלֹהִים once. To be sure, in the course of the narrative prologue, Job is not the first to utter the name אֱלֹהִים. In his second response, Job is retorting to his wife who has just mentioned God with the name אֱלֹהִים (cf. 2:9). However, it is of great significance if one realises that in the disputes between Job and his friends Job's expressions of agony and complaints against God only use the generic names of God, such as אֱלֹהִים, אֱל, or שְׁדִי. The shift of divine names from יְהוָה to אֱלֹהִים, therefore, not only reflects Job's avoidance of using God's proper name in his second response, but also reveals the narrator's tendency to link Job's last response in the narrative prologue to rebellious moments in the poetic disputes. This shift prepares readers for Job's forthcoming articulations of deep perplexity and crisis.

Fourthly, a difference should be noted also between the narrator's two verdicts at the end of the two accounts. This difference, though slight, is not insignificant. After the first account of Job's trial, the narrator concludes with a sentence containing two balanced phrases: "In all this Job did not sin, nor did he ascribe any folly to God" (1:22). Only the first phrase, "in all this Job did not sin", recurs in the narrator's second verdict. The second phrase is replaced by a nominal form, בְּשִׁפְתָיו, "with his lips" (2:10c). This final detail has divided interpreters. Some scholars understand the expression "not sin with his lips" in the second response as equivalent with the phrase "not ascribe any folly to God" in the first.⁸⁰ The annotation "with his lips" is even taken as an emphatic remark intended to strengthen further the claim on Job's integrity.⁸¹ It serves in a more straightforward manner to accredit God and to discredit the Adversary, given that the Adversary had predicted that Job would blaspheme God (cf. 1:11; 2:5).

Other critics consider the annotation "with his lips" as a kind of reductive note which limits the scope of Job's innocence. They argue that the sentence "Job did not sin in his lips" may imply that Job could have sinned in his

⁸⁰ The feminine singular noun form תְּפִלָּה ("folly"), as it appears in the second phrase of the first verdict, occurs only on two other occasions in the Bible, referring to "shouting" (Job 24:12) or "prophesying" (Jer 23:13). This term, therefore, can be understood as a folly expressed in speech. Cf. S.R. DRIVER – G.B. GRAY, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, Vol 1 (Edinburgh 1921); GORDIS, *Job*, 22; HOFFMAN, "The Relation", 164.

⁸¹ Cf. HARTLEY, *Job*, 84.

heart.⁸² It is not difficult to recognise that this interpretation is merely a conjecture. No literary evidence can justify such an extreme conclusion that takes what happens in Job's heart as contrary to his words.⁸³ On the contrary, various examples from the wisdom literature say that it is the expressions of one's lips that manifest the integrity of one's life (cf. Ps 39:1; Prov 10:13, 32; Eccl 10:12). From this standpoint, one may surely conclude that the narrator intended the expression to assure readers that Job was innocent in all of his actions towards God. Nevertheless, it is suspect that the narrator's concluding sentence promotes a naïve belief in Job's unshakable faith. At the beginning of the narrative, the narrator described Job's scrupulous concern for what was happening in the hearts of his children (1:5). The same narrator cannot now be absolutely silent about what is happening in Job's own heart in the face of his calamity. Job's inner wavering is communicated to readers by means of various literary hints. Along with other significant changes in Job's second response, as Clines argues, the narrative remark about Job's lips can certainly be interpreted as a literary sign indicating that the full truth about Job's reaction to the calamity has not yet been revealed.⁸⁴ If so, the story of Job's faith is not yet finished, and his theological stance is not yet fully exposed.

By repeating that Job did not sin, the narrator makes it very clear that it is Job's exceptional piety, not any kind of sins, that leads him to exceptional suffering. The fact of carefully affirming both the blamelessness of the protagonist and the reality of his suffering is an ingenious literary strategy that produces a double effect. It calls into question the conventional worldview on the causal nexus between piety and prosperity. At the same time, it represents a serious warning for the simplistic view that losses and sufferings in one's life are evidence of impiety. The narrator's presentation of the righteous protagonist is an exposition that sets the stage for the

⁸² Various Talmudic and rabbinic traditions follow this direction. For example, the Talmud Baba Batra affirmed: "With his lips he did not sin, but in his heart he sinned". Cf. J. NEUSNER, (ed.), *Talmud of Babylonia*. An American Translation, vol. XXII.A: Tractate Baba Batra (BJS 239; Atlanta 1992) 76. Similarly, Rabbi Rashi commented, אָבֵל בְּלִבּוֹ חָטָא, "but he sinned in his heart". Cf. A. SHOSHANA (ed.), *The Book of Job*. Commentaries of Rashi, Rabbenu Jacob b. Meir Tam, and a disciple of Rashi (Jerusalem 1999).

⁸³ "Thinking and speaking hardly differ in the East". Cf. M. WEISS, *The Story of Job's Beginning*. Job 1–2: A Literary Analysis (Jerusalem 1983) 71. Cf. also A.B. DAVIDSON, *The Book of Job* (CBSC; Cambridge 1889) 16.

⁸⁴ CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 155.

remainder of the drama. There are suggestive elements that may raise many questions about what is still hidden behind the veil of Job's heroic manifestation of faith. How does the protagonist understand himself in the face of adversity? At what level can he cling to his integrity? How does he understand God amid his own suffering? How do others interpret the protagonist's suffering under the guidance of ethics of retribution? All these questions can be answered only after Job endures his suffering in silence for seven days and nights (2:13) before revealing his profound and sincere stance before God. Only then do readers have the opportunity to discover the deep disintegration of the protagonist.

CHAPTER 3

ETHICS ON TRIAL

After seven days and nights of sitting in ashes, Job breaks the silence. Bitter words gush forth from his wounded soul that show the complexity of what has been happening in his inner life. His words allow the three friends, who sat with him in silence to console him, to now assume the role of theological disputants with him. All four express their thoughts in poetry, but the narrator makes it clear that it is Job who has the upper hand over the various arguments of his friends. The arrangement of the poetic corpus demonstrates this fact.

1. Organisation of the Corpus of Poetry

The corpus of poetry opens with Job's using a verb of lament, יָאֲבֹד יוֹם ("perish the day"; 3:3), and closes with Job's describing himself with a twofold image closely related to the rite of mourning, עָפָר וָאֵפֶר ("dust and ashes"; 42:6). This corpus is comprised of three clear-cut sections.

The first section (chapters 3–31) consists of two soliloquies, one of which appears at the beginning of the section (chapter 3) and another at the end (chapters 28–31), together with three cycles of disputation between Job and his friends. Each speech of Job in the debate takes place in two steps: Job first addresses his friends, then God.¹ After each speech of Job, one of his friends takes a turn to deliver a speech, which provokes Job to respond. It is noteworthy, however, that the literary structure of the three cycles of disputations is designed in such a way that the speeches of the friends become progressively shorter in each cycle, whereas Job's responses are always longer than the corresponding speech of his friends. A numerical survey in the below table supports this argument (cf. Table 5).

¹ For a careful study of the distribution of Job's addresses to God, see D. PATRICK, "Job's Address of God", *ZAW* 91 (1979) 268–282. For a more recent study, see K. ENGLJÄHRINGER, *Theologie im Streitgespräch. Studien zur Dynamik der Dialoge des Buches Ijob* (SB 198; Stuttgart 2003).

Table 5.
The three cycles of disputations

Job's opening soliloquy (chapter 3)			
	Speaker	Chapters	Number of verses
first cycle	Eliphaz	4–5	48
	Job	6–7	51
	Bildad	8	22
	Job	9–10	57
	Zophar	11	20
	Job	12–14	75
second cycle	Eliphaz	15	35
	Job	16–17	38
	Bildad	18	21
	Job	19	29
	Zophar	20	29
	Job	21	34
third cycle	Eliphaz	22	30
	Job	23–24	42
	Bildad	25	5
	Job	26–28	55
Job's concluding soliloquy (chapters 29–31) (96 verses)			

The first cycle of disputations is organised in such a way that Job's responses become progressively dominant in terms of quantity. The first response of Job (51 verses) is a little bit longer than the corresponding speech of Eliphaz (48 verses); the second response of Job (57 verses) is almost three times as long as the corresponding speech of Bildad (22 verses); the third response of Job (75 verses) is almost four times longer than the corresponding speech of Zophar (20 verses). In the second cycle, the structural design also gives more attention to the responses of Job (101 verses) in comparison with the speeches of his friends (85 verses). In the third cycle, the quantity of Job's words (193 verses) is more than five times longer than the number of verses attributed to the three friends (35 verses). The disputations are deliberately developed in such a manner that Job always has something more to say while his three friends have fewer and fewer arguments.

The second section of the corpus of poetry consists of the long speeches of Elihu (chapters 32–37), a character who appears and disappears in an unpredictable manner.²

The last section opens when YHWH speaks to Job “out of the whirlwind” (38:1–42:6). A small but important change in the structure of the introductory sentence is noteworthy, ויען־יהוה את־איוֹב ויאמר (38:1; then repeated in 40:1 and 6). For the first time in the corpus of poetry, the introduction of direct speech explicitly mentions the addressee (איוֹב). This addressee is accompanied by the particle את, the grammatical function of which is not just as a direct object marker, but rather as a marker of emphasis indicating the definite object of the verb.³ That formula opens the way for Job’s responses, which adopt the same structure, ויען־איוֹב את־יהוה ויאמר (Job 40:3, 42:6), exchanging the position between the subject and the object of the discourse. In this section, therefore, not only the speaker but also his interlocutor is introduced. Such introductory formula reveals that what is in process is a bilateral dialogue. In this section, Job is given an opportunity to pronounce the last words.

Thus, while the first two sections of the poetic corpus are composed of various disputations between Job and the friends in talking about God, the

² This section is beyond the scope of my research. It is true that the various arguments of Elihu’s speeches may add significant elements to the argument of the book concerning human suffering. Nonetheless, according to the narrative plot of the whole book, neither Job nor God seems to be aware of what is articulated by Elihu. In regard to the progress of Job’s arguments, his perspectives and his own theological stance, these speeches of Elihu contribute nothing. For some discussions about the function of this poetic section in the entire design of the book, see R. GORDIS, “Elihu the Intruder: A Study of the Authenticity of Job (Chapters 32–33)”, *Biblical and Other Studies* (ed. A. ALTMANN) (Cambridge 1963) 60–78; D.N. FREEDMAN, “The Elihu Speeches in the Book of Job. A Hypothetical Episode in the Literary History of the Work”, *HTR* 61 (1968) 51–59; N.C. HABEL, “The Role of Elihu in the Design of the Book of Job”, *In the Shelter of Elyon. Essays in Palestinian Life and Literature* (eds. W.B. BARRICK – J.R. SPENCER) (JSOTS 31; Sheffield 1984) 81–98; M.E. TATE, “The Speeches of Elihu”, *RevExp* 68 (1971) 487–495; L.J. WATERS, “The Authenticity of the Elihu Speeches in Job 32–37”, *BibSac* 156 (1999) 28–41; R. ANDERSEN, “The Elihu Speeches. Their Place and Sense in the Book of Job”, *TynBul* 66 (2015) 75–94.

³ It means that the introductory formula here is to be translated “Then YHWH answered Job himself and said”. Cf. B.K. WALTKE – M. O’CONNOR, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake 1990) 177–178.

last contains Job's direct dialogue with YHWH.⁴ Job's disputations with the friends are characterised by lengthy discussion of the ethics of retribution, whereas Job's dialogues with YHWH are saturated with the aesthetic values introduced by YHWH in the divine speeches. This chapter aims to examine the various articulations of the ethics of retribution expressed both by the three friends and Job, leaving the question of aesthetics for the next chapter.

2. Job's Three Friends and the Ethics of Retribution

To call into question a theory effectively, it is necessary that such a theory should be plainly articulated and fully manifested. In the prologue, the Adversary's retributive theory is taken up and promoted only by a minor character, the wife of Job. Her provocation however is instantaneously quenched by Job's exceptional piety. Now the retributive theory is vividly inflamed by the disputes between Job and his friends. What was brushed aside in the prologue is now explored on a much more sophisticated level and with passionate ardour.

Job's interlocutors are introduced at the end of the narrative prologue (2:11-13). They are the three friends, with names and provenances. They come with considerable sympathy to comfort Job. They share conventional mourning expressions and condolences with Job. The fact that they "gather together to come" (וַיָּעֲדוּ יַחְדָּו לָבוֹא, 2:11), has led various scholars to think of these three friends as a group who think alike and act in concert.⁵ It is true

⁴ The last section thus represents the culmination of Job's confrontation with his problem. Claus Westermann says that "the encompassing confrontation is that between Job and God, while within this confrontation stands the one between the friends and Job". C. WESTERMANN, *Der Aufbau des Buches Hiob* (Stuttgart 1978) 32: "Das umfassende Gegenüber ist das von Hiob und Gott; innerhalb seiner steht das Gegenüber: die Freunde – Hiob". This means that the disputations between Job and his friends can be interpreted adequately only from the hermeneutical horizon of the direct confrontation between Job and God. All of the passages in which Job and the friends talked about God are enlightened by Job talking with God directly.

⁵ Cf. SEOW, *Job*, 307. The arrival of three friends at the end of the prologue, in fact, marks the beginning of a new earthly scene in a manner parallel to the two heavenly scenes of the prologue (1:6-12; 2:1-6). That the friends come together in a united group resembles the assembly of the divine beings who come to present themselves in the heavenly court (cf. HABEL, *Job*, 97). The friends' assembly inaugurates a new test of Job, just as had happened to him after each of the two previous heavenly assemblies (cf. NEWSOM, *Job*, 366).

that the poet does not comment on the individual personality traits of the three friends,⁶ but the arguments expressed by each of them are, in fact, considerably differentiated.⁷ In order to appreciate their distinct contributions, it is necessary to treat them as individuals. Therefore, the speeches of the three friends, and also those of Job, will be read independently though not separately. This approach will help not only to identify the standpoint of each interlocutor, but also to specify the assumptions that they share in common. In reality, what happens between Job and his friends can hardly be called “dialogue” in the true sense of the term. All three friends have their particular theology, and they readily express it when it is their turn, offering explanations of Job’s dilemma. In doing so, they do not really respond to the content of Job’s arguments. Likewise, Job’s speeches are generally not meant to reply to the specifics of the theology of his friends but to develop his own theology from the perspective of a sufferer.⁸ Therefore, it could be disorienting to focus on how each speaker replies to the other’s argument. Instead, it is more appropriate and fruitful to examine the arguments attributed to each individual speaker over the course of the three cycles of speeches.

As for the selection of material from the individual speeches, the sentences will be chosen according to their relevance to the ethics of retribution. More concretely, the analysis will concentrate on verses that contain vocabulary typical of retributive ethics, both constructive and distributive retribution. The selected verses contain vocabulary employed by Job’s three friends and Job himself to explain their position on constructive retribution. This vocabulary indicates both the idea of moral probity, such as “fear of God” (יִרָא), “integrity, blamelessness” (תָּם), “righteousness” (צִדְקָה), “upright” (יָשָׁר), “innocent” (נָקִי), “pure, clean” (זָךְ, בָּר), “righteous” (צִדִּיק), as well as ideas of reward, such as “peace,

⁶ Cf. GORDIS, *The Book of Job and Man*, 77.

⁷ Among scholars who follow this direction, see BENNETT, “When A Righteous Man Suffers”, 57-64; L.J. WALTER, “Reflections on Suffering from the Book of Job”, *BibSac* 154 (1997) 426-451; D.J.A. CLINES, “The Argument of Job’s Three Friends”, *On the Way to the Postmodern. Old Testament Essays. Vol. 2* (JSOTS 293; Sheffield 1998) 719-734; W.-C. KI, “Gift Theory and the Book of Job”, *TS* 67 (2006) 721-749; S. BALDWIN, “Miserable but not Monochrome: The Distinctive Characteristics and Perspectives of Job’s Three Comforters”, *Themelios* 43 (2018) 359-375.

⁸ “In their own train of thought they do not adhere closely to that of the other”. G. VON RAD, *Weisheit in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluy 1970) 271.

restoration” (שׁלם), “good” (טוב). The selected verses contain also vocabulary related to destructive retribution that indicate both the idea of wrongdoing, such as “iniquity, mischief, perverseness” (עוון, עול, און, עוול), “trouble” (עמל), “wickedness” (רע), “transgression” (פֿשע), “sin” (חטא), “the wicked, the ungodly, the impious” (רשע, עול, חנף), as well as the idea of punishment, such as “perish” (אבד), “consume, destroy” (כלה), “condemn” (רשע), “chasten” (יכח), “judgment” (משפט), etc.

The purpose of this reading is to highlight the various ethical considerations of the disputants throughout the speeches attributed to them in three cycles, paying attention to the development of each one’s thinking on the ethics of retribution.⁹ The reading also aims to highlight the intellectual adventure regarding retributive ethics into which the book of Job invites its readers.

2.1 Eliphaz the Temanite

2.1.1 Different Fates for the Righteous and the Wicked

Eliphaz the Temanite is the first to address Job after a long period of sympathetic silence. He makes three speeches (chapters 4–5, 15, and 22), each as a response to the words of Job. The first speech (chapters 4–5) is the longest and most important discourse on the part of Job’s interlocutors. Eliphaz appears as a traditional adviser who speaks in a gentle but authoritative way with words of encouragement and reassurance. He aims to promote the orthodox understanding of the ethics of retribution, namely, that God surely rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. The fates of the righteous and the wicked are therefore radically different. This

⁹ The arguments of the three friends of Job are often repetitive and sometimes overlap one another. Some scholars hold that there is no real movement or development in their arguments other than their attitude toward Job, “they just grow more vehement in their attack on Job”, POPE, *Job*, lxx. A close examination of the speeches attributed to the three friends, however, will show that “only a genuinely distinctive argumentation [of the three friends] would fully justify the introduction of *three* interlocutors in the body of the book”, as Clines well argues. If the friends all have the same point of view, the book is indeed “long-winded and flabby”. Instead, if each of them takes a distinctive position toward Job, despite sharing most fundamental presumptions, “their presence is not only gratuitous but positively essential for the exploration of the problem raised by the book”. CLINES, “The Argument of Job’s Three Friends”, 730.

conviction is explicitly expressed in various instances throughout the first speech, the most relevant passages being Job 4:6-7, 4:8-9 and 5:6.

2.1.1.1 Job 4:6-7: Certainty of constructive retribution

הלא יראתך כסלתך	⁶ Is not your fear of God your confidence?
תקותך ותם דרכיך	Is not the very integrity of your ways your hope? ¹⁰
זכר־נא מי הוא נקי אבד	⁷ Remember, who that was innocent ever perished?
ואיפה ישרים נכחדו	or where were the upright cut off?

The poetic strophe is characterised by the use of rhetorical questions, which Eliphaz uses to encourage Job to maintain his confidence and hope in God. Terms describing moral probity, such as יראה (“fear of God”), תם (“integrity”), נקי (“innocent”), and ישר (“upright”), express Eliphaz’s advice that Job should take constructive retribution for granted. This theme develops in two continuous steps.

In the first poetic line (v. 6), the poet has Eliphaz employ two specific terms to qualify Job’s morality in accordance with God’s appreciation of him in the prologue, namely יראה and תם (cf. Job 1:1). The term יראה is an ellipsis for ירא אלהים, “fear of God”,¹¹ which is conventionally regarded as the substantial source and principal part of wisdom (cf. Prov 1:7; 9:10). Instead, the term תם, as employed in the phrase תם דרכיך, “integrity of your ways”, indicates the correctness and blamelessness of Job’s moral life. Thus, as a wise comforter, Eliphaz begins by praising Job’s morality. Invoking these personal qualities, at the same time he aims to elicit in Job corresponding religious dispositions, namely, confidence (כסלה) and hope (תקוה).¹² These last two terms appear side by side in the centre position of

¹⁰ In his translation, Clines transfers the waw of ותם to the beginning of the poetic colon to introduce תקותך, cf. CLINES, *Job* 1–20, 109. This translation eliminates the emphasis that the MT communicates. Indeed, many scholars recognise the particularity of the Hebrew construction of this colon: the copula waw is placed within the proposition instead of standing at the beginning. This construction places special emphasis on the keyword term, similar to Job 10:8, 19:23, and 2 Sam 15:34, as Dhorme points out. Cf. DHORME, *Job*, 40. Therefore, the phrase ותם דרכיך is translated here as “the very integrity of your ways”.

¹¹ As indicated by DHORME, *Job*, 44, it is a familiar style of Eliphaz’s speeches in using “fear” for “fear of God” (cf. Job 8:14; 31:24). In fact, this ellipsis is also well attested in various texts, for example in Gen 20:11; 2 Sam 23:3; Neh 5:15. Cf. GORDIS, *Job*, 47.

¹² The word כסלה is the feminine form of כסל. This root often has an ambiguous meaning. In some instances, it means “fat, fatness” (cf. Lev 3:10, 15; Job 15:27) and has the connotation of “fool, silliness”, as in Prov 14:16: “The wise fears and turns away from evil,

the poetic line, creating a continuity between them, and thus highlighting the religious dispositions that Eliphaz urges Job to have (cf. Table 6).

Table 6.
Chiastic parallelism of Job 4:6

6a	b כסלתך	a יראתך	הלא
6b	a' ותם דרכיך	b' תקותך	

The two cola of Job 4:6 are arranged in such a manner that Job's fear of God is directly associated with his confidence and Job's integrity with his hope. This arrangement suggests an organic relation between Job's moral qualities and his religious dispositions. According to Eliphaz, therefore, reverent piety is taken as insurance for one's confidence and trust, and the integrity of one's life is taken as reason for one's hope. In this way of arguing, Eliphaz reveals his theological conviction that the one who fears God and behaves with moral correctness will surely enjoy God's favour. The bedrock that supports Eliphaz's argument, therefore, is his belief in constructive retribution. The fourfold occurrence of the pronominal suffix in second person singular (ך-, "you") indicates that Eliphaz is indeed applying this conviction to Job's particular case. In this manner, Eliphaz recommends that Job rely on his own moral merits as a guarantee of his well-being. The Adversary's assumption that human beings do not fear God for nothing is the essence of Eliphaz's argument.

In the second poetic line (v. 7), Eliphaz argues for the certainty of constructive retribution on a general scale. He tries to convince Job that the opposite of constructive retribution never happens under any circumstances. No righteous person ever perished.

while the fool (כסיל) is hot-headed and careless". In other instances, however, the root כסל can have a positive sense, indicating "trust, confidence", such as "for God will be your confidence (כסלך) and will keep you from being caught" (Prov 3:26; cf. Ps 78:7, Job 8:14; 31:24). The poetic construction of Job 4:6, in which כסלתך is parallel to תקותך ("your hope"), helps determine the meaning of the former in a positive sense, that is, "confidence, trust".

Table 7.
Linear parallelism of Job 4:7

7a	b אֶבֶד	a מִי הוּא נָקִי	זָכַרְנָא
7b	b' נִכְחַדוּ	a' וְאִיפָה יִשְׂרָיִם	

Job 4:7 is arranged in a linear parallelism. It opens with Eliphaz appealing to Job to “remember” (זָכַר), that is, to reflect upon the stock of his life’s experience. This appeal can also be an invitation for Job to return to the source of the common religious belief of his time about the blessed fate of the righteous: “I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken” (Ps 37:25; cf. Sir 2:10). Going in the same direction as the Psalmist, Eliphaz nevertheless elaborates his conviction in a different way. By means of rhetorical questions, he challenges Job to prove the opposite of constructive retribution. The two verbs that appear at the end of each poetic colon both express the destruction of premature death: while the verb אֶבֶד means “to perish, to die, to be ruined or destroyed”, the *Niphal* form of verb כָּחַד means “to be effaced, destroyed, annihilated”.¹³ Remarkably, these two verbs are preceded by the two adjectives denoting the person of moral probity, both in the singular, נָקִי (“innocent, clean, guiltless”), and in the plural, יִשְׂרָיִם (“upright, righteous, just”). The juxtaposition of the terms נָקִי and אֶבֶד, as well as יִשְׂרָיִם and נִכְחַדוּ, brings to the fore what is apparently at odds according to Eliphaz, and thus serves to emphasise what he argues against. Eliphaz’s argument is strengthened by the force of rhetorical questions. Not limiting himself to the single case of Job, Eliphaz enlarges his question to the extent of any persons (מִי הוּא) in any context (אִיפָה). In Eliphaz’s mind, constructive retribution is considered as a universally valid principle that can be applied to everyone in every circumstance, without exception.

Eliphaz does not deny the reality of Job’s suffering. He does not say that the righteous does not suffer, but instead insists that the ultimate outcome of a righteous life cannot be destruction. The comfort that Eliphaz aims to offer Job may be expressed in a syllogism: the righteous do not die prematurely; Job is a righteous person; therefore, Job will not die prematurely, despite his current suffering. Eliphaz also attempts to persuade Job that ultimate

¹³ Cf. BDB 470.

destruction is only for the wicked. In this manner, he moves to argue for the certainty of destructive retribution.

2.1.1.2 Job 4:8-9: Certainty of destructive retribution

כֹּאֲשֶׁר רֵאִיתִי חֲרָשִׁי אֹן	⁸ As I have seen, those who plough iniquity,
וְזֹרְעֵי עֵמֶל יִקְצְרוּהוּ	and those who sow trouble, reap it.
מִנִּשְׁמַת אֱלֹהִים יֵאָבְדוּ	⁹ By the blast of Eloah they perish,
וּמִרוּחַ אָפוֹ יִכְלוּ	and by the breath from his nostril,
	they are consumed.

In defending constructive retribution, Eliphaz has appealed to Job's experience with the imperative "remember" (זָכַר-נָא). In arguing for destructive retribution, he speaks from his own experience, "According to what I have seen" (כֹּאֲשֶׁר רֵאִיתִי). As recognised by various scholars, reference to his personal experience is characteristic of Eliphaz's style of constructing his arguments (cf. 4:12-21; 5:3, 8; 15:17).¹⁴ The idea displayed here, nevertheless, is not exclusively his. Eliphaz's personal experience supports the traditional belief regarding destructive retribution. In fact, the verb pair זָרַע ("sow") and קָצַר ("reap") appear side by side in several sapiential and prophetic texts: "Whoever sows [זֹרַע] iniquity will reap [יִקְצֹר] sorrow" (Prov 22:8; cf. Sir 7:3); "for they sow [יִזְרְעוּ] the wind and they reap [יִקְצְרוּ] the whirlwind" (Hos 8:7). Sometimes, the verb חָרַשׁ ("plough") is used instead of זָרַע: "You have ploughed [חָרַשְׁתֶּם] wickedness, you have reaped iniquity" (Hos 10:13).

All three roots, חָרַשׁ, זָרַע, and קָצַר, which are used metaphorically in the language of nature, are employed in the construction of Job 4:8. The phrase כֹּאֲשֶׁר רֵאִיתִי at the beginning of the poetic line serves as a subordinate clause, leading to the main idea proposed by Eliphaz. In the main clause, the verb form יִקְצְרוּהוּ serves as the predicate, the subjects of which are formed by the two phrases with participial verbs, חֲרָשִׁי אֹן and זֹרְעֵי עֵמֶל. Gordis observes that the poetic caesura does not coincide with the logical one.¹⁵ The poetic caesura occurs after the first subject חֲרָשִׁי אֹן, marking the separation of the two poetic cola, while the logical caesura occurs only after the second subject, זֹרְעֵי עֵמֶל. This construction places the two subjects in two poetic cola, and thus has the effect of emphatically identifying those whom Eliphaz

¹⁴ Cf. DHORME, *Job*, 42; HARTLEY, *Job*, 108.

¹⁵ Cf. GORDIS, *Job*, 47.

intends to target in his argument. In reality, the two subjects consist of two parallel participial phrases. The two participles, וְזָרַעִי and חֲרָשִׁי, denote agents of the action, whose direct objects are the two nouns אֹן and עֵמֶל. As recognised by various authors, these two nouns are both ambivalent in their meaning, indicating evil-doing or evil consequences.¹⁶ The term אֹן can mean either “sin, iniquity” (cf. Num 23:21; Job 11:14) or “misery, calamity, misfortune” (Prov 12:21; Amos 5:5). Similarly, the term עֵמֶל can mean either “transgression, evil” (Ps 7:16; Isa 10:1) or “trouble, misery” (cf. Ps 10:14; 25:18; Jer 20:18). These terms encapsulate the idea that there is an intrinsic nexus between moral and physical evil, the latter being a consequence of the former. “What is sown is sin and transgression, but what is reaped is sorrow and misery”.¹⁷ In Job 4:8, these two nouns are synonymous in their generic meaning, indicating moral outrage, such as “evil, wrongdoing, trouble”. The construction of the main clause, in which the two participial phrases חֲרָשִׁי אֹן and זָרַעִי עֵמֶל serve as the subject of יִקְצְרֶהוּ, justifies the fact that both nouns אֹן and עֵמֶל are recaptured at the end in the suffix pronoun -הוּ of the verb form יִקְצְרֶהוּ, denoting the consequence of the moral outrage committed.¹⁸ By including the three

¹⁶ Cf. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 43; DHORME, *Job*, 42; CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 126. The ambivalence of these terms was first discussed in a much broader context by K.H. Fahlgren, who proposed the concept of “schicksalwirkende Tat”, a “fate-determining deed”. Cf. K.H. FAHLGREN, *S'daka, nahestehende und entgegengesetzte Begriffe im Alten Testament* (Uppsala 1932). According to Fahlgren, there was not always a clear distinction between cause and effect of an action in the early time of Israelite religion. From a lexicographical approach, Fahlgren revealed that there was a stock of Hebrew vocabulary that was employed to indicate both an action and its inherent consequences. For example, the term רָשָׁע does not mean only “wickedness” (Deut 9:27; 1 Sam 24:13; Ps 47:5; 106:6; Job 35:8) or “wicked person” (cf. Gen 18:23, 25; Deut 25:1-2; 1 Kgs 8:32; Job 11:20), but also describes the one who is “consequently burdened with guilt and must suffer his punishment” (cf. Job 11:20; 27:7, 13). Similarly, the term צַדִּיקָה denotes not only actions that bring about justice and righteousness, but also the various fruits of such actions (Isa 32:17; Prov 14:32; 21:21), cf. FAHLGREN, *S'daka*, 4, 44-46, 92. The point for Fahlgren is that in the ancient Israelite thought there existed a kind of “synthetic view of life” (“Synthetische Lebensauffassung”) according to which there was hardly a distinction between righteousness and reward or between wrongdoing and misfortune. The double level of meaning of these terms reflects somehow the ethical belief that a person who performs righteous deed would of course enjoy a happy and prosperous life while an evildoer would inevitably meet disaster and punishment, cf. FAHLGREN, *S'daka*, 50-54.

¹⁷ HABEL, *Job*, 126.

¹⁸ Admittedly, the grammatical function of the suffix pronoun -הוּ in the verb form יִקְצְרֶהוּ is ambiguous. One can also argue like Moses Buttenwieser: “the objective suffix of *reap* does

traditional metaphors of ploughing, sowing, and reaping, Eliphaz argues for an inevitable connection between wickedness and destruction, between moral and physical evil. Human evil is the cause of human suffering.

The juxtaposition of the metaphorical language of natural realities with words of moral outrage clearly shows that Eliphaz is applying an analogy from the laws of nature to the sphere of human morality. The same idea is repeated in Job 5:6, in such a way as to stress the human origin of suffering.

כי לא־יצא מאפר און For misery does not spring out of the ground
ומאדמה לא־יצמה עמל Neither does trouble spring up from the soil

The word pair און and עמל appears in both Job 4:8 and Job 5:6. In the former, these words refer to moral outrage that the wicked commit, as “iniquity” and “misdeed”. In the latter they denote consequences that the wicked suffer, namely “misery” and “trouble”. Moreover, just as the former is characterised by the metaphors taken from nature, so also the latter is characterised by the imagery of nature. In addition to the pair of images of nature, אפר (“dust, ground”) and אדמה (“soil, earth”), the poet employs also the two verbs describing the growth of vegetation, יצא (“to spring out, shoot forth”) and צמה (“to sprout, spring up”). In Job 4:8 Eliphaz asserts that human persons harvest the evil they cultivate; in Job 5:6 he argues that the land and soil are not responsible for human suffering. Misery and trouble are not like wild plants that sprout naturally from the earth without any human involvement. In line with Job 4:8, Eliphaz insists that human suffering does not derive from sources other than human beings themselves.

Clines comments that the transposition from the language of the natural order to the sphere of human morality presumes “a deterministic nexus between act and consequence, and thus robs both God and humans of their freedom”.¹⁹ This comment is actually a reaction to an important thesis argued by Klaus Koch in one of his classical articles, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?”²⁰ According to Koch, there exists an Action-Consequence-Connection (“Tat-Ergehen-Zusammenhang”) in

not refer to *evil* and *trouble*, but to the entire participial clauses”. M. BUTTENWIESER, *The Book of Job* (London 1922) 162. The meaning it conveys, however, remains the same: they reap what they sow, indicating an inevitable connection between wickedness and destruction.

¹⁹ CLINES, *Job* 1–20, 125.

²⁰ Cf. K. KOCH, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?”, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 52 (1955) 1–42.

various biblical passages. This connection can be manifested in both ways, either a connection between sin and disaster (“Sünde-Unheil-Zusammenhang”) or one between good conduct and blessings (“Guttat-Heil-Zusammenhang”).²¹ In both cases an action is understood as a seed (“Tat als Saat”) from which a corresponding harvest comes out (cf. Prov 11:18, 30). Koch agrees with Fahlgren on the concept of the “fate-determining deed” (“schicksalwirkende Tat”), stating that the consequences of an action are part of the essence of the action itself, rather than something imposed from outside.²² This means that the destiny of human persons is determined by their own actions. God’s role is very limited and is comparable somehow to the midwife (“Hebammendienst”) who merely brings to completion what was already set in motion by human actions.²³ The conclusion of Koch is a denial of the active rule of God as the one who punishes or rewards, which implies a denial of the existence of any doctrine of retribution in the Hebrew Bible. Koch insisted that it is incongruous to speak of retribution in the Hebrew Bible, since “there is no trace of a retribution theory according to which God punishes or rewards a person for his or her actions according to an established norm, which comes from the outside and imposes upon such a person”.²⁴

²¹ Cf. KOCH, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma”, 7.

²² Cf. FAHLGREN, *S'daka*, 11.

²³ Cf. KOCH, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma”, 5.

²⁴ Cf. KOCH, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma”, 22. In reality, there are several scholars who were going in the same direction with Fahlgren and Koch. Some argued that there is in fact no concrete word for “punishment” in the Hebrew Bible. What is usually called “divine punishment” is therefore simply an act of God in bringing to fulfilment a legal case against human persons corresponding to their misdeeds. Cf. F. HORST, “Recht und Religion im Bereich des AT”, *EvTh* 16 (1956) 49-75, here 74. The connection between an act and its outcomes is therefore “indissoluble”, in the sense that God does not add an external forensic act to the existential relation between an act and its consequences. Cf. VON RAD, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. Band I: Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels (München 1962) 398. Others considered this connection as “inward, necessary, and not superimposed as the consequence of a forensic verdict and penalty”. W. MCKANE, *Proverbs. A New Approach* (London 1970) 271. The conclusion of these scholars is that the deed-consequences connection existed as a theory which implied that the outcome of human actions actually depends on an irreversible process initiated by humans themselves. God’s action is therefore merely re-action and inexorably determined by human behaviour. God is not the decider of human fate, and thus divine retribution in the true sense of the term does not exist.

Koch's thesis may stand as long as readers focus only on Job 4:8, in which Eliphaz employs the metaphors from sowing and harvesting to express the connection between act and consequence. Such a thesis, however, will fail when we turn to the next verse in which Eliphaz not only mentions God as the main agent, but also emphasises God's personal involvement in the process of destructive retribution (cf. Table 8).

Table 8.
Linear parallelism of Job 4:9

9a	b יִאבְדוּ	a מִנְשַׁמַּת אֱלֹהִים
9b	b' יִכְלוּ	a' וּמְרוּחַ אָפוֹ

The poetic line of Job 4:9 is arranged in a linear parallelism in such a way as to emphasise the destruction of the wicked by the intervention of God. The two verbs employed in verse 7, with their destructive overtones, set the stage for Eliphaz's argument in verses 9. The same root אבד appears at the end of the two first cola (7a, 9a). Instead, the two second cola end with verbs with similar destructive overtones, namely, נִכְחַדוּ ("they are destroyed, cut off", v. 7b) and יִכְלוּ ("they are consumed, finished", v. 9b). With these devastating verbs, Eliphaz declares his conviction regarding the end of the wicked. Noteworthy, however, is his contention about God's personal involvement in bringing the wicked to such an end. For Eliphaz, destructive retribution is not an impersonal process that works mechanically. It is God who acts as the judge and plays the role of the executioner. This idea is conveyed by the parallelism between the two phrases מִנְשַׁמַּת אֱלֹהִים ("by the blast of God") and וּמְרוּחַ אָפוֹ ("by the breath from his nostril"). In various biblical texts, both terms נִשְׁמָה and רוּחַ are often used to indicate God's dynamic activity as a creative force and life-giving breath: "The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4; cf. Gen 2:7; 7:22; Ezek 37:5-6; Job 34:14). Nevertheless, these terms are also employed in various instances to denote God's destructive power: "The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it" (Isa 40:7; cf. Exod 15:8; 2 Sam 22:16; Ps 18:15; Hos 13:15; Isa 30:33).²⁵ Moreover, it may be noted that the term אָפוֹ as used in וּמְרוּחַ אָפוֹ is a familiar technical term in expressing the divine wrath kindled against people who

²⁵ Cf. LAMBERTY-ZIELINSKI, "נִשְׁמָה", *TDOT* 10, 65-69. Cf. also BDB 675.

committed wrongdoings (cf. Exod 4:14; Num 12:9; 32:13; Deut 6:15). Thus, by using “the blast of God” and “the breath from his nostril” in parallel, Eliphaz insists on God’s personal involvement in overthrowing the wicked. Because these two phrases are the subjects of two destructive verb forms, Eliphaz portrays God as the author of destructive retribution. The metaphoric language of nature in verse 8, therefore, serves as a lead-up for Eliphaz to affirm in verse 9 the certainty of destructive retribution exacted by God against the wicked.

In short, Eliphaz’s main argument in his first speech represents the idea that the destinies of both the righteous and the wicked are established by God in a way that corresponds to their moral state. As a comforter, Eliphaz’s intention is to differentiate Job from the wicked and assure him about the contrast between his ultimate fate and theirs. Adopting the style of a sage, Eliphaz speaks from a theoretical position and appeals to conventional piety to exhort Job to be patient and to maintain his trust in God. Although he argues that the wicked harvest what they sow, Eliphaz still believes that Job is a righteous person who had sown integrity and would certainly harvest blessings. Nevertheless, in shifting from the constructive to the destructive side of retribution while comforting Job, Eliphaz presents himself to Job and to readers of the book of Job as a representative of retributive theology rather than as a comforter. Although he does not yet accuse Job of being a wicked person, his reference to destructive retribution is undoubtedly painful for Job in his present situation. Eliphaz presents retributive theory in its entirety rather than focusing on the aspect that could comfort his suffering friend. Such an approach soon transforms Eliphaz from a consoler to a condemner in his dispute with Job.

2.1.2 Wickedness Begotten by the Wicked

The second speech of Eliphaz (chapter 15) presents considerable changes compared to the first. While in the first speech Eliphaz still expressed a high estimation of Job’s integrity, in the second he becomes more impatient and comes closer to the condemnation of his friend. The first speech ends with the assurance that the righteous are blessed by God (cf. Job 5:17-27), whereas the second concludes with long depictions of the misfortunes that befall the wicked (15:20-35). In both speeches, Eliphaz’s main concern is to reinforce the fundamental postulates of retribution. However, the tenor of the speeches alters remarkably as the language of direct assurance and

encouragement gives way to that of warning and reproach. In various instances, Eliphaz deliberately moves in the direction of convincing Job that he is indeed suffering the fate of a wicked person. Job 15:4, 5-6 and 15:34-35 are the most relevant.

2.1.2.1 Job 15:4: Job's irreligious attitude

אִי-אַתָּה תִּפְרַר יִרְאָה Surely, you yourself do away with fear
וּתְגַרַע שִׁיחָה לִפְנֵי-יָאֵל and diminish meditation before El.

In the first speech Eliphaz praised Job for his virtue of piety (cf. 4:6). Eliphaz now turns to remind Job that he is departing from that virtue in the course of the dispute. The similar term for “fear of God” or “piety”, “faith”, יִרְאָה, now appears in the context of a direct accusation. The accused action is conveyed by the verb form תִּפְרַר, from the root פָּרַר, which literally means “to break, to violate, to frustrate”. Thus, in Job 15:4a, Eliphaz accuses Job not only of breaking the very foundation of wisdom, but also of violating the very ground of his faith in God. Eliphaz's intention to accuse Job is sharpened by the use of a double emphasis. The poetic line begins with the emphatic adverb אִי (“surely, truly, indeed”), which qualifies all what Eliphaz addresses to Job in the whole sentence. In addition, the personal pronoun אַתָּה is used emphatically to indicate that Job is responsible for the diminution of his faith in God. Job 15:4b repeats the same idea. Parallel to the term יִרְאָה is the noun phrase שִׁיחָה לִפְנֵי-יָאֵל. The term שִׁיחָה means “devotion, meditation, or prayer”, and occurs only two other times throughout the Hebrew Bible in the context of praising God's law and the wisdom that is gained by meditating on God's law.²⁶ Therefore, the whole phrase שִׁיחָה לִפְנֵי-יָאֵל suggests the wise attitude of pious persons who stand before God with contemplative devotion, respect and reverence. According to Eliphaz, Job is moving away (וּתְגַרַע) from this wise attitude. The verb form תְּגַרַע, from the root גָּרַע, means “to diminish, to lessen, to do away with” and usually appears as a contrastive verb to יוֹסֵף, “to add, to increase” (cf. Deut 4:2; Eccl 3:14).²⁷ Thus, Eliphaz here is accusing Job of becoming

²⁶ “How I love your law! It is my meditation (שִׁיחָה) all day” (Ps 119:97), “I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation (שִׁיחָה לִי)” (Ps 119:99).

²⁷ Cf. BDB, 175; DHORME, *Job*, 190.

less religious by diminishing the reverence due to God.²⁸ Reading the poetic line in its entirety, it is clear that what characterises Job from Eliphaz's perspective is his lack of both an "inward sentiment" of fear of God (v. 4a) and an "outward observance of religion" (v. 4b), as Driver and Gray comment.²⁹

2.1.2.2 Job 15:5-6: Job aligned with the wicked

כי יאלף עונך פִּיךָ	⁵ For your iniquity teaches your mouth
ותבחר לשון ערומים	and you choose the tongue of the crafty.
ירשיעך פִּיךָ ולא־אני	⁶ Your mouth condemns you, not I
ושפתיך יענר־בך	Your lips testify against you.

After pointing out that Job is diminishing his own faith, Eliphaz warns Job of the danger of aligning himself with the wicked. To do so, Eliphaz bases his criticism on Job's own words. The three organs of speech are mentioned, namely, the mouth (vv. 5a, 6a), the tongue (v. 5b) and the lips (v. 6b). In the first poetic line, Eliphaz associates Job's mouth with iniquity and his tongue with that of the crafty. For Eliphaz, Job's iniquity incites him to defend himself and complain against God.³⁰ What comes out of Job's mouth is the manifestation of some inner guilt. The nature of this guilt is indicated in the second colon: "you choose the tongue of the crafty". Using the verb *בחר*, a special term denoting a deliberate choice, Eliphaz insists that Job must be fully responsible for his choice in the construction of his speech. It is noteworthy that in Proverbs the term *ערום* usually has the positive sense as "prudent or shrewd" (cf. Prov 12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8). In the book of Job, however, the term occurs only one other time with a negative sense, pointing to wicked persons whose plans will be destroyed by God: "He frustrates the devices of the crafty" (Job 5:12). Similarly, in Genesis 3:1, the term is employed to describe the cunning characteristic of the serpent, who astutely

²⁸ "Job denies God the full measure of godly respect that God deserves", H. RINGGREN, "גרע", *ThWAT* II, 70-72, here 71.

²⁹ DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 132-133.

³⁰ Indeed, there is more than one way to translate Job 15:5a. Syntactically, both terms *עונך* ("your iniquity") and *פִּיךָ* ("your mouth") can take on the role of subject or complement of the verb form *יאלף*. The colon can thus be translated not only as "your iniquity teaches your mouth", but also as "your mouth teaches your iniquity" or "your mouth utters your iniquity" (cf. LSV, KJV). However, the parallelism with the second colon, in which the term *לשון* ("the tongue") takes on the role of a complement, suggests that the first translation is more natural and therefore more favourable.

leads to a misinterpretation of God's words. By employing this term, Eliphaz directly accuses Job of being wicked by adopting the language of the crafty in his speeches. His words are, therefore, evidence against him.

The second poetic line further highlights Eliphaz's intention to accuse Job. Even though he says that he does not condemn Job, by using the negative phrase *לֹא־אֲנִי*, "not I myself", the rest of the poetic colon indicates the contrary. In continuity with the previous line, again the two organs of speech are mentioned: *פִּיךָ* ("your mouth"), and *וּשְׁפָתֶיךָ* ("your lips"). In verse 5, Eliphaz charged that Job's iniquity led him to speak as he did. Now he stresses that Job's words testify to his iniquity. It is sufficient therefore to listen to Job in order to grasp that his words prove him to be wicked. The two verbs employed in this poetic line are complementary in their meaning of accusing Job. The first verb *רָשַׁע*, when used in *Hiphil*, often denotes the act of declaring guilty or condemning the wicked: "they shall justify the righteous and condemn (וְהִרְשִׁיעוּ) the wicked" (Deut 25:1; cf. 1 Kgs 8:32; Prov 12:2).³¹ The second verb, *עָנָה*, when appearing with the preposition *ב* before a complement, is part of juridical vocabulary, meaning "to bear witness against someone".³²

It is worthwhile remembering that being condemned is one of Job's most frequent fears. Even though he is innocent, he fears that his complaints about unjust treatment may be a reason for him to be condemned (9:20, 29). He begs God not to condemn him (10:2). Now Eliphaz attacks Job on this very ground. He states that it is not God but Job who brings condemnation upon himself by his cunning words and irreverent attitude against God. The quadruple use of the suffix of the second person singular pronoun (*ךָ*-) in such a short sentence effectively reveals Eliphaz's intention, namely, Job must be fully responsible for his words against God. Eliphaz is very much bothered by Job's insistently claiming to be innocent and accusing God of guilt.³³ For Eliphaz, the more Job complains against God, which reveals an irreverent attitude, the more he aligns himself with the wicked, which proves that he deserves the suffering he is experiencing.

³¹ Cf. *HALOT*, 9009.

³² For example, *פִּיךָ עָנָה בְּךָ*: "your mouth has testified against you" (2 Sam 1:16); *אֲנִי וְעַמִּי עָנָה בָּנוּ*: "if our iniquities bear witness against us" (Jer 14:7). Cf. DHORME, *Job*, 191.

³³ According to Eliphaz, "Job's protests and charges against God are in themselves sinful and tantamount to self-incrimination", POPE, *Job*, 115.

2.1.2.3 Job 15:34-35: Reaffirmation of destructive retribution

כִּי־עֵדֶת חֲנָף גִּלְמוּד	³⁴ For the company of the godless is barren
וְאֵשׁ אָכְלָה אֹהֶל־שָׁחַד	and fire devours the tents of bribery.
הָרָה עֹמֵל וַיֵּלֶד אֹון	³⁵ Conceiving mischief and bearing iniquity
וּבֶטֶן תִּכְנֶן מְרֵמָה	their womb prepares deceit.

Eliphaz recapitulates his long discussion on the fate of the wicked in 15:34-35. The portrayal of the wicked is depicted by the two nominal phrases arranged in a chiasmic parallelism: עֵדֶת חֲנָף, “the company of the godless”, and אֹהֶל־שָׁחַד, “the tents of bribery”.

The term עֵדֶת in the first phrase is usually employed to denote a collective such as “the congregation of the children of Israel” (עֵדֶת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל, cf. Exod 16:2, 9, 10; Num 13:26; 14:5, 7). The term can indicate either “the congregation of the righteous” (עֵדֶת צַדִּיקִים, Ps 1:5) or “the band of evildoers” (עֵדֶת מְרֵעִים, Ps 22:16) or “the band of ruffians” (עֵדֶת עֲרִיצִים, Ps 86:14). In Job 15:34, עֵדֶת is accompanied by the word חֲנָף, which means “hypocrite, impious”.³⁴ The phrase עֵדֶת חֲנָף, therefore, denotes a collective group of the godless, the whole class of the wicked. This group suffers the punishment of being barren (גִּלְמוּד). Thus, according to Eliphaz’s description, the wicked have no future. Without progeny, their lives end with their own deaths.

Parallel with עֵדֶת חֲנָף is the phrase אֹהֶל־שָׁחַד, denotes the dwelling place of a specific type of person, namely, the briber. Although the word שָׁחַד can simply mean a donation, a gift, or a reward,³⁵ in various biblical texts it indicates a “gift intended to secure favour” or a gift aimed at “preferential treatment”, and thus it takes on the meaning of “bribe, bribery”.³⁶ The term שָׁחַד, therefore, means a moral crime which corrupts people: “a bribe blinds those who have sight and perverts the words of the righteous” (Exod 23:8; cf. Deut 16:19). In various instances, שָׁחַד represents the cause that leads people to pervert justice (cf. 1 Sam 8:3; Prov 17:23) or to act against the

³⁴ The word חֲנָף is typical of the vocabulary of the book of Job. Out of 13 times it appears throughout Bible, there are 8 occurrences of the word in the book of Job, in 8:13; 13:16; 15:34; 17:8; 20:5; 27:8; 34:30; 36:13. The meaning of חֲנָף in all these occurrences is always negative, indicating “the godless, wicked, or impious”.

³⁵ For example: “he shall build my city, and let my exiles go free, not for price nor reward” (Isa 45:13).

³⁶ Cf. *HALOT*, 9494.

innocent (Deut 27:25; Ps 15:5; Isa 5:23). Eliphaz assures Job that people who do these things will be destroyed together with their dwelling place: “fire shall consume the tents of bribery”. It is important to remember that fire is a frequent instrument that God uses to exact destructive retribution. The image of fire consuming a human dwelling place is a token of divine anger and judgment and is reminiscent of various texts in the Bible in which God punishes the impious, such as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24) or the burning of the camp of those who complained against God (Num 11:1; cf. also 2 Kgs 1:10; Isa 66:15).

Using both metaphors of barrenness and fire consuming tents, Eliphaz vividly emphasises the harsh fate reserved for the wicked. He concludes by returning to the idea that human persons are responsible for their own misfortune because of their own sins. Thus, the certainty of destructive retribution is reiterated.

The last poetic line of the speech employs the familiar word pair און (“iniquity”) and עמל (trouble), as well as typical vocabulary of birth language, such as בטן (“belly, womb”), הרר (“to conceive”), ילד (“to give birth”).³⁷ In the form of a proverbial expression, the first poetic colon states that the one who conceives mischief or trouble will surely give birth to evil or iniquity. The fruit of evil is inevitably evil. The metaphors of conceiving mischief may imply the activities of nurturing trouble or plotting evil. If so, it is clear to Eliphaz that evil originates within human persons who sow trouble and reap iniquity for themselves. This idea is reinforced in the second colon: “their belly prepares deceit”. The belly is the organ that gestates and gives birth to what has been conceived. When the belly of the wicked nurtures deceit or conceives mischief, what they produce is naturally evil. The evil they do strikes down the evildoers themselves, just as evildoers fall into the pit that they themselves prepared (cf. Ps 57:7).

In his conclusion, Eliphaz thus warns Job that he is destroying himself by nurturing evil thoughts and bringing forth dangerous and destructive words. Because humans beget their own suffering, Job must recognise that

³⁷ The two verbs used in this poetic colon are both in the infinitive הרר and ילד. According to Dhorme, here “infinitives are used in order to lend greater vividness to the description” (DHORME, *Job*, 206. Cf. GKC §113ff). The similarity between this colon and Isa 59:4d: “they conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity” (cf. also Ps 7:15) is evidence that this idea comes from a proverbial expression.

his suffering is due to himself alone. He, not God, is responsible for his suffering. In this accusation, Eliphaz leaves no room for words of consolation or encouragement; instead, his depiction of the fate of the wicked serves as a severe warning to Job.

2.1.3 Calling Job to Repentance

In his final speech, Eliphaz clearly shows that he thinks Job is a great sinner. Based on the reality of Job's great suffering, he presumes Job's great guilt (22:4-5). In order to help Job, Eliphaz earnestly advises him to adopt a docile attitude of submission and repentance so as to be restored (22:21-23).

2.1.3.1 Job 22:4-5: Job's wickedness is great

המִירָאתָךְ יִכְיָח	⁴ Is it because of your piety that He chastens you,
יָבוֹא עִמָּךְ בְּמִשְׁפָּט	and goes to judgment with you?
הֲלֹא רַעְתָּךְ רַבָּה	⁵ Is it not that your wickedness is great,
וְאֵין-קֶץ לְעוֹנֹתֶיךָ	and that there is no limit to your sins?

Eliphaz began his speeches with the belief that Job was a pious person. Based on constructive retribution, he suggested piety, or the fear of God, should sustain Job's hope and confidence (4:6). Believing that Job has been doing away with his piety (15:4), Eliphaz now aims to expose that Job does not have any piety at all. He does this through a double interpretation of Job's situation (22:4): Job is experiencing God's chastisement (יָכַח) and judgment (מִשְׁפָּט). The verb יָכַח in *Hiphil* often means "to rebuke, to reproach". However, when this verb appears with God as subject and with an accusative of person as complement, it has a strong meaning as "to chasten, to punish".³⁸ The whole phrase יָבוֹא עִמָּךְ בְּמִשְׁפָּט, "he enters with you into a judgment", is a technical expression insinuating the establishing of a tribunal.³⁹ In various biblical texts, to be with God in a judgment is tantamount to being judged and chastened.⁴⁰ Thus, Eliphaz convincingly

³⁸ For example: והִכַּחֲתִי בַשֶּׁבֶט אֲנָשִׁים, "I will chasten him with the rod of men" (2 Sam 7:14); אַל-יִבְקַעַץ תּוֹכִיחֵנִי, "don't chasten me in your indignation" (Ps 38:2); cf. also Ps 6:2; Prov 3:12; Job 5:7; 13:10. Cf. *HALOT*, 3751.

³⁹ For further discussion on מִשְׁפָּט as a technical term for the lawsuit, see. S.H. SCHOLNICK, "Poetry in Courtroom: Job 38-41", *Sitting with Job*. Selected Studies on the Book of Job (ed. R.B. ZUCK) (Grand Rapids 1992) 421-440.

⁴⁰ "YHWH will enter into judgment with the elders of his people and their leaders: 'It is you who have eaten up the vineyard. The spoil of the poor is in your houses'" (Isa 3:14; cf.

portrays Job's miserable situation in terms of destructive retribution. By means of the rhetorical questions and with a touch of irony, he asks whether Job's miserable situation derives from his piety (מִירְאָתָךְ).⁴¹ The answer Eliphaz has in mind for this question is obviously "No!" In his view, God never chastises the pious nor brings a righteous person to judgment. For Eliphaz, Job's great suffering proves that he is a great sinner.⁴²

Job 22:5 reinforces Eliphaz's accusation by means of rhetorical questions. If the first line is an affirmative question, beginning with the interrogative marker ה, and implying a negative answer, the second line is a negative question, beginning with the interrogative particle הֲלֹא, and implying an affirmative answer. Thus, Eliphaz is trying to convince Job of the gravity of his sinful status. The two terms for sinfulness, רָעָה ("evil, wickedness") and עֲוֹן ("iniquity, perversity"), are directly attached to Job by means of the second person singular enclitic pronoun (ךָ-). These two terms, moreover, are qualified by the two adjectival complements: רַבָּה ("abundant, great") and אֵין-קֵץ ("no end, without limit"). Eliphaz accuses Job not only of gross wickedness but also of an abundance of iniquities.⁴³

Ps 143:2; Eccl 11:9). "Several passages use מִשְׁפָּט without further qualification to mean 'sentence' or 'punishment'". B. JOHNSON, "מִשְׁפָּט", *TDOT* 9, 86-97, here 90.

⁴¹ Clinging to the retributive theology, Eliphaz cannot tolerate the fact that a pious person suffers. However, readers who witness the two heavenly scenes in the prologue (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6) know that all of the protagonist's suffering stems not from his sins or misdeeds but precisely from his integrity and piety. It is God's appreciation of Job's integrity and piety that causes him to be put to the test. It is ironic that the author puts ironic words regarding Job's piety into the mouth of Eliphaz, the most eloquent representative of retributive theology. Undoubtedly, the author's sympathies are with Job and the author's criticism is targeted at Eliphaz's cold and heartless application of retributive theology in Job's particular case.

⁴² "Only great guilt can explain great suffering". CLINES, "The Argument of Job's Three Friends", 729.

⁴³ In fact, following the rhetorical questions in 22:4-5, Eliphaz lists a catalogue of sins he presumes Job to have committed. Job is depicted as a social and economic evildoer who has taken advantage of the vulnerable in society in order to build his own fortunes (vv. 6-9). Westermann points out that this catalogue of sins is enclosed between the causal particle כִּי, "because" (v. 6), and the conjunction עַל-כֵּן, "therefore" (v. 10). According to him, this kind of structure is a hint of prophetic judgment: what is presented after the conjunction עַל-כֵּן represents divine punishments in proportion to the crimes committed. Cf. C. WESTERMANN, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Philadelphia 1967) 137-168. Thus, Eliphaz is clear in the conviction that Job is suffering as the result of his wickedness.

Interpreting Job's suffering as divine punishment, Eliphaz has tried his best to persuade Job to acknowledge his own sinfulness. His belief in the theory of retribution leads him to conclude that Job must have acted wickedly. Eliphaz clings to the theology of retribution at the cost of abandoning his confidence in the moral integrity of his friend. By the end of his speeches, Eliphaz's attitude towards his suffering friend has dramatically altered. A comforter turns himself into an accuser. Nevertheless, despite the various accusations, Eliphaz does not conclude his speeches with words of condemnation, but with words of advice and exhortation. After having struggled to point out Job's problem, Eliphaz now offers Job the solution. He reassumes the role of counsellor and employs exhortation. In imperative verbs, he exhorts Job to seek reconciliation so that good fortune may return to him (22:21-22). He recommends repentance as the key to Job's restoration (vv. 23-26).

2.1.3.2 Job 22:21-22: Exhortations to reconciliation and acceptance

הסכ־נא עמו ושלם	²¹ Be reconciled with Him and be at peace
בהם תבואתך טובה	in this way good will come to you.
קח־נא מפיו תורה	²² Accept instruction from His mouth
ושִׁים אמריו בלבבך	and place his words in your heart.

Eliphaz's exhortation employs a set of four imperative verbs. The first two, *הסכ־נא* and *שלם* (v. 21), are synonymous in urging Job to be reconciled with God. The root *סכ־נא* appears in the book of Job with the frequent meaning of "to be profitable, to be useful": "Can a man be profitable to God?" (Job 22:2; cf. 15:3; 34:9; 35:3). In *Hiphil*, however, this verb usually means "to be acquainted with" or "to have experience of".⁴⁴ In Job 22:21, the construction of the *Hiphil* imperative *הסכ־נא* and the preposition *עמו* indicates the meaning as "be reconciled with Him".⁴⁵ This verb embodies many of Eliphaz's recommendations for Job. For Job to be reconciled with God would mean to change his attitude, to surrender and not to act as if God were his adversary, to rebuild a harmonious relationship with God, to be with God not as with a stranger but rather as a partner. Similarly, the second verb *שלם*, "to be safe, to be at peace", also suggests an attitude of reconciliation. In the construction of the first poetic colon, the complement *עמו* can refer both to

⁴⁴ "You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways" (Ps 139:3; cf. Num 22:30).

⁴⁵ Cf. *HALOT*, 6556.

verb *שָׁלַם* and *סָכַן*, so the second verb can be translated as “be at peace with Him”. Eliphaz wants to disarm Job’s polemic attitude against God. For him, as long as Job continues struggling against God and regarding God as an adversary, he will continue experiencing his inner agony and prolong his suffering. Only through a radical change of his attitude toward God can Job regain his peace and re-establish his well-being. This utilitarian idea is exposed in the second poetic colon, which begins with a preposition with third person plural pronominal suffix, *בָּהֶם*, “by these things, by this means”, referring to the two verbs in the first colon. The second colon conveys the purpose of Eliphaz’s advice to Job: “good things will come to you”.⁴⁶ The noun *טוֹבָה* usually denotes good things or prosperity a righteous person encounters in life.⁴⁷ In various texts, the word *טוֹבָה* also indicates a good outcome, happiness, or a favourable end for the one faithful to God.⁴⁸ Thus, to exhort Job to be reconciled and at peace with God, Eliphaz presents a utilitarian vision: by doing so, Job will benefit himself with good things and will find a sense of well-being reserved for the righteous person. It is evident that Eliphaz is moving within the framework of the ethical perspective that closely ties morality and prosperity together. This ethical perspective also penetrates all the following exhortations.

The second two imperatives, *שִׁים* and *קַח*, require from Job both an active acceptance and a docile internalisation of God’s instructive words. The imperative form *קַח* (“receive, accept”) is a technical term of wisdom literature, referring to the act of accepting and appropriating wise words,

⁴⁶ *תְּבוֹאָתְךָ* is a difficult word. Some scholars disagree with the vocalisation of MT *תְּבוֹאָתְךָ* and suggest changes. Fohrer reads it as a verb: *תְּבוֹאָךְ* “it comes to you”, cf. G. FOHRER, *Das Buch Hiob* (KAT XVI; Stuttgart 1963); Dhorme reads it as a noun: *תְּבוֹאָתְךָ*, “your produce, your yield”, cf. DHORME, *Job*, 336. Gordis reads the verb form as it is but argues that the second Tav in the verb form *תְּבוֹאָתְךָ* is anomalous, as in Deut 33:6, *תְּבוֹאָתְךָ*, cf. GORDIS, *Job*, 249. The last reading is the best because it requires no textual change. Accordingly, the word *תְּבוֹאָתְךָ* is the verb form in *Qal*, imperfect, third person feminine singular of the root *בּוֹא* and the pronoun suffix in second person singular masculine, *ךָ*.

⁴⁷ For instance, “That I may see the prosperity (*טוֹבָה*) of your chosen” (Ps 106:5; cf. Eccl 6:6; 7:14).

⁴⁸ An illustrative example for this sense is the words of Joseph to his brothers: “Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good” (Gen 50:20; cf. also Deut 28:11). Cf. HALOT, 3399.

such as counsel or instructions.⁴⁹ The complement of this verb form, מִפִּי, תוֹרָה, also carries the sapiential nuance. As recognised by various scholars, the term תוֹרָה here, the only occurrence in the book of Job, does not refer to the law in the Pentateuchal sense, but rather to wisdom teaching as moral and religious guidance.⁵⁰ Words coming out from God's mouth can have a specific character of wisdom, as Proverb 2:6 affirms: "For YHWH gives wisdom. Out of his mouth (מִפִּי) comes knowledge and understanding". Thus, in the first poetic colon, Eliphaz earnestly advises Job to take the position of a humble learner before God, the source of all wisdom and the true teacher. He advises Job to adopt the attitude of a wise person, not only in accepting God's instruction but also in storing up God's words into the seat of human understanding and memory. This act of internalising expresses the deepest level of acceptance, entrenching God's sapiential words and instruction from God's mouth into Job's heart.⁵¹

Briefly, the two cola of verse 22 complement each other in conveying Eliphaz's sapiential advice to Job. The exhortations to reconciliation and acceptance imply a call to repentance, in the sense of a radical conversion to God. This call becomes explicit in the concluding exhortations.

⁴⁹ These words can come from a wise person: "Listen, my son, and receive my instruction" (Prov 4:10; 8:10), or even from God: "all my words that I shall speak to you, receive with your heart and hear with your ears" (Ezek 3:10).

⁵⁰ DHORME, *Job*, 306; GORDIS, *Job*, 249; CLINES, *Job* 21–37, 563.

⁵¹ Hearing Eliphaz's advice that Job should accept God's instructive word, readers may wonder what it is. God has not yet addressed Job. What Job has heard so far is only traditional teachings regarding divine retribution as understood and promoted by his friends. By appealing to God as the source and true teacher of wisdom, Eliphaz is speaking on behalf of God just as he has presented himself as mediator and channel of divine revelation (cf. 4:12ff; 5:27; 15:8–11). To promulgate the teachings of divine retribution and apply them to Job, Eliphaz attribute these teachings to God as their source. For this he will be rebuked at the end of the book (cf. 42:7).

2.1.3.3 Job 22:23: Call to repentance

אם-תשוב עד-שדי תבנה If you return to Shaddai, you shall be built up⁵²
 תרחק עולה מאהלך if you remove wickedness from your tent⁵³

Eliphaz's call to repentance in Job 22:23 is conveyed by a conditional sentence, beginning with the conjunction אם, "if". The main clause is the verb form, תבנה ("you shall be built up"), inserted between the two subordinate clauses: תשוב עד-שדי ("you return to Shaddai") and תרחק עולה מאהלך ("you remove wickedness from your tent").

The construction of the first subordinate clause, שוב עד-שדי, is reminiscent of the well-known idiomatic formula שוב עד-יהוה אלהיך ("return to the Lord, your God") in Deuteronomy. In this formula, the verb שוב signifies turning to God for salvation in the time of distress: "In your distress [...] you will return to the Lord your God and heed him" (Deut 4:30). It also indicates a moral conversion of the chastened people to God, obeying God's voice and observing God's commandments so that their fortunes may be restored (Deut 30:2ff). The nuance of moral conversion is much clearer in prophetic texts when the verb שוב is employed as a technical term for the summons to repentance.⁵⁴ In various prophetic texts, the verb שוב conveys both the sense of turning away from evil and turning toward God. In Jer 4:1, verb שוב appears in the subordinate clause of a conditional sentence (אם-תשוב), exhorting Israel to repent in the sense of returning to God and putting away their abominations. In Ezekiel, the construction שוב מן is sometimes employed to send forth to the house of Israel the call to turn away from their idols (cf. Ezek 14:6) and their transgression (cf. Ezek 18:30). Similarly, this construction שוב מן, with the verb שוב in imperative, is often employed to insist on a moral conversion, such as "turn away from your evil ways and

⁵² Instead of תבנה ("you shall be rebuilt"), the Septuagint reads καὶ ταπεινώσης σεαυτόν – "and you humble yourself", as if the word were ותענה or ותכנע. Cf. CLINES, *Job* 21-37, 544; J. GRAY, *The Book of Job* (THB 1; Sheffield 2010) 308. Some scholars follow this reading, cf. DHORME, *Job*, 306; B. GRAY, *Job*, 304. However, this reading is not necessary, as Habel argues "The Masoretic Text, however, makes reasonable sense in the light of Ugaritic *bny*, 'heal, restore'". HABEL, *Job*, 333, cf. also CLINES, *Job* 21-37, 544; GORDIS, *Job*, 249.

⁵³ Although this second colon is not initiated by a subordinating conjunction, it undoubtedly depends on the conjunction אם at the beginning of the whole sentence. Cf. DHORME, *Job*, 306. It is a familiar style of the Joban poet to use a component at the beginning of a poetic line that takes on a double duty function and holds up all its cola, e.g., Job 8:5; 11:13-14.

⁵⁴ Cf. BDB 997a §6d.

from your evil deeds” (Zech 1:4; cf. Jer 18:11; 25:5). In various instances, the call to repentance is tantamount to a call to life: “that the wicked repent from his way and live!” (Ezek 33:11; cf. 18:32). In returning to God, people will experience God’s return to them (cf. Zech 1:3; Mal 3:7).

In Eliphaz’s call to repentance, there exist both elements of returning to God (22:23a) and turning away from evil (22:23b). The verb employed in the second subordinate clause, רָחַק (“to remove, to be cast away”), is sometime used to denote the act of turning away from wickedness, such as falsehood and lies (cf. Prov 30:8) or harlotry (cf. Ezek 43:9). Instead, the noun עוֹלָה is a frequent term for moral wickedness, such as “badness, malice, iniquity, injustice”.⁵⁵ Thus, the second subordinate clause reaffirms the meaning of the first: returning to God implies and necessitates turning away from evil. Together, the two subordinate clauses express Eliphaz’s crucial appeal to Job for moral repentance and a religious conversion.

The only verb form in *Niphal* תִּבְנֶה (“you shall be built up”) assumes the role of the main clause, expressing the supposed consequence of the conditional sentence. “To build” is a metaphorical way to express God’s constructive action in favour of a nation or a people.⁵⁶ When this verb occurs in *Niphal* and has human beings as subject, it specifies the theme of being prosperous or being restored to a new life. With this verb form, God promises an established life for evil people who would turn to God: “if they will diligently learn the ways of my people [...] they shall be built up in the midst of my people” (Jer 12:16). To be built up means to thrive (cf. Mal 3:15). For those who have experienced suffering, to be built up signifies to be restored or to be rebuilt so that they may live on in a new life: “I will build you and you shall be rebuilt, O virgins of Israel” (Jer 31:4; cf. 33:7). In the case of barren women, like Sarah or Rachel, to be built up means for them to obtain children and thus to have their lives blessed and re-established (cf. Gen 16:2; 30:3). Therefore, it is significant when Eliphaz uses the metaphorical language of “being built up” for Job. Despite the varied crimes Eliphaz has accused Job of committing, he still thinks that Job is redeemable. Eliphaz believes that by a submissive attitude of repentance Job will be able to change his fate. This means that, according to Eliphaz’s

⁵⁵ Cf. HALOT, 6859; SCHREINER, “עוֹלָה”, TDOT 11, 522-529, here 523-524.

⁵⁶ For instance, “I will set my eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land. I will build them up and not overthrow them” (Jer 24:6; cf. Jer 18:9; 31:28).

ethical point of view, destructive retribution can become constructive.⁵⁷ As long as suffering persons admit being sinners before God and sincerely repent, their fate will be totally reversed. Repentance therefore is the master key to resolve Job's problem.

2.1.4 Summary and Assessments

Eliphaz inaugurates his role as comforter with the belief that Job is a righteous person (cf. 4:3-6). According to his retributive theory, a righteous person must enjoy a blessed life, and only wicked persons deserve misfortune and suffering (cf. 4:7-9; 5:6; 15:34-35). This belief forces him to face an apparent contradiction: Job, a righteous person is suffering an evil fate. From the perspective of constructive retribution, he encourages Job to maintain his trust in the just God (cf. 22:21-22). From the perspective of destructive retribution, however, Eliphaz attempts to persuade his suffering friend to reconsider his claims of being innocent and righteous. Eliphaz steadily veers in the direction of undermining his friend's innocence (cf. 15:4-6). To vindicate his traditional theology, Eliphaz presumes that Job must have committed various crimes in order to account for the severity of his suffering (cf. 22:4-5ff). To save the just God of his rigid theology, he chooses to sacrifice his suffering friend by denying him the possibility of being a righteous sufferer. However, the intention of Eliphaz is not to forsake Job. For Job to have a favourable relationship with God, Eliphaz offers the paradigm of the repentant sinner (cf. 22:23ff). Through his speeches Eliphaz is depicted as an eloquent theologian who holds fast to a theology that represents the gracious character of God. This God is the ultimate source of hope even for the those who are guilty.

2.2 Bildad the Shuhite

The three speeches of Bildad (chapters 8, 18 and 25) are relatively short in comparison with those of Eliphaz. Bildad's arguments share a few common points with the theology of Eliphaz, but his emphatic points differ considerably. Bildad chooses the theme of divine justice as his starting

⁵⁷ To assure Job that repentance will grant him a blessed life, Eliphaz employs a number of hopeful images in his final words (cf. Job 22:24-30). He uses the conventional formulae of the constructive retribution for Job, such as envisioning that Job will delight in the Almighty and will lift up his face to Eloah (22:25), and that Job will become an intercessor for the deliverance of those who are guilty (22:30).

point. The firm belief in divine justice is the ground upon which Bildad bases his teachings on retribution, both destructive and constructive.

2.2.1 On God's Retributive Justice

Bildad's first speech (Job 8) focuses on the theme of divine justice. God is the God of justice, and God's justice serves as the cornerstone of divine retribution: God always rewards the blameless and punishes the wicked, without exception. Suffering is therefore proof of wrongdoing, while devotion brings forth divine blessings. The speech opens with rhetorical questions about the possibility of God perverting justice (v. 3), proceeds with evidence of destructive retribution (v. 4) as well as conditions for constructive retribution (vv. 5-6), then concludes with a restatement of God's retributive justice (v. 20).

2.2.1.1 Job 8:3: Affirmation of God's justice

האל יעות משפט Does El pervert judgment?
ואם-שדי יעות-צדק Or does Shaddai pervert justice?

With a pair of rhetorical questions, Bildad announces the topic of divine justice. The proper name El Shaddai is split into two separate names, each of which takes the role of subject in each colon. Thus, the two cola of this poetic line describe the same content, intensifying the point Bildad wants to develop. The same verb *יעות* occurs in both cola. This root often indicates the meaning as “to bend, pervert, distort, make crooked, turn upside down”: “Surely El will not act wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment” (Job 34:12; cf. Amos 8:5; Eccl 1:15). In Job 8:3a, the direct object of *משפט* denotes “not merely the action of judging, or the place where judgment is declared, but also ‘what is just’, the right”.⁵⁸ This meaning is very close to the object of the same verb in 8:3b, *צדק*, “the right, justice, righteousness”. It should be noted that the two terms *צדק* and *משפט* often appear in pairs in various professions of Israel's faith: “The Rock, his work is perfect for all his ways are just (*משפט*). A God of truth and without iniquity, righteous (*צדק*) and upright is He” (Deut 32:4). God loves righteousness and judgment (Ps 33:5). God establishes his throne upon justice and judgment (Ps 89:15; 97:2). God executes judgment and justice in divine governance (Ps 99:4). It is in righteousness and judgment that God

⁵⁸ DHORME, *Job*, 102; cf. K.-M. BEYSE, “משפט”, *ThWAT* V, 94.

reveals himself as a faithful God to the people of Israel (Hos 2:21). Therefore, from Bildad's traditional and orthodox perspective, a God who perverts justice and judgment is unimaginable. By using rhetorical questions, Bildad firmly asserts that God would never be unjust. If so, what happened to Job cannot be unjust. The justice of God, according to Bildad's subsequent speech, is manifested in accordance with the principles of retribution: God surely punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous. Bildad takes Job's miserable situation as an illustration of such principles.

2.2.1.2 Job 8:4: Evidence of destructive retribution

אם־בניך חטאו־לוֹ	If your children sinned against Him
וַיִּשְׁלַחֵם בְּיַד־פֶּשַׁעַם	He delivered them into the hands of their transgression.

Unlike Eliphaz who opens his speeches with an acknowledgment of Job's piety, Bildad begins by touching on Job's most painful wound, the death of his children. He argues for the nexus between sin and punishment, considering the death of Job's children a manifestation of destructive retribution. His thinking is expressed in the form of a hypothesis. The consequent clause employs the verb *שָׁלַח*, which means "to send, to cast out, to stretch out". In various texts, God's stretching out his hand often implies divine punishment: "I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all my wonders" (Exod 3:30; Deut 28:20; 1 Kgs 9:7). The construction *שָׁלַח בְּיַד* in Job 8:4, as Dhorme recognises, recalls the expression *שָׁלַח בִּי* in Psalm 81:13, in which God delivers up people into the stubbornness of their heart.⁵⁹ Thus, in Bildad's apodosis, the expression "God delivered them into the hands of their transgression" denotes God's act of making Job's sinful children experience the consequence of their wrongdoing. Bildad shares with Eliphaz the belief that sins carry in themselves self-destructive consequences (cf. 4:8; 5:6) and that God is the one who brings these consequences to fulfilment. The protasis, "if your children sinned against God", is reminiscent of Job's fatherly preoccupation at the beginning of the story that his sons and daughters might have offended God (cf. 1:5).⁶⁰ The particle *אם* at the beginning of the clause gives the impression that Bildad is

⁵⁹ Cf. DHORME, *Job*, 102.

⁶⁰ The mention of the death of Job's children here creates a direct connection between the prologue and the dialogue of the book of Job. For some scholars, this connection is important literary evidence that the two parts of the book, narrative prologue and poetic dialogue, are not independent compositions. Cf. POPE, *Job*, 65; CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 203.

speaking hypothetically about the sin and punishment of Job's children. However, the fact is that Job's children have already died, and Bildad must be fully aware of that fact. The hypothetical structure form is therefore only an indirect expression of Bildad's belief that Job and his children had sinned against God.⁶¹ Understanding the death of Job's children as God's punishment, and believing that God cannot do injustice, he regards the death of Job's children as evidence of their sin. Bildad argues from the result to the cause: from the reality of the premature death of Job's children he infers their sin. The ground for this inference is divine justice understood from the retributive perspective.

For Bildad, God's retributive justice is manifested not only in punishing the wicked but also in rewarding the righteous. At this point, Bildad carefully distinguishes Job's fate from that of his children. He seems to share the same conviction with the teaching of Deuteronomy that retribution should not be collective: "the father shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deut 24:16). Divine retribution is for the individual, corresponding to individual moral status: "The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (Ezek 18:20). Although appealing to destructive retribution as the fundamental explanation for the death of Job's children, Bildad does not directly accuse Job as Eliphaz does. For Bildad, the death of Job's children serves not only as a proof of the validity of destructive retribution and as evidence of God's justice but also as a warning for Job to change his attitude. Following Eliphaz, Bildad moves in the direction of exhorting Job toward constructive retribution.

2.2.1.3 Job 8:5-6: Conditions for constructive retribution

אם־אתה תשחר אל־אל	⁵ As for you, if you would seek El
ואל־שדי תתחנן	and make supplication to Shaddai
אם־זך וישר אתה	⁶ if you are pure and upright,
כי־עתה יעיר עליך	surely then He would awake for you
ושלם נות צדקך	and make prosperous the habitation of your righteousness.

⁶¹ Thus, Gordis reads the particle אם at the beginning of Job 8:4 not as hypothetical but as emphatic, and translates it with "indeed" instead of "if". GORDIS, *Job*, 88. Similarly, Driver and Gray comment: "Bildad says *if*, from a desire to spare Job, but he means *Because*". DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 76.

Bildad's exhortations are constructed in the form of conditional sentences: the first three cola (vv. 5ab-6a) constitute the hypothetical clause, and the last two cola (v. 6bc) the consequent one. With the emphatic personal pronoun *אתה*, he shifts his speech from the actual misfortune of Job's children to Job's hypothetical good fortune. In the hypothetical clause, Bildad describes two main conditions necessary for Job to be restored. The first condition concerns Job's attitude towards God (v. 5ab), the second the morality of Job's life (v. 6a).

In the first two cola, Job is advised to take on the attitude of a true devotee: "to earnestly seek El" (*תִּשְׁחַר אֱלֹהִים*) and to "beseech Shaddai" (*אֶל־יְהוָה תִּתְחַנֵּן*). The primary meaning of the verb *שָׁחַר*, in the first colon, is "to dawn", and so "to get up early". Occurring in *Piel* with God as the direct object, this verb often implies an attitude of searching with promptness and earnestness.⁶² Habel understands this verb as "to dawn, to go early" and thus connects it with verb the *שָׁחַר* in Job 1:5, which expressed Job's earnest attitude in getting up early in the morning to offer sacrifice for his children.⁶³ In Psalms, the verb *שָׁחַר* conveys the longing attitude of the devout psalmist toward God: "God, you are my God. I will earnestly seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My flesh longs for you" (Ps 63:2; cf. Isa 26:9). In some other cases, this verb appears in parallel to *שׁוּב*, and thus implies a sense of repentance: "They return and seek God earnestly" (Ps 78:34; cf. Hos 5:15). By using this verb in his exhortation, Bildad aims to evoke in Job the wholehearted attitude of a true devotee in addressing God. This exhortation may imply a call to repentance for Job. However, since Bildad does not explicitly accuse Job, his intention to call Job to a moral repentance remains ambiguous. Instead, the verb *חָנַן* in *Hithpael* in the second colon means "to beseech, implore, make supplication, seek favour" (cf. Job 9:15; Ps 30:8; 142:1). Very often in Psalms, this verb conveys the request for divine mercy from an afflicted devotee: "Have mercy on my, O God. See my affliction by those who hate me" (Ps 9:13; cf. 6:2; 25:16; 31:9; 123:3). This request may imply an expectation of a just reward on the part of the righteous petitioner: "I will walk in my integrity, redeem me and have mercy on me" (Ps 26:11; cf. 4:1; 119:29). At times, asking for God's mercy may also imply an attitude of repentance from the pious supplicant: "Have mercy on me, heal me, for I have sinned against you" (Ps 41:4; cf. 51:1-2). Thus, the use of the verb *חָנַן*

⁶² Cf. L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL, *Dizionario di Ebraico Biblico* (Milano 2013) 850.

⁶³ Cf. HABEL, *Job*, 157.

in the second colon, is complementary to שָׁחַר in the first colon, both urging Job to adopt the docile and submissive attitude of a supplicant toward God. Both imply a call for Job to abandon his polemical litigation against God. Perhaps Bildad believes that the fact that Job is still alive, though suffering, means that he may not have sinned as gravely as his children had. Bildad thus would share with Eliphaz the view that Job's situation is still redeemable, so long as Job shows himself to be a pious man who relies on God's kindness and mercy.

The second condition focuses on Job's own moral quality.⁶⁴ Firmly believing in constructive retribution, Bildad states that one must be pure (טָהוּר) and upright (יָשָׁר) to merit a blessed and prosperous life. From the reader's point of view, this condition sounds rather ironic. From the beginning of the book, Job's uprightness has been confirmed as a matter of fact more than once (cf. 1:1, 8; 2:3). Although Bildad does not directly deny Job's integrity as Eliphaz did, he does put the possibility of Job being 'upright' and 'pure' in a conditional sentence. This may reflect some doubt on his part, caused by the fact that Job is undoubtedly suffering. From Bildad's unyielding belief in the principle of retribution, it is difficult for him not to regard Job's suffering in some way as destructive retribution. Thus, along with devotion, he also adds moral integrity as a second prerequisite for Job to change his fate.⁶⁵

The consequent clause expresses the reward that Job would receive when he meets the conditions in the hypothetical clause. God is the subject of both verbs employed in the two cola: יַעֲרֶה and יִשְׁלַם. The first verb יַעֲרֶה means

⁶⁴ Some scholars consider Job 8:6a to be a moralising gloss on verse 8:5. According to them, it makes the entire verse 6 an unusual poetic line with three cola. Cf. DUHM, *Hiob*, 47; FOHRER, *Hiob*, 184; J. STEINMANN, *Job* (Paris 1960) 118; V. MORLA, *Libro de Job* (Estella 2017) 266-267. DHORME, *Job*, 103, argues that the theme of "pure and upright" is extraneous in this context because Job's integrity is not at issue here. However, the sudden appearance of a poetic line with three cola is not at all unusual in the book of Job, for instance: 4:16, 19; 7:4; 9:24; 10:3, 15; 11:20; 12:6. Moreover, in this literary context, Job 8:6a is intelligible as the second condition required by Bildad. The omission of these poetic cola is therefore unnecessary.

⁶⁵ Reading this prerequisite in the broad context of the book, readers may recognise the irony intended by the poet. Job's devotion and righteousness have been affirmed since the beginning of the book as a matter of fact (cf. Job 1:1, 5, 8, 22; 2:3, 10). Bildad does not know that even though Job's personal morality satisfies the prerequisite that he suggests, Job still suffers. His application of the retributive theory to Job's case is highly inappropriate.

“awake, wake up”, and often appears in petitions for God to bring help and salvation to the supplicant: “Wake up! Bestir yourself for my judgment, for my cause, my God and my Lord” (Ps 35:23; cf. 44:24; 59:5). The first promised consequence for Job’s devotion and integrity, according to Bildad, implies an active intervention on God’s part to rescue Job from his predicament. The second verb *שָׁלַם* is more particular in promising Job’s restoration. In *Piel*, the verb *שָׁלַם* often denotes “to complete, make restitution”, “to recompense, reward”, “to restore, replace”.⁶⁶ With God as the subject, this verb depicts God as the “Lord of recompense” (Jer 51:56) who rewards people according to their good deeds (1 Sam 24:19; Rut 2:12; Ps 31:24; 62:12; Jer 25:14) and restores their loss and misfortune (Joel 2:25; Isa 57:18). In Job 8:6c, the object of the restoration is expressed by the phrase *נוֹת צְדִיקָךְ*. According to Habel and Balentine, this phrase can be understood in two senses. Literally, *נוֹת צְדִיקָךְ* means “the abode of your righteousness”, which may indicate the habitation which is rightfully Job’s. In this case, the promised restoration regards Job’s material property. Poetically, however, the expression *נוֹת צְדִיקָךְ* may express the dwelling characterised by Job’s righteousness. In this case, the promised restoration concerns more Job’s upright status.⁶⁷ In any case, it is evident that Bildad bases his exhortations upon the firm belief in constructive retribution. From Bildad’s perspective, Job’s submissive pleading together with his blamelessness and righteousness are necessary conditions for him to be restored. Bildad wants Job to place his trust in God, and he asserts that God’s justice will then work in Job’s favour.

2.2.1.4 Job 8:20: A just God according to retributive justice

הַיְיָ אֵל לֹא יִמָּאֵס-תָּם For El will not reject a blameless person
וְלֹא יִחַזֵּיק בִּידֵי-מַרְעִים nor hold the hands of evildoers.

In the final words of the speech, Bildad recapitulates his teaching on retribution. He now unequivocally answers the questions he raised regarding God’s justice (v. 3): God will never act unjustly. From Bildad’s point of view, the justice of God is manifested in retribution. Thus, people are classified in two opposing categories according to their moral status, “the blameless” and “the evildoers”. The repetition of the negative particle *לֹא* in each poetic cola emphasises that the fates of these two kinds of people are

⁶⁶ Cf. HALOT, 9672.

⁶⁷ Cf. HABEL, *Job*, 175; BALENTINE, *Job*, 151.

distinct in terms of what God would not do for them. The verb *מָאס* in the first colon denotes a negative action as “to reject, despise, cast away”, while the verbal phrase *חִזִּיק בְּיָד*, “to hold the hands”, is an expression of divine blessing, indicating guidance and support from God.⁶⁸ So, according to Bildad, God is supremely just and neither favours the evildoers nor disfavours the blameless. Traditional wisdom regarding the retributive justice of God remains intact because God never acts otherwise.

In this speech, Bildad shows himself to be an eager defender of God’s justice. He uses the theory of divine retribution to argue for divine justice. In his “black and white” worldview divine retribution operates upon uncompromising principles of reward or punishment. The problem is that when retribution is employed as the sole and sufficient explanation of human misfortune, the only way for Bildad to defend God’s righteousness is to attribute unrighteousness to Job’s children. From the principle of retribution, he deduces that those who suffer must be victims of their own iniquity, for God always acts according to the paradigm of retribution. As Clines noted, Bildad does not acknowledge that “to deny the universal applicability of retribution is not to deny the righteousness of God”.⁶⁹ Thus, if in 8:4 Bildad wronged Job’s children by inferring from their death that they were sinners, in 8:5-6 he wrongs God by connecting divine activities to the paradigm of retribution. For him, both God’s blessing and chastisement are contingent on human moral status.

2.2.2 On the Fate of the Wicked

Like Eliphaz, after appealing to constructive retribution to exhort Job, Bildad cannot help but move on to illustrate his understanding of destructive retribution. His second speech (Job 18) is a long depiction of the terrible fate of the wicked. The depiction is introduced by an exordium,⁷⁰ in which Bildad states that Job can never change the moral universe to suit his own purpose.

⁶⁸ For instance, “I have taken you by the hand and kept you. I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations” (Isa 42:6).

⁶⁹ CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 203.

⁷⁰ By *exordium* I mean the introductory part of a speech in which the speakers try to present themselves and their arguments as intelligent and trustworthy. Both Job’s friends and Job himself usually do so by virtue of directly attacking and undermining the argument of their interlocutors.

2.2.2.1 Job 18:4: The moral universe of God's design is immovable

טָרַף נִפְשׁוֹ בָּאָפוֹ	You who tear yourself in your anger
הֲלִמְעַנְךָ תֵּעֶזֶב אֶרֶץ	Is it for your sake the land shall be forsaken,
וַיֵּתֶק צוּר מִמְּקוֹמוֹ	or the rock removed out of its place?

In his laments, Job accused God of torturing him with divine anger: “he has torn me with his wrath” (16:9). Bildad shifts the blame onto Job’s shoulders, retorting that the real cause of Job’s suffering lies not in God’s anger against him but rather in his anger against God.⁷¹ It is Job’s indignation against God that has been destroying him. In his lamentation, Job revealed his wish to reverse the divine design, turning light into darkness and turning his own existence into non-existence (Job 3). Here Bildad understands Job’s words as both a self-destroying wish and an attack on the cosmic order. He counterattacks Job with two pungent rhetorical questions.

In v. 4b, the verb employed is עֶזַב, denoting the act of leaving or forsaking. Occurring in *Niphal* and relating to the land or the country (אֶרֶץ), this root expresses the supreme catastrophe of a country empty of its population (cf. Lev 26:43; Isa 7:16). The image of being forsaken implies a cursed and chaotic land. Employing this image in the first rhetorical question, Bildad is plainly telling Job that it is not because of his own suffering that the whole land would suffer with him. In v. 4c, the term employed is צוּר, “the rock”, in parallel with אֶרֶץ, “the land”. It is noteworthy that “The Rock” is an ancient title for El (cf. Deut 32:4, 31; 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Sam 22:3). “The rock removed out of its place” implies a chaotic situation that shakes the foundation of the universe.⁷² Employing this image in the second rhetorical question, Bildad aims to make it clear to Job that an alteration in the structure of cosmic order just for him is impossible. Thus, the two expressions “land forsaken” and “rock removed” complement each other in conveying Bildad’s assertion: the natural world or the cosmic order cannot be affected by the suffering and anger of someone like Job.⁷³

⁷¹ In Clines’ words: “Job’s injuries are self-inflicted”, CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 411.

⁷² It is also noteworthy that the expression “the rock removed out of its place” in v. 4c is reminiscent of Job’s lamentation in 14:18, in which the same expression was employed by Job to illustrate his deep frustration in seeing all of his hopes collapsed. From the perspective of a pious sufferer, Job also experienced the breakdown of his surrounding world. This perspective, however, is now challenged by Bildad.

⁷³ For Bildad, “it is beyond his imagination that God would so alter the universe to redeem one man”. HARTLEY, *Job*, 274.

Even though both of the images employed in v. 4bc come from the physical order, it is not difficult to see them as figuratively pointing to the moral order of the world, especially in the context of the second speech of Bildad. Many scholars recognise an analogy between the cosmic order and the moral order, in the sense that the latter is an organic part of the former.⁷⁴ If so, the question Bildad aims at Job can be reasonably interpreted as Driver and Gray rendered it: “Is the established order of the world (viz. that suffering is a consequence and proof of sin) to be interrupted, in order that you may continue to be reputed righteous?”⁷⁵ It is unwise of Job to ask God to reverse the divine design of retribution for his sake. It is noteworthy that in Bildad’s question, the adverbial form הַלְמַעֲנֶךָ, “on account of you, for your own sake”, is placed in the emphatic position. The question implicitly conveys the accusation that Job has become too self-centred and full of his own importance in expecting a reversal of the universal order in his favour. For Bildad just as the laws of the universe remain unchanged, so too will the law of retribution continue to function. At this point, Bildad turns to deal with the fate of the wicked.

2.2.2.2 Job 18:5, 21: Unconditional announcements of the fate of the wicked

While in the first speech Bildad used conditional sentences to describe constructive retribution, in the second he employs unconditional announcements to teach Job about destructive retribution. Bildad’s depiction of the fate of the wicked is enclosed by key terms denoting the evildoers: רָשָׁע, “the wicked” (v. 5), עוֹל, “the ungodly” (v. 21a), לֹא־יָדַע אֵל, “those who do not know God” (v. 21b). It is sufficient to consider the two poetic lines that encapsulate Bildad’s entire instruction.

גַּם אוֹר רָשָׁעִים יִדְעַךְ	⁵ Indeed, the light of the wicked goes out
וְלֹא־יִגֵּה שְׂבִיב אֵשׁ	and the flame of his fire does not shine.
אֲךְ־אֵלֶּה מִשְׁכְּנוֹת עוֹל	²¹ Surely such are the dwellings of the ungodly
זֶה מְקוֹם לֹא־יָדַע אֵל	this is the place of the one that does not know El.

⁷⁴ “For Bildad the moral order is so integrally related to the natural order that asking for a change in the moral law [...] is the same as asking for a remarkable event in nature”, HARTLEY, *Job*, 274. “Cambiar el orden de la retribución es cambiar el orden del mundo”, L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL – J.L. SICRE DÍAZ, *Job. Comentario Teológico y Literario* (Madrid 1983) 339. Cf. also DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 158; CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 411-412.

⁷⁵ DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 158.

Job 18:5 is typical of sapiential traditions, employing the image of extinguished light to describe the punishment reserved for the wicked. “The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked goes out” (Prov 13:9; cf. Prov 20:20; 24:20). Balentine observes that “Bildad uses these traditions selectively”.⁷⁶ While the teaching of Proverbs proportionately develops both the prosperity of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked, here Bildad focuses on the destructive side of the teaching. His main lesson is that no evildoer can escape God’s punishment. Driver and Gray understand the image of extinguished light in terms of misfortune befalling the wicked: “The light [...] burning in the house, and the fire burning on the hearth, are symbols that the fortunes of the owner are still intact; when those fortunes are broken, the light goes out”.⁷⁷ Habel interprets the contrast of light and darkness as symbols of life and death. When the light in a house goes out or its lamp does not shine, such a house is plunged into darkness, and it becomes “the domain of death”.⁷⁸ Thus, the first poetic line depicts the fate of the wicked with a gloomy picture. This picture will be followed by a number of metaphorical images, through which Bildad vividly delivers his instruction regarding misfortunes prepared for the wicked: their extinguished light and their diminished vigour (vv. 6-7), their state of being trapped (vv. 8-10) and subsequently devoured by the terror of death (vv. 11-14), their loss of all habitations (vv. 15-16) and even of all earthly memories (17-19). The depiction ends with the reaction of horror of the people from the east and west to the fate of the wicked, as well as with a description of the final place reserved for the godless (vv. 20-21).

Remarkably, Bildad’s depiction of the punishments of the wicked parallel what Job has experienced: the skin devoured by disease (v. 13a, cf. 2:7-8), the destruction of the dwelling place (v. 15) and the loss of offspring (v. 19, cf. 1:19), the terror felt by those who see what has happened to the wicked (v. 20, cf. 2:12). Alonso Schökel and Sicre Díaz comment that Bildad’s speech is that of “a student who does not realise the inadequacy of his paper when confronted with reality: for the innocent Job is suffering most of the future chastisements of the wicked”.⁷⁹ It is improbable that Bildad is totally unaware of parallels between his depiction of the fate of the

⁷⁶ BALENTINE, *Job*, 273.

⁷⁷ DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 158.

⁷⁸ HABEL, *Job*, 286.

⁷⁹ ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 337.

wicked and Job's condition. These parallels cannot be merely coincidental. Perhaps they may remind Job that his current life bears all the hallmarks of the punishment of a sinner. Even so, it is not clear whether Bildad considers Job a wicked person. Bildad never urges Job to repent. He just presents the darkest side of the doctrine of divine retribution. The message Bildad wants to send to Job through this long depiction is quite clear: Job's present suffering is great, but a still much more horrible fate can happen to ungodly persons.

Job 18:21 is a summary statement. The motif of מְקוֹם, "the place", reconnects Bildad's conclusion with his exordium, in which Bildad argues that the foundation of the world's moral order is firmly established in its "place" (v. 4). In his view, the "place" of the moral order is unshakable. He contrasts this firm foundation with "the place" of the ungodly (v. 21ab). All of the images of destruction he has given illustrate the dwelling place reserved for the wicked. In his last words, the wicked person is identified as "the one who does not know El". As we know, "knowing God" is "the basic concept of obedience to the moral law (cf. Hos 4:1)".⁸⁰ This concept does not imply a theoretical knowledge or passive recognition, but "a practical, religio-ethical relationship". Instead, "not knowing God", often "appears in combination with parallel verbs as a way of expressing apostasy and religio-ethical decline".⁸¹ "The one who does not know God" therefore denotes not only the ungodly in a religious sense but also the wicked in an ethical sense. By mentioning God at the end of his speech, Bildad reminds Job that it is God who will carry out the destructive retribution, which is a dominant feature in his theory of retribution.

Thus, in his second speech, Bildad moves from a positive to a negative tone, changing his focus from constructive to destructive retribution. In both speeches, he places the theology of retribution on par with the validity of the laws of nature, which apply to everyone without exception. In such a theology, there is hardly a place for the cries of innocent sufferers. Even though he does not directly accuse Job of being a sinner, readers might draw out the implicit conclusion from his black-and-white worldview. As Driver and Gray sharply comment: "The fact remains that the wicked do not prosper, and that those who do not prosper are wicked. [...] Bildad denies

⁸⁰ GORDIS, *Job*, 194.

⁸¹ BOTTERWECK – BERGMAN, "דע", *TDOT* 5, 448-481, here 469.

that the wicked can or do prosper, at the same time suggesting plainly enough the particular application: Job is not prosperous, Job is wicked”.⁸²

2.2.3 On Mortals before God

The third speech of Bildad (Job 25) is a hymn of praise to God, which is unusually short.⁸³ The speech opens with a sharp contrast between God’s nature and that of human beings. On the one hand, God is presented as having dominion and awesome power (הַמֶּשֶׁל וְפָחַד), and as establishing the cosmic order, bringing light to the entire universe (vv. 2-3, 5). On the other, human beings appear as maggots (תּוֹלְעָה) and worms (רִמָּה) (v. 6). The anthropological perception, pronounced by Eliphaz (4:17; 15:14, 16) and Job (9:2; 14:4), is now elaborated with more detail and reiterated with little variation. To cope with Job’s various questions regarding the morality of divine justice, Bildad follows Eliphaz by shifting his focus to the moral imperfection of humanity.

⁸² DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 158.

⁸³ The reconstruction of the third cycle of the speeches, in particular its final parts (Job 25–27), remains an unsolved problem. Most commentators believe that there must have been some damage to this part of the text in the course of transmission, although this view is based on the difficulties of interpreting the content of these speeches rather than on any obvious evidence of textual damage. Many distrust the attributions of the MT that ascribes Job 25 to Bildad, Job 26–27 to Job, and nothing to Zophar. Instead, they consider most of Job 26 (vv. 5-14) as the second part of Bildad’s speech, continuing with 25:1-6. Cf. for example, GORDIS, *Job*, 534-535; DHORME, *Job*, 336-344; TERRIEN, *Job*, 183-185; ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 448-449; POPE, *Job*, 180-186; HABEL, *Job*, 366-368; NEWSOM, *Job*, 517-519. The earliest translations of the book of Job, such as the Septuagint and the Qumran Targum, follow the same distribution of speeches as seen in the MT. Cf. HARTLEY, *Job*, 4-5; NEWSOM, *Job*, 497. I hold that a reading faithful to the MT is preferable. Any of the proposed surgeries on the text do not solve all of the problems of the apparent inconsistencies in Job’s speeches. I suggest that a certain overlapping between the speeches of the three friends and between theirs and Job’s, as presented by the MT, should be taken seriously as belonging to the original and strategic design of the author of the book. On the one hand, the disarray in these speeches can be understood as an interpretive clue that the disputes between the three friends and Job have finally broken down. Cf. SEOW, *Job 1–21*, 381; W.A. VOGELS, *Job, l’homme qui a bien parlé de Dieu* (Paris 1995) 146-147. On the other hand, the unusual brevity of Bildad’s last speech may be an indication that the friends’ arguments are exhausted. Cf. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 214.

2.2.3.1 Job 25:4: How can a mortal be righteous before El?

ומה יצדק אנוש אֱלֹהִים How can a mortal be righteous before El?
 ומה ייזכה ילוד אִשָּׁה How can one born of woman be pure?

After praising God's majesty, Bildad describes human beings with parallel terms, אֱנוֹשׁ ("mortal"), and ילוד אִשָּׁה ("one born of woman"). The term אֱנוֹשׁ is a general name for mankind, denoting an ordinary human person.⁸⁴ In the poetic disputes, Eliphaz is the first who employed this term to raise the question about the possibility for a human person to be morally blameless: "Can a mortal be righteous before Eloah? Can a human being be pure before his Maker?" (4:17). In the literary context of his first speech, these questions serve to emphasise the creatureliness of human beings, as vulnerable mortals (cf. 4:19-20). Indeed, ילוד אִשָּׁה is a peculiar phrase occurring only in the book of Job that may be interpreted in various ways. Tur-Sinai regards "born of woman" as a reference to the ritual impurity that affects both the woman and the child through the birth process (cf. Lev 12:2-5).⁸⁵ Balentine favours an existential understanding and thinks that the one "born of woman" is "destined to die and decay as a mere earthling".⁸⁶ In the book of Job, however, the phrase ילוד אִשָּׁה characterises human life as fragile and ephemeral (cf. Job 14:1-2). This phrase was also employed by Eliphaz in his second speech: "What is mortal that he could be pure, or one born of woman that he could be righteous?" (15:14).⁸⁷ In his speech, Eliphaz

⁸⁴ Cf. BDB 60.

⁸⁵ N.H. TUR-SINAI, *The Book of Job. A New Commentary* (Jerusalem 1967) 232, 376.

⁸⁶ BALENTINE, *Job*, 384.

⁸⁷ A Sumerian text contains an idea very similar to that of Job's friends. In a work named "Man and His God", considered by Samuel N. Kramer as "the first essay on human suffering and submission", the author says: "Never has a sinless child been born to his mother. A mortal has never been perfect. A sinless man has never existed from of old" (lines 104-105). According to Kramer, the main theme of this composition is that human sinfulness is the best explanation for human misfortune: "Man's misfortunes are the result of his sins and misdeeds, and [...] no man is without guilt [...] there are no cases of unjust and undeserving human sufferings; it is always man who is to blame, not the gods". S.N. KRAMER, "Ethics. The First Moral Ideals", *History Begins at Sumer. Thirty-Nine Firsts in Recorded History* (Philadelphia 1956) 111-115, here 112-113. The solution for the sufferer is therefore summarised in Kramer's classical statement: "in cases of suffering and adversity, no matter how seemingly unjustified, the victim has but one valid and effective recourse, and that is to continually glorify his god and [to] keep wailing and lamenting before him until he turns a favourable ear to his prayers". S.N. KRAMER, "'Man and His God', a Sumerian Variation on the 'Job' Motif", *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (eds. M. NOTH – D.W.

compared human beings “born of woman” to heavenly beings in such a way as to highlight the corruptibility and inherent inclination to iniquity of the former (cf. 15:15-16).⁸⁸ In Job 25:4, Bildad proposes a very similar idea. The two moral qualities in question are righteous (צדק) and pure (זכה). Bildad does not deny that human beings might be morally blameless in an absolute sense. Rather, he denies that human beings can be righteous or pure according to God’s standards or in comparison with God. The comparative sense is clearly manifested in the last two poetic lines of the speech.

2.2.3.2 Job 25:5-6: Mortal, who is maggot and worm

הן עדיירה ולא יאהיל	⁵ Behold, even the moon is not bright
וכוכבים לא־זכר בעיניו	and the stars are not pure in his eyes.
אף כִּי־אנוש רמה	⁶ How much less a mortal, who is maggot
ובן־אדם תולעה	and a human being, who is worm.

Before, by way of comparison, Eliphaz stated that even angels are not trustworthy and heavenly beings are not clean in the eyes of God, much less are human beings (cf. 4:18; 15:15). Bildad now follows the same approach. He chooses the two images of the world of creation that are characterised by their physical brightness at night, i.e., the moon and the stars. In this manner, Bildad metaphorically associates moral perfection with the quality of illumination. He affirms that “even though the moon and stars, members of God’s heavenly army, appear so bright to mankind, they have no innate purity that gives them any position with God”.⁸⁹ Bildad argues that if such marvellous celestial entities as the moon and stars can have no claim to purity before God, neither can human beings. Just as the Psalmist who gazed into the heavens and discovered with astonishment the smallness of human

THOMAS) (VT.S 3; Leiden 1955) 170-182, here 171. It is not difficult to see that Job’s friends share the gloomy anthropological perception that no one is so righteous that he or she could expect to be totally free from sufferings. In their disputes with Job, they defend God at the cost of condemning their friend. They advise Job to become docile and submissive, wholeheartedly relying on divine intervention and calling upon divine assistance.

⁸⁸ Although Job also asked “how can a mortal be righteous before El?” (9:2; 14:4), he is far from asserting the impossibility of human innocence. Job 9:2 belongs to the context in which Job laments that it is impossible for him, an innocent man, to obtain vindication from God (cf. 9:15, 20-21). Job 14:4 is a lament about God’s strict scrutiny upon vulnerable people like Job. Job’s own innocence is a cardinal point throughout the book, the point that Job never relinquishes.

⁸⁹ HARTLEY, *Job*, 357.

beings, and wondered: מַה־אִנוֹשׁ, “What is a human person?” (cf. Ps 8:4), so too Bildad now addresses Job with a similar question: כִּי־אִנוֹשׁ, “Who is a human person?” (v. 6a). However, unlike the Psalmist who marvelled at the thought that God had crowned human beings with God-like dominion (Ps 8:5-6), Bildad sees nothing but the extreme lowliness of human beings. In Bildad’s view of the universe, there is a well-defined hierarchical order, at the top of which is undoubtedly the almighty God and at the lowest of which are mortal human beings. In between, heavenly beings are much higher than human beings, but at the same time very much lower than God. Such a comparison highlights the extreme lowliness of human beings.

To specify the lowliness of human beings in the order of the universe, in extreme contrast to such heavenly bodies like moon and stars, Bildad employs the image of two subterranean insects, the maggot (רֶמֶה) and the worm (תּוֹלֵעָה). In the book of Job, רֶמֶה often appears as symbol of disease, death, and decay (cf. 7:5; 17:14; 21:26; 24:20); while תּוֹלֵעָה is associated with carcasses (Isa 66:24). When a human person is compared to a worm, such a person is on the fringe of death, becoming an object of contempt and accusation (cf. Ps 22:7). In Isa 14:11, the two terms רֶמֶה and worm תּוֹלֵעָה appear together as the two denizens of Sheol that envelop the dead: “maggots are scattered beneath you, and worms cover you”. When Bildad pictures human beings as maggots and worms, he suggests that they have a wretched and earthly existence, not just because they are mortal but because they are morally inept. Such creatures could never stand before God and claim to be blameless. In praising and defending God, he damns humanity.

2.2.4 Summary and Assessment

Bildad’s commitment to retributive theology is grounded on his belief in divine justice. God is a just God who unequivocally rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Starting with contrasting considerations on the fate of Job and of his children, Bildad means to offer to Job some encouragement grounded in his confidence in divine justice. By a conventional elaboration on the fate of the wicked, he warns Job against taking that path. In conclusion, he reiterates the traditional statement on the impossibility for any human being to be pure and righteous as an indirect way of discrediting Job’s claim of innocence. Unlike Eliphaz, however, Bildad does not directly call Job to repentance. Throughout the three speeches, Bildad manifests himself as a traditionalist who observes the world through a sharply black-

and-white lens and sustains the absolute character of the moral order of the world. More importantly, for Bildad the nexus between sin and suffering is uncompromisingly maintained according to the fundamental assumptions of divine retribution. In any case, divine justice always remains intact; only human beings are to blame for their sinful nature.

2.3 Zophar the Naamathite

The MT attributes only two speeches to Zophar (chapters 11 and 20) in the first two cycles of disputes.⁹⁰ In both speeches, Zophar voices his firm belief in retributive theology and applies it to Job. While the first speech relies on constructive retribution to call Job to repentance through conditional assurances of being blessed by doing so; the second is a long and conventional treatise on the inevitable destruction of the wicked by which Zophar issues stern warnings to Job.

2.3.1 On the Peaceful Security of a Repentant Sinner

2.3.1.1 Job 11:4, 6c: Job's punishment is only partial

Like the other two friends, Zophar is much disturbed by Job's conviction that he is innocent. To persuade Job to repent, Zophar asks him to admit the reality of his iniquity.

ותאמר זך לקחי⁴ You say: "my doctrine is pure
ובר הייתי בענעיד and I am clean in your eyes".

ודע כיישיה לך אלוה מעונך^{6c} But know that Eloah forgets
part of your iniquity.

⁹⁰ Many commentators disagree with the MT, which attributes no speech to Zophar in the third cycle. They consequently adopt the theory that there ought to have been a third speech from Zophar and try to reconstruct it with the second part of Job 27 (cf. GORDIS, *The Book of God and Man*, 99; DHORME, *Job*, 353-359; POPE, *Job*, 187-188; HABEL, *Job*, 383-387; ROWLEY, *Job*, 174-178) or even with 27:7-23 (cf. CLINES, *Job* 21-37, 651-677). This reconstruction is tenable from the point of view of the content. However, this does not necessarily mean that the attribution of the MT can be simply ignored. Nor does it mean that Zophar's silence at the end of the third cycle is unreasonable. In fact, in accordance with the MT, no ancient version, not even the Septuagint, the Qumran Targum or the Vulgate, attributes a third discourse to Zophar. The view taken here is therefore that of the MT, which asserts that Zophar only made two speeches.

Instead of engaging with Job's actual situation, Zophar treats Job's problems on a theoretical level and pays more attention to Job's words. By the verb form "you say" (וְתֹאמַר), Zophar gives the impression that he is now quoting Job's words. However, there are at least two subtle differences between the words Zophar attributes to Job and what Job actually said. Firstly, Zophar understands the various laments in Job's agonised speeches as "doctrine" (לִקְחָה). The word לִקְחָה literally means "what is received", and thus stands for teachings or beliefs received from a tradition. In various texts, לִקְחָה is a familiar term for "doctrine", or "instruction" (Prov 1:5; 4:2; 9:9; Isa 29:24; Deut 32:2). Nevertheless, nowhere in all his lamentations does Job speak of his "teaching", let alone declare that such teaching is pure.⁹¹ Secondly, Job also never claimed to be "clean" (בָּר) in God's sight. To maintain his blamelessness, Job frequently employs terms indicating personal and moral integrity, such as תָּם ("blameless, integral"; cf. 9:20, 21) and צַדִּיק ("just, righteous"; cf. 9:15, 20; 10:15). Whereas the term בָּר employed by Zophar is often associated with the quality of shining,⁹² and thus denotes some kind of cleanliness or spotless purity. Therefore, the saying attributed to Job is indeed a form of mockery by which Zophar denies that Job, a sufferer, can validly claim to be innocent or pure.

Zophar's assessment of Job's moral state is contained in verse 6c, one of the nodal verses of the entire speech.⁹³ The verse starts with the imperative וַדַּע, which is frequently used "to stress the certainty of a consequence".⁹⁴ Using this verb, Zophar teaches Job the knowledge of God's unfathomable

⁹¹ BALENTINE, *Job*, 185, aptly comments: "But Job has not *studied* affliction, he has *experienced* it. He has not constructed a *doctrine* of grief, he has *cried out* in anguish". Similarly, CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 260, notes: "It is the gravest misapprehension for Zophar to cast Job's speeches as classroom lectures or theoretical disquisitions. The term 'doctrine' by itself is enough to show how little empathy Zophar is capable of".

⁹² "YHWH's commandment is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Ps 19:8; cf. Song 6:10).

⁹³ Some scholars do not think this part of verse 6 is original, because it breaks the metric pattern. Cf. BUDDE, *Hiob*, 53; W.B. STEVENSON, *Critical Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Poem of Job* (Glasgow 1951) 353; MORLA, *Job*, 353. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 106, judge the verse as "an isolated stichos, exceeding the usual length", whereas HARTLEY, *Job*, 197, considers it "a parenthetical note". However, as GORDIS, *Job*, 121, argues, metric pattern "is never in itself a sufficient cause" for omitting a poetic colon in the book of Job. Moreover, the meaning of verse 6c fits very well with the literary context to which it belongs. CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 262, rightly regards the verse to be the nodal verse for it contains "the essence of Zophar's view of Job's guilt".

⁹⁴ Cf. GKC §101i; DHORME, *Job*, 144.

wisdom that, according to him, is hidden from Job (cf. vv. 5-6a). The content of this knowledge can be translated in at least two different ways, depending on how one understands its main verb form, יָשָׁה. The form יָשָׁה is derived from the root נָשָׂה which can have two different meanings, either “to lend, to be creditor, to demand payment” or “to forget, to overlook”.⁹⁵ Some scholars follow the first and translate: “God demands of you less than your iniquity”, or “God exacts from you less than your guilt demands/deserves”.⁹⁶ Others follow the second and read: “God causes some of your guilt to be forgotten for you”, namely, “God forgets/overlooks/ forgives part of your sin”.⁹⁷ In my opinion, the meanings of these two readings are not actually incompatible. Both take the preposition מִן in the last word, מִמֶּעוֹנֶךָ, as partitive. The first reading tends to focus on the part of what Job is experiencing compared to what he should have deserved. The second reading focuses on what Job should have endured but that was overlooked by God. The two readings converge in the affirmation that God did not actually punish Job in a manner proportionate to his sin. This affirmation may help to convey two important ideas that Zophar wants to teach Job.

Firstly, it states that Job is indeed a great sinner.⁹⁸ From Zophar’s retributive perspective, Job’s suffering is straightforwardly interpreted as a consequence of his sinfulness. What Job must learn is very clear: that he is guilty, and that God is just. “Far from punishing Job unjustly, God gives him less than he deserves”.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Cf. BDB 674.

⁹⁶ Cf. GORDIS, *Job*, 121; HABEL, *Job*, cf. also NRSV, ESV, KJV.

⁹⁷ Cf. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 106; POPE, *Job*, 83; ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 240; HARTLEY, *Job*, 195; CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 251. Cf. also NIV, NASB. In fact, there are other authors who switch to another option: “Eloah demands from you an account of your sin”. DHORME, *Job*, 144. Cf. also MORLA, *Job*, 349, 353: “Sabrías que Eloah te pide cuentas”. According to Dhorme, it is disquieting to read the construction of the *Hiphil* verb יָשָׁה with the two preposition ל and מִן before the two complements. He suggests an emendation of the construction יָשָׁה לְךָ to יִשְׁאַלְךָ “He shall ask you”. This reading, however, is unpersuasive because it requires an unnecessary editing of the text.

⁹⁸ DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 107, thus render Zophar’s implicit instruction: “You are very wicked in His sight, and your sufferings, great as they may be, do not equal the greatness of your wickedness”. Cf. also JANZEN, *Job*, 98: “Job’s sin is greater than God’s treatment of Job suggests”.

⁹⁹ POPE, *Job*, 85; cf. GORDIS, *Job*, 121.

Secondly, Zophar's affirmation that "Eloah forgets part of your iniquity" gives rise to the image of a merciful God. For Zophar, Eloah is not merely just but also a God of mercy. If Eloah were only just, Job would have suffered much more. According to Zophar, thus, it is the divine mercy that tempers divine justice by not carrying out full destructive retribution on Job. As Clines points out "the concept of the forgiving mercy of God is alien to the wisdom thinker but at home with the visionary prophet".¹⁰⁰ For Zophar, thus, this prophetic idea serves a dual function: to highlight the divine mercy in Job's case and, at the same time, to reaffirm Job's sinful state. This idea paves the way for Zophar to step forward to urge Job to repent so as to change his fate in keeping with the promises of constructive retribution.

2.3.1.2 Job 11:13-16: Call to repentance

Fully convinced that Job's sinfulness is the cause of his misfortune, Zophar now proposes a solution. His approach is similar to that of Bildad (8:5-7) and Eliphaz (22:23-30). He relies on constructive retribution to impart conditional assurances for Job's future. He recommends four conditions for transforming Job's life that consist of not only devout prayer but also of eradication of evil.

אם־אתה הכינות לבך	¹³ If you yourself prepare your heart
ופרשת אליו כפך	and stretch out your hands toward Him
אם־און בידך הרחיפהו	¹⁴ If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away
ואל־תשכן באהליך עולה	and do not let evil dwell in your tents

The first pair of conditions concerns Job's devotion. Firstly, Job is advised to prepare his heart (הכינות לבך) for God (v. 13a). A heart prepared for God is a heart of faithful trust: "his heart is prepared, trusting in the Lord" (Ps 112:7). Just as Samuel exhorted the people of Israel to prepare their hearts by turning away from foreign gods and serving only the LORD (cf. 1 Sam 7:3), so too Zophar exhorts Job to establish his heart on God, that is, to make it firm and concentrated so that he may enter into an intimate relationship with God. The emphatic use of the personal pronoun, אתה ("you") at the beginning of the sentence, is noteworthy. Zophar insists that no one other than Job himself is responsible for changing his destiny. This

¹⁰⁰ CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 262. In reality, the very idea that God does not exact the full punishment that human beings deserve is found several times in prophetic texts. For instance, "I am the one who wipes out your transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember your sins" (Isa 43:25; cf. Isa 64:9; Ezek 20:17; Jer 4:27; 5:10; Ezra 9:13).

change would be possible only through a radical transformation in his heart. Job is also required to perform an outward gesture that reflects his reformed inner attitude (v. 13b). “To stretch one’s hand out” is the conventional posture of humble supplication: “I fell upon my knees and stretched my hands out to the LORD my God” (Ezra 9:5; cf. Exod 9:33; Ps 88:10; 143:6). With a heart directed to God, the gesture of turning toward God with open hands (כַּף) would imply an attitude of submission and surrender. Thus, like Eliphaz and Bildad, Zophar advises Job to present himself before God with earnest devotion. Such devotion must include both an inward disposition and an outward expression.

The second pair of conditions explicitly requires Job’s moral repentance. In addition to the requirement of a fervent piety, Zophar’s advice to Job also includes particular actions of repentance, removing iniquity from his hands and wickedness from his tent (v. 14). The employment of the two terms, אָוֶן (“iniquity”) and עוֹלָה (“evil”), at the beginning and at the end of the poetic line, underlines the moral characteristic of the repentance that Zophar recommends to Job. To stretch his hands toward God, Job must make sure that his hands are free from iniquity.¹⁰¹ He must change his life by distancing himself from evil. Zophar portrays evil as an unwelcome guest who should never be allowed to dwell in his tent (v. 14b). In various biblical texts, to “dwell in the tent” of someone means to be master of that person and to take possession of that person’s property.¹⁰² Zophar’s last advice to Job therefore is a call to repentance. Job must dissociate himself from evil and not let evil take control of his own life. Zophar believes that if Job repents, he will become a righteous person and will surely enjoy the rewards of the righteous.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Zophar shares the prophetic vision that the prayers of the one with treacherous hands cannot be accepted by God: “When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Even when you multiply prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood” (Isa 1:15).

¹⁰² For example, in describing God’s blessing for Israel, the psalmist says, “He cast out the nations before them. He apportioned them for an inheritance by measurement and made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents” (Ps 78:55); Noah’s blessing to Japheth uses the same imagery: “God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant” (Gen 9:27).

¹⁰³ Just as the protasis of Zophar’s conditional assurances is initiated by the emphatic use of אִם־אֵתָהּ (v. 13), so too the apodosis is marked by the two emphatic phrases כִּי־עַד (“surely then”, v. 15) and כִּי־אַתָּה (“for you yourself”, v. 16). The language expresses Zophar’s firm belief in constructive retribution, about which he endeavours to instruct Job.

כִּי־עֵץ תִּשָּׂא פָנֶיךָ מִמּוֹם	¹⁵ Surely then you shall lift up your face without blemish
וְהָיִיתָ מִצֵּק וְלֹא תִירָא	you shall be steadfast, and shall not fear
כִּי־אָתָּה עֹמֵל תִּשְׁכַּח	¹⁶ for you yourself shall forget the misery
כַּמִּים עֲבָרוּ תִזְכָּר	you shall remember it as water that flowed past

Unlike the other two friends, Zophar does not directly mention material restoration in his promises to Job. Instead, he is more interested in Job's personal well-being, Job's dignity, and security. He assures Job that he can repent and start a new life totally different from his current situation. His dignity will be recovered so that he can "lift up his face" (v. 15a), which in this context means "to be cheerful, happy, self-confident".¹⁰⁴ A "face without blemish" suggests a person of moral integrity, a righteous person.¹⁰⁵ The reward for Job's repentance will be to attain the dignity of a righteous person; righteousness itself is a reward for contrition. Job had complained that his worth had sunk so low that he could not "lift his head" to God, a God who did not recognise his innocence and pursued him like a lion (cf. 10:15-16). Zophar now retorts that as a penitent who abandons moral iniquity and whose face is free from all stain, Job could happily enjoy his life and confidently present himself in the presence of God. If Job makes peace with God, Zophar promises him that his life will be secure and free from fear (v. 15b). One may say that a life free of fear would be a dream come true for Job, because one of his frequent complaints is about the terror he has been experiencing from God (cf. 7:14; 9:34-35). In this first colon, Zophar declares that a life without blemish is a life without fear.

Zophar believes that Job's new life will be characterised by forgetting his past misery and trouble (עֹמֵל, v. 16a). The word עֹמֵל is a frequent term for Job to refer to his miserable situation (cf. 3:10, 20; 7:3). Now Zophar's uses the term in comparison to מִים ("water", v. 16b), envisioning that all Job's troubles would flow away like water. Water is often used as a symbol of trouble and destruction (e.g., Gen 7:17-24; Ps 88:18; 123:4-5). Zophar recognises that Job is now submerged in troubles, like one swept into deep

¹⁰⁴ GORDIS, *Job*, 124.

¹⁰⁵ The term מוֹם ("blemish") is particularly frequent in ritual texts, indicating physical defects that make people unworthy of presenting themselves before God (cf. Lev 21:17, 18, 21, 23). However, Balentine may be right in stating that this term has a moral sense in the context of Zophar's promises. For Balentine, Zophar's use of this term may imply that "Job's sins have disfigured him both morally and physically, thus rendering him unfit for entry into the presence of God". BALENTINE, *Job*, 190.

waters. But just as flood waters flow away, so Job's troubles can pass away as well. This may not mean that all troubles Job experienced can be simply erased from his memory. Job somehow still remembers them (v. 16b).¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, he can utterly experience the release or liberation from their burden. Just as flood waters recede, even the most tragic experiences will no longer affect Job's life when he finds a peaceful relationship with God. Repentance is the key that will unlock the gates of peace for him.

2.3.2 On the Inevitable Destruction of the Wicked

It is intriguing that Zophar cannot close his lucid descriptions of the fate of the righteous before adding an ominous note about the gloomy fate reserved for the wicked: "But the eyes of the wicked will fail" (11:20). This note anticipates his second speech (Job 20), which includes a long and conventional teaching regarding destructive retribution. Zophar asserts the brevity of the success of the wicked (vv. 4-5) as a way of insisting on the definitiveness of their destruction (v. 6ff).

2.3.2.1 Job 20:4-5: The happiness of the wicked is momentary

הזאת ידעת מני-עד⁴ Do you know this from of old
 מני שים אדם עלי-ארץ since the establishment of *adam* on the earth
 כי רננת רשעים מקרוב⁵ that the delight of the wicked is short
 רשמחת חנף עד-ירגע and the gladness of the godless is momentary?

Theoretically, both the success of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous can pose vexing problems for keen advocates of retributive theology like Job's friends. By having denied that Job is righteous, however, the three friends somehow cast aside the problem of the suffering of the righteous. The remaining problem concerns the success of the wicked, which Zophar now discusses. His approach is very similar to that of Bildad and Eliphaz in appealing to traditional wisdom, "from of old" (מני-עד), to authorise his view (v. 4). While the two friends attributed their wisdom only to the past generations of the fathers (cf. 8:8-9; 15:18-19), Zophar goes much

¹⁰⁶ Clines sees in the parallelism between "forget" and "remember" a "psychological truth" that trouble or pain people have experienced in their lives will never be totally forgotten. He also notes the peculiarity of Zophar's words in using "remember" and "forget" as synonymous: "'Remember' is of course often paralleled to 'not forget'" (e.g., Ps 9:13; 74:18-19, 22-23) and 'forget' to 'not remember' (Job 24:20; Prov 31:17; Isa 17:10; 54:4), but here only are these polar opposites in *synonymous* parallelism". CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 269.

further. He appeals to the primordial moment of the creation of humankind.¹⁰⁷ In this way, Zophar invests the wisdom he is about to teach Job with both antiquity and permanent validity.

Zophar's teaching is about the transience of happiness for the wicked (v. 5). He employs two familiar terms for the wicked, רשעים ("the wicked, the criminal") and חנף ("the profane, irreligious"), associating them with two nouns in construct, רננת and שמחת. While שמחה often expresses joy, gladness, or mirth, רננה is usually employed to express the shouting for joy, such as the joyful voice that welcomes the birth of a child (cf. Job 3:7), or joyful singing or exultation (cf. Ps 63:6).¹⁰⁸ This line conveys Zophar's important concession that the wicked may prosper, which gives them something to celebrate, to sing out. Nevertheless, at the end of the two cola, both "the delight of the wicked" and "the gladness of the godless" are qualified by words denoting the brevity of time: מקרוב ("from near, short"), and עדי־רגע ("during a moment, momentary").¹⁰⁹ For Zophar, one need not wait long to see the end of the prosperity of the wicked. Destructive retribution may be suspended temporarily but will soon manifest itself as an inviolable principle.

The assertion that the wicked prosper only briefly serves as a prelude to Zophar's long discourse on destructive retribution (vv. 5-29). In agreement with Eliphaz and Bildad, Zophar insists that the punishment of the wicked

¹⁰⁷ As recognised by various scholars, the second colon, "since the establishment of *adam* on the earth" (מִנִּי שֵׁם אָדָם עַל־אָרֶץ) is reminiscent of the second Genesis account of creation (Gen 2:8; cf. DHORME, *Job*, 264; CLINES, *Job* 1-20, 484; BALENTINE, *Job*, 311). The colon is also evocative of the expression in Deut 4:32, "since the day when God created human on the earth", cf. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 177. Zophar's words thus evoke the very beginning and origin of creation. However, in the context of his entire speech as an elaboration on the fate of the wicked, Zophar revises the tradition on human creation by focusing only on the perspective of punishment rather than blessing. Balentine aptly comments: "In Zophar's view, creation teaches that human beings are fated to be like the Adam and Eve of Genesis 3, not of Genesis 1-2", and concludes: "Zophar has construed the truth about creation so narrowly that Job has no place to stand in God's moral order, until he admits guilt and accepts punishment", BALENTINE, *Job*, 311.

¹⁰⁸ In Psalm 100:2, שמחה and רננה are paired to denote the joy of the faithful before God: "Serve YHWH with gladness. Come before his presence with joyful singing".

¹⁰⁹ Gordis notes that the use of the two prepositions מִן and עַד in the two poetic cola favours the idea that "Zophar is covering the entire extent of time from the past to the future". GORDIS, *Job*, 215. Both עדי־רגע and מקרוב express the same idea that the delight of the wicked does not cover a long-time span, the entire extent of their joy lasting but a moment.

is an integral part of the world order. This main idea of his long speech is framed by the references to “human” (אדם; vv. 4 and 29), as well as terms indicating the world of creation such as “heavens” and “earth” (שמים, ארץ; vv. 4,6 and 27).

2.3.2.2 Job 20:27, 29: The certainty of destructive retribution

יגלו שמים עונו וארץ מתקוממה לו	²⁷ The heavens will reveal their iniquity and the earth will rise up against him.
זה חלק־אדם רשע מאלהים ונחלת אמרו מאל	²⁹ This is the portion of a wicked from Elohim and the inheritance decreed to him by El.

At the beginning of the elaboration on the fate of the wicked, Zophar refers to human beings simply as אדם, “human, mortals” (v. 4). At the end, however, he focuses on רשע אדם, a “wicked person” (v. 29). Although Zophar admits that they may briefly enjoy success (vv. 6-11), he gives a detailed description of the disasters and misery they will experience in their earthly life (vv. 12-26). Zophar concludes his speech by depicting the cosmic witnesses and God as the jury pronouncing judgment against the wicked.

Imagining the heavens and the earth testifying against the wicked is a familiar motif to open a divine lawsuit. When the two encompassing cosmic entities, the heavens and the earth, are called to bear witness, the rebellious people of Israel find themselves at the crucial moment of judgment for their sins (cf. Isa 1:2; Deut 32:1; Ps 50:4). Invoking this motif to conclude his speech (v. 27), Zophar emphasises the ultimate destruction of the wicked. According to him, the iniquities committed by the wicked do not take place in total secrecy but are observed by the cosmos. At God’s judgment, both the heavens and the earth will testify against them by uncovering all of their misdeeds. As recognised by many scholars, Job 20:27 is very reminiscent of Job 16:18-19. Because he was convinced of his innocence, Job sought intervention from the heavens and the earth in his favour. He hoped that the earth would not ignore his cries for vindication of his blood (16:18) and that a witness in the heavens would attest on his behalf (16:19). Zophar now harshly undercuts the basic premise of Job’s hope. In his view, the heavens and the earth will certainly intervene in Job’s trial, but in a direction totally

opposite to Job's expectations.¹¹⁰ The cosmos will side with the accusers against the wicked.

In the last poetic line, Zophar encapsulates his teaching regarding destructive retribution. By employing the phrase אדם רשע, "wicked person", he associates the wicked with the Adam of the primordial rebel, who was first placed on the earth (v. 4). Zophar calls the final punishment for the wicked their "portion" (חלק) and "inheritance" (נחלה). Both the terms חלק and נחלה are often employed to refer to material possessions allotted to individuals (cf. Gen 31:14; Deut 10:9; Num 26:53-54; 33:54). In various texts, however, these terms carry the metaphorical meanings that indicate the life and the destiny of a person apportioned by God (cf. Isa 17:14; Eccl 5:18; Ps 16:5; Job 27:13; 31:2). God is mentioned twice at the end of two poetic cola as אלהים and אל, prefixed by the causative preposition מן. Thus, like Eliphaz and Bildad, Zophar is firmly convinced that God is the active agent who decides the fate of the wicked (cf 4:9; 18:21). Retribution is not a human work but rather a divine law decreed by God. The fate of the wicked is determined by God because it is God who established the moral order according to retributive justice and who ensures that it operates.

Zophar's second speech elaborates a much narrower and gloomier theology in comparison with that of his first speech. Though starting with pictures of peaceful security for a repentant sinner, Zophar quickly moves to destructive retribution and focuses on descriptions of the fate of the wicked. As noted by Habel, he avoids any hint of compassion or repentance and is interested only in presenting "an uncompromising doctrine of retribution".¹¹¹ Balentine succinctly summarises Zophar's argument in the second speech: "He removes *mystery*, *righteousness*, and *hope* and builds a finished product exclusively from the materials of *certainty*, *sin*, and *punishment*".¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Zophar's mockery of Job's search for help from a heavenly witness is acutely rendered by John C. Holbert: "The earth offers the wicked no help by revealing a legitimate 'cry of blood' (see Gen 4:10); it rather reveals the true iniquity of the wicked. The skies hold no star witness; they rather hold condemnation for the wicked [...] God is all that the wicked Job will find, and that God burns with anger against Job, the foulest sinner in the world". J.C. HOLBERT, "'The Skies Will Uncover His Iniquity': Zophar Tries to Put Job in His Place", *W&W* 31 (2011) 417-432, here 421.

¹¹¹ HABEL, *Job*, 320.

¹¹² BALENTINE, *Job*, 320.

2.3.3 Summary and Assessment

Not only is Zophar decisive in his way of accusing Job but he is also eager to elaborate an uncompromising theology of divine punishment. In comparison with the other two friends, Zophar is apparently less courteous and discreet toward Job. While Eliphaz offers consolation and encourages Job to be patient and to hope, Bildad warns Job to examine himself to ensure that he is different from the wicked. Zophar, by contrast, urges Job to repent for the sins he has already committed. His argument suggests that Job already has a problem with God and that repentance is the only solution for him. Zophar's speeches emphatically affirm not only the ethics of retribution but also the role of God as the absolute source and guarantor of such ethics.

2.4 The Three Friends and the Ethics of Retribution: A Synthetic View

Although the three friends of Job are distinct from each another in their arguments, they agree on a number of theological points regarding retribution. Starting from the original intention to comfort Job, the three friends are unanimously convinced that Job's miserable situation is still redeemable. The solutions provided by them converge in the advice that Job must acknowledge the limit of his own moral qualities and accept that God has acted reasonably. Most importantly, Job must repent of his sinfulness as a way to be reconciled with God.

Throughout the debates, the friends are employed as a literary device that allows readers to see different perspectives rather than letting them focus only on the individual view of Job, the lamenter.¹¹³ By making the three friends do their best to articulate their theology and to reveal the principles in which they believe, the narrator shows considerable respect for the tradition.¹¹⁴ The validity of such a theology cannot be conveniently rejected.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, through the three friends, the author of the book

¹¹³ Cf. K.J. DELL, *Job. An Introduction and Study Guide: Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* (London 2017) 63.

¹¹⁴ R.E. MURPHY, *The Tree of Life. An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids 1996) 38.

¹¹⁵ In reality, many points of the friends' arguments are just and proper and can be seen as authentic teachings of wisdom. It may be enough here to mention just one example: what was said by Eliphaz regarding the fate of the crafty person is affirmatively reused by Paul in 1 Cor 3:19: "For it is written: 'He catches the wise in their craftiness'" (cf. Job 5:13). Thus,

also skilfully shows readers how traditional wisdom can be wrongly applied to a concrete case. No one can deny the failure of the three friends to comfort Job. They witnessed the agony of Job, whose suffering was “very great” (cf. 2:13). Unfortunately, they reason as speculative philosophers who follow the internal logic of their thoughts rather than questioning the applicability of their arguments to Job’s case. Although they do speak of constructive retribution, the dominant focus of their arguments on punishments highlights their reliance on threats of destructive retribution. Operating under the presumption of destructive retribution, they interpret Job’s sufferings as divine punishments, and therefore they progress gradually towards persuading Job to confess his sin, whatever it may be. They summon Job to return to his conventional state of piety in order for God to be well-disposed toward him. In this manner, there is in fact little difference between the arguments of the friends and that of the Adversary in the prologue, given that they all propose “a self-serving ethics of earning a reward by dint of piety”, as noted by Dermot Cox.¹¹⁶

From the narrative point of view, the prologue’s depiction of Job’s innocence exposes the inappropriateness of the friends’ attitude towards their suffering friend, as well as the irrelevance of their theological argumentation. Readers of the book of Job acknowledge from the very beginning of the disputes that the friends are wrong in denouncing Job’s immorality. As they accuse a thoroughly innocent man, the friends run the risk of turning themselves into caricatures of the wise, people who appear wise but in fact employ elements of a sound theology in an improper and irrelevant manner.¹¹⁷ For the sufferer, their theology appears as a burden rather than a comfort. For a righteous person like Job, the more the friends argue the more their arguments become inappropriate and incorrect.

From the logical point of view, the fallacy of the friends’ argumentation derives from their erroneous inferences. In one sense, the simplistic presumption of a strict identity between human suffering and divine punishment is not tenable. This identification represents a theological

to suppose that the friends speak only in error and that their theology is simply wrong would be as injudicious and erroneous as the judgments they themselves have passed on Job. Cf. BALENTINE, *Job*, 159.

¹¹⁶ COX, *Man’s Anger*, 49.

¹¹⁷ Cf. E.B. SMICK, “Semeiological Interpretation of the Book of Job”, *WTJ* 48 (1986) 135-149, here 137. Cf. also J.W. WHEDBEE, “The Comedy of Job”, *Semeia* 7 (1977) 1-39.

misinterpretation according to which all the contingencies of human existence are attributed solely to God. In another sense, the inductive inference that human suffering, whatever it may be, has human immorality as its sole justification, is fallible. This way of reasoning represents a methodological error. They follow the principle of retribution, arguing backwards from the observed reality of suffering to the presumed cause of sin.

The manner in which the friends interpret the principles of retribution reflects a considerable naivety, from both a theological and an anthropological perspective. In arguing for an absolute principle of divine retribution, the friends risk turning a traditional belief into an unconditionally accepted dogma. This dogma pretends to predetermine God's actions, as if God were mechanically bound to a certain paradigm or principle.¹¹⁸ In addition, the manner in which the friends apply this dogma to Job also risks promoting a dangerous assumption that the moral quality of one person can easily be evaluated through his or her external prosperity, whether material or general well-being. This dogma claims incompatibility between a person's suffering and that person's possible righteousness. Therefore, it also prevents the friends from appreciating Job's moral integrity, which has been clearly indicated to readers in the narrative prologue.

In conclusion, basing their argument on the theology of retribution, the friends consider the relationship between the divine and human as being conditional. In such a manner, they continue the argumentative line of the Adversary's assumptions. Through their voices, the long traditions of the ethics of retribution are reported, articulated, and applied to Job, the righteous sufferer. Their argumentation, then, serves as a backdrop against which Job, who has so far won the sympathy of readers, sets forth his revolutionary articulations. Throughout the poetic corpus of the book, the narrator presents readers the clash of two divergent perspectives, one of which is the speculative theology concerning suffering while the other is an experiential theology from a sufferer's viewpoint.

¹¹⁸ Cf. PARSONS, "Guidelines", 404.

3. Job and the Ethics of Retribution

After having considered the ethical perspective of the friends, it is now time to examine Job's own perspective. How does Job react to the various teachings and recommendations of his friends? How does he interpret his suffering? How does Job relate to God amid his miserable predicaments?

Job's integrity is solidly affirmed in the prologue by the narrator (cf. 1:1, 22; 2:10) as well as by YHWH (cf. 1:8; 2:3). Moving from the narrative prologue to the poetic disputes, readers are given the opportunity to hear Job speak directly about his inner life. In the narrative prose, Job has heroically passed the two tests. Only with the poetic expositions does he reveal himself to be a deeply wounded person. Together with the various lamentations upon his predicament, Job also must struggle to defend himself from the friends who interpret his suffering as divine punishment. This means that readers now can understand how Job assesses his own moral quality. In reality, Job is well aware of his own innocence. He boldly insists on his moral integrity. Not only does he protest against the friends who failed to comfort him, he also blames God for treating him unfairly. Surprisingly, however, the more Job argues from the perspective of a sufferer, the more he manifests himself as moving within the same framework of the ethics of retribution as his friends do. The following investigation of Job's ethical perspective will unfold in two main steps: (1) Job's self-declarations of innocence, (2) Job's accusations against God for punishing him unjustly.

3.1 Job's Self-declarations of Innocence

To defend his innocence, Job offers two arguments. Firstly, he describes who he is, employing the two crucial terms which were ascribed to him in the narrative prologue, namely, *תם* and *ישר* (cf. Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). These terms occur in important moments in which Job convincingly claims his moral integrity, such as Job 6:29b, 9:15a, 20ab, 21a. Secondly, Job describes who he is not, as a way to prove his moral blamelessness, as in 6:10c, 10:7a, 27:5-6, and especially in Job's long oath of innocence in Job 31.

3.1.1 Job's Claims to Moral Integrity

When the three friends interpreted Job's suffering as resulting from his moral flaws, they also considered God as the main agent behind everything happened to him. Like them, Job regards God as the main architect of all his suffering. Nevertheless, he radically disagrees with their interpretation of

his suffering. To defend himself, at various moments Job imagines entering into a lawsuit with God in which he can be vindicated. Even though Job grants the impossibility of putting God on trial with him, he does not cease to assert his own integrity.

3.1.1.1 Job 6:29: “My righteousness is still intact”

שׁוּבוּנָא אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָה Return now! Let there be no injustice!

וּשְׁבוּ עוֹד צְדִיקִיבָה Return! My righteousness is still intact.

In criticizing his friends’ failure to comfort him and accusing them of being treacherous (6:14-30), Job urges them to face him honestly and acknowledge his righteousness. Twice he employs the technical verb שׁב to ask the friends to change their attitude toward him.¹¹⁹ The root שׁב often indicates a physical change of direction, “to turn back, return”. In Job’s appeal, this root expresses the change of attitude that he wishes to see in his friends. As Driver and Gray render it: “Turn back from the unfair course you have adopted: do not unjustly assume my guilt”.¹²⁰ The double employment of the root שׁב in imperative at the beginning of the two poetic cola (6:29ab), as Habel points out, might function as a prophetic call to repentance (cf. Jer 18:11).¹²¹ When his friends demand that he repent, Job retorts that it is they who must repent.

In the first poetic colon, the combination between the negative particle אַל and the jussive תְּהִי conveys Job’s desire for what should not happen between him and his friends, namely “iniquity, injustice”, as designated by the term עוֹלָה. In this context, the “iniquity” or “injustice” may imply the “unfair assumption that Job must be guilty”, as Pope explains.¹²² Thus, Job’s first call to return (6:29a) is an appeal to the friends not to do him injustice and condemn him a priori solely based on the fact that he is suffering. In the second poetic colon (6:29b), instead, Job frankly asserts his righteousness. The feminine suffix ה־ at the end of the colon refers to the immediately

¹¹⁹ In the MT, the second occurrence of the verb שׁב in 6:29b is וּשְׁבִי according to *Ketib*, and וּשְׁבוּ according to *Qerē*. I join the majority of scholars in recognising that Q is preferable. The imperative feminine singular form וּשְׁבִי does not fit the literary context of Job 6:29, while the imperative masculine singular form וּשְׁבוּ creates an emphatic repetition of Job’s call to his friends. Cf. also DHORME, *Job*, 85; HARTLEY, *Job*, 140; CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 162; GRAY, *Job*, 176.

¹²⁰ DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 67.

¹²¹ HABEL, *Job*, 150.

¹²² POPE, *Job*, 56.

preceding noun צדק. The colon would thus literally mean “my righteousness is still in itself”. Job is declaring that his righteousness is here, is present, is intact. He is convinced that he has a righteous cause, that he is still unconvicted. Thus, Job’s second call to return is an appeal to the friends to recognise his situation as it is, namely, the situation of a righteous sufferer. Despite his suffering, Job still holds fast to his integrity and earnestly demands that the friends believe in it.

3.1.1.2 Job 9:15: “I am righteous”

אשר אם־צדקתי לא אענה Though I am in the right, I could not answer
למשפטי אתחנן to my judge I must appeal for mercy.

Faced with Job’s predicament, Bildad advised him to make supplication (תתחנן) to God (cf. 8:5). Job now employs the same verb (אתחנן), but with considerable bitterness. In Bildad’s advice, in fact, making supplication implies the stance of a guilty person whose problem can find no other solution than divine mercy and forgiveness. Now in the imaginary setting of a trial in which God would act as the judge, Job fears that he could not do other than what Bildad advised him. The problem for Job is that pleading for divine mercy would imply an admission of guilt. Job has no doubt that he is in the right, namely, he has done nothing wrong to deserve his miserable situation. A righteous person should have the right to enjoy God’s favour. How could Job consent to make supplication to God just to receive, in Driver and Gray’s expression, “as a favour what was really his by right”?¹²³ Thus, although the phrase אשר אם־צדקתי is only a subordinate clause in the construction of the entire poetic line, and although this phrase appears as a hypothetical, it signals Job’s awareness of his own righteousness, a truth to which Job insistently clings. At the same time, Job’s assertion of his righteousness is conveyed along with his feeling that he is being treated unfairly. Even though he is sure that he is not guilty of any crime God might impute to him, he is still trapped by the fact that God is apparently dealing with him as if he were already convicted of sin. Job thus portrays himself as a righteous sufferer, treated unjustly both by his friends and by God.

¹²³ DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 90.

3.1.1.3 Job 9:20-21: “I am blameless”

אם־אצדק פי ירשיעני	²⁰ Though I am righteous, my mouth shall condemn me.
תם־אני ויעקשני	Though I am blameless, He will declare me guilty.
תם־אני לא־אדע נפשי אמאס חיי	²¹ Though I am blameless, I do not know myself I despise my life.

Job 9:20-21 also belongs to the images of a courtroom with which Job describes his dilemma.¹²⁴ Two contrasting pairs of terms appear in verse 20: צדק (“righteous”) is the antithesis of רשע (“wicked”), and תם (“blameless”) is opposed to עקש (“crooked”). Both the roots רשע and עקש are used in *Hiphil* in such a way as to contradict Job’s moral qualities and the reality of the life he is experiencing. Thus, Job’s two declarations of his innocence are paradoxically followed by the two verb forms indicating he is being associated with wickedness and guilt. Imagining himself in the presence of God, Job fears that he would be found guilty, despite his righteousness and blamelessness.

Various scholars understand that Job’s mouth would condemn him in Job 9:20 as an effect of Job being overwhelmed by the divine sovereignty. Alonso Schökel and Sicre Díaz think that Job would be terrified of his direct confrontation with God, so he would “not only fail to find the appropriate response, but also condemn himself”.¹²⁵ However, it is more reasonable to read Job 9:20 in connection with Job’s earlier claim of righteousness (9:15). If Job has no other way to deal with God than to plead for divine mercy, speaking to God in a legal court is tantamount to Job admitting that he is a real sinner. In such a way Job mouth cannot maintain his right, but instead betrays and condemns himself.

In verse 21, Job again declares his innocence: “I am blameless”, but this time accompanied by two negations: “I do not know myself. I despise my life”.¹²⁶ According to Habel, “Job is describing the transformation which the

¹²⁴ Indeed, courtroom imagery is predominant in Job 9 as a result of the intensive use of technical terms, such as ריב (“contend”) and ענה (“answer”) (v. 3); משפט (“judge, judgment”) (vv. 15, 19, 32); חנם (“without cause”) (v. 17); מכיה (“umpire, arbiter”) (v. 33); צדק (“to be in the right”) and רשע (“to be in the wrong”) (vv. 15, 20, 29).

¹²⁵ ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 230.

¹²⁶ Scholars remark that Job 9:21 is an unusual sentence. “It consists of three short clauses which are too long for one poetic line and too brief for two”, POPE, *Job*, 73. However, the

crisis has produced in his life”.¹²⁷ In reality, Job is well aware that his suffering makes him appear guilty. He knows that he is innocent, but his current misery makes him look evil. He becomes estranged from himself and hates his misery.¹²⁸

In any case, it is evident that the threefold affirmation of integrity is the focal point of Job 9:20-21. The way Job declares his integrity in contradistinction to the harsh experience of his life implies his very sense of being treated wrongly. Nevertheless, even when everything in his life seems to be going against him, Job still refuses to give up his conviction of being a righteous and blameless person.¹²⁹ To go directly against the friends’ counsels for him, Job moves also in the direction of describing who he is not, what he did not and will not do.

3.1.2 Job’s Claims not to be Immoral

3.1.2.1 Job 6:10: “I have not denied the words of the Holy One”

ותהי עוד נחמתי	It is still my consolation
ואסלדה בחילה לא יחמול	and I rejoice in unsparing anguish
כי־לא כחדתי אמרי קדוש	for I have not denied
	the words of the Holy One.

The two trials in the prologue pushed Job to the fringe of death. Surprisingly, in the context of lamenting upon his unexplained suffering and impending death, Job speaks of his consolation (נחמתי). The explanation for such a consolation is introduced by the causal conjunction כי at the beginning of the third poetic colon. Thus, Job’s consolation comes from the consciousness that he is not unfaithful to God: “I have not denied the words of the Holy One” (6:10c). God is indirectly addressed by the term קדוש, “the

staccato 2:2:2 rhythm in this verb can be read as the original intent of the poet to convey Job’s deep emotional agitation at this moment through “staccato cries of frustration”, HABEL, *Job*, 194; Cf. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 92; GORDIS, *Job*, 107.

¹²⁷ HABEL, *Job*, 194.

¹²⁸ Gordis interestingly points out that the expression לא־אדע נפשי (“I do not know myself”) is an idiomatic phrase as it appears also in Song 6:12. He suggests that “not to know or to recognise oneself” can mean “to be moved beyond the normal emotional state”. In Song 6:12, the lover is saying “I am beside myself with joy”; whereas in Job 9:21, the suffering Job is saying “I am beside myself with misery”. GORDIS, *Job*, 107.

¹²⁹ Pope thus comments, “Job will gladly forfeit his miserable life, but he will not relinquish his integrity and claim of innocence”. POPE, *Job*, 73.

Holy One”, a familiar epithet for the Holy God of Israel (cf. Ps 71:22; 99:9; Isa 1:4; 5:19; 6:3; 40:25; 54:5; Hos 11:9; Hab 3:3). The phrase, *אמרי קדוש*, “words of the Holy One”, therefore, refers to the divine decrees or ordinances by which God teaches and guides human beings in their life.¹³⁰ Instead, the verb employed in this colon, *כחד*, may describe either the act of concealing or effacing.¹³¹ Thus, with the construction, *לא כחדתי אמרי קדוש*, Job is making claim to righteousness, that he has not disregarded or violated divine ordinances in any way. He is depicting himself as an obedient servant, the one who remains ever pious despite his terrible suffering and his imminent death. On the one hand, this description connects the plaintive Job of the poetic disputes with the pious Job of the prologue, who did not “charge God with any wrongdoing” (1:22). On the other hand, this depiction foreshadows Job’s refusal to yield to his friends’ demands that he repent. For a righteous sufferer like Job, consolation does not come from the friends who are supposed to be his comforters, but rather from his own blamelessness.¹³²

3.1.2.2 Job 10:7: “I am not guilty”

על־דעתך כִּי־לֹא אֲרֻשֶׁעַ For you know that I am not guilty
וְאֵין מִיֶּדֶךָ מִצִּיל and yet there is no deliverance from your hand.

The ingenuity of Job’s approach in the poetic disputes is that he not only addresses the friends, his loquacious interlocutors, but also does his best to address God, whose silence is part of his misery. His declarations of innocence are therefore addressed not only to the friends but also directly to God. Job cries out against God because he does not deserve any punishment: *על־דעתך כִּי־לֹא אֲרֻשֶׁעַ*, “I am not guilty” (10:7a). The claim to integrity at this moment has a special significance: according to Job’s awareness, God certainly knows (*דעתך*) his innocence. It is exactly this awareness of God’s knowledge that bewilders Job. Job’s suffering proves that God’s hand does not protect the innocent (Job 10:7b). God seems to be indifferent in leaving the innocent to suffer without any help or intervention. Moreover, when this

¹³⁰ For instance, in Job 22:22, the term *אמריו*, “His [God’s] words”, appears as synonym for *תורה*, “the law”. Cf. DHORME, *Job*, 82; HABEL, *Job*, 147.

¹³¹ Cf. BDB 470.

¹³² Clines thus expresses Job’s consolation: “No greater boon could be granted a doomed human, no greater comfort in the agony of death, than to know that he has not betrayed his God”. CLINES, *Job 1–20*, 174.

sentence is read together with its preceding context of rhetorical questions (10:3-6), as Balentine indicates, it is clear that Job is totally puzzled as to why God so obsessively seeks his sin “when it should be clear that no such sin exists”.¹³³ For Job, in Clines’ expression, “to believe that God knows he is innocent and punishes him all the same is to feel utterly trapped”.¹³⁴

The assertion that Job is innocent according to his self-awareness may disturb scholars, since in various moments Job seems to mention his iniquity and sin.¹³⁵ In contrast to the negative phrase *לֹא אֲרִשֶׁע* (“I am not guilty”) in 10:7a, Job seems to have admitted that he is guilty in 9:29 when he used the similar phrase in affirmative, *אֲנִכִּי אֲרִשֶׁע* (“I am guilty”). Similarly, in 7:20 Job employed the very familiar verb form for confession of sin: *חָטָאתִי* (“I have sinned”).¹³⁶ Nevertheless, these instances need to be read in context. Job 7:20-21 describes God as “Watcher of humans” (*נֹצֵר הָאָדָם*), not in the sense of protecting them (cf. Ps 12:7; 31:23) but rather in the sense of being a scrupulous faultfinder. Job ironically asks what the effect would be on God if he were to have committed any sins. Therefore, the verb form *חָטָאתִי* in Job 7:20 is used hypothetically, even without the particle *אִם*.¹³⁷ So, too, in Job 9:29 Job feels that God has decided that he is guilty (cf. 9:20b, 28b). In this context, Job considers two opposite hypotheses: Even if he were righteous and blameless (cf. 9:20-21) or if he were guilty (9:29), all his efforts to vindicate himself would be in vain. The phrase *אֲנִכִּי אֲרִשֶׁע* is therefore conveys a hypothesis rather than a confession of guilt.¹³⁸ In reality, there are several other instances in which Job speaks of his iniquity

¹³³ BALENTINE, *Job*, 174.

¹³⁴ CLINES, *1–20*, 247.

¹³⁵ Some scholars do not seem to take Job’s various claims of innocence seriously. They believe that Job does not deny having committed sin. For example, “Job, though “perfect”, does not deny that he has sinned”, DRIVER–GRAY, *Job*, 125; “Job does not pretend to be free from all guilt”, GORDIS, *Job*, 146; “Throughout the dialogue, Job never denies the possibility that he has sinned; rather, he denies having sinned as grievously as his suffering would seem to indicate”, HARTLEY, *Job*, 140.

¹³⁶ The verb form *חָטָאתִי*, in the first person singular, is used in confessions of sin by various biblical characters, such as Pharaoh (Exod 9:27; 10:16), Balaam (Num 22:34), Saul (1 Sam 15:24; 26:21), David (2 Sam 12:13).

¹³⁷ Various scholars point out that the Hebrew verb in perfect may stand in a conditional sentence without a modifier. The first verb form *חָטָאתִי* in Job 7:20 can be safely read as hypothetical. Cf. GKC §159b.h; DHORME, 110; GORDIS, *Job*, 82; HARTLEY, *Job*, 150.

¹³⁸ For the same interpretation, see DHORME, *Job*, 142, 148; ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 221.

hypothetically rather than as a fact, for example: אִם־חַטָּאתִי, “if I have sin” (10:14), or אִם־רָשָׁעִי, “if I am guilty” (10:15). These instances are hypothetical and ironic and therefore do not contradict Job’s various claims to integrity. Instead, they are indications of Job’s interpretation of his current plight. They convey Job’s feeling of being subjected to unfair treatment when he has not yet had the opportunity to offer his defence in God’s court and nevertheless is enduring suffering as if he had already been sentenced. Firmly convinced of his integrity, Job challenges God to identify his moral wickedness: “How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin!” (13:23). Ironically, Job invites God to assume the role of the prosecutor, whose task is to specify the accusations against him. If God cannot do this, and Job is sure that God cannot, Job’s complaint that he has been wronged by God will be vindicated.

3.1.2.3 Job 27:5-6: “My heart does not reproach me”

חֲלִילָה לִי אִם־אֶצְדִּיק אֶתְכֶם	⁵ Far it be from me that I declare you right.
עַד־אָגוּעַ לֹא־אֲסִיר תַּמָּתִי מִמֶּנִּי	Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.
בְּצִדְקָתִי הִחַזְקָתִי וְלֹא אֲרַפָּה	⁶ I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go.
לֹא־יִחַרְף לִבִּי מִיָּמַי	My heart does not reproach me for any of my days.

Job 27:5-6 summarises Job’s defence up to this point. The construction חֲלִילָה לִי (“far it be from me!”) is an introductory formula for pronouncing a truth or a decision under oath. The phrase חֲלִילָה לִי literally means “profanation to me!”, “a profaned thing may it be from me!”. The phrase is often translated as “God forbid!”, “May God keep me from [...]”.¹³⁹ The statement that follows this introductory formula, therefore, would amount to sacrilege and would bring with it a self-condemnation. By employing this formula, Job strongly declares that it would be a profanation for him to admit that the friends are in the right. Accepting their advice would be an offense not only against himself but also against God. The term צִדָּק employed in 27:5a therefore conveys Job’s ironic intent to reject unequivocally the

¹³⁹ Cf. P. JOÜON – T. MURAOKA, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (SubBib 27; Roma 2011) §165k. The formula is employed to convey solemn oaths in several texts, see for example Gen 44:17; Josh 22:29; 24:16; 1 Sam 12:23; 14:45; 20:2, 9; 24:6; 2 Sam 20:20; 23:17; 1 Kgs 21:3.

friends' attempt to disavow his moral integrity. By using the two terms **תם** and **צדק** in parallel in 27:5b and 27:6a, suffixing them with the first person singular, **תמתי** ("my blamelessness") and **צדקתי** ("my righteousness"), Job firmly asserts his own integrity. No matter what happens, he will not plead guilty when he knows that he is innocent. For readers of the entire book, the way Job consistently depicts himself as not turning away from blamelessness (**לאֲאָסִיר תַּמְתִּי**) but holding fast to righteousness (**בְּצַדִּיקְתִּי** **הַחֲזַקְתִּי**) is reliable. His self-understanding is in continuity with YHWH's appraisal of him in the prologue: Job turns away from evil (**סָר מֵרָע**) and holds fast to his integrity (**וַעֲדָנוּ מִחֲזִיק בְּתַמְתּוֹ**), despite the disasters that have fallen on him for no reason (cf. 2:3, 9).

In the last poetic colon (27:6b) Job appeals to the testimony of his heart, making a self-attestation. The term **לב** may indicate the seat of life and reason, designating "one's inner process of consciousness and thought" as Terrien describes it.¹⁴⁰ As part of Job's claim to integrity, however, the term is more likely to have a moral sense associated with Job's conscience.¹⁴¹ The word **לִבִּי** may therefore be better translated as "my conscience", and the phrase "my heart does not reproach me" better understood as a serious declaration of a clear conscience.¹⁴² The last word **מִיָּמִי**, "from my days, for any of my days", indicates Job's whole life.¹⁴³ Job proudly declares that he has never done anything deserving reproach. His conscience is clear because his life is free from any wrongdoing.

3.1.3 Summary and Assessment

The first step of our investigation of Job's ethical perspective did not comprehensively examine Job's various declarations of integrity. Nevertheless, the analysis of exemplary instances is sufficient to demonstrate effectively Job's awareness of his own innocence as well as his

¹⁴⁰ Cf. TERRIEN, *Job*, 181.

¹⁴¹ In reality, the association of the heart with moral quality is quite familiar in biblical texts, for example, **יִשְׂרָאֵל בֶּלֶב** – "the upright in heart" (Ps 7:11), **בֶּרֶךְ לֵב** – "the pure in heart" (Ps 24:4); **לֵב טָהוֹר** – "a pure heart" (Ps 51:12).

¹⁴² For this understanding see POPE, *Job*, 187; HARTLEY, *Job*, 369; BALENTINE, *Job*, 402. ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 466, comment as follows: "Su argumento supremo es la consciencia. [...] Examinándose internamente, la consciencia no lo acusa de delitos que merezcan el trato recibido. La sinceridad se impone frente a cesiones interesadas, la consciencia exalta su valor. Por esta visión, el verso es una cumbre en el AT".

¹⁴³ For the same expression, see Job 38:12; 1 Sam 25:28.

determination to defend himself. By insisting on his innocence, Job protests that he has done nothing to deserve his current tragedy. His claims of integrity are accompanied by the sentiment of being treated unjustly as if he were a convicted sinner. These claims serve as the basis for Job's unrestrained accusations against God. According to him, the unjust God is the cause of his misery. If he is in the right, God must be in the wrong. This is the very conviction that leads Job to attack God.

3.2 Job's Attack on God

3.2.1 Job 9:17: "He multiplies my wounds without cause"

אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעֲרָה יִשּׁוּפְנִי For he would crush me with a tempest
וְהָרְבָה פָּצְעֵי הִנָּם and multiplies my wounds without cause

The special term הִנָּם appeared twice in the narrative prologue within the context of Job's trials. The first time, this term conveyed the Adversary's doubt regarding the very ground and motivation of Job's piety: "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (1:9). The second time, the term appeared from the mouth of YHWH acknowledging the authenticity of Job's piety: "He still holds fast to his integrity although you have incited me against him to destroy him without cause" (2:3). YHWH thus discredited the Adversary's doubt, admitting that what had happened was unjust to Job: Job is suffering for no justifiable reason. Now, when Job uses the same term הִנָּם (9:17b) to describe the injustice of his predicament, readers know that his intuition is correct. He may also be correct in his accusation against God: "He multiplies my wounds". Even when Job's suffering after the first set of misfortunes was acknowledged as "without cause", YHWH continued to allow the Adversary to cause more misfortune for Job (2:6). Thus, just as the term הִנָּם was used to convey the Adversary's question about Job's piety in the narrative prologue, now the same term is employed to convey Job's question about God's justice and goodness in permitting him to suffer. The context of a trial appears again, but with a twist: the one on trial is no longer Job, but God.

However, by having Job speak of שַׁעֲרָה, "the tempest", the poet suggests Job's impropriety in his accusation against God.¹⁴⁴ From the perspective of

¹⁴⁴ Several scholars do not accept the term שַׁעֲרָה in the MT as "tempest". They suggest reading שַׁעֲרָה as the *nomen unitaris* of שַׁעַר, "hair", "a strand of hair", "by a mere hair", "by a trifle", reasoning that this reading will foster a parallelism with the term הִנָּם in the second

a sufferer, Job often envisions God's intervention in his situation as threatening and destructive.¹⁴⁵ If God were to appear with him in court, Job envisions, "he would crush me with a tempest" (9:17a). Instead, in what will happen when the similar term occurs (38:1), YHWH does not crush Job with the tempest but engages into a dialogue with Job from within the storm in order to free him from his short-sighted ethical perspective and restore him to fullness of life. In the disputes between Job and the friends, the poet was on Job's side to reveal how inappropriate the friends' arguments under the influence of retributive ethics were. Now in Job's accusations against God, the poet sides with God to reveal how Job is misled by the same ethics of retribution.

3.2.2 Job 9:22-24: "If not He, then who?"

אחת היא עליכן אמרתי	²² It is all one, therefore I said
תם ורשע הוא מכלה	He destroys the blameless and the wicked.
אם-שוט ימית פתאום	²³ If the scourge slays suddenly,
למסת נקים ילעג	He mocks the despair of the innocent.
ארצ נתנה ביד-רשע	²⁴ The earth is given into the hand of the wicked
פני-שפטיה יכסה	He covered the faces of its judges.
אם-לא אפוא מיהו	If not He, then who?

Lamenting unjust suffering, Job does not always focus only on his own case. In various instances, by means of general considerations, Job tends to open himself up to associating with the reality of the moral corruption of the world to which he belongs.¹⁴⁶ Job 9:22-24 is an excellent illustration of this tendency. In these three verses, Job charges God with being an unjust God

colon. Cf. DHORME, *Job*, 123; POPE, *Job* 72; GORDIS, *Job*, 106; CLINES, *Job* 1–20, 235. HABEL, *Job*, 193, thinks that a double meaning may be intended here. However, the suggested emendation is not really necessary when the MT reading makes perfect sense in this context. Indeed, *שערה* is another way of writing the word *סערה*, with the same meaning of "storm, tempest" as it appears also in Nah 1:3. In Job 9:17b, the poet uses the term *הנם* to refer to the beginning of Job's story. If so, there is no reason to reject that in Job 9:17a the same poet may be anticipating readers to the resolution (cf. 38:1) by the use of the term *שערה*. For scholars who follow MT, see ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 219; HARTLEY, *Job*, 174; MORLA, *Job*, 298.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example: Job 6:9; 7:17-20; 9:15-18, 30-31; 10:3-7, 16-17; 12:14-25; 14:18-20; 16:7-14; 19:6-12; 23:15-16.

¹⁴⁶ For Job's general considerations of unjust suffering beyond his own situation, see for example Job 9:22-26; 12:5-6; 21:7-26; 24:1-26.

who violates the fundamental principles of retribution. This charge develops on three levels.

First, in verse 22 God is characterised as an indiscriminating destroyer. It is no exaggeration to state that this verse is probably “the strongest indictment of God to be found in the book”, as Gordis comments.¹⁴⁷ Two terms as opposite as תם (“blameless”) and רשע (“wicked”) are now indiscriminately equated and juxtaposed as a double object (ורשע תם) of the same action of God. The equating of these two terms is anticipated by the emphatic phrase in the initial position of the sentence, אחת היא, which can be translated as “one single thing”, “one and the same thing”, “it is all one”, “it is the same”. Thus, Job shockingly points out that the fates of both blameless and wicked are indeed alike because of the arbitrariness of God’s execution of justice.¹⁴⁸ The gravity of his accusation, however, is not just about God’s moral arbitrariness or indifference, but rather about divine enmity toward human beings. No matter who the human persons are, God would eventually destroy all, both blameless and wicked. From the human concept of justice, a God who destroys or puts to end (מכלה) to everyone without distinguishing between the innocent and the wicked can only be an inexcusably immoral god, a god devoid of any sympathy for human beings.¹⁴⁹

Second, in verse 23, God is depicted as an evil god who mocks the suffering of the innocent. The term for the innocent נקי, “the clean, the guiltless”, was used in Eliphaz’s words of assurance for the happy fate of the righteous (cf. 4:7). Eliphaz also assured Job that as a righteous person he would experience God’s deliverance at the time of disasters (cf. 5:19-22). Job now says the very opposite. The innocent are not exempt from being struck by disaster (שׁוּט), nor can their good moral state prevent them from falling into the situation of trial or despair (מסה). Once they emerge in such

¹⁴⁷ GORDIS, *Job*, 108.

¹⁴⁸ However, it is not quite convincing to say here as Pope does that Job “explicitly denies any moral order in the universe. God is simply indifferent to good or evil”. POPE, *Job*, 73. Rather than denying the moral order, Job is criticising God for the moral disorder caused by God’s indifference. The ground on which Job reasons is retributive ethics, according to which God should punish the wicked and reward the righteous. Job is criticising God because this is not the case in the current reality of his life and his world.

¹⁴⁹ Job’s accusation here can be read as, in Clines’ sharp comment, “the expression of a distressing conviction that the cruelty that life exhibits can only reflect a divine sadism”. CLINES, *Job* 1–20, 239.

a situation, the image of God they can experience is only that of the one who is totally antagonistic to them, who laughs at them. The verb employed at the end of the sentence, לָלַץ, means “to mock, to deride”, indicating the act of gladly laughing with derisive intent.¹⁵⁰ Various biblical texts state that only wicked people can take delight in the unfortunate fate of innocents.¹⁵¹ Thus, by saying that God “mocks the despair of the innocent”, Job ironically lists God among the godless. Worse than just being quietly indifferent to the fate of human beings, God is portrayed as an evil and cruel one who derives pleasure from human suffering. Such a type of god can only make the plight of the innocent more bitter and more painful.

Third, in verse 24, Job accuses God of siding with the wicked, acting in their favour, and therefore being the source of social wickedness and oppression. Job attacks the two social aspects of God’s injustice, concerning land (24a) and juridical ethics (24b). Very different from what traditional wisdom taught, that “the upright shall dwell in the land” (Prov 2:21), and “the wicked shall not dwell in the land” (Prov 10:30), Job lays bare the harsh reality that those who inherit the land are indeed the wicked. The earth is given into their hand, namely, handed over to their power. Even though the verb employed is the impersonal use of the *Niphal* נִתְּנָה (“given”), the immediate literary context makes it clear that God is the agent¹⁵² who blinds and perverts those who are responsible for doing justice: “He covers the faces of its judges” (24b). For Job, thus, social injustice exists not only because of God’s indifference, but rather because of God’s active intervention in the direction of favouring the wicked. Just as human evildoers must be guilty of corrupting judges with bribes for their own benefit, so too God must be guilty of blinding judges for God’s own interest in despising the innocent and supporting the wicked. In his denunciations,

¹⁵⁰ “[H]e gladly lets them vainly cry out for help as a part of their suffering. He lets them struggle hopelessly until they die”, thus comments HARTLEY, *Job*, 177. Verb לָלַץ occurs three other times in the book of Job with the same meaning, see Job 11:3; 21:3; 22:19.

¹⁵¹ For instance, Ps 22:7-9; 80:6; Prov 17:5; Jer 20:7.

¹⁵² Gordis regards the use of the *Niphal* נִתְּנָה as a way to mitigate Job’s accusation against God. For him, the subject accused of injustice in this sentence is the human agent rather than God. The sentence is thus translated: “The land is given over the hand of the evildoer, who is able to bribe the judges”. GORDIS, *Job*, 96, 108. However, Job’s intention to mitigate his accusation against God in this literary context is not likely. Job is articulating his bitter experience of God from the distorted view of a sufferer. A deliberate mitigation of his attack on God is very unusual.

Job manifests his radical conviction that the root of all social injustice must derive from God.

Job's accusations end with a poignant question in the last poetic colon of verse 24: If God is not responsible for all the undeserved miseries in the world, who is?¹⁵³ On the one hand, this question represents a summary of Job's bitter attack on God in coping with his underserved suffering. If it is certain that he is innocent and suffering, then it is God's integrity that must be questioned. On the other hand, it is a sign of Job's radical monotheism when he does not shift the blame to agents other than God. God is the only one to whom Job can turn to for help and, at the same time, the only one whom Job can blame for all of his misery and the miseries of the whole world.¹⁵⁴

In short, in 9:22-24 Job is speaking from the viewpoint of a sufferer who experiences God's acting against the principles of retribution. Accordingly, God is characterised as both unjust and immoral, siding with the wicked in oppressing the righteous. Job blames God as solely responsible for the suffering of the innocent. If he is guiltless, God must be wrong in punishing him. In this way, Job makes the same mistakes as the friends, namely interpreting his suffering as divine punishment.

3.2.3 Job 13:24: "Why do you hide your face?"

למה־פניך תסתיר	Why do you hide your face
ותחשבני לאויב לך	and consider me your enemy?

Amid his suffering, Job feels himself to be God's enemy. This tormenting anguish was once expressed in his denunciation of the hostile divine presence that closely scrutinises him: "Why do you not look away from me?" (Job 7:19). Paradoxically, it is not less tormenting for him to experience the mysterious absence of God. In various poetic texts, "to hide the face" is an idiomatic expression for divine absence. In Psalm 44:25, the

¹⁵³ Job 9:24c is the only third colon of a verse in this chapter, standing like a broken-off sentence. With this striking construction, the poet has Job conclude his uncompromising accusations against God for the corruption of moral order in the world.

¹⁵⁴ Artur Weiser has an insightful comment that this phrase demonstrates the ruthless logic of Job's thinking as a believer. Job "remains attached to God in all circumstances and dares to take upon himself consequences dangerous and bordering on blasphemy, rather than abandoning the foundation of the monotheistic faith". A. WEISER, *Das Buch Hiob* (ATD 13; Göttingen 1951) 76.

exact question למה־פניך תסתיר (“why do you hide your face?”) is used by the psalmist to describe the experience of being abandoned by God. The hiding of his face implies that God ignores human affliction and oppression and forsakes humans who are in distress (cf. Ps 13:2; 30:8; 88:15; 104:29). Very often, the prayer of a pious sufferer for God not to hide God’s face is equivalent to a petition for God’s urgent intervention: “Hide not your face from your servant, for I am in trouble. Answer me quickly” (Ps 69:18; cf. 102:3). More importantly, in some prophetic and legal texts, the hiding of God’s face is properly understood as divine punishment for human sins: “My anger will be kindled against them in that day. I will forsake them and will hide my face from them, and they will be devoured” (Deut 31:17-18; cf. 32:20; Jer 33:5; Isa 59:2; Mic 3:4).

In Job 13:24, Job does not just share with the psalmists the lament about divine absence but rather boldly questions the reason for divine punishment in his own case. The parallelism between the two cola in the line associates God’s act of hiding the face (24a) with God’s hostile act of treating Job as an enemy (24b).¹⁵⁵ Many commentators recognise that here, by using the term “enemy” (אֹיֵב), Job is probably playing on the words of his name (אִיּוֹב) and of the fate he is living (אֹיֵב לְךָ, “your enemy”, namely, the enemy of God).¹⁵⁶ If this is the case, Job is actually complaining to God for not dealing with him as himself, Job, *ʾiyyōb*, an upright and blameless servant of God, but rather as *ʾōyēb*, an enemy of God. Being enemy of God means nothing other than being wicked and therefore subject to divine punishment (cf. Ps 37:20; Judg 5:31; Nah 1:2). From Job’s perspective, God is treating him as a sinner. The question about God’s hiddenness, thus, bears the brunt of the most acute pain and sorrow within a pious sufferer who must endure the bewildering alienation and enmity of God. At the same time, the question itself is a significant indication that the resolution Job has been seeking for

¹⁵⁵ A few scholars combine the term אֹיֵב and the name אִיּוֹב. Gordis argues that, according to Hebrew folk etymology, the name אִיּוֹב is “a passive participle noun from the verb אָיַב, “to hate”, hence, meaning “the hated, persecuted one”. GORDIS, *Job*, 10-11; cf. BALENTINE, *Job*, 44. The name may have been chosen to characterise the hero of the story, who is the subject of enmity and unjust suffering. However, Pope demonstrates that the name *ʾiyyōb* most likely has a common root with *Ayyab*, “well-attested as a fairly common name among western Semites in the second millennium”. POPE, *Job*, 5-6; cf. DHORME, *Job*, 2. The name *ʾiyyōb* therefore was not simply an invention from the author of the book of Job.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 284; HABEL, *Job*, 232; BALENTINE, *Job*, 214; CLINES, *Job* 1–20, 320.

his entire problem is not theoretical or theological answers but in fact the presence of God.

3.3 “As El Lives”: Job’s Oaths of Innocence

Job’s final words, before YHWH’s intervention from the whirlwind, take the form of solemn oaths. The formal language of the oath begins in Job 27, then the content of Job’s oaths is fully expounded throughout Job 31.

Taking an oath is indeed a serious and resolute way of stating a truth. To guarantee absolutely his claims of innocence, Job decides to swear on God’s life. The initial interjection אֱלֹהִים (v. 27a), “God is alive”, can be translated in diverse ways as “by God”, “as God lives”, “as truly as God is alive”.¹⁵⁷ By invoking God’s name, Job’s oath constitutes a sacred act of speech. Simultaneously, the language of oath also involves a curse for Job himself if his sworn statements prove to be false or dishonest.¹⁵⁸ Thus, by employing the language of oath, Job binds himself to his various affirmations of innocence as a way to compel God, his accuser, to answer his lament.¹⁵⁹ God is now left with only two options: either to prove Job wrong in his claims and his oath of innocence or to admit that he is wrong in accusing and punishing Job.

Several scholars see in Job’s oath of innocence a deep irony when the God to whom Job is appealing is identical with the God whom he has accused of wronging him. Yes, it is undeniable that Job depicts God as the source of his misery: El does him injustice in taking away his right, and

¹⁵⁷ In reality, in 27:2-3, Job invokes three different names of God: “As long as *El* lives, who has denied my right; *Shaddai*, who has embittered my soul. As long as life is in me, and the breath of *Eloah* is in my nostrils”.

¹⁵⁸ As Clines explains: Oath is “the language of cursing, of binding oneself by an affirmation. If what Job affirms is untrue, then he will have cursed God, for the oath is by God’s life”. CLINES, *Job 21–37*, 649. For an overview on the oath, see for example M. GREENBERG, H.H. COHN, M. ELON, “Oath”, *EncJud* 15 (2007) 358-364; R.S. KAWASHIMA, “Oaths, Vows, and Trust in the Bible”, *On the Word of a Jew*. Religion, Reliability, and the Dynamics of Trust (eds. N. CAPUTO – M.B. HART) (Bloomington 2019) 17-35.

¹⁵⁹ Job’s act of swearing, therefore, has a crucial significance in the development of the story of Job, as Habel well notes. It is “not just another verbal outburst in the speech cycle, but a catalytic action in the narrative plot which is designed to initiate a reaction from God”, HABEL, *Job*, 380.

Shaddai in embittering his life (v. 27:2).¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Job is clear in confessing that the same God, even referred to by another name, Eloah, is the source of his life (v. 27:3). Thus, Job is honest in not hiding the feeling of being treated unjustly by God: he accuses the very God by whom he swears. At the same time, however, Job remains faithful to the only God of his life: he swears by the very God he accuses.¹⁶¹

Job's last words in the disputes with his friends represent his final attempt to establish his innocence. All the expressions in Job 31 embody Job's recollections of his blameless past for the purpose of demonstrating his own moral integrity. The whole chapter is a long poem, composed of a series of oaths of innocence, with which Job solemnly declares that he has done nothing wrong and that does not deserve any maltreatment by God or his community.

The very foundation of Job's oath of innocence is his belief in divine retribution. The assumptions of the ethics of retribution are echoed by Job's mention that God will decide the "portion" (חלק) and the "heritage" (נחלת) for people in consonance with their moral quality. According to this retributive theory, Job insists that calamity and disaster are portions intended only for the unrighteous and evildoers. As for him, his own portion should be commensurate with his moral state, for God must clearly know his steps and his ways (vv. 2-4). With this conviction, Job is willing to risk serious oaths for his innocence regarding various fields of ethics. Regarding sexual ethics, Job swears that he did not look lustfully at a girl (v. 1) and did not let his heart be seduced by a woman at his neighbour's door (vv. 9-12). In this way, Job claims that his morality is pure even on the level of intention and that his righteousness is manifested up to the resistance of any temptation. Regarding social justice, Job presents himself as an exemplary administrator in keeping with ancient Near Eastern morality (cf. 29:7-17). He did not despise the cause of his male and female servants, for he acknowledges their human dignity and admits that they were created by the same God who created him (vv. 13-15). As an important member of the community, he was

¹⁶⁰ "Job swears by God, though in the very terms of the oath he charges God with doing him injustice", DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 226.

¹⁶¹ Rabbinic interpretation understands this paradox as pertinent to the dynamic of love: אמר רבי יהושע מאהבה עבד איוב את המקום אין אדם נודר בה"י המלך אלא אם כן אוהבו – Rabbi Joshua said: "Job served God out of love, for no one swears by the life of the king unless he loves him", quoted by GORDIS, *Job*, 287.

benevolent toward the most vulnerable members of his society, such as the poor and the widows, the orphans and the naked (vv. 16-20). He never misused his social influence in such a way as to oppress the powerless, since he knows that ultimately, he has to face God's power and he is afraid of God's retribution (vv. 21-23). Regarding his faithful adherence to God, Job states that nothing and no one can lead him astray. He has not placed his trust and confidence in gold, neither has he felt joy in his material wealth and acquisition (vv. 24-25). He declares that he has not worshiped the sun or the moon, as he is aware that such idolatry would surely deserve divine punishment (vv. 26-28). Regarding his social duty, Job swears that he did not take as his joy the evil that struck those who hate him, nor did he allow himself to commit such a sin as cursing their life (vv. 29-30). Towards sojourners and travellers, he and the members of his households exercised the gracious moral virtue of hospitality (vv. 31-32). Job also describes himself as an extremely transparent person who did not conceal the transgressions he might have committed, even when the fear of social contempt terrified him (vv. 33-34). Finally, with regard to care of the earth, Job swears that he did not exploit or abuse his land and that he had not violated his obligations to the workers on or owners of the land. As Habel argues, the term אדמה – "land", "ground", or "earth" – can be understood as a "symbol and gauge of human righteousness before God".¹⁶² Job's words, therefore, can be taken as a summary of his own righteousness. His declaration of his innocence opens with solemn oaths related to the imagery of covenant (31:1) and closes with the imagery of the earth, which is conventionally taken as a witness to covenant treaties (cf. Deut 30:19; Isa 1:2; Mic 6:2).¹⁶³

At the end of the series of oaths Job expresses a wish (מִי יִתֵּן), challenging God for the last time (vv. 35-37). He expresses a desire for a "hearer" (שֹׁמֵעַ) who could act as a mediator for his legal controversy and for the one who accuses him to specify the sins of which he is accused (cf. 13:23). Job solemnly announces his mark (תּוֹרִי), which functions as his signature consenting to enter the legal dispute that he wants to pursue until it is fully resolved (v. 35). Job expects to receive in return an indictment written by his accuser (סֵפֶר כְּתָב אִישׁ רִיבֵי) that will serve as undeniable evidence that such a person of honour and innocence as himself has actually been

¹⁶² HABEL, *Job*, 440.

¹⁶³ Cf. BALENTINE, *Job*, 497.

maltreated by God. Far from being ashamed of being put on trial, Job would publicly display this indictment and wear it like a crown. As a man justifiably proud of his innocence, Job is convinced that he will be vindicated in a face-to-face confrontation with God and that he will be able to give a satisfactory account of his blameless life (vv. 36-37). Job thus keeps appealing to God until the end, even if by means of polemical confrontation and with a proud demeanour.

3.4 Summary and Assessment

Job's moral integrity, as introduced in the prologue by the narrator (cf. 1:1, 22; 2:10), affirmed and reaffirmed by YHWH (cf. 1:8; 2:3), is confidently and solemnly professed through Job's own mouth. Job's efforts to defend himself are often coupled with his various bitter denunciations of God's injustice. Throughout the argument with his friends, Job has been increasingly feeling himself treated unjustly by God according to the retributive theory. In seeking access to wisdom to understand his own situation, Job switched from disputing with the friends to challenging God directly. Swearing an oath is the most powerful means at his disposal.

The poetry in Job's speeches has opened perspectives on his inner life. Readers do not know Job just through external descriptions of the narrator but have also come to know the various nuances of the inner struggles and feelings expressed by the protagonist himself. The layer of heroic and conventional piety has been uncovered. Readers approach the core of the sufferer's agony and witness some important changes in Job. In reality, Job begins his journey by calling into question the validity of the prevailing theory of retribution. In arguing with his friends, he persistently refused to interpret his suffering as a consequence of his own behaviour. Nevertheless, under the pressure of the insistence of his friends, who speak as representatives of the theology of retribution, Job has been gradually driven to reconsider the problem through the lens of his friends' theology. It becomes evident that what Job refuses is, in fact, the application of such a theology to his life rather than the theology itself. In lacking answers for his own problem, he comes to accuse God of injustice for causing a righteous person to suffer instead of benefiting him. By doing so, he accepts some of the principles advocated by the friends and clearly shows that, even though he and the friends argue from distinctive points of view, they converge in sharing the same fundamental presuppositions of the ethics of retribution.

Like the three friends, Job also believes that God's retributive justice must be the ultimate conclusion of wisdom. While the friends insist on destructive retribution, emphasizing the certainty of punishment for wickedness, Job moves under the guidance envisioned by constructive retribution, hoping for the reward of the righteousness.

In any case, Job shows himself consistent in the defence of his integrity. Although Job maintains his innocence from beginning to end, he is equally persistent in his devotion to God, even in the midst of challenging and accusing him. Till the end of his journey, Job still manifests a paradoxical loyalty to God, whom he unhesitatingly considers the cause of his predicament and, at the same time, to whom he appeals as the only one who can save him.

4. Conclusion: The Dead End of the Ethics of Retribution

The Adversary is right, to some extent, in raising the question as to whether Job fears God for naught (cf. 1:9). The provocation motivated by the ethics of retribution in the prologue, instigated by the Adversary and taken up by Job's wife, are extended at length through the various arguments of the three friends. This provocation has had a considerable impact on Job. No matter how rebellious he tends to be, the more Job continues his speculation and engages in disputation, the more he shows himself deeply rooted in his contemporary thought-forms. Like his friends, Job indeed understands God's acts in terms of blessing and cursing, reward and punishment. Progressively, Job appropriates the lens through which the friends wish him to see and shows himself in fact moving inside the frame of the ethics of retribution. Throughout his varied speeches, it gradually becomes clear that Job is still clinging to the assumption that there should be some correlation between act and consequence, and therefore the just should be rewarded and the unjust punished. He is bitterly scandalised when the reality of his life is not so. He protests the misapplication of the ethics of retribution in his case. Absolutely convinced of his own innocence, Job rejects his friends' belief that he needs to repent. He becomes angry with them because their assumption regarding destructive retribution does not fit the facts of his experience. He becomes rebellious against God when his own assumption regarding constructive retribution is not satisfied. Both applications of the same theology led him to a dead end.

Therefore, the more Job and his friends argue with each other, the more they become stuck in a blind alley. It is true, as Gray pointed out, that what the friends try to defend is a theory, whereas Job defends the reality of his experience.¹⁶⁴ While the friends defend their theory at the cost of refusing the possibility of Job's innocence, Job cannot totally free himself from the theory maintained by his friends in order to defend his experience. He does not have any other theory of suffering than that of his friends. Therefore, insisting on his own innocence, Job cannot help but conclude that he has been unjustly inflicted and that God is the cause of his unjust suffering.¹⁶⁵ Under the guidance of the ethics of retribution, the best resolution Job can reach is that he is in the right and God is in the wrong for having maltreated him. In various moments, Job characterises God as unjust, capricious, and violent. This characterisation, however, betrays the traditional belief shared by both Job and his friends. Job cannot abandon the God of his piety. He cannot believe that the God whom he worships is treating him as a sinner. Job constantly appeals to God. And constantly he shows himself caught by the contradictory portrayals of a God modelled by the theory of retribution. At the end of the disputations, both Job and his interlocutors find themselves stuck inside the framework of the ethics of retribution, which proves itself insufficient to give a satisfactory answer in his own case.¹⁶⁶

At the beginning of his journey, Job is characterised as a traditional hero sustained by the wisdom of conventional piety. Nonetheless, during the sophisticated articulations and critical disputations, the wisdom of this hero is seriously tested and shows itself insufficient and unsatisfactory. Job's rebellious attitude during the disputation seems to reverse his conventional piety of the prologue. The twists and turns in his intellectual journey are a visible sign of a disorientation. The dead end of the debate between Job and his friends thus reveals not only the limits of conventional wisdom but also exposes the limits of critical reason that tends to call into question such a conventional wisdom in providing appropriate answers for the case of the righteous sufferer.

Interestingly, after Job makes his final appeal to God, the author introduces another character, Elihu, to explore further perspectives. This new character is not satisfied with the friends. Nor does he agree with Job.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. GRAY, "The Purpose and Method of the Writer", 39.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 35.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. BALENTINE, *Job*, 412.

He starts very gently, but progressively he attacks Job more fiercely, mimicking the pattern in the speeches of the three friends. The more he speaks, the more he reveals himself a follower of retributive ethics. The more he argues, the more he increases in readers a sense of the futile dead-end of the ethics he is striving to defend. To this speaker Job never responds. No human speaker can satisfy Job. The only one with whom Job now wants to speak is God.

CHAPTER 4

AESTHETICS ON STAGE

The preceding chapter offered an examination of the ethical perspectives exposed in the disputes between Job and the three friends. Moving inside the framework of the ethics of retribution, the more the debaters engage in the disputations, the more they arrive at the end of a blind alley. Despite his complaints about being treated unfairly, Job constantly appeals to God. It is not YHWH but Job who first attempts to build a bridge to enable a divine-human dialogue. So far, YHWH has had a few moments in the prologue to talk *about* Job, but has not spoken directly *to* Job, while Job plainly manifested his desire to turn away from his friends so as to address God directly. Eventually, Job persuades YHWH to answer him directly.

This chapter focuses on how YHWH responds to Job, paying particular attention to the aesthetic perspective of YHWH's speeches. The chapter begins with two important considerations. First, in order to have an appropriate appreciation of the aesthetic dimension of YHWH's speeches, a general understanding of the aesthetic dimension in the Hebrew Bible is needed. Second, before directly dealing with the content of the two speeches of YHWH, it is important to discuss the necessity of a divine intervention in the book of Job, as well as some remarks about the general structure of the last poetic section (38:1–42:6). The main body of the chapter provides a close reading of the two speeches of YHWH (38:1–40:2; 40:6–41:26) and Job's first response (40:3–5). The chapter concludes with an assessment of the shift from an ethical to an aesthetic perspective in the speeches of YHWH and proposes the potential consequences of that shift.

1. Preliminary Remarks

1.1 The Aesthetic Dimension in the Hebrew Bible

Although the scriptures assert that God is the author of all beauty (cf. Wis 13:3), biblical aesthetics had seemed foreign to and were long underrated by various critics. There is no shortage of authors who deny the existence both of beauty and of aesthetic values in biblical texts. So, for example, in his *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Gerhard von Rad asserted:

There is no particular significance in many of the statements which ancient Israel made about beauty [...] Israel lacked all critical reflexion on the phenomenon of beauty and on artistic reproduction.¹

Walter Grundmann took a similar view:

Beauty [...] does not occur at all as an aesthetic quality; this is linked with the low estimation of art in biblical religion.²

It is not hard to realise that these estimations are considerably influenced by the philosophical traditions which approach the idea of beauty through abstract and systematic theories. Accordingly, beauty is seen as an idea derived from something transcendental, formal, and absolute.³ Thus, biblical aesthetics were subjected to inappropriate inspection under philosophical lenses. However, as recently pointed out by many scholars, to assess biblical aesthetics by means of modern concepts of beauty is inappropriate.⁴ A thorough evaluation of the aesthetic dimension of the Hebrew Bible is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, in order to be able to appreciate what YHWH presents to Job in the two divine speeches, it is essential to have some understanding, even if only at a basic level, of the biblical concepts of beauty, the aesthetic perception of the biblical authors, and the importance of the aesthetic dimension in the biblical context.⁵

¹ G. VON RAD, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 376.

² W. GRUNDMANN, "Kalos", *TDNT* 3 (1966) 536-550, here 544.

³ Cf. W. DYRNESS, "Aesthetics in the Old Testament: Beauty in Context", *JETHS* 28 (1985) 421-432, here 421.

⁴ In fact, there is a fundamental difference between Plato's philosophy and biblical thinking regarding beauty. According to Plato's philosophy, every beauty in the ephemeral physical world is nothing but a poor and declining copy of a rational, perfect, and eternal original, which is Beauty itself. Cf. R.C. LODGE, *Plato's Theory of Art* (London 1953) 241. On the contrary, the biblical context favours a continuity between the concrete and the abstract. Cf. O. KEEL, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*. Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms (New York 1978) 9ff. In biblical thought, therefore, within the unity of God's creation, each creature embodies its own specific beauty and glory, as will be clearly seen in the case of YHWH's speeches to Job.

⁵ For general studies on biblical aesthetics, see C.W. REINES, "Beauty in the Bible and the Talmud", *Judaism* 24 (1976) 10-17; E.P. CLOWNEY, "Living Art: Christian Experience and the Arts", *God and Culture*. Essays in Honour of Carl F.H. HENRY (eds. D.A. CARSON – J.D. WOODBRIDGE) (Grand Rapids 1993) 233-253; R.L. HUBBARD, "The Eyes Have It: Theological Reflections on Human Beauty", *ExAu* 13 (1997) 57-72; L. FERRETER, "The Power and the Glory: The Aesthetics of the Hebrew Bible", *LTh* 8 (2004) 123-138; R.J.

1.1.1 Biblical Concepts of Beauty

In his article “Beauty and the Bible”, Peter Spitaler observes that “Biblical authors had little interest in systematic, structured reflection upon beauty. Nor did they theorise beauty. For them, beauty was less an abstract concept than an embedded construct”.⁶ A systematic theory of beauty is alien to the biblical world. There is, in fact, no single vocabulary specific to beauty in the Hebrew Bible. Instead, as has been shown in some recent studies, there is a whole cluster of words which may be foreign to modern concepts of beauty but that are used to express different categories of the beautiful and to refer to beauty and to the enjoyment of beauty.⁷ A concise survey of relevant biblical vocabulary can help to shed light on how biblical authors perceive beauty.

Among Hebrew terms, perhaps *יָפִי*, “to be fair, to be beautiful”, is the one corresponding most with the word “beauty”. The term typically designates outward physical beauty. Thus, a number of distinguished persons are described as “beautiful”, such as Sarah (Gen 12:11, 14), Rachel (Gen 29:17), Joseph (Gen 39:6), David (1 Sam 16:12), Abigail (1 Sam 25:3), Absalom (2 Sam 14:25), Tamar (2 Sam 14:27), Esther (Esth 1:11; 2:7), the daughters of Job (Job 42:15), the beloved in the Song of Songs (Song 4:1, 10). In most of the cases, as analysed by David Penchansky, the beauty ascribed to these figures is deeply intertwined with their attractiveness and so with their power. Beauty is what makes these persons attractive, and beauty therefore bestows upon them privileges over their competitors. The more someone is beautiful, the more powerful they are.⁸ Likewise, the term *יָפִי* and its cognate *יָפִי* are also employed to describe the beauty of privileged places that are closely associated with God, such as mount Zion (Ps 48:3; 50:2), the Temple (Isa 64:11), the Sanctuary (Ps 96:6), the city of Jerusalem or Tyre (Lam 2:15; Ezek 27:3, 4; 28:12), and the personification of Israel (Ezek 16:14, 15, 16).

BAUTCH and J.-F. RACINE (eds.), *Beauty and the Bible. Toward a Hermeneutics of Biblical Aesthetics* (SBLSS 73; Atlanta 2013).

⁶ P. SPITALER, “Beauty and the Bible: Synthesis and Looking Forward”, *Beauty and the Bible*, 101-113, here 104.

⁷ For studies about biblical aesthetics based on language matters, see DYRNESS, “Aesthetics in the Old Testament”, 423-426; FERRETER, “The Power and the Glory”, 123-138; PENCHANSKY, “Beauty, Power, and Attraction”, 47-66, esp. 52-55.

⁸ Cf. PENCHANSKY, “Beauty, Power, and Attraction”, 48-51.

To describe physical attractiveness, moreover, there are other words which share the same semantic range with יָפֶה. Frequently associated with it is the term מְרֹאֶה, which means “beautiful in appearance” or “beautiful in form”. Persons who possess this kind of beauty are often admired and desired by many others (cf. Gen 12:11; 24:16; 26:7; 39:6; 2 Sam 11:2; Esth 1:11; Dan 1:4). Beauty increases dignity and leads to exaltation. Together with מְרֹאֶה, also the adjective תּוֹבָה is occasionally used to describe the feminine beauty and attractiveness of important figures, such as Esther (Esth 2:7) and Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2). This beauty contributes to their success and promotion.

Therefore, it is noteworthy that in various texts beauty is intimately linked with the concept of glory. Thus, the verb פָּאֵר is frequently used to indicate both “beautify” and “glorify” in the sense of making someone or something assume a place of honour and dignity (cf. Ps 149:4; Ezra 7:27; Isa 49:3). The noun forms of this verb, תְּפָאֵרֶת and תְּפָאֶרֶה, denote external ornaments which enhance the beauty of a person (cf. Isa 3:18; Ezek 16:12; Esth 1:4; Ps 71:8) or a city (cf. Isa 52:1). At the same time, these terms can designate the splendour and glory that bring dignity and honour to their bearers (Exod 28:2, 40; Isa 3:18; 10:12; Prov 16:31). In addition, the linked connotations between beauty and glory can be seen also in other words. For example, the term צָבִי, “splendor”, “glory”, “beauty”, is usually applied to the attractiveness and splendour of nations, lands, cities, or peoples (cf. Isa 13:19; 28:5; Jer 3:19; 2 Sam 1:19). This kind of beauty arouses admiration within observers and therefore increases a sense of self-worth, which makes beauty appear desirable and pleasurable. Besides, in various texts, the verb חָמַד, “to desire”, “to delight”, is also used to connote beauty (Ps 19:10; 68:16). Its adjectival form, נְחָמַד, indicates the state of being beautiful, pleasing, attractive (Gen 2:9), delightful (Song 2:3), or desirable (Gen 3:6; Ps 19:11; Isa 53:2). The noun form, חֲמֻדָּה, occurs in texts that designate what is pleasant, lovely, precious, and valuable (Ps 106:24; Ezek 23:6, 12, 23; Jer 25:34; Dan 11:43). Similarly, the verb נָעַם, “to be pleasant”, “to be lovely”, is also used to indicate different types of beauty, such as the exquisiteness of music (Ps 81:3), of delightful words (Prov 16:24; 23:8), or of the pleasant land (Ps 16:6). The terms also signify the beauty relating to the character of a person, such as the loveliness of a lover (Song 6:4), of David (2 Sam 23:1), or of Jonathan (2 Sam 1:26). In some occurrences, the term even denotes beauty in the sense of moral appropriateness, such as that found in the harmony between brothers (Ps 133:1), the words of the wise (Prov 22:18),

or the amiability of those who listen to and serve God (Job 36:11). On other occasions, the term can suggest pleasantness in the sense of being suitable for a situation or fitting moral conduct, for example, the attitude of the righteous who praise the Lord (Ps 135:3), the holiness that befits the house of God (Ps 93:5), and the loveliness of the feet of the messenger (Isa 52:7).

This short survey shows that the biblical texts are saturated with an aesthetic dimension that cannot be simply ignored or underestimated. The biblical authors perceive beauty as an aesthetic quality relating to human sensitivity and including both perceptual and conceptual dimensions.⁹ Beauty is what can be grasped with the senses and can be discerned and appropriated both emotionally and rationally.¹⁰ From the perspective of the beholders, beauty is embodied in concrete objects or persons that are lovely, pleasurable, valuable, desirable, and therefore deserve honour and dignity. On many occasions, biblical authors consider as beautiful what is orderly, fitting or morally appropriate. Beauty participates in the totality of meaning of the created order, thus reflecting the splendour of a system of relationships.¹¹ In this way, biblical aesthetics points out that the opposite of beauty is not ugliness, but is rather a kind of corrupt beauty that does not serve God's purpose but leads people astray from the just order that God intended.¹² Thus, all the natural and physical beauty of any object or person is measured by their participation in the beauty of God. Each creature is beautiful insofar as it reflects, in its own way, the beauty of the whole of creation.

1.1.2 God, the Author of All Beauty

It is imperative to emphasise that the essential object of the biblical aesthetic experience is God. Nonetheless, all the above terms, such as *יפה*, *מראה*, *פאר*, and their cognates, which are related to physical beauty, are rarely applied to God. Instead, there are other groups of words that depict

⁹ In fact, in the Hebrew model, there was hardly a clear-cut distinction between perceptual and conceptual dimensions. One embodies the other, and vice versa. Cf. A. ARNOLD, "Ethical Currents: An Aesthetic Response: Job, Suffering, and the Healing Power of Divine Beauty", *HCEUSA* 27 (2019) 32-40, here 33.

¹⁰ Cf. H. UTZSCHNEIDER, "The Book of Job and an Aesthetic Theology of the Old Testament", *CTR* 8 (2010) 91-100, here 91.

¹¹ Cf. DYRNESS, "Aesthetics in the Old Testament", 422.

¹² Cf. DYRNESS, "Aesthetics in the Old Testament", 431.

divine beauty. One of the most characteristic concepts signifying the aesthetic quality of God is כבוד, which reflects the splendour of the transcendent God, “a token of the divine glory, by means of which YHWH declares his gracious presence”.¹³ In various contexts, כבוד־יהוה, the “glory of God”, is a technical term for the aesthetic form in which God reveals himself to Israel. The presence of God is manifested by divine glory (Exod 16:7, 10; 24:17; 33:22; Ps 19:1; 29:1; 57:5; Isa 4:2; 6:3; Ezek 8:4; 10:4). There are a number of other specific terms depicting God’s aesthetic quality. With respect to the expression of the power and holiness of God, הדר, “to honour” or “glorify”, is a characteristic action of God among people (Deut 33:17; Job 40:10; Ps 104:1).¹⁴ The feminine form הדרת, “beauty”, “honour”, “holy array”, frequently describes God’s beauty (2 Chr 20:21; Ps 96:9) and the beauty of holiness (Ps 29:2). Sharing the same semantic range with הדר are such other words as הוד, “beauty”, “grandeur”, “majesty” (Ps 8:1; 96:6; 111:3; 145:5; 148:13; Job 39:20; 40:10; Isa 30:30; Hab 3:3), גאון, “excellency”, “pride”, “majesty” (Exod 15:7; Job 40:10; Isa 2:10, 19, 21; 24:14), and גבה, “dignity”, “grandeur” (Job 40:10). All these terms are used to express the awe-inspiring quality of God’s self-manifestation. God’s majestic beauty is both perceptible and desirable. God’s faithful ones yearn to behold the beauty of God (Ps 27:4; 90:17).

Although the majestic beauty depicted by the above terms is understood as belonging primarily to God, God can bestow beauty on people. God crowns human beings with glory and honour (כבוד והדר; Ps 8:5). God places divine honour and majesty (הוד והדר) on the righteous king (Ps 21:5; 45:3). God’s gifts for the people are magnificent (cf. Lev 23:40; Deut 33:17), and God’s wonderful works are perceived as full of honour and glory (הוד והדר; Ps 111:3). As Creator and proprietor of everything in the created world, God is the origin of all beauty. God’s beauty is at the top of the hierarchy. The beauty of all creatures depends on how fully they participate in God’s own beauty.¹⁵

Because God is the essential object of biblical aesthetic experience, Israel’s most intensive encounter with beauty must essentially take place in the religious sphere, as von Rad imagined: “in the contemplation of YHWH’s

¹³ W. EICHRODT, *Theology of the Old Testament*. Vol. 2 (London 1967) 32.

¹⁴ Cf. DYRNESS, “Aesthetics in the Old Testament”, 425.

¹⁵ Cf. PENCHANSKY, “Beauty, Power, and Attraction”, 54.

revelation and action”.¹⁶ The close association between beauty and glory is most obvious in theophanies, which are certainly the central subject of biblical aesthetics, as “they reveal more clearly than all else how the special experience of God undergone by Israel became normative for the special features in the experience of beauty”.¹⁷ Perceived as self-manifestations of God, theophanies disclose the beautiful and the sublime, an experience that exceeds all human imagination and evokes the feeling of being overwhelmed by something too vast or too powerful to be put into words.¹⁸ At the same time, it is the experience of the glory and beauty of God that can bring about, through its aesthetic dimension, a renewal in the understanding of human beholders. How complete this renovation will be, of course, depends on how much the encounter with God is appreciated and how the aesthetic dimension is integrated into the worldview of the recipients.

1.1.3 Theophany as the Crucial Key to Job’s Problems

At the crucial moment of the narration, the book of Job turns to an aesthetic device par excellence, a theophany in which YHWH appears and directly addresses Job (Job 38:1). The poet does not describe the details of the theophany itself. Rather, a spacious stage is dedicated to the exposition of YHWH’s words. Human disputations give way to the language of divine manifestation.

As has been shown, Job’s dilemma is in the sphere of ethics. It is not exactly his sufferings that torture Job but rather the absurdity and meaninglessness of such suffering. What Job needs is an aesthetic experience that is capable of changing his moral worldview and rendering his life worth living despite his suffering. Thus, if Job’s intellectual journey begins with a bitter rejection of any value of creation and the meaning of life (Job 3), at the climax of this journey, a theophany reassures Job about the goodness, the inherent beauty and glory of God’s creation. God renews

¹⁶ VON RAD, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 376.

¹⁷ VON RAD, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 378.

¹⁸ A. BERLIN, “What is the Book of Job about?”, *A Common Culture Heritage. Studies on Mesopotamia and the Biblical World in Honour of Barry L. EICHLER* (ed. G. FRAME) (Bethesda 2011) 113-121, here 116.

Job's perspective and his sense of the meaningfulness of the created world.¹⁹ The whole creation becomes the theatre of God's beauty and glory. God gives Job a God's-eye view of nature, inviting him to behold the world from a totally different perspective. The experience of the theophany not only fulfilled Job's deepest desire for a confrontation with God but also provided an aesthetic key for setting aside his ethical problems.

1.2 The Necessity of the Last Poetic Section (38:1–42:6)

There has been no shortage of scholars who have questioned the originality of the words spoken by YHWH, thereby annulling the responses of Job.²⁰ Their argument is based principally on the content of the speeches of YHWH. They maintain that these words do not answer the varied questions that have been raised throughout the book.²¹ Others have stated that the original ending of the speeches is determined by the intrusion of the narrator in 31:40: "the words of Job are ended".²²

I find it inconceivable that Job 38–42 is a later addition. As shown in the previous chapter, the divine speeches play an indispensable role in the overall structure of the book of Job (cf. Table 1, p. 43). I would therefore

¹⁹ Cf. J. MCATEER, "Silencing Theodicy with Enthusiasm: Aesthetic Experience as a Response to the Problem of Evil in Shaftesbury, Annie Dillard, and the Book of Job", *The Heythrop Journal* 57 (2016) 788-795, here 789.

²⁰ A concise bibliography on the different positions of authors regarding the originality of the divine speeches can be found in ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 651-653.

²¹ Negative judgments regarding the speeches of God, therefore, are not rare. For example: "noble irrelevance", G.B. SHAW, *Parents and Children* (London 1910), cited in D. WOLFERS, "The Lord's Second Speech in the Book of Job", *VT* 60 (1990) 474-499, here 474; "a sublime irrelevance", R.N. CARSTENSEN, *Job: Defence of Honor* (Nashville 1963) 91; CRENSHAW, "When Form and Content Clash", 70-844, here 78; "a huge irrelevance", R.A.F. MACKENZIE, "The Purpose of the Yahweh Speeches in the Book of Job", *Biblica* 40 (1959) 435-445, here 436; "the final desolation and abandonment of Job", PENCHANSKY, *The Betrayal of God*, 53; "poor theology", J.G. WILLIAMS, "Job and the God of Victims", *The Voice from the Whirlwind. Interpreting the Book of Job* (eds. L.G. PERDUE – W.C. GILPIN) (Nashville 1992) 208-231, here 222. For a summary of authors who disregard the way God responds to Job, see L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL, "God's Answer to Job", *Job and the Silence of God* (eds. C. DUQUOC – C. FLORISTAN) (Edinburgh 1983) 45-51, here 45.

²² Cf. A. VAN HOONACKER, "Une question touchante la composition du livre de Job", *RB* 12 (1903) 161-189; M. JASTROW, *The Book of Job* (Philadelphia 1920) 67-70; D.B. MACDONALD, "The Book of Job as Lyric", *The Hebrew Literary Genius. An Interpretation being an introduction to the reading of the Old Testament* (Princeton 1933) 20-32, here 27.

follow the common trend among modern scholars, that is, to defend not only the originality but also the necessity of the divine speeches for the interpretation of the book of Job.²³ In the following paragraphs, I argue that the direct intervention from YHWH is necessitated by the narrative plot of the story, by the general structure of the book, and by the development of the poetic disputations between Job and his friends. In the overall design of the book of Job, YHWH is presented as the only character who can resolve the questions that have been raised in the book.

1.2.1 From the Narrative Perspective

From the narrative point of view, the intervention of YHWH is needed. In the beginning of the story, YHWH appears as a main character of the narrative prologue. It is YHWH's permission that triggered the trials of Job (1:6-12; 2:1-7). At the end, it is fitting that YHWH should render the final judgment. Otherwise, the composition would be judged as not being able to finish what it had started.

In addition, the characters' ignorance of the wager requires a word from YHWH. Indeed, from the beginning of the story, the narrator has made the cause of Job's sufferings clear to readers by having them witness the two scenes of the heavenly court. These events remained unknown to Job and his friends. In such narration, the readers are privileged. They know more than most of the characters. Because of their ignorance, the friends tried their best to persuade Job to humble himself and to confess his sinfulness, as would have been supported by their traditional belief. Likewise, Job, being convinced of his innocence, desperately struggled to defend himself. After three cycles of debate, none of those engaged in the disputations had solved the problem or changed anyone's mind. It is therefore clear that the solution of the problem of Job cannot be found on the logical plane of intellectual knowledge formulated as a theological doctrine.²⁴ The narrative plot of the entire story of Job generates an expectation of an adequate response from YHWH regarding the wager and addressing Job's

²³ It can be said, as stated by R. Alter that "the poetry of this final speech is so intricately and so powerfully a fulfilment of key elements in the body of the poetic argument". ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 108.

²⁴ Cf. WEISER, *Hiob*, 241.

protestations. To resolve the tension built up between Job and his friends, a word from YHWH is indispensable.

1.2.2 From the Structural Perspective

From the structural point of view, the arrangement of the overall structure of the disputations between Job and the three friends (3–27) requires a word from YHWH. As Gregory W. Parson argued, the literary structure of the book of Job in general, and that of the poetic body in particular, is designed intentionally to conform to an architectonic symmetry.²⁵ As has been seen, the symmetry is attested in the overall structure of the three cycles of disputation between Job and his friends, as well as in the arrangement of the first two cycles.

The disputations begin with an introductory soliloquy (Job 3) and end with a final soliloquy by Job (Job 29–31). The first two cycles (Job 1–14; 15–21) follow the same pattern and are comprised of speeches uttered by the three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, each of which is followed by a response from Job. This pattern, however, breaks down in the third cycle with the silence of Zophar. As a matter of fact, the literary structure of the disputations is designed in such a way that the speeches attributed to the three friends are increasingly shorter in each cycle, while Job's speeches become progressively longer.²⁶ The absence of Zophar's third speech, therefore, may be indicative of the bankruptcy of human controversies in facing the problem of Job.²⁷ In searching for a solution, thus, Job was brought gradually farther away from human disputations in order to be lifted up toward something else. The lack of symmetry at the end of the third cycle highlights the futility of the disputations between Job and his friends.²⁸ It calls for a direct intervention from God, without which the structure of the book collapses.²⁹

1.2.3 From the Development of Poetic Disputations

The poetic disputations are closed by the oath of innocence of Job (Job 31). The oath includes a series of self-imprecations. On the one side, these

²⁵ Cf. PARSONS, "The Structure and Purpose of the Book of Job", 139-157.

²⁶ Cf. PARSONS, "The Structure", 140.

²⁷ Cf. SEOW, *Job 1–21*, 381; VOGELS, *Job, l'homme qui a bien parlé de Dieu*, 146-147.

²⁸ Cf. PARSONS, "The Structure", 151.

²⁹ Cf. ROWLEY, *Job*, 14.

promulgate Job's clear affirmation of his innocence in the face of the friends' accusations. On the other, these self-imprecations establish a final and definitive challenge to God: God must appear to contest or affirm Job's claim of integrity.³⁰ In other words, Job is now ready to face God, even at the cost of dreadful individual punishments. By placing himself under the oath of innocence, Job hopes to compel God to appear and to defend the divine conduct.³¹ At the end of the oath Job declares a firm closure: "Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!" (31:35). The protagonist is now calling for the divine response. The neutrality of YHWH is no longer possible, otherwise Job would come out victorious, for he has left YHWH speechless.³² The development of the poetic debate requires that YHWH must speak.

Furthermore, during the poetic disputations it is clear that not only all characters of the book, but also readers, are captivated by the hope that YHWH may eventually answer Job.³³ It would be unsatisfying, then, if the author had no intention of fulfilling this expectation. YHWH's leaving Job unanswered after putting his very faith and his religious existence into trial would be "a crueller mockery of his hero than any inflicted by the friends".³⁴ YHWH's silence would frustrate not only Job but also readers of the book.

YHWH must intervene to resolve the problem of the book of Job. The narrative plot, the structural design of the book, and the development of the poetic disputations require a word from YHWH. It is only with YHWH's speeches that Job's hope for communication can be fulfilled. Only the words of YHWH can open a new path and draw Job into an authentic dialogue.

³⁰ L.G. PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*. Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job (JSOTS 112; Sheffield 1991) 196.

³¹ Cf. J.L. CRENSHAW, "When Form and Content Clash: The Theology of Job 38:1–40:5", *Creation in the Biblical Traditions* (eds. R.J. CLIFFORD – J.J. COLLINS) (CBQ 24; Washington 1992) 70–84, here 71.

³² ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 649.

³³ Cf. For example 11:5; 13:22–24; 16:19–21; 19:27; 31:35.

³⁴ MACKENZIE, "The Purpose", 437.

1.3 The Symmetrical Structure of the Last Poetic Section

The last poetic section is comprised of two portions, as indicated by the repetition of the narrative introduction (38:1; 40:6). The symmetrical structure of the whole section is quite clear (table 9).

In the final poetic section divine and human words interact and form two parallel discourses. Both begin with an identical narrative introduction to the words of YHWH (38:1; 40:6) followed by YHWH's challenges to Job (38:3; 40:7) that raise the thematic questions of each of YHWH's speeches. The first is about the "counsel" or plan of YHWH (עצה, 38:2), while the second is about YHWH's "justice", "judgment" or "governance" (משפט, 40:8). Both sections end with a response from Job, initiated by an identical narrative introduction (40:3-5; 42:1-6).

Table 9.
Symmetrical structure of the last poetic section
(38:1–42:6)

YHWH's first speech 38:1–40:2		YHWH's second speech 40:6–41:34	
A	<i>narrative introduction:</i> ויעני־יהוה את־איוב מן הסערה ויאמר 38:1	<i>narrative introduction:</i> ויעני־יהוה את־איוב מן סערה ויאמר 40:6	A'
	<i>thematic question:</i> מי זה מחשיך עצה במלין בלי־דעת 38:2	<i>challenge to Job:</i> אזר־נא כגבר חלציך אשאלך והודיעני 40:7	
	<i>challenge to Job:</i> אזר־נא כגבר חלציך ואשאלך והודיעני 38:3	<i>thematic question:</i> האף תפר משפטי תרשיעני למען תצדק 40:8	
Job's first response 40:3-5		Job's second response 42:1-6	
B	<i>narrative introduction:</i> ויען איוב את־יהוה ויאמר 40:3	<i>narrative introduction:</i> ויען איוב את־יהוה ויאמר 42:1	B'

The integrity of this section is also well-marked thanks to the strategy of *inclusio*, evolving in two steps. In the first step, the *inclusio* is constructed

by the use of two similar sentences of YHWH's introductory words to Job, delimiting thereby YHWH's first speech (table 10).

Table 10.
YHWH's introductory words to Job

ויענייהוה את־איוב מן הסערה ויאמר 38:1	ויענייהוה את־איוב ויאמר 40:1
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In the second step, the *inclusio* is significantly different. The divine speeches begin with various rhetorical questions. These questions are characterised by a significant distribution of the root ידע, which appears four times, once in each of the first four verses (38:2: בלי־דעת, 38:3: הודיעני, 38:4: ידעת בינה, 38:5: תדע). The same phenomenon is repeated at the end of this section, in which the distribution is regular in each of the first three verses of the last poem (42:2: ידעתי, 42:3a: בלי דעת, 42:3c: לא אדע, 42:4: הודיעני).³⁵ This distribution not only highlights a keyword of the whole section but also reveals a close relationship between the words of the two speakers. Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that the various elements of the rhetorical questions at the beginning of the divine speeches are recapitulated at the end. The first question of YHWH in 38:2, is almost exactly repeated at the end in 42:3. The ironical challenge of YHWH in 38:3, אֲזַרְנָא כְּגִבֹר חֲלָצִיךְ, “Gird up your loins like a man. I will question you and you shall make me known”, after having been exactly repeated in the opening of the second speech (40:7), is partly embedded in the last poem, אֲשַׁאלְךָ, וְהוֹדִיעַנִי, in 42:4.

In brief, the divine-human dialogue at the end of the book of Job is a well-organised poetic section. The two pairs of speeches by YHWH and Job are like the panels of a diptych, as Newsom notes³⁶ and as is shown in Table 9. This carefully constructed literary form is an appropriate vehicle for YHWH's appearing to and addressing directly a human interlocutor, giving him an opportunity for a bilateral dialogue.³⁷ This exchange has no parallel in wisdom literature. YHWH personally persuades Job to regard his problem in a different light and from a different perspective, which raises his relationship with YHWH to another dimension. Understanding YHWH's

³⁵ Cf. FOKKELMAN, *Job*, 318.

³⁶ Cf. NEWSOM, *A Contest*, 239.

³⁷ About the mutual relationship between form and content in the message of the book of Job, see CRENSHAW, “When Form and Content Clash”, 70-84.

speeches, therefore, is essential for the interpretation of the whole book and for an appropriate understanding of the final state of the protagonist.

2. Aesthetic Exposition in YHWH's Speeches (38:1–40:25)

2.1 First Speech (38:1–40:2): The Aesthetic Aspect of the Created World

2.1.1 First Proem: A Challenging Theophany (38:1-3)

The divine intervention is carefully introduced by a particular formula, ויעניייהו את־איוֹב מן הסערה ויאמר (38:1). The particularity of this formula can be discovered in three details.

First, the employment of the Tetragrammaton at this moment is of great significance. Throughout the poetic disputations, Job and his friends always refer to God using generic names such as Elohim, El, Shaddai, and Eloah.³⁸ Now, by having the name YHWH recur, the narrator asserts that this final poetic section is to be considered an integral narrative element of the entire book. It is directly connected with the narrative prologue in which the name of God is consistently given as YHWH. Readers are reassured that the deity who discloses himself and directly addresses Job is the God of Israel's orthodox traditions.³⁹ The name YHWH is frequently associated with other theophanies (cf. Exod 19:9-20; Judg 5:4-5; Ps 18:7-15; 50:1-3).

Second, the novelty of the introductory structure is manifest in the appearance of the direct object, את־איוֹב, indicating the addressee of the speeches. This structure, never appearing in the disputations between Job and his friends, signals the importance not only of the divine speaker but also of the human interlocutor. The ardent longing of Job to have YHWH

³⁸ The only exception occurs in 12:9, כי יד־יהוה עשתה זאת, and it can be convincingly justified as a citation of a popular proverb, as being attested also in Isa 41:20. The use of generic names of God in poetic disputations is an appropriate way of reference, due to the fact that none of the four speakers is an Israelite. Regarding the shift in divine names and its crucial significance for the interpretation of the book of Job, see for example LACOQUE, "Job or the Impotence of Religion and Philosophy", 33-52.

³⁹ Cf. PATRICK, "Job's Address of God", 277. That God appears to and addresses directly a human interlocutor and gives him an opportunity for a direct discourse is unparalleled in wisdom literature. "The speech by Job and the speech by God stand over against each other somewhat like the facing panels in a diptych, as contrasting but linked utterances ... they supply what was absent from the wisdom dialogue". NEWSOM, *A Contest*, 239.

speak to him directly (cf. 13:22; 23:5; 30:20) is fulfilled. Unlike the friends, YHWH does not use monologues. Instead, the divine speeches are composed of questions that demand a response from Job.⁴⁰

Third, the manner in which YHWH addresses Job is characterised as a theophany, though it lacks many conventional details.⁴¹ Instead of a multitude of disturbances in nature, the poet of the book of Job simply has the term סַעֲרָה, “whirlwind” or “tempest”, recur. This imagery is frequently associated with the appearance of God in biblical traditions (cf. Nah 1:3; Zech 9:14; Isa 29:6; Jer 23:19; 30:23; Ezek 1:4; 13:13). The recurrence of the term סַעֲרָה is sufficient to indicate that the one speaking to Job is YHWH. As for Job, the whirlwind manifests the divine presence. YHWH is present to him not simply an audible experience but also an intimate and dramatic encounter with YHWH (cf. 42:5).⁴²

YHWH prepares for the divine speech by a proem that contains a question (38:2) and an imperative challenge to Job (38:3). The question represents both an interrogation and a rebuke. “Who is this?” challenges Job’s understanding of his own identity. YHWH describes him as darkening the divine counsel because all the words that he had uttered so far are senseless, “words without knowledge” (38:2). As indicated by Habel, the employment of the two crucial terms in this question, עֵצָה, “counsel”, and דַּעַת, “knowledge”, firmly settles the speech of YHWH in the context of wisdom

⁴⁰ The exchange between the two speakers “brings heaven and earth together around the ash heap of human suffering”, BALENTINE, *Job*, 62.

⁴¹ D. COX comments that in wisdom literature theophanies have no real function, given that it is not revelation but reason and experience that are normative in wisdom literature. Cf. D. COX, “Structure and Function of the Final Challenge: Job 29–31”, *PIBA* 5 (1981) 55–71, here 65. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that the book of Job is not so easily boxed into the conventional category of wisdom literature. It is, therefore, not reasonable to expect the poet of the book of Job to follow strictly the criteria of such a category. At the crucial moment of his work, the Joban poet employs the prophetic genre of theophany, fusing it with typical elements of wisdom literature, such as creation and dialogue. This is arguably the book’s greatest innovation.

⁴² For further discussions of the whirlwind and the theophany, see, for example, J.G. WILLIAMS, “Deciphering the Unspoken: The Theophany of Job”, *HUCA* 49 (1978) 59–72; D.E. GOWAN, “God’s Answer to Job: How Is It an Answer?”, *HBT* 8 (1986) 85–102; T.F. DAILEY, “Theophanic Bluster: Job and the Wind of Change”, *SR* 22 (1993) 187–195; J. LÉVÊQUE, “L’interprétation des discours de YHWH (Job 38:1–42:6)”, *The Book of Job* (ed. W.A.M. BEUKEN) (BETL 114; Leuven 1994) 203–222; P.J. NEL – N.F. SCHMIDT, “The Rhetoric of the Theophany of Job”, *OTE* 16 (2003) 79–95.

traditions.⁴³ By pointing out Job's error at the very beginning, YHWH implicitly reveals the intention to make the divine design clear to Job by means of didactic language.

YHWH challenges Job to prepare himself like a mighty man, a warrior (כַּגִּבֹּר), to struggle with what YHWH is about to ask (38:3). YHWH's speeches are not meant to answer the various questions Job has raised during the poetic disputations. Instead of entering into Job's way of thinking and arguing, YHWH challenges Job to prepare himself to take a totally different trajectory. Travelling with YHWH is the best solution for Job to be renewed by having his journey reoriented, his perspectives changed, and his horizon amplified to the maximum extent. YHWH invites this reorientation by several series of rhetorical questions that can be divided into two major poems, in conformity with their topic. The first (38:4-48) opens Job to the aesthetic values of the natural cosmos, through which YHWH instructs Job about the divine design. The second (38:39-39:30) leads Job to the world of wild living creatures, through which YHWH teaches Job about divine governance of the world.

2.1.2 Aesthetic Value of the Natural Cosmos (38:4-38)

The first poem consists of ten brief strophes dealing with aspects of cosmological and meteorological phenomena. YHWH leads Job to contemplate the divine design for the natural cosmos by asking him questions about the foundation of the earth (vv. 4-7), the control of the sea (vv. 8-11), the morning and dawn (vv. 12-15), the expanse of the earth (vv. 16-18), the phenomena of light and darkness (vv. 19-21), the storehouses of snow and hail, lightning and wind (vv. 22-24), the rain (vv. 25-27), moisture and water (vv. 28-30), the movements of the stars (vv. 31-33) and the control of clouds (vv. 34-38).

YHWH begins by taking Job to the primitive moment of creation when the foundation of the earth was established. YHWH asks Job where he was then, which suggests that Job has no grounds on which to claim knowledge or understanding (v. 4). By means of rhetorical questions that begin with the interrogative pronoun מִי, "who", YHWH makes it clear to Job that it is

⁴³ Cf. N. HABEL, "In Defence of God the Sage", *The Voice from the Whirlwind*. Interpreting the Book of Job (eds. L. PERDUE – W.C. GILPIN) (Nashville 1992) 21-38, here 22.

YHWH, the architect and manufacturer of the entire earth, who laid down its foundation, decided its measures, stretched out its line, laid its cornerstone, and set its bases (vv. 5-6). The exuberant joy YHWH manifests in describing creation is expressed through the celebration of the morning stars and heavenly beings, who sang together and shouted out in joy as they witnessed the construction of the earth (v. 7). From YHWH's perspective, the earth appears as fulfilling a well-planned and praiseworthy design.

In line with the first strophe, the second (38:8-11) also poses rhetorical questions about Job's understanding of the identity of the one who reigns over the chaotic waters of the sea (v. 8). It is important to note that in ancient literature, the image of the sea had conventionally been considered a symbol of primordial chaos.⁴⁴ From YHWH's perspective, however, the sea appears like a docile baby, beautifully vested in clouds and peacefully wrapped up in thick darkness (v. 9). YHWH takes care of the sea by prescribing its boundaries, placing limits on its power to disturb other parts of creation (vv. 10-11). The chaotic sea does not appear as something antagonistic or hostile to YHWH but is subject to YHWH's vigilance and parental care. Through YHWH's description, the two fundamentally antithetic entities of creation, earth and sea, are two poles of a creative tension in a world that contains both safety and danger, both firmness and fluidity.

In the third strophe (38:12-15), YHWH ironically challenges Job's authority over the divine design, using the imagery of morning and dawn to disorient Job's moral understanding. In his initial outburst, Job had cursed the night of his birth and wished to keep the sun from ever rising again on his birthday (cf. 3:9). YHWH now questions Job's power to do so. In keeping with ancient Near Eastern traditions, morning and dawn appear not only as markers of new days but as a recapitulation of the work of creation. The morning light brings everything on earth out of the formless shadows of night into distinct and recognisable forms. It is therefore a sign of a new

⁴⁴ Fights between deities and the chaotic sea at the moment of creation is one of the conventional motifs in Semitic myths. For instance, the Babylonian epic *Enūma Eliš* (IV. 137-139) recounts the story of Marduk struggling with Tiamat, creating the dry land separated from the sea, placing bars and taking precautions to prevent the waters of the sea from moving back over the land (cf. *ANET* 63-67). In biblical traditions, the sea is also usually symbolised as a hostile force that is subjugated and restrained by a mighty God, the creator. See for example Ps 74:13-14; 89:10-11; 104:5-9; Isa 17:12-13; Jer 5:22, etc.

creation.⁴⁵ This beautiful image of the re-creation of light is tactically employed in YHWH's response to Job.

More than once, Job had accused God of not maintaining the moral order by not punishing the wicked (cf. 21:7-33; 24:13-17). The endurance of the wicked is thus taken by Job as a moral outrage. YHWH directly challenges Job to imagine things differently. In YHWH's description, the darkness of night appears like the skirts (כַּנְפוֹת) that cover the earth, in whose darkness the wicked can hide. YHWH then calls for Job to make the morning light appear in such a way as to grasp the skirts of night covering the earth and shake out all the wicked (v. 13). If Job can thus establish morning light as an act of re-creation under the guidance of his ethics of retribution, then in such a new creation he might rid the world of the wicked (v. 15). However, the reality of the world to which Job belongs is not as he imagined. Reading this strophe together with its immediately preceding context, it becomes clear that just as the sea is juxtaposed with the earth to form a wholeness of creation, so also darkness and light form the cycle of time together. According to YHWH's design, the wicked have their own place in the world despite the tensions with the righteous. YHWH does not eliminate the former as a way to sustain the latter. Instead, by the light of day YHWH somehow restrains the darkness. If so, the actual problem is not the presence of the darkness itself or the existence of the wicked themselves, but rather Job's perception of them. Wallowing in the darkness of his predicament, Job has been unaware of the dawn with its restorative power.⁴⁶ He has failed to perceive the amazing movements of creation from dark to light and from light to darkness. He has ignored the positive and beautiful aspects, which include even the element of chaos, of the world to which he belongs.

In the fourth and the fifth strophes (38:16-18; 19-21), marked by the ironical query אִם-יִדְעַת, "if you know" at the end of each (vv. 18, 21), YHWH questions Job about his experience of the varied dimensions of the world in which he finds himself. From YHWH's perspective, the earth is presented not only according to its expanse (v. 18) but also according to the extremity of its depth (תְּהוֹם), to "the springs of the sea" and "the recesses of the deep",

⁴⁵ Cf. B. JANOWSKI, *Rettungsgewissheit und Epiphanie des Heils*. Das Motiv der Hilfe Gottes "am Morgen" im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament. Band I: Alter Orient (WMANT 59; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1989) 183-184.

⁴⁶ Cf. W.P. BROWN, "Ask the Animals and They Will Teach You", *The Ethos of the Cosmos*. The Genesis of Moral Imagination (Grand Rapids 1999) 317-380, here 343.

to “the gates of death” and “the doors of the shadow of death” (vv. 16-17). These images regarding the unfathomability of the underworld call into question Job’s varied descriptions of the abyss of Sheol. In his desolation, Job had imagined the underworld pessimistically. He had portrayed the underworld as a place where everyone is equally desolate (3:17-19), as a desirable hiding place for him to escape from God (14:13-15), and as a land of gloom and deep darkness (10:21-22) where all human hope is destroyed (17:13-16). YHWH now directly challenges these images by pointing to dimensions of the netherworld that are beyond Job’s grasp. Furthermore, YHWH invites Job to look up, questioning his knowledge about the way of light and the place of darkness (vv. 19-20). In all the questions, the sarcastic manner with which YHWH asks a response from Job is noteworthy: Job is addressed as though he were the firstborn at the moment of creation and his lifespan were long enough so as to be able to understand and answer all YHWH’s questions (v. 21). Thus, by guiding Job to think about the primordial structures of creation, YHWH reveals the limit of Job’s understanding and competence in all the spheres in which he rendered judgment.

From the sixth strophe on (38:22-24), YHWH questions Job about his experience concerning meteorological phenomena, beginning with the storehouses (אֶצְרוֹת) of snow and hail (v. 22), and the source of the light and of the east wind (v. 24). In various biblical texts, storehouse is a familiar image for the source of the heavenly forces that are disposed for divine use either in blessing (cf. Deut 28:12; Jer 10:13) or in punishing (Exod 9:22-26; Isa 30:30; Ezek 30:11-13; Sir 39:29). The emphasis here is on the free will of the One who reserves the stores of snow and hail for opportune times, who distributes light, and who scatters the east wind on the earth. This sovereignty over nature is also manifest in the next strophe (38:25-27), in which YHWH invites Job to open his eyes to see how rain and water, precious gifts from heaven, are openhandedly distributed to the waste and desolate land (vv. 25-27). According to YHWH’s design, even inhospitable regions are not excluded from YHWH’s abundant blessing. The way YHWH deals with each individual in creation is not conditioned by its own status or its productive faculty but according to divine generosity.

It is noteworthy that, in various biblical texts, not only the sea but also the desert and wastelands are associated with chaos (cf. Exod 14:11, 12; Num 14:33; Ps 78:40; 102:7; Jer 51:42-43). From Job’s perspective, the

desert and wastelands are closely linked to destructive chaos (cf. Job 1:19; 30:3, 14). From YHWH's perspective, however, this land has its own inherent worth. In YHWH's world, there is no place which can properly be called "godforsaken". According to YHWH's design, even barren land can miraculously put forth tender grass (אֶשְׂתִּי) (v. 27), the first and foremost sign of botanical life (cf. Gen 1:11-12).⁴⁷ Life-giving rain from heaven is not distributed on earth according to a mechanistic calculation of retribution.⁴⁸

The eighth strophe (38:28-30) is also related to the imagery of water. By the motif of procreation and the language of begetting (הוֹלִיד) and birthing (לֵד), YHWH questions Job's understanding about the mysterious origin of water (vv. 28-29). Unlike the ancient theogony that considers natural phenomena to be the offspring of divine unions⁴⁹ or the mythological traditions that attribute the hidden origin of water to rain deities,⁵⁰ YHWH claims power over the phenomenal transformations of various forms of water, such as "drops of dew", "ice", and "hoar frost". By means of rhetorical questions, YHWH points out to Job the divine perpetual care for creation, which is continuously renewed day by day in varied mysterious ways (v. 30). The beautiful and varied forms of existence that are manifested in creation are tangible signs of the intangible providence of YHWH in the divine design.

In the ninth strophe (38:31-33), YHWH takes Job on a tour of the stars and ordinances of heaven. Job is asked about his capacity for binding the Pleiades and loosening Orion, leading the Mazzaroth and guiding the Bear (vv. 31-32). This is about the power to regulate the movements of the constellations and to control their meteorological influence on earth (v. 33). In fact, the names of the constellations mentioned here are the ones referred to by Job in his ironic praise of God's power (cf. 9:9). According to Job, God's power works for nothing except for pointing out that God's power is beyond the grasp of human wisdom. YHWH now invites Job to contemplate the cosmic design to see that things function in their interconnection (מַעֲדָנוֹת: "the cluster") and interrelation (מִשְׁכוֹת: "the cords"), according to

⁴⁷ Cf. BROWN, "Ask the Animals", 347.

⁴⁸ For more discussion that considers the phenomenon of rain upon the desert and desolate lands as an implicit refutation of the notion of justice according to the ethics of retribution, see TSEVAT, "The Meaning of the Book of Job", 99-100.

⁴⁹ Cf. CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 1111.

⁵⁰ Cf. HABEL, *Job*, 542.

proper time (בִּעְתּוֹ: “in its season”), and leaving their visible impact (מִשְׁטָרוֹ: “its dominion”) on earth. When considered from within, it becomes clear that YHWH’s design does not work in such an arbitrary manner as Job had imagined.

The last strophe (38:34-38) is climactic, encapsulating the two main subjects present throughout the poem, namely, power (vv. 34-35) and wisdom (vv. 36-38). YHWH first challenges Job to command the clouds to pour out rain and to send forth thunderstorms (v. 34-35). In reality, earthly meteorology is closely associated with heavenly astronomy. If only YHWH can administer the movements of the constellations, then only YHWH can control meteorological phenomena on earth. It is not Job’s voice that brings down the heavenly gift of rain to the earth, but YHWH’s. In addition, YHWH also challenges Job’s understanding of the cosmic wisdom concerning the heavenly clouds and water (vv. 36-38). The fact is that Job does not have the wisdom to “number the clouds”, namely, to predict the changes in weather (v. 37). In this regard, other creatures of YHWH are more capable than Job himself. The practical wisdom to “number the clouds”, in fact, is implanted in the two types of bird who do sense coming changes in weather, the ibis and the rooster (v. 36).⁵¹ These challenges show Job’s limited knowledge about YHWH’s cosmic plan. It is within YHWH’s authority and wisdom to maintain the universe in a manner beyond Job’s understanding and power to imitate.

In brief, it is apparent that YHWH does not aim to answer any of Job’s specific questions. Instead, YHWH asks questions that deconstruct Job’s moral worldview and to invite him to adopt a new perspective. In the first part of speeches YHWH’s questions are about very visible and familiar phenomena in the physical universe, such as earth and sea, light and darkness, rain, stars and clouds. YHWH highlights the mysterious

⁵¹ The two rare terms טְהוֹת and שְׂכִי are usually translated as “mind” and “heart” (cf. NIV, NRSV, NEWSOM, *Job*, 600). Most probably, however, they can be rendered as “the ibis” and “the rooster”, cf. DHORME, *Job*, 540; FOHRER, *Hiob*, 508-509; O. KEEL, “Zwei kleine Beiträge zum Verständnis der Gottesreden im Buch Ijob (xxxviii 36f., xl 25)”, *VT* 31 (1981) 220-225; GORDIS, *Job*, 452-453; BROWN, “Ask the Animals”, 349; CLINES, *Job* 38-42, 1050. While the ibis is the emblem of Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom, and functions as a weather announcer regarding the rising of the Nile; the rooster is the forecaster of rain and dawn, cf. J.A. JAUSSEN, “Le coq et la pluie dans la tradition palestinienne”, *RB* 33 (1924) 574-582. The understanding of טְהוֹת and שְׂכִי as two living animals in which is implanted the wisdom to know God’s design therefore fits better the literary context of the strophe.

incomprehensibility of the cosmic design. Everything in the world surrounding Job involves mysterious marvels, far beyond the reach of human observation and understanding, over and above human capacity and power. Job is encouraged to contemplate the cosmos through the eyes of YHWH so as to recognise who he is and who YHWH is, what he knows of the entire plan of YHWH, and what he can really do in such a plan.

Of course, the cosmos surrounding Job does not appear perfect according to human moral expectations, nor does it adapt itself to utilitarian measurements. There are still bursting seas and shadowy abysses, symbols of primordial chaos and evil. There are still deserts and desolate lands, waste places dangerous for human and deprived of human life. There are still the wicked who enjoy sunlight as does everyone else. Despite all these “imperfections”, nevertheless, the cosmos itself appears absolutely charming and attractive through the eyes of YHWH. With its unmeasurable depth, width, and height, the cosmos is rich in treasures and resources, plentiful in mystery and vitality. Heaven and earth, stars and sea, and all which is contained therein, are marvellously cooperative in a harmonious order. Job may not have noticed that the cosmos around him is full of wonders, and he may not care about it, but YHWH constantly does. YHWH knows the cosmos intimately and sustains it by gratuitous care. Thus, in order to understand YHWH’s design for the cosmos, Job’s perception of the world needs to be widened far beyond the limited boundaries established by the ethics of retribution.

2.1.3 Aesthetic Value of Wild Creatures (38:39–39:30)

Job had appealed to the testimony of the animals in the hope that they would teach his opponents about the moral corruption of this world (cf. 12:7-9). YHWH now takes the same approach, inviting Job to allow the testimony of the wild animals to teach him about the divine governance of this world. It is noteworthy that, both at the beginning and at the end of the book, the status of Job is associated with the number of animals he owns. At the beginning, Job possessed seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred oxen and five hundred donkeys (Job 1:3). At the end, YHWH blesses Job by doubling the number of all these domesticated animals (Job 42:12). This means that the domesticated animal is a great blessing for human beings. YHWH introduces the testimony of wild animals precisely to call into question the solely utilitarian perspective of human domestication.

Carol A. Newsom argues that the human utilitarian gaze that prevents one from recognising the world of creation as a wonder:

In the utilitarian gaze, subject and object are clearly distinguished, and the object is evaluated for its goodness or badness in relation to a project of the viewer [...]. But in wonder the ordinary subject-object dichotomy is disrupted with the bracketing of the self, and what is gazed upon is seen in its essential goodness.⁵²

From the utilitarian perspective, the value of animals is calculated only in reference to human benefit, according to human worth. This way of thinking resembles the ethical perspective on retribution expressed by Job and his friends, all of whom understood God's acts in terms of blessing and cursing, reward and punishment. This perspective ran the risk of interpreting Job's misfortunes, which began with the loss of all animals (cf. Job 1:13-17), as divine punishment. YHWH's invocation of wild animals aims to disrupt Job's utilitarian and ethical perspective. The vivid descriptions of wild animals under YHWH's care invite Job not only to be a hearer but also to be a viewer, capable of recognising the essential wonder and goodness of the world of creatures.

While the first poem celebrates YHWH's wondrous design in various physical and cosmological phenomena, the second does so by considering YHWH's relationship with ten kinds of wild animals that are described in seven poetic strophes. Some of these animals appear in pairs and others not.⁵³ In three strophes, six animals are arranged in pairs, namely, the lion and the raven (38:39-41), the mountain goat and the deer (39:1-4), and the hawk and the eagle (39:26-30). As for the other four animals, each occupies one strophe, namely, the wild ass (39:5-8), the wild ox (39:9-12), the ostrich (39:13-18), and the warhorse (39:19-25). In YHWH's descriptions, it is of

⁵² NEWSOM, *A Contest*, 226.

⁵³ Some authors try to group these ten animals in five pairs: lion and raven (38:39-41), mountain goat and deer (39:1-4), wild ass and wild ox (vv. 5-12), ostrich and warhorse (vv. 13-25), hawk and eagle (vv. 26-30). Cf. O. KEEL, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob*. Eine Deutung von Ijob 38-41 vor dem Hintergrund der zeitgenössischen Bildkunst (FRLANT 121; Göttingen 1978) 37-38; NEWSOM, *A Contest*, 242-245. This division, however, is somewhat forced. Indeed, the arrangement of the three pairs, lion and raven, mountain goat and deer, hawk and eagle, is deliberate and obvious, given that their names are mentioned in the very first lines of the same strophe. Whereas the wild ass, wild ox, ostrich, and war horse appear simply sequential, one after another. In addition, if these four animals had been paired, the two strophes containing them would become unusually longer in comparison to other strophes.

particular significance that all animals involved, with the exception of the horse, live in areas not inhabited by human beings, such as the wilderness, the salt land, steppes, mountains, and rocky cliffs. Each of these living creatures in its own way calls into question certain values long cherished by Job, such as retributive justice, the centrality of human beings among creatures, and human dominion over the world of creation. YHWH's celebration of these wild creatures opposes Job's habit of perceiving the world through a rigidly utilitarian morality and invites him to adopt a new perspective.

The first strophe (38:39-41) deals with the lion and the raven. YHWH shockingly asks Job about his ability to provide food for the lion (vv. 39-40). This animal is conventionally considered as king of the beasts (Gen 49:9; Mic 5:8), a powerful and wild predator (cf. Isa 5:29; Ezek 19:3) that is hostile and dangerous to humans (cf. Judg 14:5, 18; Isa 31:4; Jer 2:30). In some instances, the lion is a metaphor for the wicked (cf. Ps 7:3; 17:12). To illustrate retributive theology, Eliphaz used the image of lions punished and destroyed by the anger of God (cf. Job 4:9-11).⁵⁴ YHWH's first challenge to Job has nothing to do with fighting against or destroying the lions but providing for their sustenance. It is clear that Job can do nothing to satisfy the appetite of this fearsome creature nor even for a harmless animal such as the raven, which is usually considered an unclean animal (cf. Lev 11:15; Deut 14:14). The detail that young ravens cry out to YHWH for food after the question as to who provides food for the raven (v. 41) implicitly indicates YHWH's care for the most vulnerable of even wild creatures that are thought of as religiously unclean. The lion and the raven are not associated through the individual characteristics of the two animals but rather through their common need for sustenance. From YHWH's perspective, even wild animals that call forth fear and disdain in humans are treated as objects of divine compassion and of YHWH's practical care. It is YHWH who keeps an eye on them, hearing their requests and satisfying them. The opening strophe thus invites Job to consider the beauty of a world in which divine providence is at work, regardless of whether people know it or not.

In the second strophe (39:1-4), YHWH questions Job's knowledge regarding the biological cycle (עַתָּה) of the wild goat and deer from birth to maturity (39:1-3). Given that these two are shy and elusive creatures of the

⁵⁴ Cf. PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 215.

mountains, no one can really observe and know when they give birth or how their young babies survive and grow to maturity without any human help. These animals are also symbols of beauty (Gen 49:21; Prov 5:19; Song 2:7) and, at the same time, as creatures vulnerable to hunger and thirst (cf. Ps 42:2; Lam 1:6). They attain maturity and live their own lives in their own way, celebrating their own freedom and autonomy by not returning to the place of their birth (v. 4). YHWH's brief description of the cycle of life of these wild animals from the very vulnerable moment of birth to their mature autonomy suggests to Job an amazing journey of life that transcends a morally utilitarian perspective. It also reveals to Job that there exists in YHWH's design different forms of life for which human guardianship is totally extraneous. In remote and secretive places on earth, life goes on miraculously, regardless of whether Job is aware of it.

In the next strophe (39:5-8), YHWH describes the wild ass, an inhabitant of the wilderness, well-known for its obstinacy and its aversion to humans (cf. Gen 16:12; Isa 32:14; Hos 8:9). YHWH governs this creature not by dominating it but by liberation. In the question, "Who set free the wild ass?" (v. 5), the phrase *שְׁלַח חֲפָשִׁי* ("to send away free") is a deuteronomic idiom for being freed from servitude (cf. Deut 15:12-13, 18), as recognised by various commentators.⁵⁵ The wild ass is a counterpoint to familiar domesticated animals such as the donkey. The latter is possessed by human beings for the benefit of human settlement (cf. Job 1:3, 14). The wild ass is totally free from all forms of human control and possession due to the divine design.⁵⁶ YHWH not only freed the wild ass from bondage but gave it the wilderness for its home and the salt land as its dwelling place (v. 6). Biblical traditions often regarded the wilderness and salty land as hostile places reserved for the wicked and for those who are punished (Ps 107:34; Jer 17:6). In Job's perspective, the image of the wild ass in the wilderness was also associated with outcasts and the destitute (cf. 24:5). YHWH shows Job that in the areas that are inhospitable to humans, the wild ass cheerfully celebrates its life. As a free-ranging creature, this animal finds nourishing

⁵⁵ Cf. DHORME, *Job*, 547; HABEL, *Job*, 545; GRAY, *Job*, 472.

⁵⁶ It is remarkable that in the entire section of YHWH's descriptions of the wild animals, the word *שָׁמַתִּי* ("I established") is the only verbal form that appears in the first person singular. It highlights YHWH's involvement in the world of creation. This verb form suggests that what is usually seen as natural in the world of wild animals is actually regarded by the poet as a gift of God to creatures. Cf. CLINES, *Job* 38-42, 1122.

pastures in the mountains where it can feed on every green thing (v. 8). In comparison to these life-giving places, the city built by human beings appears to the wild ass only as a place of tumult and oppression, at which it laughs (v. 7). The two images “tumult of the city” (המון קריה) and “shouting of the oppressor” (תשאות נוגש) evoke a sharp contrast between the human structure of civilisation and the natural world as perceived by the wild ass.

Many terms used throughout this strophe echo the language of Job 3:17-19.⁵⁷ In the midst of his lamentation, Job once envisaged Sheol as a dream world where he can escape from all the miseries he had been experiencing. Job described his dream world as a place free (חפשי, 3:19b) from compulsory servitude, where the prisoners (אסירים, 3:18a) do not hear the voice of the oppressor (לא שמעו קול נגש, 3:18b). These terms are deliberately employed in YHWH’s descriptions of the wild ass as free (חפשי, 39:5a) from bonds (מסרות, 39:5b) of human domestication. It does not hear the shouting of the oppressor (תשעות נוגש לא ישמע, 39:7b). It is striking, therefore, that YHWH presents the independent life of the wild ass in its remote dwelling as a fulfilment of Job’s dream for liberation. The image of the wild ass thus opens Job to the beauty of free and autonomous life that takes place in remote areas, far from the civilised human world.

The fourth strophe (39:9-12) presents the wild ox, a creature well-known for its extraordinary and fearsome strength (cf. Num 24:8; Deut 33:17; Isa 34:7, Ps 22:22). The strophe represents a direct challenge to the utilitarian perspective of human domestication. Following the similar approach of the previous strophe, the poet depicts the wild ox in contrast to the tamed oxen serving in farmers’ settlements.⁵⁸ YHWH asks Job several questions about applying the customary ways of domesticating the latter to the former. While oxen usually appear as docile animals at the crib of its owner (cf. Isa 1:3), the strophe highlights the absurdity of expecting the wild ox to serve Job in exchange for food (v. 9). Job will never be able to force it to serve him in ploughing like other domesticated cattle (v. 10). Since the domesticity and service of oxen are customarily considered as a guarantee for human benefit (cf. Prov 14:4), YHWH ironically challenges Job to tame

⁵⁷ HABEL, *Job*, 545-546; CLINES, *Job* 38-42, 1122.

⁵⁸ In the Hebrew Bible, the ox is frequently mentioned together with the donkey as a pair belonging to human possessions (cf. Exod 21:33; 23:4, 12; Isa 1:3; 32:20; Job 1:3, 14). Therefore, it is understandable that their counterparts, the wild ass and the wild ox, are described here in two continuous strophes.

the wild ox and to harness its extraordinary strength for his own benefit (v. 11).⁵⁹ This kind of creature can never be a reliable animal for Job and therefore can never satisfy his domestic expectations (v. 12). Thus, YHWH's description of the wild ox serves to mock the logic of domestication and confound Job's utilitarian way of thinking. According to YHWH's design, the mighty strength of the wild ox exists for its own sake, not because of any human expectation or for human benefit. It points to the beauty in the world of wild creatures that are free from human domestication.

The fifth strophe (39:13-18) deals with the ostrich,⁶⁰ which the Bible describes as dwelling in inhospitable regions or abandoned places (cf. Isa 13:21; 34:13; Jer 50:39). Its cry and howling are sometimes linked to mournfulness (cf. Mic 1:8). Job invoked the image of the ostrich as a companion in his state of isolation from all human beings (cf. 30:29). However, YHWH describes this creature very differently. As noted by various critics, this creature bears a euphemistic title.⁶¹ To present it, the poet does not use the term יֶעֱנָה, the usual name for the ostrich (cf. Job 30:29; Isa 13:21; 43:20; Mic 1:8; Job 30:29) but employs the name רִנָּה which literarily means "shouts of joy".⁶² The ostrich is characterised by paradoxical and reckless features. It is a bird with impressive wings but

⁵⁹ As noted by Habel, in the challenge to tame the wild ox, the poet allows readers to anticipate God's various challenges for Job to control Behemoth and Leviathan in the second speech. Cf. HABEL, *Job*, 546.

⁶⁰ This strophe is omitted in the LXX. In addition, this is the only strophe of the whole poem in which the poet does not use rhetorical questions, but instead employs affirmative descriptions. Therefore, a few critics claim the strophe to be secondary (cf. DUHM, *Hiob*, 188; KRAELING, *The Book of The Way of God*, 153; WESTERMANN, *The Structure of the Book of Job*, 122; TERRIEN, *Job*, 255; CURTIS, "On Job's Response", 498; GRAY, *Job*, 471). However, the connection between this passage and the following one is undeniable, thanks to the term לָסוּס ("to the horse" cf. 39:18b, 19a). Moreover, from the literary point of view, this passage contributes considerably to the argument of the whole poem.

⁶¹ The name of this animal, רִנָּה, is a *hapax*. This name, however, shares the same root with the term רִנָּה, which frequently occurs in poetic texts of the Bible with the meanings: "joy", "joyful voice" or "singing" (cf. Ps 42:4; 47:1; 63:5; 100:2; 105:43; 107:42; 118:15; Job 3:7; 20:5). For further discussions on this name, see HABEL, *Job*, 524-525; NEWSOM, *Job*, 600-601.

⁶² The meaning of the first sentence of the strophe is very obscure and has been long discussed. Nevertheless, the verb form that describes the movement of the ostrich's wings, וְעָלָה, deriving from the root עָלָה, can be literarily translated as "rejoice", "flap joyously" (cf. BDB 763; Job 20:18; Prov 7:18). This detail confirms furthermore the cheerful characteristic of the ostrich as depicted by the poet.

cannot fly (v. 13). Although it lays eggs, the ostrich lacks the natural protective instinct of other birds; instead of making a nest for its eggs, it leaves them recklessly on the ground without any consideration of the dangers that may arise from passers-by or wild animals (vv. 14-15). It is known for its cruel character (cf. Lam 4:3) because it treats its young ones harshly, not as a mother would (v. 16). In the midst of these descriptions, the poet reveals that the ostrich's paradoxical features come from the fact that YHWH deprives it of instinctive wisdom and understanding (v. 17). In this negation, the poet uses a typical pair of words for wisdom, חכמה and בינה, to describe the ostrich's lack of intelligence.⁶³ By having the term אלוה recur, the poet assures readers that the lack of intelligence of the ostrich also belongs to God's design. The ostrich appears as an exceptional case in the world of wild animals, to each of which God gives skills and practical wisdom. In the last sentence YHWH reveals the one aspect in which the ostrich surpasses most other animals, its speed. Although it is an odd bird with wings that cannot fly (v. 17), the ostrich can overtake and laugh at the horse and its rider (v. 18) thanks to holding its wings aloft.⁶⁴ In the ancient Near East, the image of the horse and rider evokes the scene of the hunt.⁶⁵ The triumphant laugh of the ostrich conjures a sharp contrast between the world of human dominion and that of wild creatures. Just as the free-roaming wild ass laughs at the tumult of the city (39:7), so the ostrich laughs at the horse and rider. The speech of the wild ostrich gives it prestige in the human world. YHWH cares for the ostrich despite its oddities. Even without understanding and wisdom, the ostrich has its own place in the world created

⁶³ This detail fits the folk beliefs regarding the ostrich, as attested in an ancient Arabic proverb: "stupider than an ostrich". Many scholars have quoted this proverb in their comments, see for example DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 344; GORDIS, *Job*, 459; POPE, *Job*, 309-310.

⁶⁴ Job 39:18 is such a difficult sentence that some critics think it to be a later addition (cf. JASTROW, *Job*, 353; MORLA, *Job*, 1391). However, the majority of scholars acknowledge the intention of the poet here as offering a detail in contrast with the preceding description by evoking the great speed of the ostrich (cf. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 344; DHORME, *Job*, 553; POPE, *Job*, 310-311; HARTLEY, *Job*, 509; GRAY, *Job*, 476-477). Actually, the verb form תמריא in the first colon can be understood as deriving from the root מרא, and thus be rendered: "to beat the air with her wings" (cf. HALOT, 630). Cf. HARTLEY, *Job*, 509: "when she flaps her wings"; NRSV: "when it spreads its plumes aloft".

⁶⁵ Cf. NEWSOM, *A Contest*, 247. See for example the illustrations reproduced by Othmar Keel. In a piece found in the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun (1358-1346), one sees the picture of the Pharaoh riding horses and hunting ostriches. Cf. KEEL, *Jahwes Entgegnung*, 72.

by YHWH. The poetic description of the ostrich challenges Job's judgment of everything from an anthropocentric perspective. In the beauty of the created world, everything has its own worth, regardless of whether it is of any use to humans.

The mention of the horse at the end of strophe five introduces readers to the vivid description of the sixth and the longest strophe in the poem (39:19-25).⁶⁶ Some critics argue that the presence of the horse in this list is an exception because it is not a wild animal.⁶⁷ Some elements in YHWH's description may support this position. There are details that suggest this is a trained horse, as it is familiar to the sound of the trumpet (vv. 24b-25a) and it recognises from afar the sound of the battle and the thunder of captains (v. 25b). Nonetheless, what is clear is that the strophe celebrates not the domestication of the horse but rather its unbridled energy and fearlessness in battle. The poet describes the horse as a mighty warrior with inherent qualities not produced by domestication. The description of the horse suggests that it is a "magnificent godlike figure", as Habel pointed out.⁶⁸ The beauty and power of the horse are depicted by terms that are conventionally used to describe the aesthetic quality of God. Thus, the horse possesses "great might" (גבורה, v. 19a.), like God or a mighty warrior (cf. Judg 8:21; Job 12:13; 26:14; Ps 54:3; Jer 10:6). Its neck is clothed with "thunder" (רעמה, v. 19b).⁶⁹ The snorting of the horse is conveyed by the word חוד, "glory", a term associated with God's majesty (v. 20b, cf. Job 37:22; Ps 8:1; 104:1). This snorting brings about "terror" (אימה), as does the

⁶⁶ There are many praises for this poetic strophe: "the most brilliant of all the poems", F.I. ANDERSEN, *Job: Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Leicester 1976) 282; "of unforgettable vividness and power", KRAELING, *The Book of the Way of God*, 153; "a literary masterpiece [...] highly poetical", N. WHYBRAY, *Job*, 164; "una de la más famosas de la Biblia", ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, 693.

⁶⁷ Cf. ANDERSEN, *Job*, 272; WHYBRAY, *Job*, 164.

⁶⁸ Cf. HABEL, *Job*, 547.

⁶⁹ The word רעמה is a *hapax*. Some scholars translate it as the "quivering mane" of the horse's neck (cf. GORDIS, *Job*, 461; HARTLEY, *Job*, 510; POPE, *Job*, 305.311). However, this translation is only based on the context and very uncertain. Cf. BDB 987. Michel Dahood associates the term with the root רעם, "thunder". He argues that here the poet is splitting the composite phrase רעם גבורתו, "his mighty thunder", in Job 26:14, placing גבורה in the first and רעם in the second colon of Job 39:19. M. DAHOOD, "Hebrew-Ugaritic Lexicography X", *Biblica* 52 (1972) 386-403, here 393; cf. also DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 345; S.L. TERRIEN, *Job: Poet of Existence* (New York 1957) 225; GRAY, *Job*, 477. The horse's neck adorned with thunder is, in fact, a highly poetical image that fits the poetic strophe as a whole.

presence of God (v. 20b, cf. Exod 15:16; Job 9:34; 13:21). All these terms adorn the horse with theophanic splendor. Nowhere in the Bible is the horse exalted as highly as it is in this strophe. In other texts, horses appear as domesticated animals for human utilitarian purposes, such as pulling chariots (2 Sam 15:1; 1 Kgs 4:26), being ridden by people (Gen 49:17; 1 Kgs 20:21) or being used for warfare (Deut 20:1; Josh 11:4; 1 Kgs 20:25). At the beginning of Israel's history, horses went together with the images of pursuing enemies (Exod 14:9, 23; Deut 11:4). Prophets and sages often warn Israel of the danger of relying on the power of horses (Ps 20:7; Prov 26:3; Isa 30:16; 31:3). In this strophe, the horse is characterised by positive and admirable features, especially its fearlessness in battle. No weapon of war can falter it, not even the sword, spear, javelin, or quiver (vv. 22b-23). Some of the details suggest that the horse itself lusts for battle.⁷⁰ It laughs at fear in the midst of threats of war (22a), vigorously rushes out to meet arms (v. 21b). It reacts to the war trumpet with impatience (v. 24), giving the impression that the sound awakened its instinctive desire to plunge into battle. Its exclamation of joy and satisfaction, "Aha", merged with the trumpet sound announcing the beginning of the battle, qualifies this creature as a true warhorse.⁷¹ The magnificent characteristics ascribed to the horse add to the weight of the rhetorical questions with which YHWH challenges Job at the beginning of the strophe. In asking Job whether he could give the warhorse such great attributes (v. 19ab), YHWH aims to elicit Job's contemplation and admiration for his masterful design of this creature. Ironically giving Job the impossible challenge to make the horse to leap like a locust (v. 20a),⁷² YHWH reveals the beauty of the warhorse's unfathomable nature. The beauty of this wondrous creatures far exceeds the human capacity to understand and control.

⁷⁰ Cf. NEWSOM, *A Contest*, 247.

⁷¹ The interjection הָאָה, "aha", occurs mainly in poetic texts. It often refers to the malicious joy of the wicked on witnessing the misfortunes that befall the righteous (Ps 35:21; 40:15; Ezek 25:3; 26:2; 36:2). On other occasions it conveys expressions of joy and satisfaction (Ps 35:25; Isa 44:16). Cf. BDB 210; HALOT, 236.

⁷² Job 39:20a is a difficult sentence, usually rendered as "Do you make it leap like the locust?". The verb form תִּרְעִישֵׁנוּ, deriving from the root רָעַשׁ, literally means "quake", "shake", "quiver". Cf. BDB 950. The same root recurs in verse 24a, expressing the agitation of the horse for the moment of the battle to come. The comparison of this motion with the leap of the locust is reminiscent of that in Joel 2:4-5. However, in Job 39:20a, the movement of the horse that God challenges Job to provoke is much more than just a normal leap.

The warhorse and warlike atmosphere of strophe six anticipates the conclusion of the last strophe (39:26-30). YHWH focuses on two birds of prey, the hawk and the eagle. These two birds are depicted in a completely different way from the ostrich. The hawk soars to great heights, flying southward for seasonal migrations as prompted by its instinctive discernment (v. 26). The eagle is one of the metaphors of elusive and unattainable wisdom for human beings (cf. Prov 13:19). It soars far above the earth and makes its nest in high places inaccessible to other predators (vv. 27-28). The employment of the crucial term בִּינָה, “discernment” forms an *inclusio* for the first speech of YHWH (38:4; 39:26). In this strophe, the term highlights the fact that both the hawk and the eagle operate by their own instinctive wisdom, without being conditioned by any human intervention or instruction. The closing sentence points out the fact that young eagles, as carrion eaters, suck up blood and feed on the carcasses of those who are slain in human battles. In this manner, this final strophe forms an *inclusio* together with the first (39:39-41), based on the motif of food provision. Balentine comments that in the world created by YHWH, just as other animals are food for the lion, so also human beings can be part of a mysterious food chain to feed the eagle.⁷³ Just as the warhorse finds human battles exhilarating, so the eagle finds them nourishing.⁷⁴ YHWH’s descriptions suggests that what is thought of as wild and cruel by human standards of order and justice is just what the world actually is. This decentering of human beings within the animal world is meant to be a great shock to Job as well as to the readers. All the meaning of human existence seems to evaporate before the tragic death of the warrior killed in battle and turned into food for young eagles.⁷⁵ This unsettling image thus has power to disorient Job in order to release him from his utilitarian and retributive perspective.

The description of YHWH begins with an emphasis on Job’s ignorance regarding the world of wild creatures. It progressively highlights the diversity and mysteriousness of such a world. YHWH places Job in front of a vivid world of wild living creatures that contains a great diversity of life forms, whose shared characteristics are freedom and dignity. Whether they are fierce or timid, mighty or weak, cunning or imprudent, wild animals are

⁷³ Cf. BALENTINE, *Job*, 666.

⁷⁴ Cf. NEWSOM, *Job*, 612.

⁷⁵ Cf. HARTLEY, *Job*, 524.

excellent counterexamples to the moral perspective conditioned by anthropocentricity. They live their lives in their own ways and behave according to the instinctive wisdom planted within them, and no human manipulation or command can really affect them.⁷⁶ YHWH's extensive description of them draws Job's attention away from himself and his problems toward the greater world to which he belongs. As in the cosmological tour, the zoological tour offers Job incentives to widen his imaginative horizons and see the world through the eyes of YHWH. In this process, Job is also given opportunities to observe the world from the perspectives of other living creatures. As William P. Brown said:

Job has witnessed first-hand the perceptions and sensibilities of particular wild animals [...] he has come to see what they see, to prance with their hooves, to roam their expansive ranges, and to fly with wings to scout out prey.⁷⁷

This, however, does not mean that the world of living creatures as depicted by YHWH is self-sufficient. YHWH's creation does not appear to be invulnerable. All creatures, from the ferocious lion to the fragile mountain deer, young or old, need to be continually cared for and fed. Some animals lack practical wisdom, such as the ostrich. Some display anarchic forces, such as the warhorse. Nevertheless, the limitations of these living creatures do not prevent them from enjoying their lives in the eyes of YHWH. The world of living creatures has its own order and functions according to its own law, as mysteriously implanted and sustained by the Creator. This is a beautiful and admirable picture of life with its multiple forms. All is full of vitality and energy, totally independent of any human intervention. Nothing

⁷⁶ In this manner, God's reassessment shockingly reverses the fundamental belief of Genesis 1–2 regarding the human position in the world of creation. According to the Book of Genesis, the human being occupies the central position in God's plan as the one who has dominion over all types of creatures (cf. Gen 1:28). All animals were brought to Adam so that he would bestow upon them their proper names. Thus, the identity and existence of all living creatures are determined on the basis of their dependence on human beings (cf. Gen 2:19–20). On the contrary, in God's speech (38:39–39:30), Job in particular and human beings in general do not occupy a central position in God's creation. God presents to Job various kinds of creatures, not to adorn him with the prestige of a dominator, but rather to reveal to him his own ignorance and incompetence. These living creatures serve to illustrate God's design for the creation and therefore to teach Job about the meaning of his existence and his identity within the creation of God. Cf. BALENTINE, *Job*, 670.

⁷⁷ BROWN, "Ask the Animals", 365.

can prevent YHWH the Creator from taking delight in every quality and peculiarity of creatures.

2.1.4 Summary and Assessment

Before listening to Job's response to the first speech of YHWH, it will be helpful to summarise the aesthetic aspect of creation as presented by YHWH. The first speech is saturated with wisdom vocabulary. Conventional terms of wisdom literature appear as structural markers at the beginning and at the end of the speech, such as *דעת* (38:2), *בינה* (38:4), *ידע* (38:3-5), *בינה* (39:26), and also occur frequently in the body of the speech, for instance *בינה* (38:36; 39:17, 26) and *חכמה* (38:36-37; 39:17), the verbal forms of *ידע* (38:12, 18, 21, 33; 39:1-2), and the verbal forms of *בין* (38:18, 20). The focus of YHWH's first speech is on the key question regarding Job's capacity to know, to understand, to discern, and to comprehend the mysteries of YHWH's design for the world, either in the natural phenomena of the cosmos or in the wild creatures of the earth. In teaching Job about the intrinsic wisdom of YHWH's design, the main purpose of the first speech of YHWH is to invite Job to recognise the limit of his knowledge so as to open him to the aesthetic value of YHWH's design.

The presentation of YHWH's design in the first speech covers a wide range of cosmic images of both space and time. In terms of space, YHWH leads Job to examine the world of creation from the macro-level of the entire universe (cf. 38:4-11) to the micro-level of a drop of dew (cf. 38:28). In terms of time, Job is asked to consider creation from the macro-level of the primordial moment of the birth of the universe (cf. 38:4) to the micro-level of the birth moment of a mountain goat (cf. 39:1). All these images appeal to Job's aesthetic perceptions, both visual and audial. Job is challenged to make the most of his ability for sensory perception to appreciate the value of all that YHWH shows him. Thus, Job is called to widen his point of view, to look up to heaven (cf. 38:7, 12, 31-34), to look down to the deep (cf. 38:16-17), and to look around to the extremes of the earth (cf. 38:18).

The creation of YHWH appears with amazing dialectical tensions between contrary elements: the solidity of the earth and the fluidity of the seas, the creative dynamism of light and the chaotic ambiguity of darkness, the plentiful stores of water and the aridity of desert lands, the ferocity and yet vulnerability of lions and eagles, the fragility and yet self-sufficiency of the mountain goat and deer, the indomitable and yet admirable strength of

the wild ass and wild ox, the recklessness and yet intrepidity of the ostrich and warhorse. Job is invited to activate his perceptive imagination so as to listen to the world surrounding him, with its multiple voices and sounds. They are the voice of the morning stars that sing and of the heavenly beings that shout for joy (cf. 38:7). They are the cry for food of young lions and eagles (cf. 38:1; 39:30), the scornful laughter of the wild ass against the background of the tumult in the city and the screams of the drivers (cf. 39:7), the sound of the war trumpet, the clash of various types of weapons, the excited laughing “Aha” of the warhorse against the background of the battle screams (cf. 39:23-25).

All in all, Job is being trained to contemplate the entire creation through different eyes and from different perspectives. The aim of such a contemplation is to provoke in Job not only empathy but also respectful awe towards the wondrous creation of YHWH. Everything in such a world contains signs of the untold variety of the grand design.⁷⁸ YHWH knows the design of the cosmos intimately. Through YHWH’s eyes, creation appears like a process repeated daily that is in need of divine care and maintenance. Nonetheless, this is not a problem from divine perspective. What really needs to be transformed is not YHWH’s world itself but Job’s perception and interpretation of that world.

In the world according to YHWH’s design, Job and his personal concerns do not occupy the central position. YHWH’s design is much larger than any human concerns which are narrowly conditioned by the retributive paradigm. Neither is human justice the core value nor are the ethics of retribution the ultimate standard in YHWH’s design. There is no evidence that YHWH bases the relationship with his creatures on their moral merit. On the contrary, YHWH’s presentation carries with it many indications of the inversion of conventional perceptions of the world as seen through the lens of the ethics of retribution. YHWH actually rules this world beyond the perspective of good and evil. YHWH does not feel the need to see justice done immediately, if this is retributive justice according to human understanding.⁷⁹ YHWH genuinely brings into question Job’s moral worldview that is determined to draw a clear separation between the righteous and the wicked, between civilisation and nature. Job is urged to

⁷⁸ Cf. CLINES, *Job 38–42*, 1135.

⁷⁹ Cf. GORDIS, *The Book of God and Man*, 126.

think empathetically, and on a universal level, to acknowledge the fundamental reliability of the structures of creation to which he belongs but which he called into question in his bitter lamentations.

2.2 YHWH's Conclusion of the First Speech and Job's First Response (40:1-5)

2.2.1 YHWH's Conclusion of the First Speech (40:1-2)

At the beginning of the first speech, YHWH has questioned and challenged him to instruct YHWH (cf. 38:3: הוֹדִיעֵנִי). After having exhibited the wonders of creation through a series of questions, YHWH renews the challenge to Job, demanding that he respond.⁸⁰ The language employed by YHWH in this challenge is primarily legal. YHWH is picking up the legal language constantly used by Job during his disputations, identifying Job as the faultfinder (יֹסֵר) who contends with the Almighty (הָרַב עַם-יְשָׁדִי, cf. 9:3, 10:2, 13:8, 19; 23:6), who argues with YHWH (מוֹכִיחַ, cf. 9:33, 13:3, 10; 16:21; 23:7). During the first speech YHWH has not argued for any legal case. Whether it is in cosmological, meteorological, or zoological presentations, the language of YHWH has been more like that of the schoolroom than like that of the courtroom, as recognised by Clines.⁸¹ In other words, YHWH does not argue with Job in terms of right or wrong, good or evil, innocent or guilty, as did the friends. Instead, various rhetorical questions have been employed as a pedagogical device through which YHWH aimed to widen Job's worldview and to supply him with an aesthetic perspective on the world. It seems unlikely that YHWH is now trying to bring Job into a truly legal disputation. Instead, it is more probable that YHWH is ironically reassuming the kind of language to which Job has obstinately clung during his speeches. By doing so, YHWH makes it clear that what he is challenging is precisely Job's legal worldview that is grounded in the ethics of retribution. After subverting Job's understanding of YHWH's design about the beauty of the cosmos and the wildness of the untamed world, YHWH dares Job to respond: "Shall the one who argues contend with the Almighty? Let God's critic respond!" (40:2).

⁸⁰ God's challenge is accompanied by a short intrusion of the narrator (40:1). This intrusion marks an *inclusio* for the first speech and, at the same time, prepares for a thematic transition to the following speech.

⁸¹ Cf. CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1134.

2.2.2 Job's First Response (40:3-5)

Job's first response to YHWH conveys a remarkably different tone. Gone is the confident and arrogant stance of the one who challenged the Almighty to answer him (cf. 31:35). Gone, too, is the polemical attitude of a fervent disputer. As has been seen during the disputations, one of the key features of Job's speeches is to begin by criticising the words of his disputants. Job belittled the friends' arguments in such a way as to elevate his own. The case is totally contrary here in his first response to YHWH. After the long divine speech, Job belittles himself and announces his intention not to open his mouth again. Far from doing what the friends had been urging and expecting, Job does not make supplication to YHWH (cf. 8:5-7) or confess any sin (cf. 11:13-15). Neither does he express any repentance as his friends had recommended (cf. 22:23). Far from what even Job himself had feared, Job has not been terrified by YHWH (cf. 9:34-35; 13:20-21) or crushed by YHWH's whirlwind (cf. 9:16-17) as he had imagined. Perhaps also far from what YHWH expects, Job's response is not an answer at all.

Job replies to YHWH with a question: *מָה אֲשִׁיבָךְ*, "what shall I answer you?" (v. 3). The reason for this question is indicated just by one word, *קָלַתִּי*, coming from the root *קלל*, which is highly ambiguous. Most probably, this verb shares the same connotations with the Akkadian word *kalālu*, "despise, dishonour".⁸² On some occasions in the Bible this verb means "to be light, to be slight" (cf. 1 Kgs 12:4, 9-10; 16:31; Isa 49:6). On other occasions it bears the sense of being considered small, humbled, or despised (cf. Gen 16:4-5; 2 Sam 19:43). In other texts, the verb indicates a state of being lightly esteemed as opposite to being honoured (cf. 1 Sam 2:30; 2 Sam 6:22).⁸³ Job's word therefore can be translated in varied ways, such as "I am small", "I am of a small account", "I am light", "I am insignificant", "I am vile". Thus, one may say that Job explicitly acknowledges the radical difference between YHWH and himself in terms of status and hierarchy.⁸⁴ He feels reduced to smallness and admits that he is too insignificant to respond to YHWH.

Furthermore, the meaning of Job's words is also accompanied by the gesture of placing his hand over his mouth (v. 4). Some scholars interpret

⁸² Cf. BDB 886.

⁸³ Cf. TSEVAT, "The Meaning of the Book of Job", 91.

⁸⁴ Cf. NEWSOM, *Job*, 613.

this gesture as an indication of silent disagreement, disapproval, or even revulsion.⁸⁵ Others understand Job's silence as a note of recalcitrance, a defiant attitude, or even an insistent re-affirmation of his previous complaints.⁸⁶ However, it is important to recognise that the gesture of putting one's hand over one's mouth itself is actually full of ambiguity and can be understood in a variety of ways, rather than just as a sign of acquiescent or defiant silence.⁸⁷ Conventionally, the gesture represents a silence motivated by involuntary horror or amazement, by shame or awe.⁸⁸ More importantly, according to Job's own understanding, this gesture implies a positive attitude of respect. This is the attitude that Job once expected to receive from his friends as they were facing his suffering: "Look at me and be astonished. Put your hand upon your mouth" (21:5). This is also the same attitude that the nobles of the community once showed to Job, a gesture of full reverence: they put their hands on their mouth and restrained from talking (cf. 29:9). Similarly, Job now makes use of this same gesture to show that he will not add any more words.

Job cannot end his short response without mentioning the fact that he has already articulated his own view more than once: "I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, and I will do so no more" (40:5). Here, Job's intention to discontinue his discourse is clear. This intention, however, does not signify that he regrets and intends to renounce all that he has already said.⁸⁹ It may mean that Job now chooses to withdraw in silence because everything he wants to say has already been said. He has nothing to add, as Gordis states.⁹⁰ On the other hand, however, in the literary context immediately following the divine speech, Job's silence can reasonably be read as an indication that Job is so shocked that he does not know what to say. His familiar world has collapsed in the face of YHWH's vast and varied

⁸⁵ Cf. ROBERTSON, *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic*, 52.

⁸⁶ Cf. M. GREENBERG, "Job", *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (eds. R. ALTER – F. KERMODE) (Cambridge 1987) 283-304, here 298; J.B., CURTIS, "On Job's Response", 497-511, esp. 507. CLINES, *Job* 38-42, 1138.

⁸⁷ Cf. M.I. GRUBER, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* (Studia Pohl 12; Rome 1980) 289.

⁸⁸ Cf. CLINES, *Job* 38-42, 1139; BALENTINE, *Job*, 668.

⁸⁹ Contra Thomas K. Cheyne, who consider Job's words here a "dogged submission to authority", "a sad acceptance of the inevitable". CHEYNE, *Job and Solomon*, 54.

⁹⁰ Cf. GORDIS, *Job*, 66.

universe, while a new world has yet to be rebuilt for him. Overwhelmed and overawed by the divine speech, Job retreats into silence.

At any event, it is clear that Job's words at this moment are far from being a frank response to YHWH's challenges. His attitude reflects a tendency to avoid direct contact with YHWH. Such an attitude allows Job to speak to YHWH only in the sense of voicing unilateral complaints and criticism, as he had done so far, rather than engaging in bilateral dialogues with YHWH. As the first speech of YHWH gives no direct answer to the various questions regarding ethics and justice raised by Job during his disputations, so also Job's short response simply ignores the various questions regarding his competence which YHWH asked in the same speech. Job's response is just enough to indicate that he is evading God's questions.⁹¹ This evasion makes Job's response very different from what he had said he would do, approaching YHWH like a dignified prince to argue with YHWH courageously and transparently (cf. 31:37). Job's silence, therefore, is far from being a silence of satisfaction but appears to be a reluctant and evasive concession. Instead of opening his eyes and contemplating the immense universe, as YHWH would like him to do, Job automatically returns into himself, taking YHWH's speech personally and weighing everything according to the standard of his own status. Thus, he does not seem to perceive and understand the nature and the significance of YHWH's design. To some extent, Job is still obscuring the design of YHWH. It is difficult, given such a response, for the speech of YHWH to find its completion.

In short, Job's concession that he is of small account and his refusal to speak cannot satisfy YHWH, who has more than once lauded him as the greatest of the Orientals (cf. 1:3) and even as the greatest of human beings on earth (cf. 1:8; 2:3). It is obvious that the summoning of YHWH, that Job girds his loins like a mighty warrior to face YHWH's challenges (cf. 38:3) has not been realised. This reluctant concession is certainly not the expected end of the journey YHWH has prepared for Job.

⁹¹ Cf. J. MILES, *God: A Biography* (New York 1995) 317-318.

2.3 Second Speech (40:6–41:26): Aesthetic Aspect of Behemoth and Leviathan

Based on its content, the second speech of YHWH can be divided into three main parts: a proem in which YHWH challenges Job to assume a godlike governance of the world (40:6-14), then two vivid descriptions focusing on the two extraordinary creatures, Behemoth (40:15-24) and Leviathan (40:25–41:26).

2.3.1 Second Proem: Godlike Governance (40:6-14)

The second proem is composed of eight poetic lines, much longer in comparison to the two lines in the first proem (38:1-3). It directly opposes the theory of retribution. By means of sharp irony, YHWH invites Job to put himself in the place of YHWH to govern the world in consonance with what he thinks is right and just. In addition to a challenging summons and a thematic question (vv. 7-8) like the first, this proem contains another six poetic lines including a double ironic question (v. 9), a series of imperative challenges (vv. 10-13), and a conclusive statement (v. 14).

The order of the challenging summons and the thematic question in the second proem is reversed compared to that in the first.⁹² In the first speech, YHWH starts with a question, reproaching Job: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? (38:2). With this question, the poet announced the main theme of the first speech, which is to make YHWH’s counsel or design clear to Job. After the question, YHWH commanded Job: “Gird up your loins like a man. I will question you and you shall make me know” (cf. 38:3). With this imperative, YHWH told Job to prepare himself like a valiant man to enter into a difficult dialogue with YHWH. This imperative is repeated at the beginning of the second speech (40:7), renewing the challenge to Job to enter into a frank conversation with YHWH. The theme of the second speech is introduced in the form of a dual reproach: “Will you annul my judgment? Will you condemn me in order to justify yourself?” (40:8). The beginning of YHWH’s first speech concerns YHWH’s counsel or design (עצה) that is darkened by Job’s ignorance. The beginning of YHWH’s second speech concerns YHWH’s judgment or governance

⁹² Cf. “A Symmetrical Structure of the Last Poetic Section”, 116.

(משפט) that is in danger of being nullified by Job's self-centred efforts to justify himself at the cost of condemning YHWH (v. 8b).

The key term משפט, which appears in the thematic question, is often understood in accordance with its legal-ethical connotations and is therefore translated as "righteousness", "justice", or "legal cause". In the literary context of Job 40:6-14, however, rather than having only legal-ethical connotations, the term משפט signifies YHWH's governance and judgment as it does in a number of other biblical texts (cf. Gen 18:25; Judg 2:18; Ps 72:1-2).⁹³ The question posed by YHWH is therefore a direct reproach to Job and a direct rejection of Job's approach. Thus far, Job has shown himself to be moving inside the frame of a legal-ethical paradigm of right and wrong: if he is right, YHWH must be wrong, and the only possible way to justify his innocence is to denounce YHWH as guilty. Job has argued as though all the experience of his life could be explained only by the paradigm of the ethics of retribution. In so doing, he ignored the world of wonder, and beauty and mystery, as well as the way YHWH governs such a world. Thus, if the first speech of YHWH provides Job with a representation of YHWH's design in the cosmos (עצרה), the second speech will explore YHWH's governance (משפט) over chaos. Readers now expect YHWH's second speech to do so by dint of imagery that will push Job to the limit of his own existence.

After the summons and the thematic question, YHWH challenges Job to compare himself with God. With a double ironic question, YHWH asks Job whether he has an arm like God (זרוע כאל) or can thunder with a voice like that of God (קול כמהו; 40:9). In the Hebrew Bible, both זרוע and קול are conventional terms for describing the might and majesty of God. On various occasions, the image of God's arm (זרוע) is associated with the divine redemptive power by which God frees the chosen people from the bondage of their oppressors: "I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm (זרוע) and with mighty acts of judgment" (Exod 6:6; cf. Exod 15:16; Deut 4:34; 9:29; Ps 77:15). In other texts, the same image is associated with God's complete dominion over chaotic forces: "You crushed Rahab like a carcass. You scattered your enemies with your mighty arm (זרוע)" (cf. Ps 89:10, 13; Isa 63:5). The term קול, when recurring with רעם ("thunder"),

⁹³ For more discussions on these two kinds of connotation of the term, see S.H. SCHOLNICK, "The Meaning of *mišpāt* in the Book of Job", *JBL* 101 (1982) 521-529, esp. 522-523.

denotes God's powerful voice that commands and governs the universe: "God thunders marvellously with his voice (קוֹלוֹ). He does wondrous things that we cannot comprehend" (Job 37:5; cf. 18:13; Ps 29:3-9; 77:18; 104:7). Thus, the two images "arm" and "voice" represent God's majestic power both throughout the history of the people of God and over the natural cosmos. From Job's point of view, therefore, it is shocking to imagine himself having such power, namely, to claim to be divine or to act like God. YHWH's ironic question implies that in order to justify himself and condemn YHWH's way of governing the world, Job must show himself to be equal to God.⁹⁴ Only by putting himself in YHWH's place and sharing YHWH's perspective can Job understand the way YHWH rules the world. Otherwise, all of Job's protests and criticisms have no import.

The ironic tone of YHWH's challenge is further propelled by a series of imperative verbs. YHWH tells Job to take over the governance of the world as if he were a divine being. In order to do so, Job must clothe himself in splendour like God. Aesthetic terms are employed with considerable density. YHWH challenges Job to adorn himself with "majesty" (גִּאּוֹן) and "dignity" (גִּבּוֹהַ) and vest himself with "glory" (הֹד) and "splendour" (הִדָּר) (v. 10). Such a challenge is unfair or even unkind to a miserable mortal like Job who is mourning his life on an ash heap.⁹⁵ All these aesthetic qualities belong to God alone (cf. Ps 96:6; 104:1; 111:3), and human beings can never adorn themselves with such qualities. However, YHWH's challenge is part of his pedagogical strategy. YHWH points out the radical difference between Job and YHWH not to mock or humiliate him, but in order to instruct him. YHWH wants Job to open his perspective, to go beyond his own limited experience, and beyond his protests and criticisms.

Now YHWH addresses the criticism by Job that God is slow to bring destructive retribution down on evildoers. More than once Job bitterly pointed out that the wicked not only are spared on the day of judgment but also enjoy the blessings of the righteous (cf. chapters 21, 24) because God was neglecting the responsibilities of governing the world. In response to this, YHWH challenges Job to demonstrate his ability to remedy what he claimed to be wrong. YHWH invites Job to assume the role of the governor of the world, executing a reform that would overturn God's own approach.

⁹⁴ ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 649.

⁹⁵ HABEL, *Job*, 563.

If Job is convinced that the proud must be humiliated and the wicked must be crushed, he must show how he would do it. The ironic suggestion for Job is to act like God on the day of judgment, pouring out fury and anger upon the proud and the arrogant. This suggestion is conveyed by a chiasmic structure of two poetic lines (vv. 11-12), whose central part is formed by the repetition of two almost identical cola: “look on all who are proud and abase them” (v. 11b), “look on all who are proud and bring them low” (v. 12a). This repetition emphasises the main challenge for Job to execute the divine task by punishing the haughty and the wicked, which would demonstrate to YHWH that Job is capable of executing judgment over the world and that his retributive theory is workable.

The last sentence of the proem represents the climax of YHWH’s irony: “I myself will praise you that your right hand can give you victory” (v. 14). In this concluding line, the poet uses the term, יָמִין (“right hand”), a synonym with זְרוּעַ (cf. 40:9), thus marking an *inclusio* for this poetic strophe. Noteworthy, however, is the combination of this term with the verb יָשַׁע (“to save”). In various passages in the Hebrew Bible, especially in poetic texts, the combination of יָמִין with the root יָשַׁע is often employed to describe YHWH as the glorious saviour who performs marvellous things such as rescuing his people and bestowing salvation on the house of Israel (cf. Ps 17:7; 18:35; 20:6; 118:15; 138:7). Alonso Schökel – Sicre Díaz read the final phrase of Job 40:14, תּוֹשַׁע לְךָ יְמִינְךָ, as an adapted quotation of Ps 98:1b, הַשִּׁיעָה לּוֹ יְמִינוֹ, “His right hand gave him victory”.⁹⁶ The latter belongs to a royal Psalm that praises God as the Judge of the world and celebrates God’s victory that reaches to all the ends of the earth. In Job 40:14b, it is YHWH who ironically promises to praise Job. The verb used for praising here, הָלַל, signifies the confession of praise or thanksgiving.⁹⁷ It is a technical term for worship that glorifies divine rule.⁹⁸ It is extremely ironic that YHWH challenges Job to play the role of a powerful saviour whom YHWH would praise. By giving Job the impossible challenge to be like God, YHWH reveals the impossibility of Job’s expectations of governing or changing the world according to his retributive theory. The challenge may also be read as a stimulating invitation for Job to imagine all things from the standpoint of

⁹⁶ Cf. ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 649.

⁹⁷ Cf. G. MAYER, “יָדָה”, *TDOT* 5, 431; BDB 392.

⁹⁸ Cf. PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 220.

YHWH in order to understand YHWH's governance and transcend his limited perspective of retribution.

In brief, by means of these rhetorical questions and ironic challenges, YHWH makes it clear to Job that the world designed by YHWH, does not run only according to the rigid laws of the ethics of retribution. The existence of evildoers is an undeniable fact in such a world.⁹⁹ Immediate punishments and the total eradication of evildoers may exist in Job's desire, but not in YHWH's design. Just as the first speech of YHWH describing the beauty and the wildness of the cosmos makes room for chaos to endure in creation, the second speech reveals that YHWH allows moral chaos and evil to remain. YHWH challenges Job to open himself to the aesthetic values of what are conventionally considered symbols of chaos and evil. Job is asked to consider the mysterious power of chaos and evil, both in creation and in his own experience, through descriptions of the two liminal creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan, whose aesthetic qualities are meant to assist Job's transformation. Just as the second test of the Adversary brought Job to the edge of death, so now the second speech of YHWH confronts him with the limitations of the human experience of existence.

2.3.2 The Beauty of Behemoth (40:15-24)

Having led Job to contemplate the world of creation, YHWH now engages him in a contemplation focused on the visible attributes of Behemoth.¹⁰⁰ The

⁹⁹ Some critics understand this as a concession that reflects a divine failure, that God "cannot dispose of the wicked and of evil, at least no more than Job can". Cf. A. BRENNER, "God's Answer to Job", 133. However, it is important to recognise that at no point in the text is there claim that God cannot eliminate evildoers from the earth. During the progression of God's speeches, it becomes clear that the elimination of evil from creation does not belong to God's design, nor does such elimination of evil represent the divine way of governing the world.

¹⁰⁰ The term *בהמות*, as a noun for a proper name, appears nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, there have been various discussions concerning the identity of this animal. Commonly, it had been believed that the Joban poet is modelling Behemoth after the Egyptian water ox, the Nile-horse, or the hippopotamus. Cf. DHORME, *Job*, 565; CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 183–1190; M.V. FOX, "Behemoth and Leviathan", *Biblica* 93 (2012) 261–267. Some others think of the elephant, the water buffalo, or the wild ox. Cf. B. COUROYER, "Qui est Béhémoth: Job 40,15-24?", *RB* 82 (1975) 418–443. However, it is apparent that both Behemoth and Leviathan are depicted here not merely as normal animals. Rather, they are liminal creatures, namely, monsters that mark the edge of human imagination of creation, "betwixt and between the categories of ordinary and mythic beings". NEWSOM, *Job*, 615. As

name of this creature derives from the noun *בהמה*, “animal” or “cattle”. Thus, *בהמות* represents an intensive plural which indicates “the beast” *par excellence*, or “the great beast”.¹⁰¹ The description of Behemoth is considerably different from those of preceding creatures, with the exception of the ostrich, in that YHWH does not challenge Job with any rhetorical questions. YHWH does not use Behemoth to emphasise Job’s ignorance or incompetence concerning YHWH’s creation but to suggest the correspondence between Job and an extraordinary creature like Behemoth. The greatness of this creature is vividly expressed in ten poetic verses that can be equally divided into two strophes of five verses each.

The first strophe (vv. 15-19) is enclosed by the emphasis on the creatureliness of Behemoth, a living being designed by YHWH, as was Job: “Behold Behemoth, which I made along with you” (v. 15a).¹⁰² The phrase *אשר-עשיתי* (“which I made”) not only highlights Behemoth’s creatureliness but also suggests Behemoth’s subjugation to YHWH. He is not a chaotic adversary of YHWH that must be defeated in the act of creation but a creature that God sustains in being. The preposition *עִמָּךְ* also has a special significance. In its literary context, this word can simply be translated as “with you”, “along with you”¹⁰³, or can be understood in a comparative sense, as “like you”, “equally with you”.¹⁰⁴ YHWH’s first sentence about Behemoth affirms that indeed Behemoth is YHWH’s handiwork no less than Job is.¹⁰⁵ This analogy serves also to remind Job of his creatureliness. Both Job and Behemoth alike are YHWH’s creatures. The comparison between himself and Behemoth prepares Job for the realisation that he too is a

monsters, they are most probably shaped by a combination of characteristic components from different kinds of creatures, existing more in the realm of the human imagination than in nature.

¹⁰¹ POPE, *Job*, 320; NEWSOM, *Job*, 618.

¹⁰² The phrase *אשר-עשיתי* does not appear in the LXX, and therefore is deleted by many scholars. Their omission, however, renders the rest of the whole sentence problematic, for it reads *הנה-נא בהמות עִמָּךְ* – “Behold Behemoth with you”. Cf. DUHM, *Hiob*, 196; FOHRER, *Hiob*, 521. Some try to ascribe to *עִמָּךְ* the meaning “before you” and thus read the whole sentence: “Behold Behemoth before you”. DHORME, *Job*, 564; GRAY, *Job*, 491. In fact, as well noted by Habel, the phrase *אשר-עשיתי* belongs to the key lines that frame the poetic unit describing Behemoth. To delete this line means to destroy not only the literary structure but also the theological focus of this entire literary unit. Cf. HABEL, *Job*, 558.

¹⁰³ Cf. GORDIS, *Job*, 468; HARTLEY, *Job*, 523.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 354; CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1149.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. GORDIS, *Job*, 476.

creature valued by YHWH. YHWH's description of Behemoth helps Job to understand YHWH's way of governing the world, which in turn will help Job to know himself and to accept his position in such a world. Behemoth functions as a didactic image for Job, a mirror through which Job may review his own existence of suffering and protest.¹⁰⁶

As a creature of YHWH, Behemoth is associated with other mortals. Although Behemoth is introduced as one land animal among others: "it eats grass like an ox" (40:15b),¹⁰⁷ this powerful and giant stands out from all other creatures. His beauty is in the exceptional physical characteristics of his members. YHWH's description of Behemoth's body is rich in detail with regard to the power (כח) and strength (און) of the loins (מתנים), the muscles (שרירי) of his belly (בטן) (v. 16), his erect tail or penis (זנב), and the sinews (גידי) of his tightly knitted thighs (פחד) (v. 17). The poet uses hyperbole, comparing his bones to "tubes of brass" (אפיקי נחושה) and his limbs to "bars of iron" (מטיל ברזל) (v. 18). His extraordinary strength and beautiful body set him apart from ordinary animals. Certain elements in this description of Behemoth are reminiscent of Job's consideration of the way YHWH created him from the belly (בטן) of his mother (40:16; cf. Job 3:10), knitting him together with bones and sinews (בעצמות וגידים) (v. 40:17-18; cf. Job 10:11), which strengthens the correspondence between Behemoth and Job, as both of them are special and mysterious creations of YHWH.¹⁰⁸ YHWH's appreciation for Behemoth is therefore very suggestive to Job of YHWH's appreciation for himself. YHWH does not take Behemoth as an adversary. YHWH does not do that with Job either.

The last verse of the strophe also affirms the creatureliness of Behemoth, but in such a way as to praise it above all of YHWH's other creatures (v. 19). Behemoth is defined to be "the first of YHWH's ways" (ראשית דרכי-אל). The term ראשית, "the first", denotes a temporal sense and attributes to Behemoth the prestige of primordial antiquity. This manner of definition places Behemoth at the very beginning of YHWH's creation (cf. Gen 1:1) and links

¹⁰⁶ Cf. J.G. GAMMIE, "Behemoth and Leviathan: On the Didactic and Theological Significance of Job 40:15–41:26", *Israelite Wisdom. Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien* (eds. J.G. GAMMIE – W.A. BRUEGGEMANN et al.) (Missoula 1978) 217-231, esp. 221-222.

¹⁰⁷ This detail is interesting if one agrees that grass is one of the familiar symbols of mortality (cf. Isa 40:6-8). Cf. GAMMIE, "Behemoth and Leviathan", 220.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. HABEL, *Job*, 566.

him with personified Wisdom, which is also described as “the first of his [God’s] way” (רֵאשִׁית דַּרְכּוֹ; cf. Prov 8:22). If Wisdom is conventionally taken as the first principle with which YHWH created the world, Behemoth is presented here as the first creature designed by YHWH. From this standpoint, the term רֵאשִׁית may also suggest a qualitative sense, as Newsom argues.¹⁰⁹ As the primordial beast, Behemoth enjoys outstanding prestige. No one except his Maker can approach him.¹¹⁰ From another perspective, Gammie suggests reading the phrase רֵאשִׁית דַּרְכֵּי־אֱלֹהִים in comparison to the expression קְצוֹת דַּרְכּוֹ, “the remotest of his way”, in Job 26:14a, which is found in Job’s praise of YHWH’s creative powers (Job 26:7-12) and in which the term קְצָה was employed to describe “the last” or “the remotest” of the heavenly works of YHWH. These works are all incomprehensible to human beings. In Job 40:15, the term employed for Behemoth is רֵאשִׁית, intended as the opposite of קְצָה. Thus, in contrast to the remotest of YHWH’s ways regarding YHWH’s glory and power, Behemoth is presented as one of the ways of YHWH which is closest to Job’s ability to understand.¹¹¹ This detail again fosters a close connection between Job and Behemoth. YHWH does not present Behemoth as another impossible challenge for Job, as YHWH previously did in the descriptions of other creatures, but rather a fellow creature that is like him. Behemoth represents a possible way of being a creature for Job to consider, to whom he can compare himself and from whom he may draw lessons for himself.

In the second strophe (vv. 20-24), Behemoth is presented as a peaceful creature enjoying a dignified life in its own dwelling. Despite its extraordinary strength, Behemoth does not appear dangerous or aggressive. All the other wild animals can enjoy their coexistence around Behemoth (v.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. NEWSOM, *A Contest*, 250.

¹¹⁰ The phrase הָעֵשׂוּ יָגֵשׁ חֶרְבּוֹ, “his Maker can bring near his sword”, is read by a number of authors as an allusion to the mythic battles between Behemoth and God such as are recounted in varied Egyptian and Babylonian myths (cf. for example: J.C.L. GIBSON, “On Evil in the Book of Job”, *Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of P.C. Craigie* (JSOTS 67; Sheffield 1988) 399-419; T.N.D. METTINGER, “God the Victor”, *The Voice from the Whirlwind*. Interpreting the Book of Job (eds. L.G. PERDUE – W.C. GILPIN) (Nashville 1992). In the book of Job, the description of Behemoth does not correspond to the mythic battle tradition. From the beginning of God’s creation of Behemoth, it has been very clear that Behemoth is merely a creature and is not considered as a hostile enemy that God needs to defeat in his governance of the world. Violence is not associated with Behemoth nor with the way in which God deals with this creature.

¹¹¹ Cf. GAMMIE, “Behemoth and Leviathan”, 221-222.

20). The dignity of Behemoth however is clearly delineated by the poet. This creature enjoys a leisurely and idyllic life in his marshlands, under the shadow of the lotus and the reeds, among the willows of the wadi (v. 21-22). In such a pleasant abode, no disturbance of the surroundings could threaten Behemoth, not even the overflowing turbulence of the river (v. 23). The final sentence of YHWH's description is significant in pointing out the absurdity of the human attempt to hunt Behemoth. As often noted by scholars, Behemoth is an embodiment of chaos and hostile power in ancient literature.¹¹² The hunt of this animal is also described by different authors.¹¹³ YHWH's description of Behemoth, however, is very different from what was attested in popular lore. In this text Behemoth is not a symbol of hostile power nor is it wise for humans to hunt it.

It is noteworthy that the only imperative verb form of the whole description is found at the very beginning of the first strophe: הִנֵּה-נָא, "Behold!" (v. 15). What Job is invited to do, accordingly, is to envisage and contemplate what YHWH presents to him. From the traditional perspective, Behemoth was understood as an embodiment of chaos. From YHWH's perspective, however, this animal appears neither as a threat to creation nor as an opponent to be defeated. Behemoth appears as a creature of whom YHWH is proud, a symbol of beauty manifested through physical strength, charming characteristics, and lofty dignity. Though sharing with Job the same creatureliness, Behemoth lives a comfortable life with all that constitutes his existence in his own realm. The poetic description of Behemoth is part of the divine pedagogical approach to Job, providing, as noted by Balentine, "a model for what it means to be a creature worthy of the creator's pride and praise".¹¹⁴ By inviting Job to contemplate the beauty of what was conventionally regarded as chaos, the poetic description of Behemoth thus invokes Job's aesthetic perception and aims to transform Job's perspective.

¹¹² Cf. E. RUPRECHT, "Das Nilpferd im Hiobbuch", *VT* 21 (1971) 209-231; POPE, *Job*, 320-322; FOX, "Behemoth and Leviathan", 262.

¹¹³ Cf. for example T. SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH, *On Egyptian Representations of Hippopotamus Hunting as a Religious Motive* (Stockholm 1953) 11-14; PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 224-225; esp. O. KEEL, *Dieu répond à Job. Une interprétation de Job 38-41 à la lumière de l'iconographie du Proche-Orient Ancien* (trans. F. SMYTH) (Paris 1993) 106-116.

¹¹⁴ BALENTINE, *Job*, 686.

2.3.3 The Beauty of Leviathan (40:25–41:26)

YHWH's second speech suddenly shifts from Behemoth to Leviathan.¹¹⁵ The name "Leviathan" or "Lotan" is well-attested in Ugaritic mythology as the monster defeated by Baal and the goddess Anat.¹¹⁶ Leviathan also appears in various biblical texts as a mythical monster associated with the sea and primordial chaos. YHWH defeats Leviathan in the establishment of creation: "You broke the heads of the dragons in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan" (Ps 74:13-14; cf. Isa 27:1). The portrait of Leviathan in Job 40:25–41:26,¹¹⁷ however, does not rely on any one tradition. Instead, as argued by various scholars, it is the poet's recreation of various mythic traditions that serves as a didactic image for Job.¹¹⁸ YHWH's praise for Leviathan in the concluding verses of this speech is reminiscent of how Job was praised in the beginning of the book. The narrator opens the prologue by presenting Job as "the greatest person in all sons of the East" (הַאִישׁ הַהוּא גָדוֹל מִכָּל־בְּנֵי־קֶדֶם, Job 1:3). Similarly, YHWH concludes the poetic speeches by presenting Leviathan as "king over all sons of pride" (הוּא מֶלֶךְ עַל־כָּל־בְּנֵי־שָׁהֶץ, Job 41:26b). Moreover, just as YHWH honours Job with superlatives at the beginning of the story – "no one is like him on earth" (אֵין כְּמֹהוּ בָאָרֶץ),

¹¹⁵ As in the case of Behemoth, the precise identity of Leviathan is also the subject of inconclusive disagreement. Some scholars associate Leviathan with the crocodile, the inhabitant of the Egyptian Nile (cf. NEWSOM, *Job*, 619; CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1190-1191). Others think of the dolphin, cf. D.B. EERDMANS, *Studies in Job* (Leiden 1939) 27–30, or the whale, cf. G.R. DRIVER, "Mythical Monsters in the Old Testament", *Studi Orientalistici in Onore di Giorgio Levi della Vida* (Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto per l'Oriente 52; Roma 1956) 234-238. For more discussion, see for example M.-J. PAUL, "Behemoth and Leviathan in the Book of Job", *JC* 24 (2010) 94-100; FOX, "Behemoth and Leviathan", 261-267; E. ORTLUND, "The Identity of Leviathan and the Meaning of the Book of Job", *TJ* 34 (2013) 17-30. However, a fixed identification of this creature with any ordinary animal is unwarranted. It is true that the poet begins the descriptions of Leviathan with a number of the naturalistic features of an earthly animal (cf. 40:25–41:4), and yet various mythological features and the language of fable are then employed, which turn this animal into a mythical and liminal creature.

¹¹⁶ Cf. M. COOGAN, *Stories from Ancient Canaan* (Philadelphia 1978) 92, 106; POPE, *Job*, 329-331.

¹¹⁷ In most English versions, from Wycliffe Bible, King James Bible to modern versions such as ASV, ESV, NASB, NASV, NERV, NIV, NKJV, RSV, chapter 40 of the Book of Job ends with verse 24. Thus, the entire Leviathan section belongs to chapter 41. Whereas the MT of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia extends chapter 40 until verse 32. My work follows the Hebrew versification of the text as attested in the BHS.

¹¹⁸ Cf. HABEL, *Job*, 561; GAMMIE, "Behemoth and Leviathan", 224-225.

Job 1:8; 2:3) – so YHWH asserts of Leviathan that “no one on earth is his equal” (אֵין-עַל-עֵפֶר מִשְׁלֹל, Job 41:25a). This signals a correspondence between Job and Leviathan to which the poet wishes to draw the reader’s attention. Through YHWH’s description of Leviathan, the mythic adversary of God is turned into a creature of which God is proud and in whom he takes delight. The correspondence between Job and Leviathan, therefore, is very suggestive of the transformation that YHWH intends to achieve in Job.

The depiction of Leviathan is the most extensive part of the whole speech. As Newsom remarks, this section represents “both the climax and the epitome of what God has to say to Job”.¹¹⁹ A sharp difference between the description of Leviathan and that of Behemoth is the use of rhetorical questions. While the description of Behemoth uses only declarative sentences, the description of Leviathan is conveyed by a continuous series of rhetorical questions.¹²⁰ Thus, YHWH leads Job back to the familiar theme of the human inability to take control over YHWH’s imposing creatures.

The hunting motif that closes the description of Behemoth (40:24) is employed to open the first strophe of the description of Leviathan (40:25-32).¹²¹ At the beginning of the strophe, YHWH ironically questions Job’s capacity to subjugate Leviathan by means of traditional fishing gear, such as hook and cord, rope and gaff (vv. 25-26). This hunting motif reappears at the end of the strophe (vv. 30-31). YHWH challenges Job to imagine the two bizarre scenes: if Job himself would hunt Leviathan with harpoons and spears, Leviathan would become an object for traders bargaining in the market. The force of these challenges has the effect of showing Job the opposite, that is, dominion over this creature is merely an illusion for human beings.

From this point on, YHWH engages Job in a series of ironic challenges by using two other striking images to describe Job’s relationship with Leviathan. The first is that of “covenant”. YHWH questions Job about the possibility of Leviathan entering into a dependent relationship with Job, turning itself into his lifelong servant: “Will it make a covenant with you to

¹¹⁹ NEWSOM, *A Contest*, 250.

¹²⁰ In God’s description, the interrogative particle *וְ* appears five times at the end of Job 40 (Job 40:26-29, 31), and the interrogative pronoun *מִי* recurs five times at the beginning of Job 41 (Job 41:2b-3a, 5-6a).

¹²¹ For the hunting of Leviathan, identified as the crocodile, see KEEL, *Dieu répond à Job*, 117-129.

be taken as your servant forever?” (v. 28). The employment of the two terms “covenant” (ברית) and “servant” (עבד) is striking. Pope connects this description with the type of covenant made between those who are conquered and the conqueror or between a vassal and a sovereign.¹²² Instead, Perdue sees here an allusion to the covenant mentioned in Gen 9:1-17, in which human power is established over the animals.¹²³ In any event, the idea that Leviathan might become a perpetual servant of Job through a covenant is an ironic supposition that effectually highlights the absurdity of humans seeking dominion over YHWH’s most remarkable creatures.

The second striking image at this juncture is YHWH’s comparison of Leviathan to a playful animal. YHWH asks whether Job could turn Leviathan into a family pet, like a tiny bird, to play with (שחק, v. 29). The answer to this question must be a resounding “no”. Job cannot bring Leviathan into the human world, neither as a subjugated nor as a domesticated animal. The force of the rhetorical questions in YHWH’s challenge suggests that while Job cannot do what YHWH challenges him to do, YHWH could do so.¹²⁴ Job cannot play with Leviathan, but YHWH can; the image of YHWH playing with Leviathan in the ocean is attested in Ps 104:26: “There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to play with (שחק)”. The monster that arouses terror in human beings thus appears as a playful pet for YHWH. YHWH’s question does not merely underscore Job’s inability to control of Leviathan but invites Job to acknowledge YHWH’s complete sovereignty over even the most imposing creatures.

The second strophe (40:32–41:3) employs the motif of combat (מלחמה) to assert the invincibility of Leviathan. With an imperative verb, YHWH challenges Job to imagine himself touching Leviathan with his own hand (40:32). Such an experience would deprive Job of any illusion that he might defeat this creature. YHWH warns Job that any thought of subjugating Leviathan is in vain because humans are overwhelmed at the sight of this creature, and no one has the courage to stir it up (41:1-2a). This last detail in YHWH’s warning is reminiscent of Job’s initial lamentation about being

¹²² Cf. POPE, *Job*, 333.

¹²³ Cf. PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 229.

¹²⁴ Cf. C.L. PATTON, “The Beauty of the Beast: Leviathan and Behemoth in Light of Catholic Theology”, *The Whirlwind. Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse* (eds. S.L. COOK – C.L. PATTON – J.W. WATTS) (JSOTS 336; Sheffield 2001) 142-167, here 157.

born in a hopeless condition. Job ran out of ways to express his frustration and called for help from those “who are skilled to stir up Leviathan” (העֲתִידִים עָרַר לוֹיִתָּן) to join him in cursing the creation (Job 3:8).¹²⁵ In his praise of the indomitability of Leviathan, YHWH reveals to Job that no humans can confront this creature. YHWH essentially uses this image to engage in a direct argument with Job: if no one among mortals can face up such a creature as Leviathan, no one can challenge God, the Creator of everything under the heavens: “Who can stand before me? Who can confront me that I would repay?” (vv. 2b-3a).¹²⁶ As Perdue indicates, the phrase “to stand before someone” means “to confront someone with hostile intent” in various biblical texts (cf. Josh 1:5; 2 Sam 23:12; Ps 2:2; 94:16).¹²⁷ YHWH’s words here provide a definite response to one of Job’s most stubborn demands. During his speeches, Job has required a face-to-face confrontation with God so that he can directly argue his case and prove his innocence (cf. 23:3-7, 15). Job strongly lamented the hiddenness of God and accused God of treating him as an enemy (cf. 13:24; 19:6-22). In doing so, Job chose to deal with God as an opponent. Now, by force of rhetorical questions, YHWH shows Job’s the absurdity of his approach. If Job dares not consider Leviathan, a creature of God, as a rival, then how could he do so with God? No liminal creature like Leviathan nor Job can stand against YHWH, the Lord of all the universe. Job’s antagonistic attitude toward God is in vain and his determination to bring charges against God is hopeless. YHWH leads Job to the affirmation of divine dominion over all creatures and divine independence within creation.

This affirmation is further emphasised at the end of the strophe when YHWH explicitly claims ownership of Leviathan: “Under the entire heaven,

¹²⁵ Ancient belief often regarded Leviathan as the embodiment of destructive forces that resist God’s rule and tend to turn beauty to dust and order to confusion. The ability to stir up Leviathan, therefore, was attributed only to exceptional and competent wizards. Cf. HARTLEY, *Job*, 94.

¹²⁶ Many commentators and translators feel uncomfortable with the first-person reference in God’s words, לִפְנֵי, as attested in the MT, “who is able to stand before me?” (41:2b). They choose the emendation to the third person reference לִפְנֵי, and thus read: “who is able to stand before him?”, shifting thus the emphasis of the two sentences (41:2b-3) from God’s pre-eminence to Leviathan’s insuperability. Cf. NVI, REB, TEV, NAB, GORDIS, *Job*, 483; DHORME, *Job*, 575; NEWSOM, *Job*, 623. However, the recurrence of the first-person reference in the following text (41:4) suggests that this amendment is not necessary. For the option of adhering to the MT, cf. HABEL, *Job*, 570-571; HARTLEY, *Job*, 531-532.

¹²⁷ Cf. PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 229.

it is mine" (41:3b). Fox calls this an "affectionate possessiveness" directed toward a creature that had mythological associations with chaos and evil.¹²⁸ As the Lord of the entire universe, YHWH is Lord over all forms of chaos and evil. Job is being asked to acknowledge YHWH's creative sovereignty even in these dimensions of creation. YHWH has a plan for all of creatures that is different from what Job had expected according to retributive theory. By declaring divine sovereignty over and possession of Leviathan, YHWH prepares Job for the laudatory description of this magnificent creature that concludes the poem. Readers may recognise that YHWH's praise of this force of nature encourages Job to break out of his narrow mindset and to invite him to behold other aspects of his human sufferings beyond the frame of retributive ethics.

Thus, the rest of YHWH's speech directly describes the aesthetic quality of Leviathan. The beauty of this monstrous creature is manifested in both his physical strength and prowess. At the beginning of the third strophe (vv. 4-9), YHWH declares not to keep silent about Leviathan.¹²⁹ It is unlikely this declaration should be understood in terms of winning or losing, as commented by Hartley: the one who ceases speaking concedes the point to his opponent and becomes the loser.¹³⁰ There is no evidence to support the idea that YHWH treats Leviathan as an adversary. The following verses reveal that indeed YHWH is taking delight in Leviathan. YHWH's refusal to be silent about Leviathan is best understood as a rhetorical introduction to the following descriptions of all that is admirable in the design of this creature. It also suggests to readers that YHWH is thoroughly taking delight in such a creature.

¹²⁸ Cf. FOX, "Behemoth and Leviathan", 266.

¹²⁹ The colon 41:4a appears in the MT as a declarative sentence: לֹא־אֶחְרִישׁ בְּדָיו, "I will not keep silence about its limbs". Some scholars change the last word בְּדָיו ("its limb"), to בָּד ("boasting"), and thus turn the entire colon into a rhetorical question: "Did I not silence its [Leviathan's] boasting?" Cf. POPE, *Job*, 335; HABEL, *Job*, 551, 555. However, this rendering is unwarranted. Firstly, there is no evidence from any tradition that speaks of God silencing Leviathan's boasting. Cf. J.C. GIBSON, "A New Look at Job 41.1-4 (English 41.9-12)", *Text as Pretext. Essays in Honour of Robert Davidson* (ed. R. CARROLL) (Sheffield 1992) 129-139, here 134; NEWSOM, *A Contest*, 251. Secondly, the term בְּדָיו, "his limbs", fits very well with the literary context in which God is describing the different parts of Leviathan's body. The emendation is therefore unnecessary.

¹³⁰ HARTLEY, *Job*, 532.

The third strophe goes into great detail about the beauty of the beast, beginning with his mighty power (גְּבוּרָה, v. 4). Perdue observes that it is shocking to attribute “mighty power” to Leviathan because this term conventionally is found in praise of God’s salvific deeds: “Praise him for his mighty acts. Praise him according to his excellent greatness” (Ps 150:2; cf. Deut 3:24; Ps 20:6; 106:2; 145:4, 12).¹³¹ By deliberately ascribing גְּבוּרָה to the creature, the poet reveals its majestic dignity. The teeth that ring Leviathan’s face (v. 6) are אֵימָה, a “terror”, a term often associated with the human response to the manifestation of God’s majesty: “Terror and dread fell upon them. By the might of your arm, they become as still as a stone” (Exod 15:16; cf. 23:27). Job also had described his feelings of terror when confronted by the overwhelming power of God (cf. Job 9:32-35; 13:21). The creature clearly participates in that quality of the creator. However, it is clear that Leviathan is beautiful from YHWH’s perspective. Two other terms are employed to convey the aesthetic value of Leviathan’s outward appearance: its frame is splendid (חֵיךְ, v. 4) and its scales are adorned with majestic beauty (גְּאוּרָה, v. 7). YHWH concentrates on the outer defences of Leviathan’s body which is well-armoured by layers of an unremovable outer garment and an impenetrable coat (v. 5). Its scales are sealed together so tightly that not even air can intrude (vv. 7-9). All these features portray Leviathan as an admirable and invincible warrior.

YHWH’s description then goes beyond the realm of a natural animal, employing particular poetic imagery to portray Leviathan with ominous characters. The fourth strophe (vv. 10-13) uses hyperbole to describe these in terms of light and fire. The heat inside this creature is so intense that it can sneeze flashing light, exhale burning smoke and boiling steam, emanate sparks of fire from its mouth and set coals ablaze. This is no ordinary creature. As many scholars point out, its fiery powers are part of a traditional mythology of liminal creatures.¹³² The phenomenon of fire emanating from a living being is frequently associated with the appearance of deities in the ancient Near Eastern literature. Marduk manifests his glory by causing fire to blaze forth from his mouth.¹³³ The messengers of the sea-god Yam appear in flames.¹³⁴ In some poetic texts of the Hebrew Bible, YHWH’s theophanic

¹³¹ Cf. PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 230.

¹³² Cf. for example POPE, *Job*, 341; HABEL, *Job*, 572.

¹³³ Cf. E.A. SPEISER, “The Creation Epic”, *ANET*, 62.

¹³⁴ Cf. H.L. GINSBERG, “Poems about Baal and Anath”, *ANET*, 130.

glory is manifested by fiery phenomena: “Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth. Glowing coals flamed forth from him” (2 Sam 22:9; cf. Ps 18:8; 29:7). YHWH’s description of light and fire emanating from Leviathan therefore invests this liminal creature with the splendour and beauty that conventionally belong to the deity. Leviathan is almost a divine being with terrifying beauty. At the same time, the beauty is attractive, for the poet compares Leviathan’s eyes to the eyelids of dawn (10b). Eyelids are a traditional symbol of attractive beauty (cf. Prov 6:25). Job had also mentioned the “eyelids of dawn” (עַפְעַפ־שַׁחַר) as a poetic description of a new day and new life when he asked for help from those who disturb Leviathan (3:8-9). In spite of its ominous features, Leviathan still appears in YHWH’s description as a dazzling beauty. These details reflect YHWH’s delight in this creature and spur Job to contemplate the aesthetic values of terrifying realities in the world of creation as well as in his life.

The fifth strophe (vv. 14-17) pictures Leviathan in motion as it rises up, showing the strength of its neck (v. 14a) and the close-fitting folds of its flesh (v. 15). If the poet highlighted the outer defence made of impenetrable skin and scales of Leviathan in the third strophe, the emphasis here is on Leviathans’ inner strength. The verb form יָצוּק (“to be firm, to be hard”) recurs three times to convey the hardness of the folds of Leviathan’s flesh (v. 15b) and to compare its heart to a rock and a millstone (v. 16ab). By emphasising the feature of hardness of its body the poet explains the invincibility of Leviathan. These features also help readers to understand the import of the two terms indicating terror and fear located at the beginning and the end of the strophe. At the beginning, the poet describes that terror (דָּאֵבָה) dances before Leviathan (v. 14b). This poetic image suggests the terrific convulsion which happens among those who witness its approach. At the end of the strophe, the poet identifies those who are terrified by Leviathan as “the gods”: “when it raises up, the gods are afraid” (יִגְוְרוּ אֱלֹהִים, v. 17).¹³⁵ The poet is drawing on polytheistic mythology of lower gods

¹³⁵ Some try to modify this term and render it with “chiefs” or “mighty men” instead of understanding the term אֱלֹהִים literally (Cf. CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1198; DHORME, *Job*, 584). However, it should be noted that the mythological motif of gods cowered in confrontation with another mighty deity is quite common in Near Eastern literature. See for example in the Gilgameš Epic: “The gods were frightened by the deluge. Shrinking back, they ascended to the heaven of Anu” (lines 113-114), cf. E.A. SPEISER, “Akkadian Myths and Epics”, *ANET*, 94; or in the Baal Epic: “Why have you lowered your heads on to your knees, and on to your

cowering in the presence of a superior deity: “Were not even gods thrown down at the sight of it?” (41:1).¹³⁶ The portrait of how Leviathan’s power causes fear among other transcendent beings shows the magnitude of YHWH’s pride in and admiration for this creature.¹³⁷

While the fifth strophe mentions the fear caused by Leviathan, the sixth strophe (vv. 18-21) declares that this creature is fearless. The strophe is stamped by the laughter of Leviathan in its confrontation with various weapons of war (v. 21). By mentioning laughing, רָחַץ, the poet links the description of Leviathan with other defiant creatures in the previous speech. Leviathan’s laughter at the end of the poem echoes the laughter of the wild ass in response to the turmoil of the city (39:7), the laughter of the ostrich at his pursuers (39:18), and the laughter of the warhorse confronted by menacing weapons (39:22). All these cases reflect the fearlessness and the heroic disregard of YHWH’s creatures in facing dangers and threats. Nonetheless, it is clear that the laughter of Leviathan is much more elevated in comparison with the other creatures’. It appears only at the end of a very extensive enumeration of weapons which Leviathan disregards: sword, spear, dart, javelin, arrow, slingstone and club, the iron and bronze of which these armaments might be made, and even the rattle of javelins (vv. 18-21). All these weapons are instruments of war that produce threats and terrors, suffering and destruction. Yet, in the eyes of Leviathan these threats are nothing but harmless straw and chaff (vv. 27, 29). In the midst of a human world filled with intimidation and chaos and suffering, the image of Leviathan emerges as a beautiful symbol of heroic attitude may mean a lot to Job, whose poetic speeches are so far characterised mostly by laments. He cried out to his friends and his God, not just because of his sufferings but rather because of his judgment that they were unjust. He has suffered from the chaos of the world to which he belongs. YHWH responds to his complaints by celebrating the laughter of wild creatures in a chaotic world. Their laughter suggests to Job an alternative way to deal with the reality of his own suffering. YHWH constantly invites Job to change his perspective and his attitude toward his own problem.

princely seats? I see, gods, that you are cowed at the harsh demands of the messengers of Yam” (Baal III*.B.22-24), cf. HABEL, *Job*, 573.

¹³⁶ Following POPE, *Job*, 335 in reading the word לֵאל as the noun לֵאל “god”, instead of the preposition לֵאל “unto”.

¹³⁷ Cf. NEWSOM, *A Contest*, 249.

The seventh strophe (22-24) depicts Leviathan in its natural environment of “the mire” (טִיט) (v. 22), “the deep” (מְצוּלָה) (v. 23), and “the sea” (יָם) (v. 23), and “the depth” (תְּהוֹם) (v. 24), terms that are evocative of primordial chaos. All of these chaotic elements are agitated by the playful motion of Leviathan. Like a threshing sledge it spread itself in the mire. The deep is boiled like a pot, and the sea agitated like a boiling cauldron of ointment. The shining wake that Leviathan leaves behind itself produces a calm image of a white-haired sage. Newsom notes that these images are arranged in a way which is “progressively less violent and increasingly beautiful”: if the threshing sledge can be linked to the image of violence (cf. Amos 1:3; Isa 41:15) and a boiling pot or cauldron of ointment can symbolise agitation, the shining wake evokes only serenity and beauty.¹³⁸ The last sentence reflects the poet’s subtle artistry when the picture captured is not that of Leviathan but only that of the wake left behind it as the creature recedes into the distance: “It leaves a shining wake behind it. It makes the deep appear like white hair” (v. 24). It is exceptional to employ the imagery of white hair (שֵׁיבָה), a traditional symbol of the wisdom of age (Lev 19:32; Prov 16:31; 20:29), to describe the transformation of the deep under the movement of Leviathan. Thanks to its formidable existence, Leviathan has the power to transform the appearance of the watery chaos of the deep sea into something that deserves honour.¹³⁹ This image of transformation invites Job to see things beyond suffering and to contemplate the aesthetic aspect of his living world.

The concluding strophe (vv. 25-26) reaffirms the creaturely status of Leviathan under God and its supremacy over the kingdom of creatures. Leviathan is called “the one which is made” (הַעֲשׂוּי, v. 25). All its extraordinary power and beauty comes from YHWH, not from itself. This creature’s place in YHWH’s plan is unique. No mortal creature can be its equal (v. 25). Just as Behemoth is praised as YHWH’s masterpiece (cf. 40:19), so too Leviathan is praised as king of all proud and haughty creatures (v. 26). This way of praising Leviathan is remarkable, for it makes significant connections between this creature and Job that serve to illustrate two didactic purposes YHWH has for Job.

The first purpose is to reassert that chaos and evil do exist in the created world. YHWH’s praising of Leviathan is reminiscent of YHWH’s reiterating

¹³⁸ Cf. NEWSOM, *Job*, 624.

¹³⁹ Cf. BALENTINE, *Job*, 690.

of the challenge to Job at the beginning of the second speech. In defence of his own divine governance, YHWH challenged Job to “look on all who are proud (רָאֵה כָּל־גֹּעֵה) and bring them down (הַכְנִיָּאֵהוּ/וְהַשְׁפִּילֵהוּ)” (40:11b, 12a). Now YHWH presents to Job a creature who looks on all that are haughty (אַתָּה יִרְאֶה כָּל־גֹּבִהַּ, 41:26a) with no intention of bringing them down. Leviathan enjoys the dignity of its kingship “over all the sons of pride” (עַל־כָּל־בְּנֵי־עֲשָׂוָן; v. 26b). If “sons of pride” can be understood as an emblem of the wicked who oppose the divine rule, as Perdue rendered it,¹⁴⁰ it is obvious that Leviathan is exercising its kingship without the necessity of destroying the wicked or driving them out of its kingdom. In this manner, Leviathan becomes a model for Job to follow. Chaos and evil do exist as a vital part of YHWH’s design of the world. In consonance with YHWH’s governance, life is sustained and order is guaranteed not by abolishing chaos and evil but by restraining them.

The second purpose is to hint at YHWH’s appreciation for Job. As noted by Gammie, the motif of Leviathan as king (מֶלֶךְ) recalls the various moments in which Job described himself with regal images: “I lived as a king (מֶלֶךְ) in the army” (29:25).¹⁴¹ He associated his fate with that of kings and princes (3:14). He imagined that he would approach God like a prince (31:37).¹⁴² Picturing Leviathan as king serves as a mirror in which Job can see himself and reflect upon himself under the gaze of YHWH. It is of great significance for Job that despite all the features of its unsettling beauty, Leviathan is a creature worthy of YHWH’s pride and appreciation. Job is also a creature who delights his Creator in spite of the various rebellious protests that make him seem chaotic. This also means that Job’s lamentations and protests are not actually without merit in YHWH’s eyes.¹⁴³ YHWH’s appreciation of Leviathan parallels YHWH’s appreciation for Job, both for

¹⁴⁰ Cf. PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 231.

¹⁴¹ Cf. GAMMIE, “Behemoth and Leviathan”, 225.

¹⁴² This self-appraisal by Job is consistent with God’s praise for him at the beginning of the story as “the greatest of all the people from the east”, so much so that there was “no one like him on the earth” (cf. 1:3, 8; 2:3).

¹⁴³ Cf. GAMMIE, “Behemoth and Leviathan”, 225.

his tremendous suffering as well as for his various rebellious protestations.¹⁴⁴

From an overview, it is noteworthy that the image of Leviathan is used as an inclusion in the poetic corpus (Job 3–41). It appears in Job's initial soliloquy (3:8) in the context of his cursing his own existence and expressing his desperate desire to bring darkness where there is light and chaos where there is order. Eventually, this monstrous creature becomes the subject of YHWH's hymn of praise. From being a conventional object of terror, Leviathan is recognised as a specimen of beauty.¹⁴⁵ Every detail in its description is aesthetically delineated and serves to enhance its royal stature. Credited not only with power and authority but also with splendour and beauty, Leviathan should gain Job's awe-filled respect and arouse his empathy. By praising Leviathan, YHWH invites Job to take part in the perception of YHWH and to marvel at the beauty of awful realities. With these images, YHWH offers Job the chance, as Balentine notes, "to understand what creaturely royalty looks like" from the perspective of YHWH.¹⁴⁶

2.3.4 Summary and Assessment

Having YHWH praise Behemoth and Leviathan in response to Job's search for justice is a ground-breaking approach. Despite all the chaotic features conventionally ascribed to these two creatures, YHWH's descriptions in no way picture them antagonistically or derogatively. On the contrary, they serve to highlight YHWH's appreciation for creation and YHWH's special way of governing the world. In the second speech, YHWH is not modelled after the typical oriental image of "the Lord of the animals", in the sense of a heroic figure who fights against wild animals to conquer and dominate them.¹⁴⁷ Instead, YHWH appears as creator with an

¹⁴⁴ This appreciation will become explicit in God's final verdict when God reproaches Eliphaz: "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:8).

¹⁴⁵ Cf. BROWN, "Ask the Animals", 372.

¹⁴⁶ BALENTINE, *Job*, 691.

¹⁴⁷ The motif "the lord of the animals" is discussed in detail by O. Keel. His various representations effectively bring to the fore the mythological background of God's speeches. However, the same author also points out a radical difference between the image of a god modeled by the motif "the lord of the animals" and the portrait of God in Job 38–41. According to Keel, "The lord of the animals" is a widespread model among the warriors of

unconcealed admiration especially for the most anarchistic creatures. The high point of YHWH's speech is neither the frightful power of Behemoth and Leviathan nor the danger they present to human beings, but rather YHWH's own delight in them.¹⁴⁸ In YHWH's eyes, both Behemoth and Leviathan are beautiful in their unsettling ways. As their Creator, YHWH rejoices in the strength and dignity of these creatures and challenges Job to look beyond his human predicament and gaze on an immeasurable world of power and beauty, including awesome forces in tension with each other.¹⁴⁹ It is not tenable to think that Behemoth and Leviathan, as they appear in YHWH's speech, represent chaos and evil that YHWH must defeat so as to maintain the order of creation.¹⁵⁰ Both are presented as positive models for Job. They are pedagogical devices employed to instruct the suffering protagonist.

YHWH's appreciation for Behemoth and Leviathan transforms the conventional imagery of chaos and evil into essential parts of YHWH's design. The purpose of these images, therefore, is not to frighten Job or to humiliate him in such a way as to induce him into submission. As Adele Berlin argues, they are meant to raise Job up to a new level of reality, to adopt "a God's-eye view of the universe, where all things [...] have their own place".¹⁵¹ As a microcosm within a much wider created realm, Job's life amidst adversity and suffering is part of the pattern of chaos within YHWH's creation. His sufferings are not to be considered an unpredictable accident in YHWH's sovereign design.¹⁵² In such a world wherein human concepts of morality are not definitive, human suffering can be considered neither the cause nor the consequence of human moral failings. The perception of suffering as part of his contingent humanity will be the dawn

the Neo-Assyrian Empire. It represents a lord who annihilates evil and defends himself savagely against the rebellious world. In contrast, Job 38–41 depicts a very different image of God, who governs the world with generous tolerance and who controls the world without annihilating his opponents. Cf. O. KEEL, *Dieu répond à Job*, 129; cf. also H. UTZSCHNEIDER, "The Book of Job", 95–99.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. FOX, "Behemoth and Leviathan", 267.

¹⁴⁹ ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 137.

¹⁵⁰ Contra M.-J. PAUL, "Behemoth and Leviathan", 100: "They symbolise the power of evil, connected with Satan, who is mentioned in the first chapters of the book".

¹⁵¹ A. BERLIN, "What is the Book of Job about?", 117.

¹⁵² Cf. A. PRIDEAUX, "The Yahweh Speeches in the Book of Job: Sublime Irrelevance or Right to the Point?", *RTR* 69 (2010) 75–87, here 85.

of liberation and consolation for Job. It utterly breaks the chain of the presuppositions of the ethics of retribution.

3. Conclusion

This chapter has offered a close reading of the two speeches of YHWH, examining various aesthetic aspects in them. Far from being an irrelevant response to Job's questions and laments, YHWH's aesthetic description of the cosmos represents a radical challenge to Job's ethical perspective. The wisdom of divine pedagogy aims to draw Job from an ethical to an aesthetic perspective. YHWH's speeches are designed to transform Job's mind and expand his horizon rather than simply answering his questions. This purpose is addressed through two strategic movements: first, Job is disorientated within the moral worldview to which he has clung obsessively; at the same time, he is reoriented towards the new horizons of a reinvigorated worldview.

3.1 From Ethical Disorientation to Aesthetic Reorientation

The disorienting quality of YHWH's speeches is achieved through several tactics that aim to detach Job from his limited moral perspective. The form and language of disputations are employed to challenge Job directly. Not only does YHWH leave Job's various questions unanswered, but YHWH raises even more questions about Job's ability and understanding. Through a series of questions YHWH lays bare the inadequacies of Job's understanding. These same questions reverse his conventional perceptions of the world and its order. YHWH overwhelms Job by manifesting the vast and mysterious variety of the cosmos and interrogating him about his own position in such a cosmos. YHWH amazes Job with the dignity of the wild creatures, even shocking him by honouring the majesty of the established symbols of chaos and evil.

YHWH deliberately twists Job's perspective. Job's main concern was the malfunction of constructive retribution in his own case. He laments the fact that a righteous man like himself can suffer so much evil. YHWH's speeches question Job's own power to make things right through destructive retribution, casting down the proud and crushing the wicked.¹⁵³ YHWH's

¹⁵³ Cf. WOLFER, "The Second Speech of the Lord", 477.

questions to Job unseat Job's questions to God from an aesthetical perspective. Step by step, YHWH exposes the inappropriateness of Job's judging everything through a narrow moral lens in a world filled with complexity, variety, and beauty. Indirectly but firmly, YHWH conveys the message that challenges his rebellious intention. In the divine speeches YHWH carries out a cross-examination to humble not just Job's reasoning but Job himself. YHWH reveals Job's estrangement from the world in which human beings lack dominion. Job is encouraged to see that he is only a limited human being who belongs to an infinite cosmos and who finds himself to be a stranger within it.¹⁵⁴

On the other hand, new perceptions of the physical and natural cosmos provide Job with the resources to broaden and reshape his worldview. Uprooted from the central position in creation, Job is also invited to set himself free from the anthropocentric pattern of his moral worldview and to be open to a new and unprecedented aesthetic perspective. YHWH's descriptions of creation serve double duty for Job by disorienting and reorienting his perspective and by deconstructing and restoring his character.¹⁵⁵ The reorientation for Job is undertaken together with the enlargement of his horizons. Instead of just focusing on his house and family, his fields and his relationships in town, his possessions and children, Job is led to reach out to the sphere of the entire creation. It is a vast world overflowing with wondrously strange phenomena. Everything and every living creature in such a world has its own intrinsic worth, regardless of its relationship to human culture and civilisation. The world of creation and creatures is exposed before Job's eyes as a strange and complex environment without any problems to be fixed or eliminated. Throughout the vivid descriptions of such a creation, YHWH implicitly but effectively makes the point by means of an implicit analogy: the complexity of the moral world is comparable to the complexity of creation. As Robert Gordis renders it: "just as there is order and harmony in the natural world, though imperfectly grasped by man, so there is order and meaning in the moral sphere, though often incomprehensible to man".¹⁵⁶ The cosmos which

¹⁵⁴ Cf. R.Y. HATHORN, *Tragedy, Myth and Mystery* (Bloomington 1962) 29; D. COX, "A Rational Inquiry into God in the Book of Job: Chapters 4–27 of the Book of Job", *Greg* 67 (1986) 621–658, here 653.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. BROWN, "Ask the Animals", 377.

¹⁵⁶ GORDIS, *The Book of God and Man*, 133.

YHWH presented to Job thus serves as an aesthetic metaphor prompting Job to reconsider his own problems. The wondrous beauty of creation becomes an effective way for YHWH to respond to Job's fundamental quest lying behind his various demands for justice, the quest for the meaningfulness of the life of a righteous sufferer as well as the quest to find the presence and the role of YHWH throughout all the vicissitudes of such an existence.

3.2 From Ethics of Law to Aesthetics of Life

When comparing the opening chapter of the poetic corpus (Job 3) and the final chapters of the divine speeches (Job 38–41), we encounter a radical contrast in the perception of creation. While the initial poem embodies a bitter assault on creation, the concluding chapters represent an effusive and delightful celebration of creation. At the beginning, through the perspective of the suffering protagonist, the darkness of death seems better than the light of life. At the end, through the perspective of YHWH, the various forms of life appear in all their beauty and vivacity, autonomy and dignity. The progress from the beginning to the end of this trajectory reflects the transformation that the book intends to promote. It is the journey Job takes from an ethics of law to an aesthetics of life.

In order to change Job's stance, YHWH seeks to teach him wisdom by learning how the Creator sees, hears, respects, and admires the strangest of creatures. Job is taught not only to appreciate YHWH's creation but also to be in sympathy with all living creatures. YHWH's answer to Job's questions based on retributive ethics is to encourage him to celebrate the aesthetics of life. If Job's ethics of law has led him to exclusivism, demanding that the wicked be abased and eliminated, YHWH's aesthetics of life invites Job to inclusivism, revealing that even chaos and evil are part of YHWH's mysterious design for creation. Because chaos and evil are part of life, no one can destroy chaos and evil without destroying life itself. Job's ethical outlook viewed the sufferings of the righteous as signs of the failure and absurdity of divine justice and governance, which prevented Job from wholeheartedly placing his trust in God. In response to Job's accusation of divine incompetence, YHWH instructs Job so that he might understand the aesthetic dimension of his worldly sufferings. YHWH's aesthetics implies that human suffering is part of human life, just as contingencies are part of the life of all creatures. YHWH remains always a solicitous supporter of creation and a loving caregiver for all creatures.

While YHWH's praise of creation and creatures humbles Job, it serves also to teach Job to grow in faith by providing him with an aesthetic reimagination of God. What Job has been experiencing is not only a contemplation of the beauty of creation, but also an experience of the beauty of the Creator. YHWH's speeches grant Job intimacy with the Creator, who reveals himself as a donor and benefactor and whose faithful care ensures the functioning of the entire universe. YHWH's gracious provision feeds all of his creatures and makes it possible for the remote and desolate lands to produce tender grass. YHWH's goodness allows his creatures to enjoy freedom. YHWH's moderate intervention keeps chaos in a creative tension within the entire creation.

Furthermore, the encounter with YHWH has the potential to provoke a profound transformation within Job, leading him to self-acceptance and self-reconciliation. If Job contemplates the world of creatures and sees how YHWH acknowledges even their strangest idiosyncrasies, he cannot help but reflect upon his own creatureliness and acknowledge all that constitutes his own existence. As a creature he is like even the wildest creatures, possessing his own inner strength and resilience, marked by both fragility and nobility, and capable of growing in wisdom. Job's sufferings, his deficient level of understanding them, and his defiant way of reacting to them are all part of his characteristics as a creature. So too is Job's unrelenting search for God in the midst of his suffering.¹⁵⁷

YHWH's brilliant and cheerful description of creation reveals that creation is not merely a mystery but also a beautiful miracle.¹⁵⁸ This description can fittingly apply to Job, the unparalleled creature of YHWH's pride. YHWH does not condemn Job for his laments and protestations. And if YHWH does not condemn Job, Job cannot consider himself condemned. By means of poetic descriptions, therefore, YHWH provides the suffering protagonist with alternative resources to transform his perspectives on the world, on God, and on his very existence. Now, not only YHWH but also we the readers are looking forward to Job's ultimate response.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. UTZSCHNEIDER, "The Book of Job", 99.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. GORDIS, *The Book of God and Man*, 133.

CHAPTER 5

CONFESSION AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFERER

Job has followed various intellectual trajectories with his friends, with himself, and with his God. After YHWH's final words to Job, it is now the critical and climatic moment for Job to manifest his ultimate stance. This takes place in the last poem of the book (42:2-6), which represents Job's earnest response to YHWH. A structural analysis will show that Job's response proceeds in two steps: a confession of ignorance (42:2-3) and a manifestation of Job's final stance (42:4-6). A careful reading of the first will supply a decisive interpretive orientation toward the second.¹

This chapter offers an interpretation of Job's last words in the book based on a close reading, which is essentially synchronic while taking into account some textual difficulties. The poem will be examined by a literary analysis, i.e., a flexible cooperation between rhetorical, syntactical, semantical, and intertextual analysis that permits readers to understand the literary construction of the text and to appreciate the different possibilities of meaning it offers. I will start with a basic description of the poem which provides a delimitation of its parts and its unity as well as a consideration of its overall structure. The chapter will then be divided into two main parts that deal with the two halves of the poem. Each part will be studied through (1) an analysis of the construction of the poetic strophe, (2) followed by a translation and some important textual notes, and then (3) the work of literary and theological interpretation. This study also pays special attention

¹ Many scholars agree that the interpretation of Job 42:1-6 is a crucial key for the understanding of the whole Book of Job. Their approaches to the interpretation of this poem, however, are very different. Many start from the end, understanding v. 6 both as an interpretive key and as a point of departure for the interpretation of the whole poem. Cf. KUYPER, "The Repentance of Job", 91-94; PATRICK, "Job 42:6", 369-371; W.S. MORROW, "Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance", 211-225. Others choose to start from the second strophe. Cf. G. FOHRER, "Nun aber hat mein Auge dich geschaut: der innere Aufbau des Buches Hiob", *TZ* 15 (1959) 1-21; K. SCHWARZWÄLLER, "Nun hat mein Auge dich gesehen", *Einfach von Gott reden: ein theologischer Diskurs* (eds. J. ROLOFF – H.G. ULRICH) (Stuttgart 1994) 190-225. In these approaches, the final stance of Job in the second strophe is examined beforehand, then, the content of the first strophe is interpreted accordingly. My approach is in opposition to these.

to the artistic and aesthetic character of the poem so that its poetic beauty may be appreciated.

1. Description of the Poem 42:1-6

1.1 Delimitation and Unity

42:1-6 starts in accordance with other opening formulas in the corpus of poetry, namely, with an introductory sentence (42:1). This sentence is a narrative chain containing two *wayyiqtol* forms ויַעַן and וַיֹּאמֶר. The form וַיֹּאמֶר marks the introduction of a direct speech by Job, who addresses himself to YHWH. This speech spans verse 2 until verse 6.

Important changes regarding the literary style occur in 42:7 moving from poetry to narrative, signalled by the appearance of another pair of *wayyiqtol* forms, וַיְהִי and וַיֹּאמֶר. While וַיְהִי marks the beginning of a new narrative chain, וַיֹּאמֶר brings in YHWH as the new speaker, who directly addresses Job's friends. 42:7 marks the end of the poetic sections of the book and a return to prose narrative. Consequently, Job 42:1-6 is considered an independent literary unit.

The unity of the poem is recognisable at different levels. The most visible evidence is the compact use of the conventional vocabulary of wisdom literature. The first part of the poem contains terms that originated from the root יָדַע (2a, 3a.b.c, 4b) and from the root בִּין (3b). Three words in the first part of the poem, מִזְמָה (2b), עֵצָה (3 b), and נִפְלְאוֹת (3c), share a similar semantic field and have an essential impact on the reversal of Job's attitude in the poem. Verses 4-5 are characterised by the presence of pairs of terms indicating sense perceptions: שָׁמַע (to hear) and רָאָה (to see), אָזֶן (ear) and עֵין (eye) (42:4-5). One typical phenomenon that emerges throughout the poem is the interactional configuration of the first and second person morphemes.² That thirteen morphemes indicate the first person and seven the second in

² Fokkelman shows that in 42:2-6 there are eight morphemes for God and twelve morphemes for Job, adding up to 20, equally divided in the A-cola and B-cola. Thus, there exist a "marvellous and whimsical configuration of the first and second person morphemes". FOKKELMAN, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible*. At the Interface of Hermeneutics and Structural Analysis (SSN 41; Assen 1998) 319.

such a short pericope is a characteristic that makes the poem unique and united.

1.2 The Poetic Structure of Job 42:2-6

Seeing that 42:1 presents a customary formula to identify the beginning of a direct speech, it stands apart from the poem that follows in 42:2-6. This short poem consists of one stanza. A visible sign for the division of the whole stanza is the fact that v. 3 has three cola.³ The stanza, therefore, can be plausibly divided into two strophes, the first comprising vv. 2-3 and the second vv. 4-6 (cf. Table 11). This division is confirmed by various literary elements.

The first line of the second strophe (v. 4) contains different elements that could be considered as transition markers, such as the sudden appearance of two imperatives, *שׁמַע* and *הוֹדִיעֵנִי*, the precative particle *נָא*, and the only occurrence in the whole stanza of the emphatic use of the first person singular pronoun *אֲנִי*.

The linear parallelism created by two similar adverbial terms, *לֵכֶן* (v. 3) and *עַל-כֵּן* (v. 6), which stand in the first place of the last line of each strophe signal that the two strophes conclude in a similar way, i.e., with an announcement by Job himself (B and B'). Before each announcement is a dialectical combination of a quotation of the words of YHWH and an acknowledgment by Job (A and A'). The components of the two combinations are arranged in an inverted order: the first strophe begins with Job's acknowledgement, then continues with Job's mention of YHWH's challenge (a'-a"); while the second strophe begins with Job's mention of YHWH's challenge, then continues with Job's acknowledgement (a"-a'). A

³ Indeed, the tricolon is a principal indicator for the division of stanza and strophe, as indicated by various scholars. For example, W.G.E. Watson noted: "Since the couplet is the norm, the presence of a tricolon most probably acts as a marker of some kind. In fact, it seems to function largely as a transition marker, to open and/or close units of verse". W.G.E. WATSON, "Hebrew Poetry", *Text in Context. Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study* (ed. A.D.H. MAYES) (Oxford 2000) 253-284, here 262. Cf. also S. MOWINCKEL, *Real and Apparent Tricola in Hebrew Psalm Poetry* (Oslo 1957) 482.

linear parallelism between the two strophes, therefore, is generally accepted.⁴

Table 11.
Linear parallelism of 42:2-6

Strophe I	Acknowledgment: Job's recognition	42:2	a'	A
	Quotation: YHWH's challenge	42:3a	a''	
	Announcement: Job's confession <i>Conjunction:</i> לכן	42:3bc	B	
Strophe II	Quotation: YHWH' challenge	42:4	a''	A'
	Acknowledgment: Job's experience	42:5	a'	
	Announcement: Job's reversal <i>Conjunction:</i> על-כן	42:6	B'	

This stanza, therefore, has two parallel strophes. Besides their thematic connections, they are linked together by a *concatenation*, shaped by two verb forms of the same root located at the end of the last line of the first strophe (עָדָה, v. 3c) and at the end of the first line of the second (הוֹדִיעֲנִי, v. 4b). As it contains these two strophes, the stanza is balanced in diverse ways. Each of its strophes has one embedded speech (v. 3a; v. 4), and each speech contains six words. The general structure of the poem also shows that the poetic stanza has a balance of 3+3 verses.

2. Job 42:2-3: Job's Confession of Ignorance

2.1 An Analysis of the Poetic Construction of the First Strophe

The first poetic strophe, 42:2-3, is marked by a clear *inclusio*, thanks to the root יָדַע that appears in the first (יָדַעְתִּי) and the last (לֹא־יָדַעְתִּי) position of the strophe. A close reading of its poetic syntax shows that it is a three-line strophe.⁵

⁴ Principally, the division in this table follows HABEL, *Job*, 578, for his recognising the indicative terms used to describe each component of the parallelism, as well as the division of components, but not for the general structure of the poem.

⁵ For this division, cf. P. VAN DER LUGT, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 407, and also FOKKELMAN, *Major Poems*, 318-319.

The strophe starts with a colon containing two verb forms: one in the second person singular according to *Ketib* (ידעת), or first person singular according to *Qere* (ידעתי), and one in the second person singular (תוכל). Then, the coordinating ו marks a transition from the first to the second colon, which contains one verb form of the third person singular in *Niphal* (יבצר). Verse 42:2, therefore, is a poetic line whose sum of words is eight, equally divided into two cola.

From there on, the speech progresses with a nominal clause introduced by the combination of the interrogative particle מי and the deixis in the third person singular זה. This combination, מי זה, brings in a new subject, indicated as an indefinite third person who has not yet been introduced. This means that there is a syntactic gap between verses 2b and 3a.⁶ This gap denotes that v. 3a is detached from the poetic line of v. 2.

In the second part of verse 3, all three verb forms return to the first person singular (אדע, אבין, הגדתי), introduced by the adverbial particle לכן. That compound word (כן+ל) shows that what follows connects with the preceding situation and that it is the same person who speaks.⁷ At the same time, nevertheless, that word is a good indication of a poetic line division, namely, v. 3a is to be separated from the rest of verse 3 and to be treated as a poetic line.

Thirdly, similarly to the first line of the strophe, the rest of verse 3 deserves identification as a poetic line whose eight words are equally divided into two cola. The two cola of this line end with the same syntactical structure: coordinating ו + negative adverb לא + a perceptive verb in *yiqtol* of the first person singular.

⁶ Here by “syntactic gap” I mean an interruption in the line of the discourse spoken by Job in the first person singular and addressed to God in the second person singular, as indicated by VAN WOLDE, “The Reversal of Job”, 229. The appearance of the third person singular indefinite in v. 3a is a sign confirming that this poetic line is a quotation embedded in the middle of Job’s speech.

⁷ According to B. JONGELING, the word לכן occurs almost always in a discourse and rarely in a narrative: “Une fois seulement *lākēn* figure dans le cadre de rédaction du narrateur biblique. Pour le reste *lākēn* se trouve toujours dans le discours direct et ce en divers contextes”. He concludes: “dans la grande majorité de endroits où *lākēn* figure c’est la même personne qui dépeint une situation et poursuit son discours par *lākēn*”. Cf. B. JONGELING, “*Lākēn* dans l’Ancien Testament”, *Remembering All the Way* (eds. B. ALBREKTSON – O. ROTEM) (OtSt 21; Leiden 1981) 190-200.

All in all, 42:2-3 is a three-line strophe consisting of two bicola, one in the first (v. 2) and one in the last line (v. 3bc), together with one monocolon in the middle (v. 3a).⁸ The two bicola have the same number of words in each line and colon. The particularity of the second line (v. 3a) is clear for many reasons: its location is at the central position in the strophe; it is the only monocolon, as well as the only interrogative sentence, not just of the strophe but of the whole stanza; it is the only sentence in which the first and second person singular morphemes are totally absent, as Fokkelman points out.⁹

2.2. Translation and Textual Notes

2.2.1 Translation

ויען איוב את־יהוה ויאמר	¹ And Job answered YHWH and said:
ידעתי כי־כל תוכל	² I know that you can do all things,
ולא־יבצר ממך מזמה	no plan of yours can be thwarted.
מי זה מעלים עצה בלי דעת	³ <i>Who is this that obscures counsel</i>
	<i>without knowledge?</i>
לכן הגדתי ולא אבין	Therefore, I have declared
	though I did not understand,
נפלאות ממני ולא אדע	things too wondrous for me
	and I did not know.

2.2.2 Textual Notes

v. 2

K: ידעת, Q: ידעתי. Kautzsch – Cowley show that the first person singular in the perfect form of ידע appears sometimes without the ך at the end, as seen in the K form. This ך is “probably to be regarded as the remains of an early orthography” and from which are “omitted vowel letters even at the end of the word”.¹⁰ In other words, the K preserves a defective spelling of the first

⁸ VAN DER LUGT, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 407, considers v. 3a to be a bicolon. He breaks v. 3a into two cola of 4+2 words. This division, however, is problematic. As Fokkelman contests, the last two words בלי דעת, without containing any predicate, can only be a complement of what precedes and can hardly form by themselves an independent colon. Cf. FOKKELMAN, *Major Poems*, 318.

⁹ Cf. FOKKELMAN, *Major Poems*, 318.

¹⁰ GKC §121.

person singular, as seen in 2 Kgs 8:20, Ps 16:2, 143:10, and Ezek 16:59.¹¹ The ordinary form of Q, therefore, is preferable.

מזמה: G seemingly reads מְאֻמָּה in its translation οὐθέν (“nothing”). Some early authors follow G and suggest an emendation of מזמה to מאומה.¹² Also, the Targum of Job from Qumran (11QtgJob), which reads חֲקַר וְחִכְמָה (strength and wisdom)¹³ instead of מְאֻמָּה, does not agree with the MT. Nevertheless, G’s οὐθέν cannot be cited in support, as Driver and Gray well argued, for, “having paraphrased מִן מִן לֹא יִבְצֹר by ἀδυνατεῖ δέ σοι, the translator necessarily also paraphrased מְאֻמָּה by οὐθέν”.¹⁴ Likewise, the attestation of the 11QTgJob is very limited because of its fragmentary character. Moreover, a similar syntax of this verse appears also in Gen 11:6, in which a combination of the construction לֹא יִבְצֹר and the root מִזֵּם is attested. The emendation, therefore, is not necessary.

v. 3

Different authors judge v. 3a to be a scribal repetition, because of its similarity to 38:2, which ought to be deleted.¹⁵ In this case, however, a small difference is much more significant than a major similarity. Indeed, the slight modification of the verb form, from מַחֲשִׁיךְ (38:2) to מַעֲלִים (42:3a), provides good evidence that v. 3a is neither a scribal repetition nor a scribal error.

במלין. On the one hand, the absence in 42:3a of the word במלין, which is present in 38:2, is problematic according to many authors. Some try to reinsert the word into the place where it is supposed to be missing.¹⁶ The translation of G, which makes use of the word ῥημάτων, seems to support this supposition. On the other hand, Dhorme explains this absence in terms

¹¹ All these cases are indicated by GORDIS, *Job*, 492.

¹² Cf. G. BEER, *Der Text des Buches Hiob* (Marburg 1897) 61; C.J. BALL, *The Book of Job* (Oxford 1922) 459; M. BUTTENWIESER, *Job*, 291.

¹³ Cf. M. SOKOLOFF, *The Targum to Job from Qumran Cave XI* (Bar-Ilan Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Culture; Ramat-Gan 1974) 100-101.

¹⁴ Cf. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 347.

¹⁵ The first colon is omitted in LXX S*, while the whole verse is replaced by verse 40:5 in the 11QtgJob. Cf. SOKOLOFF, *The Targum to Job from Qumran*, 100-101, 167. Among critics who omit this verse see for example DUHM, *Hiob*, 202; DHORME, *Job*, 589; E. KRAELING, *The Book of the Ways of God*, 161; MORLA, *Job*, 1457.

¹⁶ Cf. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 347; BEER, *Der Text*, 61.

of haplography, i.e., by accidental omission בַּמַּלִּין has fallen out before בְּלִי.¹⁷ My judgment, nonetheless, is to adhere to the MT. Not only is the modification of the verbal form to מַעֲלִים significant, but also the absence of בַּמַּלִּין. This will be discussed more in the exegesis.

2.3 A Literary and Theological Interpretation of Job 42:2-3

The introductory sentence that opens Job's last words, "Then Job answered YHWH and said", is structurally similar to that which preceded in the divine speeches (cf. 38:1; 40:1, 3, 6). In this manner, the poet reaffirms to readers that what Job is about to utter is no longer a monologue, but an essential part of a dialogue, a response. The newness of that structure consists of using the name YHWH as a direct object. It signals the importance not only of the speaker but also of his interlocutor, the One whom Job long sought. A close relationship between this final poem and the divine speeches is essential for understanding the poem itself.

Gerald Janzen has claimed that "direct speech in Job always has the character of disagreement".¹⁸ The last direct speech, 42:2-6 in general and 42:2-3 in particular, however, is of a very different character. Job's response in 42:2-3 is a sapiential confession that prepares the way for the declaration of a radical change in Job's final stance. It is a confessional statement, in which Job agrees with YHWH. As a wise sage, Job acknowledges YHWH's omnipotence, confesses his own ignorance, and then proclaims his appreciation of the otherness of YHWH and of YHWH's plan.

2.3.1 "You can do all things" (42:2): Acknowledgement of YHWH's Omnipotence

For many reasons, the very first word of the poem, יָדַעְתִּי ("I know"), is crucial. Firstly, the root יָדַע had a critical role in structuring the divine speeches. At the beginning of each speech, YHWH challenges Job to make YHWH know (וְהוֹדִיעֲנִי, 38:3; 40:7). During the two divine speeches, this root repeatedly recurred in forms of the imperative refrain הִגֵּד אִם-יָדַעְתָּ ("Declare, if you know!", cf. 38:4, 5, 18) and of direct interrogatives in the

¹⁷ DHORME, *Job*, 589.

¹⁸ The two exceptions are Job's brief internal self-address in 1:5 and his response to the first set of calamities in 1:21. Otherwise, the disagreement between Job and his interlocutors intensifies with each turn of the dialogue. Cf. J.G. JANZEN, *Job*, 248.

second person singular הִידַעַת (“Do you know?”, cf. 38:21, 33; 39:1-2). The strophe 42:2-3 is, therefore, an honest response in which Job responds to the series of rhetorical questions asked of him in the divine speeches. Secondly, as has been noted, the root ידַע consistently occurs in each of the first four couplets of the poem. The repetition “fittingly characterises the climactic speech of Job, following so many chapters of confused questions and conflicting opinions”, as Janzen remarked.¹⁹ The root also opens the first verse and closes the last verse of the strophe. In terms of literary convention, this inclusive repetition marks the specific issue of these verses, namely, “the depth of understanding of the protagonist”.²⁰ Finally, it is noteworthy that the verb form ידַעַת frequently conveys various forms of recognition in the Psalms, as indicated by Alonso Schökel – Sicre Díaz.²¹ In using ידַעַת, the Psalmist praises God: “My enemies will retreat on the day when I call. By this I know that God is for me” (Ps 56:9; cf. 41:11), a response with confidence: “I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness you have humbled me” (Ps 119:75; cf. 20:6; 140:12), or a confession of faith: “For I know that the Lord is great, our Lord is above all gods” (Ps 135:5). Thus, the word ידַעַת from Job’s mouth now signals the confessional character of Job’s response, paving the way for Job’s articulation of what he has learned from the teaching of the divine speeches.

At the outset of his confession, the confessor says: “I know”. What does he know? He knows that YHWH can do all things (42:2a). This confession is apparently surprising. On the one hand, YHWH never asked Job’s opinion about YHWH’s omnipotence but called Job’s capacity of understanding and powers of acting into question. If so, in the response after the divine speeches Job should express the recognition of his incapacity rather than talk about YHWH’s omnipotence. On the other hand, one may say that there is nothing novel about this confession, which goes “no further than what he had acknowledged all long”, as Clines stated.²² Why does Job reaffirm his belief in YHWH’s omnipotence, an “obvious truth which he never questioned”?²³ What does the first colon, beautifully formed with

¹⁹ Cf. JANZEN, *Job*, 253.

²⁰ Cf. T.F. DAILEY, “Wondrously far from Me: The Wisdom of Job 42:2-3”, *BZ* 36 (1992) 216-264, here 263.

²¹ ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 728.

²² CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1213.

²³ Cf. B. THOMASON, *God on Trial. The Book of Job on Human Suffering* (Nashville 1980) 82. The confession of God’s omnipotence is striking, moreover, since God’s exposition

alliteration in it (כִּי־כָל תּוֹכֵל) exactly mean? It is necessary to read the whole poetic line and to examine its structure closely. The verse is comprised of two cola, disposed in a chiastic parallelism (cf. Table 12).²⁴

Table 12.
Chiastic parallelism between 42:2a and 42:2b

Job 42:2a	תּוֹכֵל b	כָּל a	יָדַעְתִּי כִּי
Job 42:2b	מְזִמָּה a'	וְלֹא־יִבְצֹר מִמֶּךָּ b'	

What Job confesses is expressed in a relative clause, introduced by the conjunction כִּי. In this clause, the last word, מְזִמָּה, functions in chiastic parallel to the first, כָּל. These two terms are, therefore, complementary.

The substantive מְזִמָּה generally denotes a plan, a purpose, or a device. It appears 19 times in the Bible.²⁵ In the majority of cases, it has a negative connotation, indicating the evil thoughts or evil devices of the wicked: “In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor, let them be caught in the plans they have devised” (Ps 10:2; cf. 10:4; 21:11; Job 21:27). It also indicates a wicked act (Jer 11:15) or a punitive action of God (cf. Jer 23:20; 30:24).²⁶ However, the negative meaning derives not from the term itself but from the context.²⁷ The term can also be positive or neutral in its meaning, indicating discretion (Prov 1:4; 2:11) or the power of devising: “do not let these escape from your sight: keep sound wisdom and discretion (מְזִמָּה)” (Prov 3:21; cf. 5:2; 8:12).

in his speeches is not just a display of power. LACOCQUE argues reasonably: “If YHWH’s discourses were a mere demonstration of omnipotence, they would indeed vindicate the stance of Job’s friends who praised the arbitrary power of the Divine. Then, the book as a whole is self-defeating”. Cf. LACOCQUE, “Job or the Impotence of Religion and Philosophy”, 38.

²⁴ The parallelism is well rendered in English by VAN WOLDE, “The Reversal of Job”, 239, as follows:

<i>that you</i>	<i>can do</i>	<i>all things</i>
<i>that from you</i>	<i>can be thwarted</i>	<i>no purpose</i>

²⁵ Among them, the term occurs only twice in the book of Job, once in the plural (21:27) and once in the singular (42:2).

²⁶ Cf. BDB 273.

²⁷ “Die negative Bedeutung liegt nicht im Worte selbst, sondern ergibt sich aus dem Kontext. So kann das Wort auch eine ganz besondere positive Färbung erhalten, wenn es in der Weisheitsliteratur als eines der zahlreichen Synonyme für ‘Weisheit’ gebraucht wird”. S. STEINGRIMSSON, “זִמָּם”, *ThWAT* II, 599-603, here 601.

The similarity between the structure of Job 42:2b and that of the last phrase of Gen 11:6 (cf. Table 13) is very valuable for an adequate understanding of the term מְזֻמָּה.

Gen 11:6	לֹא־יִבְצֵר מֵהֶם כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת
Job 42:2b	וְלֹא־יִבְצֵר מִמֶּךָּ מִזְמָה

²⁸ Indeed, one result of this substitution is the grammatical problem of the discordance between the noun מִזְמָה and the verbal form יִבְצֹר of the new phrase. While the whole clause כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת is considered as masculine, the substituted noun מִזְמָה is feminine. Surely, in conjunction with מִזְמָה, the feminine form תִּבְצֹר would be more appropriate. In the whole Bible, however, the *Niphal* of בָּצַר appears exclusively in these two texts, both times in the masculine singular, introduced by לֹא. Therefore, the intertextual confrontation helps to point out that “the masculine form of the verb is carried over to Job 42:2 as a frozen form. This frozen, ungrammatical usage suggests that Gen 11:6 is both the ironic target and the source of Job’s rhetoric”. Cf. M. FISHBANE, “The Book of Job and Inner-Biblical Discourse”, *The Voice from the Whirlwind* (eds. L.G. PERDUE – W.C. GILPIN) (Nashville 1992) 91.

²⁹ Cf. PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 234-235.

the echo of God's ancient judgment of cultural pride is transformed into a humble confession".³⁰

In any event, the term מִזְמָה still has an ambiguous implication in the context of 42:2. By using the term מִזְמָה at this point, Job recognises that YHWH has a scheme in governing the world of creation, and this scheme "may turn out well or badly for people".³¹ The ambiguous character of the term מִזְמָה is evocative to readers, because it recalls the scheme planned by YHWH and the Adversary to test Job's integrity at the beginning of the narrative.³² This scheme is never revealed to Job as the proximate cause of his suffering. Although YHWH addressed Job directly and personally, none of Job's questions about his losses are answered in detail. Job remains ignorant of the wager between YHWH and the Adversary. He does accept that everything that happens on earth occurs within the framework of YHWH's wisdom and power. YHWH has his own agenda for the world, and YHWH can do all that is planned. Thus, at the very beginning of his words of confession, Job manifests himself as a sage illuminated by YHWH's words through his own acceptance and recognition of YHWH's wisdom and power.

Moreover, it is clear that the two cola of Job 42:2 complement one another in expressing the whole idea of YHWH's wisdom and omnipotence. The affirmative of the first colon, "you can do all things", is complemented by the negative in the second, "no plan of yours can be thwarted". Together, they express YHWH's omnipotence and autonomy. Job acknowledges that YHWH reigns supreme and cannot be grasped by human thought and wisdom, as Dhorme noted.³³ This poetic line, therefore, makes a strong differentiation between the divine and the human. To make this line fit within its context, the proposal of John Wilcox about an implicit self-reference in Job's perspective is interesting: "I know that thou, *not I*, can do all things/and that there are no purposes of thine, *not mine*, which can be thwarted".³⁴ This recognition of Job's self-reference is clearer when the two responses of Job are read together. The differentiation between the human "I" and the divine "You" appears at the outset Job's first response to YHWH: "I am of small account, what shall I answer You?" (40:4). In such a

³⁰ Cf. FISHBANE, "Job", 91.

³¹ Cf. VAN WOLDE, "The Reversal of Job", 239.

³² Cf. HABEL, *Job*, 581.

³³ DHORME, *Job*, 589.

³⁴ J.T. WILCOX, *The Bitterness of Job. A Philosophical Reading* (Ann Arbor 1992) 191.

differentiation, Job's limitations are contrasted to YHWH's limitlessness.³⁵ Experiencing the difference between himself and God brings Job to a new stage of knowing. At the outset of Job's second response, therefore, the term ידעתי signifies a very special kind of knowledge. Understood in its full biblical sense, it is broader than mere perception and more resounding than simple cognition. It is "an experiential discernment that grasps the significance of what is conceived or imagined".³⁶ This knowledge is a profound experience that embraces the knower's whole being, an experimental knowledge that liberates and sustains.³⁷

In brief, the analysis shows that the first poetic line epitomises YHWH's plan as experienced by Job. Job acknowledges YHWH's wisdom, the boundless omnipotence of YHWH as well as YHWH's absolute autonomy. The second level of Job's experience is an awareness of his own limitations, which opens the way to the confession of his ignorance.

2.3.2 The Confession of Ignorance

Job's confession of ignorance is organised in a dialectical combination of YHWH's interrogative words and Job's meditative response.

2.3.2.1 "Who is this that obscures counsel without knowledge?" (42:3a): YHWH's Challenge in Job's Own Words

The response of Job continues in a nominal clause. The new subject, אֲנִי, introduces an indefinite third person. Some translators are inclined to insert an explanatory phrase, "you say", before this sentence. On the one hand, this explanatory phrase would show that the sentence does not originate with Job, even though he is the one uttering it. On the other, the phrase helps to emphasise the idea upon which Job bases his argument.

The similarity between this first part of the confession (42:3a) and the beginning of the divine speech (38:2) is evident (cf. Table 14). This similarity clarifies some important elements in Job's intention. Firstly, 38:2 presents the very first words of YHWH in the divine speech. YHWH's first

³⁵ The fundamental difference, however, is that in his first response Job chose to remain silent (cf. 40:4-5); in the second response, instead, he decides to utter what he has learned from the divine speeches.

³⁶ DAILEY, "Wondrous far from Me", 263.

³⁷ FOHRER, *Hiob*, 533.

question opens up a series of rhetorical questions with which YHWH disparages the criticism Job had undertaken in his prior speeches. Job now connects his response to the very point where the divine speeches began. Secondly, this similarity makes it clear that the indefinite third person is no one other than Job himself.³⁸ In 38:2, the use of *מי זה* is a rhetorical approach with which YHWH engaged Job in interrogative challenges. Job now accepts the challenge and lets himself enter fully into the dialogic dynamic of the divine speeches.

In Job's words, what characterises him is described by the *Hiphal* participle *מעלים*, generally understood as acts of concealing, hiding, or obscuring. By which means? By a lack of knowledge, *בלי דעת*. A comparison of the two sentences, 38:2 and 42:3a, perhaps can give us an indication of what kind of knowledge Job lacked then.

Table 14.
Job 38:2 and Job 42:3a

(38:2)	מי זה מחשיך עצה במלין בלי־דעת <i>Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?</i>
(42:3a)	מי זה מעלים עצה בלי דעת <i>Who is this that obscures counsel without knowledge?</i>

Several authors note that 42:3a is a quotation from 38:2.³⁹ Though very similar, however, there are also some significant differences between the two verses. In his response, Job takes the very words of YHWH on his own lips but transforms them. Thus, a part of the response affirms Job's acceptance of YHWH's criticism while another part refines YHWH's criticism and deepens Job's recognition of his own ignorance.

There is a minor change in the verb Job employs. Originally, YHWH's question uses the *Hiphal* participle form of the verb *חשך* for the act of darkening. In Job's elaboration, that verb becomes *עלם*. This second root appears 28 times in the Bible. In the majority of cases, it denotes a restriction that hides or obscures the eyes, "to hide" or "to be hidden".⁴⁰ For instance, in Prov 28:27: *ומעלים עיניו* ("the one who closes his eyes", "who turns a blind eye"), in Isa 1:15: *אעלים עיני* ("I will close my eyes"), or in Job 28:21:

³⁸ As Fokkelman notes, Job "understands very well to whom God is referring with his criticism about 'obscuring counsel'", FOKKELMAN, *Major Poems*, 321.

³⁹ Cf. for example GORDIS, *Job*, 492; DHORME, *Job*, 589; POPE, *Job*, 347-348.

⁴⁰ Cf. C. LOCHER, "עלם", *TDOT* 11, 147-154, here 147-149.

ונעלמה מעיני ("it is hid from the eyes"). This meaning is indeed not entirely different from the root חשך, which appears 18 times in the Bible and frequently denotes the act of darkening that prevents people from seeing, "to make dark, darken".⁴¹ For instance, תחשכנה עיניהם ("Let their eyes be darkened") (Ps 69:23), or על־אלה חשכו עינינו ("for these things our eyes are darkened") (Lam 5:17). Thus, by using a verb with a meaning similar to that used by YHWH, Job agrees with YHWH's criticism. Repeating YHWH's criticism in his own words, Job acknowledges that it is he who was responsible for obscuring YHWH's plan from his limited perspective.

The most obvious change in 42:3a is the deletion of the prepositional phrase במלין ("with words") in 38:2. In his elaboration, Job suggests that he is not concerned only with the inadequacy of his words.⁴² YHWH criticises Job for darkening the divine plan by words without knowledge, the ignorant words he spoke during his lamentations and disputes. Job takes this criticism seriously and recognises that "words without knowledge" are perhaps only an external manifestation of his own internal ignorance. By dropping the word במלין, Job acknowledges that he has been obscuring YHWH's plan not only by words but more profoundly by his lack of understanding, by his polemic attitude, and even by false suppositions conditioned by his limited ethical perspective.

In Job's response, he repeats exactly the word עצה with the verb form מעלים, serving as direct object. In different contexts in the Bible, the term עצה represents God's plan: "this is the plan that is determined for the whole earth" (Isa 14:26). The term can have a positive meaning, indicating counsel and wisdom belong to God: "Counsel and sound knowledge are mine. I have understanding and power" (Prov 8:14; Jer 32:19). However, the term עצה can also have a negative meaning, indicating God's plan or counsel against opponents: "Hear the counsel of YHWH, that he has taken against Edom" (Jer 49:20; cf. 50:45; Mic 4:12). In the book of Job this term appears 9 times. It often expresses a negative connotation, indicating the advice of the wicked, as in the construction עצה רשעים ("the counsel of the wicked"; Job

⁴¹ Cf. MITCHELL – LUTZMANN – RINGGREN, "חשך", *TDOT* 5, 245-258, here 245.

⁴² In van Wolde's expression, what implies in Job's expression is "the entire process of thinking and living through which man believes he can grasp the play by cutting it down to human size". VAN WOLDE, "The Reversal of Job", 241.

10:3; 21:16; 22:18) or *עצת נפתלים* (“the counsel of the cunning”; Job 5:13).⁴³ However, in accordance with its general use in the Bible, the term also appears in positive contexts expressing something precious, for instance: “they listened to me and waited, and kept silence for my counsel (*עצה*)” (Job 29:21). In another verse, the term is even used as an attribute of God, parallel to technical terms for wisdom: “With God are wisdom (*חכמה*) and strength (*גבורה*), he has counsel (*עצה*) and understanding (*תבונה*)” (Job 12:13).

The fact that *עצה* displays both negative and positive connotations aligns this term with the one used in the former verse, *מזמה*. Like *עצה*, *מזמה* is also the focal substantive in its poetic line. Both are feminine singular, and the connotations of the two are ambivalent, dependent on their literary contexts. In the context of 42:2-3, the occurrence of these two terms establishes a continuity between what YHWH has spoken to Job and Job’s own meditation on the character of YHWH’s plan.

At the outset of the divine speeches (38:2), the term *עצה* plays an important role in announcing YHWH’s cosmic design, which is beyond human comprehension. The term *עצה* now reappears on the lips of Job in immediate proximity to the word *מעלים*. As noted, the root *עלם* gives the connotation of a restriction or obscuring of the eyes. Similarly, the root *עצה* can also mean “to shut, to enclose”, for instance, in Prov 16:30, *עיני עצה* (“he that shuts his eyes”), or in Isa 29:10, *את עיניכם ויעצם* (“he has shut your eyes”).⁴⁴ The syntactic and semantic connection of these two terms, therefore, “generates a layer of meaning that emphasises the limiting, restricting activity of man which is based on no knowledge whatsoever”, as Wolde explains.⁴⁵ The connection of these two terms leads readers to the main point of Job’s confession of ignorance.

In brief, the analysis of 42:3a shows how seriously Job takes YHWH’s challenge. In poetic disputes, Job often uses quotations to repudiate the words of his opponents. Here Job repeats the accusing words of YHWH in

⁴³ In Job 18:7 the term *עצתו* (“their counsel”) is used also in the context of describing the disasters befalling the wicked: “their strong steps are shortened; their own counsels throw them down”.

⁴⁴ Cf. BDB 781.

⁴⁵ Cf. VAN WOLDE, “The Reversal of Job”, 240.

such a way as to acknowledge them.⁴⁶ The adaptation of YHWH's speech signals that Job has internalised YHWH's words, and points to the acknowledgment that he had obscured YHWH's plan by his own ignorance. With this way of echoing YHWH's words, Job already enacts a change of mind and a submission to YHWH.⁴⁷ By agreeing with YHWH, Job enters into the very process of confessing his ignorance and begins to gain wisdom.

2.3.2.2 "I have declared, though I did not understand" (42:3bc): Job's Confession

By means of the conjunction לכן, Job now comes to the first conclusion. While verse 2 starts with Job claiming to know, the conclusion in verse 3 emphasises the fact that he did not know. YHWH had accused Job of darkening counsel without knowledge (בלי־דעת) in 38:2, which Job now fully accepts as true, using a double negative repetition: ולא אבין ("I did not understand", 42:3b) and ולא אדע ("I did not know", 42:3c).

⁴⁶ Indeed, Job quoting YHWH's words to recognise his own limited knowledge is a radical change in his attitude. For the Job of the dialogues is always polemical in front of his opponents' view. A characteristic of Job's literary style is that "the quotation represents the point of view that Job repudiates". S. TERRIEN, "Job as a Sage", *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (eds. J.G. GAMMIE – L.G. PERDUE) (Winona Lake 1990) 233. Similarly, R. GORDIS shows that "again and again Job quotes the utterances of his opponents, even distorting them in some degree, and then proceeds to refute them", cf. GORDIS, *The Book of God and Man*, 169-189. For example, the friends have stated again and again that the sins of the father will be visited upon the children (cf. 5:4; 20:10, 26); in 21:19a, Job quotes this view, then rejects it in 21:19b-21. Moreover, the polemical character of Job's discourse is not only directed at opponents inside the Book of Job, but also at certain texts within the wisdom tradition. At times, Job takes the positive ambiguity of the words used in one context and employs them negatively in his own discourses. Among several examples, the case of Ps 8:5-7 and Job 7:17-18 is an illustrative example. While the former exalts the human persons and their special status in the mind of God – "What are human beings that you are mindful of them [...] you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour" (Ps 8:5-6) – the latter reflects Job's sarcasm in the light of the psalmist's praise: "What are human beings, that you make so much of them, that you set your mind on them, visit them every morning and test them every moment?" (Job 7:17-18). As Fishbane comments, this way of quoting represents an "intertextual irony", in which "Job's speech shifts from cosmological to moral providence, from praise to biting provocation". Cf. FISHBANE, "The Book of Job", 89-90.

⁴⁷ As Hartley comments, it is a sign of Job's submission to YHWH's sovereignty when Job recasts YHWH's opening charge into a self-judgment. Cf. HARTLEY, *Job*, 536.

Job opens his confession with the verb form **אָדָּנִי**, “I have declared”. The discourse comes back to the first person singular. From meditating on YHWH’s words Job now reflects upon himself. Besides, the verb is used in the perfect form, conventionally referring to the past. In his statement, therefore, Job looks back to what went before.

It is worth noting that the *Hiphil* form of the verb **אָדָּנִי** is not normally used for ordinary speaking but rather for important declarations. The root occurs very frequently in *Hiphil*, referring to the act of someone’s declaring or communicating something verbally to someone else to reveal significant information to the addressee.⁴⁸ Remarkably, in various sapiential texts, the root **אָדָּנִי** in *Hiphil* is employed to set down the principle of tradition, that is, “to hand on or to teach everything that constitutes the religious and cultural heritage of the people”.⁴⁹ It indicates, moreover, “something before not understood, concealed or mysterious”.⁵⁰ In the book of Job, the *Hiphil* of the verb **אָדָּנִי** is used specially for announcing events or making known things previously unknown (cf. Job 1:15; 36:9), or even for revealing something secret (11:6).⁵¹ Obviously, in all cases the subject of that verb form is considered to be the knower and the communicator, comparable to the traditional sage.⁵²

Therefore, it is significant when Job uses the weighty verb **אָדָּנִי** in his response. What did Job make known until now? Is the poet revealing something specific by having this verb recur?

To answer these questions, the literary analysis of the last poetic line of the strophe will proceed in two steps. The first is a close reading, paying attention to the peculiarity of the syntax of the poetic line as well as the literary device employed. The second step will analyse the two cola of the poetic line taking notice of their literary correspondences in a broader context.

⁴⁸ Cf. C. WESTERMANN, “אָדָּנִי”, *TLOT* 2, 714-715.

⁴⁹ “You shall tell your son in that day, saying ‘It is because of that which YHWH did for me when I came forth out of Egypt’” (Exod 13:8; cf. Job 15:18; Eccl 6:12), GARCIA-LÓPEZ, “אָדָּנִי”, *TDOT* 9, 185.

⁵⁰ “Who told you that you were naked?” (Gen 3:11; cf. 12:18), BDB 616.

⁵¹ The **אָדָּנִי** hi. occurs 17 times in Job. Almost a half the cases are with the construction “אָדָּנִי hi. + לְ” (Cf. 1:15-17, 19; 11:6; 12:7; 33:23; 36:9).

⁵² For an in-depth discussion on Job as a sage, see TERRIEN, “Job as a Sage”, 231-234.

2.3.2.2.1 A close reading of 42:3bc

Table 15.
Job 42:3b and Job 42:3c

β	α		
ולא אבין	הגדתי	לכן	42:3b
ולא אדע	נפלאות ממני		42:3c

At first glance, the parallel construction between 3bβ (ולא אבין) and 3cβ (ולא אדע) is evident. But what is the relationship between 3bα (הגדתי) and 3cα (נפלאות ממני)? Technically speaking, the construction of the whole poetic line is composed of diverse elements that have both similarities and differences. Fokkelman argues that “the similarity becomes the background against which disparity announces itself”.⁵³ Paying attention to the differences between the two cola may clarify the meaning of the poetic line.

In addition to its parallelism, this final poetic line is characterised by a clever use of ellipsis, “the suppression of an element demanded by the context”.⁵⁴ According to Fokkelman, the ellipsis here is a case in which “a transitive verb is used absolutely, that is, without its direct object”.⁵⁵ The use of ellipsis in poetry is not just a grammatical phenomenon but “a figure of speech and point of style”, as noted by Alonso Schökel.⁵⁶ In 42:3bc, the poet deliberately employs ellipsis to arrange artistically elements of Job’s confession. Ellipsis is also employed here as a literary device that allows readers to play a more active role in reading the text, effectively engaging them in the literary discourse and deepening their appreciation of the poem.

All three verbs in this poetic line are marked by their ellipsis of a direct object. Because of ellipsis, the two cola end correspondingly in an unfinished way: “I did not understand”, “I did not know”. On the one hand, the total lack of an object arouses the curiosity of readers. *What* did Job not understand? *What* did he not know? The poet leaves the answer to these questions open. On the other hand, the omission of the object in both phrases

⁵³ J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Reading Biblical Poetry*. An Introductory Guide (Louisville 2001) 78.

⁵⁴ W.G.E. WATSON, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*. A Guide to Its Techniques (JSOTS 26; Sheffield 1984) 304.

⁵⁵ FOKKELMAN, *Job*, 314.

⁵⁶ L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (SubBib 11; Roma 1988) 166.

may function as “an iconic sign of Job’s understanding”, to use Fokkelman’s expression,⁵⁷ by which the poet signals to readers that what Job really understood is nothing. The ellipsis signifies the all-inclusive character of Job’s not-knowing and not-understanding. In this emphatic repetitive construction, Job thoroughly confesses his ignorance. The confession is further reinforced by the artistic arrangement of the remaining two cola, 42:3bα and 42:3cα.

After the first verb form, “I have declared” in 3bα, readers naturally expect an object. That expectation is not immediately satisfied. The ellipsis here creates a pause which evokes for readers thoughts and considerations. After a moment of suspense in 3bβ, the expectation for an object is finally satisfied by the word נפלאות, “wondrous things”, in 3cα. The grammatical unity of הגדתי נפלאות ממני, “I have declared things too wondrous for me”, is split into two parts and spreads over the two cola. According to Fokkelman, the impact of this operation is that the elliptical clause ולא אבין intervenes “with an intentionally disruptive effect, which impels the reader to confront the negative aspect and the infringement”.⁵⁸ In this way, all four half-cola of the poetic line are placed in a reciprocal relationship. Thus, 3cα (נפלאות) supplies 3bα (הגדתי) with a specific content which confirms Job’s ignorance. This confirmation is strengthened all the more by the intervention of the negative refrain 3bβ (ולא אבין) and 3cβ (ולא אדע). Technically speaking, this poetic line represents a case of double duty: the verb of the first colon is still active in the second, whereas the object of the second colon is retroactively included in the first. This poetic device effectively underscores Job’s incapacity to explain the divine plan. For Dailey, it suggests the existential claim that “the making of knowledgeable pronouncements had surpassed Job’s own capacity of wisdom”.⁵⁹

In sum, the close reading of 42:3bc shows that readers have been brought to a crucial moment in the confession of the protagonist. The purpose of ellipsis here is not to impede readers’ ability to understand the meaning of the poetry, nor does the use of ellipsis encourage readers to jump to a hasty and superficial conclusion. The ellipsis is deliberately ambiguous. So that

⁵⁷ FOKKELMAN, *Major Poems*, 322.

⁵⁸ FOKKELMAN, *Job*, 314.

⁵⁹ DAILEY, “Wondrously far from Me”, 263-264.

careful readers may reach a deeper understanding of the poem, another literary device is employed, that of parallelism.⁶⁰

2.3.2.2.2 The poetic line 42:3bc and its literary correspondences

A close attention to the construction of 42:3bc also shows that this poetic line does not stand separately from its literary context. While the first colon (42:3b) links up to the beginning of the divine speeches (38:4b) (cf. Table 16), the second colon (42:3c) is arranged in parallel to the second colon of the first poetic line of the same strophe (42:2b) (cf. Table 17).

As noted above, Job opens his confession with the weighty verb form הִגַּדְתִּי. An intertextual consideration shows that this is not accidental. Job echoes YHWH's challenges in the beginning of the divine speeches (38:4b), in which the same combination of the two roots, נָגַד and בִּין, occurs.

Table 16.
Job 38:4b and Job 42:3b

הִגַּד אִם־יָדַעַת בִּינָה	YHWH's challenge (38:4b)
הִגַּדְתִּי וְלֹא אֲבִין	Job's response (42:3b)

38:4b is composed of two verbal clauses. The first is a *Hiphil* imperative, הִגַּד, and the second immediately follows the most common conditional particle, אִם.⁶¹ If the two are read as propositions of one conditional sentence, then הִגַּד אִם־יָדַעַת בִּינָה is the hypothetical clause, the protasis, while הִגַּד is the consequent one, the apodosis. The validity of the consequent clause is conditioned by that of the hypothetical one. The employment of the two typical roots of wisdom literature, יָדַע and בִּין, in the hypothetical clause makes its requirement more demanding. The sentence can appropriately be rendered as “Declare, if you know fully” or “Proclaim, if you understand thoroughly”.

What did YHWH challenge Job to declare or proclaim? In other words, what is the object of the imperative verb הִגַּד? What is the content of בִּינָה, according to the challenge of YHWH? The context of this verse clarifies that

⁶⁰ As WATSON, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 304, indicates: “The main clue to determining elliptical expressions comes from the structure”. The parallelism between Job 42:3bc and its literary correspondences in a broader structure will shed light to help understand the deliberate ambiguity caused by the use of ellipsis.

⁶¹ Cf. WALTKE – O’CONNOR, §31.6.1b; JOÜON – MURAOKA, §167a.

the content of YHWH's challenge is supplied in the preceding question: **אִיפֹה הָיִיתָ בִּיסְדֵי-אָרֶץ** – “Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?” (38:4a). This is indeed the first concrete and very challenging query of YHWH after having challenged Job with introductory rhetorical questions (38:2-3).

YHWH brings Job back to the time of the foundation of the earth (**בִּיסְדֵי-אָרֶץ**). The combination of the noun **אָרֶץ** and the root **יסד** appears frequently in contexts of the creation of the world (cf. Isa 48:13; Zech 12:1; Ps 78:69). The earth was established by the wisdom of YHWH (Prov 3:19). In 38:4b, Job is treated as if he were a primordial person who had witnessed the laying of the earth's foundation. It is necessary to have been present at the origin of things in order to be able to understand them. Can Job identify himself with personified Wisdom (Prov 8:12, 22-31), who was primordial and therefore was the sole witness of the first moment of the creation? Of course, he cannot. YHWH questions Job's understanding of the origin of the earth (**בִּיסְדֵי-אָרֶץ**) and also of himself (**אִיפֹה הָיִיתָ**). This rhetorical question reveals the irony in the hypothetical clause when YHWH says to Job, “you have understanding”. If the hypothetical clause collapses, so does the consequence.

This intra-textual reading sheds light on Job's attitude in his concluding response. It shows that the **ו** in 43:3b, **וְלֹא אָבִין**, clearly has a concessive value. Faced with YHWH's challenge, “Declare, if you really understand”, Job recognises his failure: Although he could never meet the requirements of the challenge, Job has unconsciously followed the imperative of the apodosis: “I have declared [...]”. The condition for the validity of the argument in the challenge of YHWH, “if you really have understanding” (38:4b), is now rendered negative in Job's admission, “I did not understand” (42:3b).

On the general level of the whole poetic strophe (Job 42:2-3), the correspondence between the first and the last poetic line is significant. The concluding colons of these two lines are arranged in a remarkable concentric symmetry.

Table 17.
Concentric symmetry between 42:2b and 42:3c

מזמה c	ממך b	ולא־יבצר a	42:2b
ולא אדע a'	ממני b'	נפלאות c'	42:3c

This parallelism evokes an inevitable clash between YHWH's limitlessness and Job's limitedness. The first one is favourable to YHWH, while the second is unfavourable to Job. The opening construction of the first, (a) ולא־יבצר, corresponds to the terminal one of the second, (a') ולא אדע. Together, they manifest the radical difference between YHWH and Job by means of a negation at two different extremes: nothing is impossible for YHWH, and nothing is what Job knows.

At the centre of this confrontation (b and b'), the same comparative preposition (מן) is combined with two different pronominal suffixes, for YHWH (ך-) and Job (ני-). The two words ממך and ממני, therefore, create a balance in syntactical function, while their semantic content is completely opposite: ממך serves to indicate the boundless power of YHWH, whereas ממני uncovers the radical inadequacy of Job. The parallelism of these two cola gives rise to a symmetrical figure: ממך is contradicted by the negation preceding it (ולא־יבצר), and ממני is explained by the negation following it (ולא אדע).⁶²

Also remarkable is the correspondence between the two substantives (c) and נפלאות (c'). In the context of the parallelism, v. 3c sheds more light on the understanding of the term מזמה. On the most basic level, Job's acknowledgment that "no plan of yours can be thwarted" can mean simply that YHWH does indeed have a plan, though human beings cannot understand it. The plan of YHWH does exist and it is YHWH who causes its fulfilment, not humans. If so, the world is not as chaotic as Job had pictured it in his opening monologue and as he has frequently repeated in disputes

⁶² This is good evidence, indicating the deliberate intention of contrasting Job's capacity and YHWH's, namely, "how God and man occupy diametrically opposed positions as regards the impossible". FOKKELMAN, *Major Poems*, 320-321.

with his friends.⁶³ This is really an important insight for Job. He is now convinced that YHWH's omnipotence is not arbitrary but is exercised according to a definite plan. The parallelism between *מַזְמָה* and *נִפְלְאוֹת* suggests that, according to Job's understanding now, the plan of YHWH is something wondrous, even if it is elusive from the human point of view.

Until now, the poetic line 42:3bc has been analysed principally through an examination of the literary devices of ellipsis and parallelism. The analysis of ellipses covers the two cola and discovers the deliberate ambiguity of the verse. With parallelism, the verse is read in a broader context of its literary correspondences, from which varied possibilities of meaning are exposed. The two literary devices work together to reveal the content of the sincere confession of Job. To complete the analysis, we will consider one of the most important terms of the whole strophe, *נִפְלְאוֹת*. Its semantic nuances come from the broader interpretative horizon of the biblical traditions in which it is found.

2.3.2.3 "Things too wondrous for me" (42:3c): Exclamation of Wisdom

The term *נִפְלְאוֹת* derives from the root *פֿלֵא*. This root occurs 69 times in the Hebrew Bible, of which 42 are instances of the participle in the nominalised plural form *נִפְלְאוֹת*. According to Joachim Conrad, the verb forms derived from *פֿלֵא* usually deal with "acts and effects transcending human knowledge and imagination, and hence above all transcending the powers of human agency".⁶⁴ Appearing in *Niphal* form in texts about the relationship between God and human beings, the primary meaning of this verb form is to indicate that "there are no limits on God's ability to help people in distress or in difficult circumstances where they do not know which way to turn".⁶⁵ Furthermore, the nominalised participle *נִפְלְאוֹת* frequently refers to mighty acts of God "that are humanly inexplicable and indescribable, but are experienced as extremely efficacious events that shape human lives" (cf. Ps 78:4; Neh 9:17).⁶⁶ In the vast majority of cases, *נִפְלְאוֹת*

⁶³ G. GUTIÉRREZ renders the implicit reasoning of Job in disputes as follows: "I do not understand these plans, therefore they do not exist". Cf. G. GUTIÉRREZ, *On Job. God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll 1987) 84.

⁶⁴ Cf. CONRAD, "פֿלֵא", *TDOT* 11, 535.

⁶⁵ Cf. CONRAD, "פֿלֵא", 537.

⁶⁶ Cf. CONRAD, "פֿלֵא", 540. God's mighty acts, indicated by the term, are to be understood in an inclusive abstract sense, given that it occurs only in the plural.

characterises YHWH's acts of deliverance, either the great events of the deliverance of the people in the early period of Israel's history (Exod 3:20; 34:10; Judg 6:13; Ps 78:11, 32; 105:2, 5; 106:7, 22) or the various acts of deliverance experienced by individuals (Ps 9:2; 107:24; 118:23).⁶⁷ Furthermore, the term occurs not only in the foundational events of Israel's existence but also in the Psalms of thanksgivings of the individual. In these Psalms, the term speaks of "signs that God steadfastly maintains the Covenant" (Ps 111:4-9) or even "refers to the new exodus and the ingathering of the diaspora" (Ps 96:3; 98:1).⁶⁸ Delivered from affliction, the psalmist thanks and praises God for mighty acts: "I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart. I will tell of all your wonderful deeds" (Ps 9:2; cf. Ps 26:7; 71:17; 86:10).

In the book of Job, besides 42:3, the term נפלאות appears four other times in the mouths of Eliphaz (5:9), Elihu (37:5, 14) and Job himself (9:10), and it always refers to the inscrutable deeds of God in creation.⁶⁹

A number of significant results may be drawn from the study of the term. Firstly, the term נפלאות has a rich theological history in the Hebrew Bible, and its connotations are always positive toward God's action in history. In 42:2-3, this term reveals a significant change in Job's mind. By arranging נפלאות parallel to מזמה, the poet continues the chain of feminine substantives with which Job describes YHWH's plan. The chain begins with the singular מזמה in the first poetic line, becoming the singular עצה for an instant in the second line, then reaches its peak in the plural נפלאות in the third line. That chain illustrates Job's trajectory of perceiving and describing YHWH's plan, which was crossing through different nuances, including even those generally negative and ambivalent, then, finally finds its positive and theological culmination. The change of terms supplies readers with an iconic sign of Job's transformation, reflecting the renovation of the way Job thinks about YHWH and considers YHWH's plan. By letting himself enter into the dialogue using the words of YHWH, Job discovers that, from YHWH's

⁶⁷ Cf. ALBERT, "פלא", 983; CONRAD, "פלא", 540.

⁶⁸ Cf. CONRAD, "פלא", 540.

⁶⁹ In the Book of Job, the term נפלאות appears very frequently in parallel to גדלות. In such a parallelism, the latter is always specified in such a way as to magnify it even more as something unattainable for human beings, e.g. גדלות עד-אין חקר – "great things, unfathomable" (5:9; 9:10), or גדלות ולא נדע – "great things, and we cannot understand" (37:5).

perspective, “people are busy trying to reduce the unlimited and elusive plan of God to an עצה which people can apprehend”, as Wolde notes.⁷⁰ Following this insight, Job recognises the magnitude of YHWH’s wisdom and appreciates YHWH’s plan as נפלאות.

Secondly, the use of נפלאות highlights Job’s experience of his own finitude.⁷¹ In 43:3c, indeed, the construction נפלאות ממני makes a comparison between God and a particular human being in which נפלאות stands for something wondrous, transcendent, and elusive to the human. Employing this term to describe what he had talked about during the time when he had still been ignorant, Job manifests his profound insight and his new attitude of a sage. The term נפלאות signals Job’s insight that there is another way of knowing and speaking about God. When he supposed that he knew everything and tried to explain everything within the framework of the doctrine of retribution, he had no way to break through and journey ahead.⁷² Only when Job is freed from the retributive ethics that led him to laments and disputations, to self-preoccupation and self-justification, can he speak a new language.⁷³ In front of נפלאות, Job confesses that he knows nothing. And this confession is a fundamental condition for Job to attain real wisdom after admitting that he had known nothing.

Thirdly, the occurrence of נפלאות signals Job’s astonished reaction in front of the discovered otherness of God.⁷⁴ By referring YHWH’s plan to נפלאות, the poet subtly integrates the protagonist into the tradition of the chosen people, those who know how to be astonished and amazed in front of the transcendent character of God. It is necessary to keep in mind that Job’s declaration occurs precisely in response to the challenges that have been addressed to him in the divine speeches. It is YHWH who “answered

⁷⁰ VAN WOLDE, “The Reversal of Job”, 240.

⁷¹ According to von Rad, Job’s confession underscores the ‘negative’ feature of Israel’s wisdom, in which “there is an unfinished and even unfinishable dialogue about man and the world on the basis of an awareness of the ambivalence of recorded phenomena”, so it is wise to “let things retain their constantly puzzling nature”. VON RAD, *Weisheit in Israel*, 404.

⁷² Cf. GUTIÉRREZ, *On Job*, 85: “Previously, when he moved within the framework of the doctrine of retribution, he did not have any journey at all ahead of him because at bottom everything was (supposedly) understood, and he was already at the goal”.

⁷³ As G.E. Frost notes, now “the madness of self-justification gives way to free and spontaneous praise of God”. G.E. FROST, *The Color of the Night* (Minneapolis 1977) 90.

⁷⁴ The referent of נפלאות, strictly speaking, is not God’s act as such, but “one’s astonished reaction to God’s unexpected intervention”. Cf. ALBERT, “פלא”, 984.

Job”, speaking to him “from the whirlwind”, סַעֲרָה (38:1; 40:6), the medium par excellence for YHWH’s appearance and intervention.⁷⁵ In the biblical traditions, human experiences of נִפְלְאוֹת are normally expressed as redemptive events or as life-sustaining forces in creation and in history. Job now places himself within those traditions, and his experience thus finds its expression in the historical-theological background the term carries. Just as the people of the Covenant used נִפְלְאוֹת to describe the mighty acts of God that delivered them from bondage, Job now uses it to mark his “new exodus”. The term signifies Job’s new conviction that YHWH is and always has been on his side and not on the opposite, as he had subjectively experienced and rashly declared. It is precisely in the tradition of those who praise God that Job renews his faith and acquires a new wisdom.

2.4. Conclusion

2.4.1 Job’s Confession of Ignorance: Manifestation of an Illuminated Wisdom

In the few words contained in 42:2-3, the poet creates an aesthetic atmosphere in which different profound ideas and complex feelings are activated.⁷⁶ The route by which the poet brings Job to the confession departs from an acknowledgment concerning God and reaches an enlightened awareness about the protagonist himself. YHWH’s words are embedded in the middle of this transition. Job’s words revolve around the words of YHWH, which function as the pivot of Job’s confession.

The overall arrangement of the strophe produces a paradoxically epistemological effect. Job starts from knowing (יָדַעַתִּי) and ends in not-knowing (וְלֹא אָדַעַת). The drama of the poem of Job, nonetheless, does not end at the point “where the impassable wall separating God from man is erected

⁷⁵ The term סַעֲרָה appears 22 times in the Bible. The occurrence of this particular term shows that the author of the book of Job is undoubtedly influenced by the traditional language of the theophany (cf. 2 Kgs 2:1; Jer 23:19; Ezek 13:11, 13; Zech 9:14; Ps 83:16, etc.), and he deliberately employs the term to mark the crucial moment of the divine discourses. A human response to these discourses occurs inside and under the dominion of this “theophanic ambience”.

⁷⁶ According to W. EMPSON, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York 1947) 18-20, the idea of “atmosphere” that can be felt or thought is the key to the understanding of poetry. It can be defined as “the consciousness of what is implied by meaning”, and though it may transcend verbal analysis, analysis can be helpful in making sense of parts of it.

again”, as Artur Weiser argues.⁷⁷ Neither does the confession of Job finish in a resigned agnosticism. Although Job frankly concedes that his own level of theo-linguistic wisdom had not been sufficient,⁷⁸ the confession of ignorance by Job concerns not his present state but his previous condition, as suggested in the alternation of verbal forms in qatal (הגדתִי) and yiqtol (אָדע, אַבִּין) in 42:3bc.⁷⁹ For Thomas F. Dailey, “when Job spoke earlier, his words had not yet been informed by his sapiential realisation; the epistemological lacuna, therefore, is here realised not in virtue of its timeless insuperability, but as characteristic of the protagonist’s past”.⁸⁰

The ignorance confessed by Job is recognised in different stages. The arrangement of Job’s response to the divine speeches brings to light not only that Job knew nothing about the cosmic design of YHWH, but, at the same time, that he did not know that he did not know. At the end, however, Job is no longer ignorant about his ignorance. Recognising and confessing his ignorance is an act of wisdom brought about by the theophanic encounter with YHWH. The first part of Job’s response shows a sincere recognition of his ignorance as well as a modest but significant gain in knowledge.

In his confession Job manifests a renewed insight into God.⁸¹ Job is aware of himself within a broader theological perspective.⁸² After hearing

⁷⁷ Cf. A. WEISER, *Hiob*, 263-264.

⁷⁸ DAILEY, “Wondrously far from Me”, 264.

⁷⁹ This past time referent is suggested by the syntax of the verse: starting with a qatal (הגדתִי) and continuing with two yiqtol (אָדע and אַבִּין). As Joüon – Muraoka describes: “In an alternation of qatal and yiqtol (frequent in poetry), the qatal places in the past the action expressed by the following yiqtol” (e.g., Isa 26:5; Job 4:15; 19:10, 12). Cf. JOÜON – MURAOKA, §113o.

⁸⁰ Cf. DAILEY, “Wondrously far from Me”, 264.

⁸¹ Once, in the darkness of his crisis, Job had doubts both about the possibility and the consequence of God’s answer to him: “If I summoned him and he answered me, I do not believe that he would listen to my voice. For, he will crush me with a tempest, and will multiply my wounds without cause” (Job 9:16-17). Now, Job’s conviction is radically changed. He knows that God is on his side and not on the opposite. God does not crush him with a tempest, but God does truly challenge him.

⁸² The new insight is both theological and anthropological. These two dimensions now come together in the new awareness of Job. Having learned from the divine speeches, Job recognises that God does not condemn him. God totally ignores the ethical logic of Job about sins and punishments, righteousness and reward. Instead of answering Job’s questions, God questions them. The so-called “sublime irrelevance” in the answer of God (cf. CARSTENSEN,

the voice from the whirlwind, Job understands how different God is from his previous understanding. This breakthrough was prepared by the poet from the very first moment of the divine discourses: it is YHWH, not El, Shaddai, Eloah or Elohim, who spoke to him from the whirlwind. It is this new intuition into the otherness of God that saves Job from his problems.

Throughout long disputations with the friends, Job had been waiting for an opportunity to prove his integrity and to defend his righteousness. By having consistently used the same form, יְדַעֲתִי, Job has again and again expressed his belief that he would be vindicated by God (cf. 13:18; 19:25-27). Now Job vindicates God, using the same verb form at the outset of his last response. In recognising that God's wisdom is of a higher order that remains too wonderful for human beings, Job is not far from wisdom.

2.4.2 Exegetical and Theological Implications

Unlike his concession of the first response (40:4-5), Job addresses YHWH in a candid manner in the second response. He takes the two divine speeches seriously, and they propel him to engage in a divine-human dialogue. Here lies the fundamental difference between Job's speeches and those of his friends. While the friends kept talking about God and defending their traditional theologies, Job not only talks about YHWH but with YHWH. In talking about God, human discourse remains insufficient and limited. In talking with God, humans enter a new horizon which some have described as an experience of the sublime.⁸³ From an aesthetic point of view, Job's experience and his elaboration of the words of YHWH can be described as an inspired process of *mimesis* through which Job discovers a new hermeneutic and reconstructs his theological language, as Perdue explains.⁸⁴ By repeating YHWH's words, Job's response to the divine speeches is the

Job, 91) represents indeed a significant shift which liberates Job from his impasse and prepares him for a renewed insight into God.

⁸³ The word "sublime", as used by NEWSOM, refers to an experience that emerges from an encounter with something found "at the threshold from the human to that which transcends the human". That experience is "classically described in terms of a crisis of understanding [...] More than merely a cognitive crisis, it is a crisis of subjectivity itself". NEWSOM, *A Contest*, 236-237.

⁸⁴ Cf. PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 232-238. As Newsom notes, this elaboration can be appreciated also in the light of Heidegger's reflections on the reception of a work of art, namely, it is a process of both reception and appropriation (*Ereignis*), cf. NEWSOM, *A Contest*, 254-255.

moment of his re-creation. His confession shows a subjectivity that has been disintegrated and is now being reintegrated by the sublime words of YHWH.

The final response of Job is not yet exhaustive in 42:2-3. We have not yet heard his ultimate stance. Yet the various elements within these two verses give an indication of what this stance should be or, at the least, should not be.

Firstly, Job's confession of ignorance is the manifestation of a sapiential attitude rather than a penitential confession. Through these two verses, the intention of the poet is to invest Job with characteristics of a sage, one in whom we find words of wisdom and a source of theological knowledge. Job's confession does not issue from culpability but from his newly gained wisdom.

Secondly, though Job has not yet explicitly declared his final stance, we witness a radical change of his attitude in comparison with his confrontational stance in the debates. In these two verses, he gradually comes closer to a submission to YHWH. If Job and the author of the book of Job are coherent, then we cannot expect that his declared stance would be totally reversed in the second strophe of the poem (42:4-6). The result of this analysis does not support the thesis that Job makes his final confession "tongue-in-cheek"⁸⁵ or that he expresses defiant insolence and "totally and unequivocally rejects YHWH".⁸⁶

Finally, it is important to recognise in Job's confession of ignorance a dimension of doxology. The majestic beauty and glory of creation manifested to Job in the two divine speeches culminates in Job's expression of awe that has arisen from pondering "things too wondrous for me" (נפלאות במנין). Contemplating YHWH's wonders, Job cannot remain in the passive and defiant silence that he exhibited in his first response: "I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but will proceed no further" (40:4-5). Now he wisely enters into joyful praise of God, having experienced YHWH's totally amazing otherness.

⁸⁵ Cf. ROBERTSON, "Job", 466.

⁸⁶ CURTIS, "On Job's Response", 497. More details about this author's critique will be discussed later in the exegesis of Job 42:6.

3. Job 42:4-6: Job's Transformation

3.1 An Analysis of the Poetic Construction of the Second Strophe

The second strophe, 42:4-6, consists of three poetic lines. Each line is a regular bicolon.

The imperative verb *שמע* marks the beginning of the second strophe. Another verb form in the same mood is also found at the end of verse 4, *חודיעני*. These two imperatives create an inclusion for the first poetic line (v. 4), investing it with a challenging tone. This line is particular, because only two of the six words are non-verbal form, that is, the precative particle *נא* and the personal pronoun *אנכי*. Besides the two imperative verbs, this line also contains two verbs in the imperfect of the first person singular (*אדבר* and *אשאלך*). These four verb forms are arranged in a chiasmic order, dividing the poetic line into two chiasmic cola. The first colon, comprising four words, starts with the imperative *שמע* and ends with the imperfect *אדבר*. The second colon starts with the imperfect *אשאלך* and ends with the imperative *חודיעני*. With these four verb forms, the first poetic line is characterised by the dialogic dynamics of hearing and speaking, questioning and answering. This dynamic is also more evident in the phenomenon of alternating change between the morphemes of the first and second person singular in both cola: “*you* hear – *I* speak” in the first colon, “*I* ask *you* – *you* teach *me*” in the second colon. This first poetic line therefore prepares the ground for what will be articulated in the rest of the strophe.

The second poetic line (v. 5) is linked to the first by the double occurrence of words from the root *שמע*. Both lines begin with words from the same stem. The second line is characterised by terms related to sensory perception, both auditory (*שמעתך, אזן*) and visual (*עיני, ראתך*). The line contains two verb forms, one in the first person singular (*שמעתי*) and the other in the third person singular (*ראת*), although both refer to Job as the speaker. The appearance of the conjunction *ועתה* in the middle of this second line marks its division. The six words of this line are therefore equally divided into two cola. In each colon, the main substantive is located in the centre, followed by the associated verb forms. In this way, the two cola of the second poetic line are arranged in a linear parallelism. This parallelism leads readers to compare and contrast the two aspects of Job's sensory perception, “ear” and “eye”, “hear” and “see”.

The last poetic line (v. 6) is introduced by the compound conjunction על-כן. With this line, therefore, Job's discourse reaches its climatic conclusion. Of the seven words of this line, two are verb forms, one in *yiqtol* (אמאס) and another in *weqatal* (ונהמתי). Both are in the first person singular, referring to Job as the speaker. The *weqatal* ונהמתי, therefore, continues the action of the *yiqtol* אמאס. The separation of these two verb forms creates a balance for the last poetic line, given that each of its cola comprises one verbal predicate.⁸⁷ In this manner, the first colon consists of the conjunction על-כן and the verb form אמאס used absolutely, namely, without a direct object. The second colon is composed of the last four words of the poem.

3.2. Translation and Textual Notes

3.2.1 Translation

שמע־נא ואנכי אדבר	⁴ <i>Hear now, I myself shall speak,</i>
אשאלך והודיעני	<i>I will question you, and you should make me know.</i>
לשמע־אזן שמעתיך	⁵ <i>By hearing of the ear I had heard of you,</i>
ועתה עיני ראתך	<i>but now my eye has seen you.</i>
על-כן אמאס	⁶ <i>Therefore, I submit,</i>
ונהמתי על-עפר ואפר	<i>and change my mind concerning dust and ashes.</i>

3.2.2 Textual Notes

v. 4

The similarity between Job 42:4 and the two verses 38:3 and 40:7 is often noted. A large number of scholars thus regard 42:4 as a marginal gloss.

⁸⁷ There are in fact two groups of scholars who divide the last poetic line in two different ways. The first group follows the tradition of the Masoretic cantillation mark. For them, the conjunctive *munach* under אמאס and the disjunctive *atnach* under ונהמתי are indicative that these two verb forms should go together, and that the division of the poetic line should only occur after the second verb form. In this way, the poetic line breaks into two disproportionate cola of 4 + 3 words: the first contains two verbal predicates, while the second none. For this division, see FOHRER, *Hiob*, 531; TUR-SINAI, *Job*, 579; DHORME, *Job*, 590; POPE, *Job*, 347; GOOD, *In Turns of Tempest*, 375; VAN DER LUGT, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 407. The second group favours a syntactic balance, dividing the line in 3+4 words. Cf. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 373; KUYPER, "The Repentance of Job", 91; GORDIS, *Job*, 305; HABEL, *Job*, 575; HARTLEY, *Job*, 535; FOKKELMAN, *Major Poems*, 322, 327. This difference reflects the complexity and ambiguity innate in the last poetic line, which will be discussed later in more detail.

According to them, the verse is a note that was originally supposed to remind readers of YHWH's challenge, to which Job is now about to respond. The note then would have been incorporated into the text by a later editor. It is therefore omitted in the reading by many critics.⁸⁸ However, as in the case of 42:3a, there are also many scholars who argue that verse 42:4 is an integral part of the original text, as it appears in the MT.⁸⁹

In fact, verse 42:4 is a deliberate quotation that links Job's speech and YHWH's. The LXX preserves this verse with a variation. It reads as follows: ἄκουσον δέ μου, κύριε, ἵνα κἀγὼ λαλήσω. By interposing κύριε between אֲנִי and אֲנִי, this reading places all the words of Job 42:4 in Job's mouth. Thus, the LXX clearly indicates that the speaker in the first person singular is Job, and the addressee in the second person singular is YHWH.⁹⁰ Accordingly, Job appears as a supplicant who asks YHWH for further instruction. Admittedly, the tendency to attribute verse 42:4 to Job is understandable, seeing that Job is the speaker in the first person singular both in the preceding and the following verses (cf. 42:3bc; 42:5-6). However, there are reasons to believe that this attribution is improbable. Both cola of verse 42:4 would sound odd if they came from Job's mouth. If verse 4a were the words of Job, there would be no reason why the personal pronoun אֲנִי should be used here. On the one hand, from the beginning of the poem, Job is the speaker associated with all verbs in the first person singular. On the other hand, one can agree with Fokkelman and van Wolde that the emphatic use of the first personal pronoun אֲנִי sounds too exalted to apply to Job in the immediate context of the confession of ignorance.⁹¹ The whole sentence has the tone of YHWH speaking to Job rather than that of Job speaking to YHWH. It is also unreasonable to read verse 4b as Job's request for further instruction. The two divine speeches in the immediately preceding context

⁸⁸ Cf. for example DUHM, *Hiob*, 202; G. HÖLSCHER, *Das Buch Hiob* (Tübingen 1937) 98; FOHRER, *Hiob*, 532; DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 372; DHORME, *Job*, 590; TUR-SINAI, *Job*, 577; POPE, *Job*, 348; V. STRAHAN, *The Book of Job* (Edinburgh 1913) 345, 347; A. DE WILDE, *Das Buch Hiob* (OS 22; Leiden 1981) 396; MORLA, *Job*, 1149.

⁸⁹ Cf. for example WEISER, *Hiob*, 254; TERRIEN, *Job*, 216; GORDIS, *Job*, 491; ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 725; HABEL, *Job*, 575; GRAY, *Job*, 486; CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1206.

⁹⁰ For those following this reading, Job 42:4 is not a quotation but Job's own utterance addressing God, see for example, HARTLEY, *Job*, 534, 536; E. Ho, "In the Eyes of the Beholder: Unmarked Attributed Quotations in Job", *JBL* 128 (2009) 703-715, here 711-714.

⁹¹ Cf. FOKKELMAN, *Major Poems*, 324; VAN WOLDE, "Job 42:1-6", 231.

already represent long and challenging instructions to Job. The whole verse 42:4, therefore, cannot be Job's own words but should be treated as a quotation in which Job is presenting YHWH as the speaking subject. As in the case of verse 3a, YHWH's challenging words are imbedded in Job's speech as a leadup to Job's expression of his own stance.

v. 5

Grammatically speaking, the conjunction וְעַתָּה in the middle of verse 5 can be read as consecutive, "and now", or as contrastive, "but now". Some scholars choose the consecutive reading because they interpret the two verb forms "hearing" and "seeing" as two similar forms of perception.⁹² The LXX adopted the contrastive interpretation because at the end of the first colon, it adds τὸ πρότερον, "previously", highlighting thus the antithetical correspondence with νῦν δὲ, "but now", at the beginning of the second colon. In this manner, the parallelism between the two cola is recognised as contrasting. Also, the two forms of perception, "hearing" and "seeing", are considered as contrasted with one another.⁹³ I prefer the reading of the LXX, though without necessarily adopting its additional adverb τὸ πρότερον.

⁹² Cf. PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 232; VAN WOLDE, "Job 42:1-6", 233; CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1205, 1217; CLINES, "The Wisdom of Job's Conclusion (Job 42:1-6)", *Goochem in Mokum*. Wisdom in Amsterdam (eds. G.J. BROOKE – P. VAN HECKE) (OtSt 68; Leiden 2016) 34–42, here 34; BALENTINE, *Job*, 693. In fact, it is not uncommon to see the pair of verbs שָׁמַע and רָאָה used as two complementary forms of sensory perception. See for example Gen 24:30; Exod 3:7; 2 Kgs 19:16; Prov 20:12; Ps 48:8; Job 13:1, 29:11.

⁹³ Actually, the majority of scholars understands Job 42:5 in this direction. Cf. for example BUDDLE, *Hiob*, 270; DUHM, *Hiob*, 202; FOHRER, *Hiob*, 534; WEISER, *Hiob*, 254; DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 372; DHORME, *Job*, 590; TERRIEN, *Job*, 269; GORDIS, *Job*, 492; MACKENZIE, "The Transformation of Job", 56; WILLIAMS, "You Have Not Spoken Truth of Me", 233; PATRICK, "Job's Address of God", 277; M. GREENBERG – J.C. GREENFIELD – N.M. SARNA, *The Book of Job* (Philadelphia 1980) 62; W. VOGELS, "The Spiritual Growth of Job: A Psychological Approach to the Book of Job", *BTB* 11 (1981) 75–80, here 79; O'CONNOR, "Job's Final Word", 188; A. DI LELLA, "An Existential Interpretation of Job", *BTB* 15 (1985) 49–55, here 53; HABEL, *Job*, 582; HARTLEY, *Job*, 535; ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 725, 729; POPE, *Job*, 347; DE BOER, "Does Job Retract?", here 188; J. LÉVÊQUE, *Job et son Dieu*. Essai d'exégèse et de théologie biblique (Paris 1970) 525; J.C. SHELLEY, "God's Bet and Job's Repentance", *RevExp* 89 (1992) 541–546, here 542; J.D. PLEINS, "Why Do You Hide Your Face? Divine Silence and Speech in the Book of Job", *Int* 48 (1994) 229–238, here 238; DAILEY, "The Aesthetic of Repentance", 67; FOKKELMAN, *Job*, 317; GRAY, *Job*, 486; OEMING – SCHMID, *Job's Journey*, 83; MORLA, *Job*, 1456.

There are instances in the Bible, e.g., 1 Kgs 10:7 or Job 28:22, 27, where visual perception is understood as superior to auditory perception.

The idiom לְשִׁמְעָאֵזֶן literally means “by the report of the ear”. Several scholars translate it with terms that indicate information at second-hand, such as “durch Gerüchte”,⁹⁴ “par ouï-dire”,⁹⁵ “per sentito dire” or “dalla parola altrui”,⁹⁶ “de oídas”,⁹⁷ “by hearsay”, “by rumour” or “by the ear’s rumour”.⁹⁸ Thus, the following verb form שָׁמַעְתִּיךָ should not be translated as “I have heard you”,⁹⁹ but instead “I have heard of you”.¹⁰⁰ In this case, the pronoun suffix ֶךְ serves as a dative suffix, as indicated by Anton Blommerde.¹⁰¹ In reality, the verb שָׁמַע does not mean only “to hear” but can also mean “to hear about”, “to hear of” in some instances.¹⁰² For example:

⁹⁴ Cf. HÖLSCHER, *Hiob*, 98.

⁹⁵ Cf. DHORME, *Job*, 590; TERRIEN, *Job*, 316; STEINMANN, *Job*, 204.

⁹⁶ Cf. P. FEDRIZZI, *Giobbe* (Torino 1972) 283; G. RAVASI, *Giobbe* (Roma 1979) 811.

⁹⁷ Cf. ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 725; MORLA, *Job*, 1456.

⁹⁸ Cf. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 372; POPE, *Job*, 347; GORDIS, *Job*, 492; WHYBRAY, *Job*, 171; R. SCHEINDLIN, *The Book of Job* (New York 1998) 155; R. ALTER, *The Wisdom Books* (New York 2010) 177.

⁹⁹ Cf. GREENBERG – GREENFIELD – SARNA, *Job*, 62; WILLIAM, “You Have not Spoken Truth of Me”, 233; GOOD, *In Turns of the Tempest*, 171; PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 232; VAN WOLDE, “Job 42:1-6”, 233; CLINES, *Job 38–42*, 1205; CLINES, “The Wisdom of Job’s Conclusion (Job 42:1-6)”, 34.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. NIV, ESV, ASV, KJB, NASB, ERV, DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 372; KRAELING, *The Book of The Ways of God*, 161; DHORME, *Job*, 590; DI LELLA, “An Existential Interpretation of Job”, 53; J.G. WILLIAMS, “Job’s Vision: The Dialectic on Person and Presence”, *HAR* 8 (1984) 259-272, here 259.269; GORDIS, *Job*, 491; POPE, *Job*, 347; HABEL, *Job*, 575; HARTLEY, *Job*, 535; DE BOER, “Does Job Retract?”, 188; GRAY, *Job*, 486; VAN DER LUGT, “Who Changes His Mind about Dust and Ashes? The Rhetorical Structure of Job 42:2-6”, *VT* 64 (2014) 623-639, here 625.

¹⁰¹ Cf. A.C.M. BLOMMERDE, *Northwest Semitic Grammar and Job* (BibOr 22; Rome 1969) 8. Together with Job 42:5, Blommerde also indicates various examples in Job, in which the accusative suffix may have the meaning of a dative, such as: 3:25; 6:4c; 6:13; 9:31; 10:2b; 15:12, 18, 21; 20:22; 28:17, 19; 29:11, 16; 31:18, 37; 41:21. In reality, the use of dative suffix in Hebrew is “a moot question among grammarians”, as noted by M. DAHOOD, “Ugaritic Studies and the Bible”, *Greg* 43 (1962) 55-79, here 67. Nonetheless, the same author argued in favour of this use. See for example, M. DAHOOD, “Qoheleth and Northwest Semitic Philology”, *Bib* 43 (1962) 349-365, esp. 352-353; M. DAHOOD, “Karatepe Notes”, *Bib* 44 (1963) 70-73, esp. 72-73; Cf. also M. BOGAERT, “Les suffixes verbaux non accusatifs dans le sémitique nord-occidental et particulièrement en hébreu”, *Bib* 45 (1964) 220-247, esp. 228ff.

¹⁰² HALOT, 9751.

Jethro heard *about* all that God had done for Moses and Israel (Exod 18:1); all the kings of the earth heard *about* the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kgs 4:34). Similarly, as in the case of Ps 132:6, the combination of the verb שָׁמַע with the personal pronoun, in שָׁמַעְנוּהוּ, does not mean “we have heard it”, but rather “we have heard *about* it”.¹⁰³

v. 6

The last verse of Job’s final poem poses problems for several scholars. Some state that this verse is textually uncertain or judge that the text is most probably corrupt and avoid interpreting it altogether.¹⁰⁴ The difficulties arise because almost every word in this verse is ambiguous. Many questions have been raised regarding the two verb forms אָמַאֵס and נִחַמְתִּי, as well as the prepositional phrase עַל עֵפֶר וָאֶפֶר.

v. 6a: the verb form אָמַאֵס

Critics who oppose dividing the verse into 3+4 words argue that this would create an odd 2+3 meter. Some suggest that the verse is probably corrupt because there is no object for אָמַאֵס in the first colon.¹⁰⁵ Its allegedly missing object is supplied in several ways. The Targum of Job adds the object עֲתִירִי, thus reading: “I reject my wealth”. The Vulgate regards the verb as reflexive in *Niphal* אָמַאֵס: *idcirco ipse me reprehendo*, “therefore, I reprehend myself”. The LXX also regards אָמַאֵס as reflexive, adding ἐμαυτὸν as its object, and offers a double translation: διὸ ἐφάυλισα ἐμαυτὸν καὶ ἐτάκη, “therefore, I despise myself, and melt away”.¹⁰⁶ The second verb form in this translation, ἐτάκη, suggests another to some scholars, understanding מָאֵס as a secondary form of מָסַס, which means “to melt, to dissolve, to sink down”.¹⁰⁷

Among modern scholars, there are basically two interpretations of אָמַאֵס. A minority follow the translation of the second verb in the LXX, understanding אָמַאֵס as a form of the intransitive verb מָאֵס, from the root

¹⁰³ Cf. DHORME, *Job*, 590.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. WESTERMANN, *Hiob*, 125; DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 372; ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 730.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 372; HARTLEY, *Job*, 53; CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1207.

¹⁰⁶ GRAY follows this double rendering and reads: “I demean myself and yield”, see GRAY, *Job*, 486.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. BDB 549, 587–588. HALOT, 5377.

מָסַס, and thus reads: “I sink down”, “I melt away”, “I yield”.¹⁰⁸ The majority consider אָמַס as transitive and therefore try to supply it with an object. Their various suggestions can be summarised in five ways:

- (1) Job rejects his previous words, his arguments, and his attitude against YHWH.¹⁰⁹
- (2) Job despises himself.¹¹⁰
- (3) Job rejects YHWH.¹¹¹
- (4) The phrase עָפַר וָאָפַר at the end of the second colon is taken as the object of Job’s rejection.¹¹²
- (5) Some understand אָמַס as a transitive verb used in an absolute sense, without an object.¹¹³

My translation is closely connected with the last option. I believe that the poet deliberately uses אָמַס in an absolute sense to create an ellipsis, which, as we have seen, is a figure of speech employed elsewhere in the poem. It is not hard to imagine that the poet chose this literary style in the last phrase spoken by the protagonist.

¹⁰⁸ “Je m’abîme”, cf. DHORME, *Job*, 590; TERRIEN, *Job*, 268; “I melt away”, NEB; WILLIAMS, “Job’s Vision”, 269; O’CONNOR, “Job’s Final Word”, 193-194; “I am wasting away”, cf. BUTTENWIESER, *Job*, 152. Others understand an intransitive verb but translate differently, see “I recant”, cf. KRAELING, *The Book of the Ways of God*, 161; POPE, *Job*, 347; “I retract”, NASB; cf. HABEL, *Job*, 575; “I yield”, “I submit”, cf. CLINES, “The Wisdom of Job’s Conclusion”, 34.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. NAB; NJPS; JB; TEV; DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 373; FOHRER, *Hiob*, 531; KUYPER, “The Repentance of Job”, 94; TSEVAT, “The Meaning of the Book of Job”, 21; POPE, *Job*, 348; JANZEN, *Job*, 255; A. GUILLAUME, *Studies in the Book of Job* (Leiden 1968) 139; THOMASON, *God on Trial*, 81; WHYBRAY, *Job*, 171; DI LELLA, “An Existential Interpretation of Job”, 53; FEDRIZZI, *Giobbe*, 283; BALENTINE, *Job*, 694; MORLA, *Job*, 1469; “Job retracts his lawsuit against God”, HABEL, *Job*, 576; CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1207.

¹¹⁰ “I despise myself”, NIV; NRSV; ESV; ISV; J.C.L. GIBSON, “The Book of Job and the Cure of Souls”, *SJT* 42 (1989) 303-317, here 307; “I abase myself”, GORDIS, *Job*, 491; de WILDE, *Hiob*, 399; HARTLEY, *Job*, 535; “I abhor myself”, KJV; ASV; ERV; TERRIEN, *Job: Poet of Existence*, 234.

¹¹¹ Cf. CURTIS, “On Job’s Response”, 503.

¹¹² Cf. PATRICK, “Job 42:6”, 369-371; MORROW, “Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance”, 212-215; GOOD, *In Turns of the Tempest*, 376; PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 232; VAN WOLDE, “Job 42:1-6”, 244.

¹¹³ CURTIS, “On Job’s Response”, 504; FOKKELMAN, *The Major Poems*, 319.

v. 6b: *the verb form נחמתי*

There are also various ways of understanding the construction of the second colon. The verb form נחמתי can be read either in *Niphal* or in *Piel*. Its root, נחם, is opened to a considerable variety of translations: “to become remorseful, repent of something, regret; to be sorry, to find comfort, to be comforted; to feel sympathy for someone, comfort, console”.¹¹⁴ The most common interpretations of נחמתי in 42:6 are:

- (1) “To repent, relent, regret”. This is the traditional understanding followed by the vast majority. The whole phrase, ונחמתי על עפר ואפר, is thus translated: “I repent in/on/upon dust and ashes”.¹¹⁵ Accordingly, the phrase ונחמתי על עפר ואפר serves as object of the verb ונחמתי, and the word על as spatial-locative preposition.
- (2) Following the translation of the Targum on Job, ואיתנהמית – “I console myself”, a considerable group of authors understand the verb as “to be comforted, to be consoled, to comfort oneself”.¹¹⁶
- (3) Van der Lugt suggests a peculiar interpretation and understands the collocation על נחם in an active sense: “to have compassion”, “to feel sorry for”.¹¹⁷ In his view, the whole of 42:6 is attributed to YHWH

¹¹⁴ SIMIAN-YOFRE, “נחם”, *TDOT* 9, 340-355, here 342. Cf. BDB 636-637; *HALOT*, 6096.

¹¹⁵ Cf. KJV, NAB, RSV, JB, NIV, NEB, WESTERMANN, *Der Aufbau*, 125; KRAELING, *The Book of the Ways of God*, 161; TERRIEN, *Job: Poet of Existence*, 234; POPE, *Job*, 347; MACKENZIE, “The Transformation of Job”, 56; DHORME, *Job*, 590; HABEL, *Job*, 575; DI LELLA, “An Existential Interpretation of Job”, 53; GORDIS, *Job*, 491; KUYPER, “Repentance of Job”, 94; WILLIAMS, “Job’s Vision”, 269; ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 725; W. VOGELS, “The Spiritual Growth of Job”, 79; NEWELL, “Job: Repentant or Rebellious”, 315; GIBSON, “The Book of Job and the Cure of Souls”, 307; GOOD, *In Turns of the Tempest*, 171; LÉVÊQUE, *Job et son Dieu*, 526; SHELLEY, “God’s Bet and Job’s Repentance”, 542; OEMING – SCHMID, *Job’s Journey*, 83.

¹¹⁶ Cf. BUTTENWIESER, *Job*, 292; DE BOER, “Does Job Retract?”, 192; O’CONNOR, “Job’s Final Word”, 181, 195; PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 232; G. BORGONOVO, *La Notte e il Suo Sole: Luce e Tenebre nel Libro di Giobbe* (Roma 1995) 83-85; SCHEINDLIN, *Job*, 155; FOKKELMAN, *Job*, 317; CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 1205; KRÜGER, “Did Job Repent?”, 223-224; B. MCKIBBEN, *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job and the Scale of Creation* (Cambridge 2005) 53; CLINES, “The Wisdom of Job’s Conclusion”, 34.

¹¹⁷ VAN DER LUGT, “Who Changes His Mind”, 631-632. Troy W. Martin goes in the same direction, though he attributes not only verse 6 but also verse 5 to God. Accordingly, it is God who finally withdraws the legal case against Job and repents for his unjust treatment of Job. Cf. T.W. MARTIN, “Concluding of the Book of Job and YHWH: Reading Job from the

and the phrase *וְנַחַמְתִּי עַל עָפָר וָאֵשׁ* is interpreted as an expression of YHWH's compassion for the vulnerable human being Job.

The preposition על

Dale Patrick suggested a new way of understanding the verb *נַחַמְתִּי* in association with the preposition *עַל*. He points out that the combination of the verb *נַחַם* with the preposition *עַל* is a well-attested idiom in the Hebrew Bible.¹¹⁸ In this idiom, the function of the preposition *עַל* is not spatial-locative but rather referential, indicating “about, concerning”. He translates the verse as “I repent of dust and ashes”, in the sense of “changing one’s mind” or “reversing a decision”.¹¹⁹

Another way of reading *עַל* is suggested by A. Wolters, who re-vocalises it as a noun, *עֹל*, treating it as a derivative of the hollow verb *עוּל*, which means “to nurse, to suckle”, which suggests the meaning of “nursing baby” or a child in general.¹²⁰ This approach yields: “Therefore, I recant and repent, a child of dust and ashes”. This reading actually follows the proposal of the Targum of Job with its reference to “children”: *ואיתנחמית מבניי דהינון*; *עפרא וקטם*, “I console myself for my children who are dust and ashes”.¹²¹

End to the Beginning”, *JBL* 137 (2018) 299-318. This interpretation is improbable if one reads these last two verses in the larger context of the divine speeches.

¹¹⁸ PATRICK, “Job 42:6”, 369-371. DE BOER, “Does Job Retract?” also suggests a similar reading. However, neither Patrick nor de Boer are the pioneers in this initiative. L.J. Kaplan brings to light that this insight was indeed anticipated by a medieval author Maimonides in his work *The Guide of the Perplexed* (1190). Cf. KAPLAN, “Maimonides, Dale Patrick, and Job XLII 6”, 356-357. de Boer and van Wolde find the combination *עַל נַחַם* occurring 17 times in the Bible. Fokkelman identifies the phrase in Exod 32:12, 14; 2 Sam 13:39; Isa 57:6; Jer 8:6; 18:8, 10; 31:15; Ezek 14:22; 32:31; Joel 2:13; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:10; 4:2; Ps 90:13; Job 42:6. Cf. FOKKELMAN, *The Major Poems*, 329, footnote 56.

¹¹⁹ PATRICK, “Job 42:6”, 369-370. See also T.F. DAILEY, “And Yet He Repents: On Job 42:6”, *ZAW* 105 (1993) 205-209, here 207: “I despise, yet repent concerning the (in)justice of this life”; Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 377: “Job repents his repentance”; HABEL, *Job*, 583: “Job has decided to ‘change his mind’ about proceeding with litigation or lament”; BALENTINE, *Job*, 695: “I repent concerning dust and ashes”.

¹²⁰ Cf. A. WOLTERS, “A Child of Dust and Ashes”, 116-119, followed by VAN DER LUGT, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 407. However, as criticised by Fokkelman, this vocalisation is not so certain, nor is the equivalence between the two terms *עֹל* and *עוּל*. It is also unlikely that these two terms can be synonymous with *עוּלֵל*, “child”. Cf. FOKKELMAN, *Major Poems*, 326.

¹²¹ DE LAGARDE, “Targum on Job”, 117. Cf. CURTIS, “On Job’s Response”, 501; WOLTERS, “A Child of Dust and Ashes”, 118.

The hendiadys עפר ואפר

The two words עפר ואפר are usually understood as a hendiadys that suggests a variety of meanings, depending on the immediate literary context.

When על is taken as locative preposition, the whole phrase על עפר ואפר recalls the concrete location where Job has been sitting and lamenting since the beginning of the story: “he sat among the ashes” (והוא ישב בתוך־האפר) (2:8).¹²² However, the majority of critics recognise that עפר ואפר is an idiomatic expression that can suggest a variety of symbolic or metaphoric connotations. It generally evokes the “composition of the human frame”,¹²³ or the “human condition” as a “worthless mortal”,¹²⁴ representing “the existential make-up of human life in its earthly status”,¹²⁵ or “humans in their utter frailty before the divine”.¹²⁶ The hendiadys is also understood as a concrete image for humility or humiliation¹²⁷ and would be associated with Job’s period of mourning or humbling himself.¹²⁸ Others suggest that in this expression Job ultimately defines himself as merely dust and ashes.¹²⁹

I follow Dale Patrick in interpreting the construction על ונחמתי as an idiom, whose direct object is the idiomatic expression עפר ואפר. More details regarding this construction will be discussed in the comments below.

¹²² DHORME, *Job*, 590; POPE, *Job*, 349. Similarly, A. van Selms argues that the phrase implies Job’s gesture of throwing himself “on the ground” to adopt a posture showing his deep respect for God. Cf. VAN SELMS, *Job. A Practical Commentary* (Grand Rapids 1985) 156. Instead, C. Muenchow understands the phrase as indicating Job’s action of “falling down upon the ground” as an expression of Job’s self-abasement and shame. Cf. MUENCHOW, “Dust and Dirt”, 610.

¹²³ CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1211.

¹²⁴ PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 237.

¹²⁵ DAILEY, “And Yet He Repents”, 207.

¹²⁶ CURTIS, “On Job’s Response”, 501.

¹²⁷ Cf. WHYBRAY, *Job*, 171.

¹²⁸ Cf. PATRICK, “Job 42:6”, 370; NEWELL, “Job: Repentant or Rebellious?”, 315.

¹²⁹ See for example: “Ich selbst nichts bin als Staub und Asche”, F. DELITZSCH, *Das Buch Hiob* (Leipzig 1902) 90; “und [ich] bereue als Staub und Asche”, H. STRAUSS, *Hiob* 19,1–42,17 (Neukirchen-Vluyn 2000) 336; “Being dust and ashes”, GREENBERG – GREENFIELD – SARNA, *Job*, 62; PLEINS, “Why Do You Hide Your Face?”, 238; “Seeing I am dust and ashes”, NJPS.

3.3. A Literary and Theological Interpretation of Job 42:4-6

After the confession of ignorance, Job expresses his final stance before YHWH in three continuous steps. In verse 4, Job elaborates YHWH's challenging words so as to set the stage for his climatic expression. In verse 5, Job describes what his experience of YHWH implies, employing the two most important sensory perceptions, hearing and seeing. In verse 6, Job declares the reversal of his attitude towards YHWH and towards human frailty.

3.3.1 "Listen now!" (42:4): YHWH's Challenge in Job's Own Words

As has been seen, YHWH's speeches are inaugurated by both a reproachful question (38:2) and an imperative challenge (38:3). In the first part of his response (42:3a), Job has thoughtfully elaborated on YHWH's question in 38:2 and thoroughly confessed his ignorance. Now in the second part, Job embeds YHWH's imperative challenge in his own speech in an innovative manner (cf. Table 18).

Table 18.
Job 38:3 (40:7) and Job 42:4

	b	a
38:3 (40:7)	אֲשַׁאלְךָ וְהוֹדִיעֲנִי <i>I will question you and you shall make me know</i>	אֲזַרְנָא כְּגִבֹר חֲלָצִיךָ <i>Gird up your loins like a man</i>
42:4	אֲשַׁאלְךָ וְהוֹדִיעֲנִי <i>I will question you and you shall make me know</i>	שָׁמַע־נָא וְאֲנִי אֲדַבֵּר <i>Listen now, I myself shall speak</i>

Just as 42:3a is not an identical quotation of 38:2, so too 42:4 is not a simple repetition of 38:3. Job again takes the challenging words of YHWH on his own lips and transforms them. In one part of the line, this sentence contains YHWH's own words (42:4b), but in the other part, it conveys Job's free rendering of YHWH's words according to his understanding and in the service of his specific purpose (42:4a). So, as in the case of 42:3a, Job's elaboration in 40:4 reflects both a reception and an appropriation of YHWH's words.

3.3.1.1 Job's Reception: "I will question you, and you shall make me know" (42:4b)

The second half of YHWH's challenge (38:3b; 40:7b) is reported exactly in the second colon of the poetic line. Why does Job choose to quote this phrase? The quotation of YHWH's demand explains why Job must now speak. It also represents a pregnant summary of what was happening during the speeches of YHWH according to Job's understanding. YHWH has addressed Job as a questioner who ironically interrogated him, challenging him to teach YHWH about creation and divine rule. Repeating this challenge in his own words, Job now shows that he has recognised the irony of YHWH's challenge and that he has taken seriously the lessons from the divine speeches. The root $\text{ע} \text{ל}$ in this poetic colon unites the two strophes of this poem and highlights a close connection between Job's final poem and the two divine speeches. In his confession of ignorance, Job acknowledges that he could not make anything known to YHWH, but it is YHWH who has given him knowledge. The quotation serves as a lead-up for Job to express his newly acquired knowledge. Job is about to declare to YHWH, not in the manner of an instructor as YHWH had ironically challenged him to do, but in the manner of a learner speaking to his Master what he has learned from the divine speeches.

In addition, it is also worth paying attention to the syntactic balance created by the two verb forms of the quotation. The symmetry of first person and second person alternating as subject and object in the poetic colon, I – you, and you – me, symbolises reciprocity between the two speakers. Having employed this structure twice, at the beginning and the end of the first divine speech (38:3; 40:7), YHWH insistently demanded both a frank dialogue from Job and a decision on his part regarding his theological attitude. This demand was not met in Job's elusive response (40:3-5). Now, by taking up YHWH's demand in the context of his confession of ignorance, Job shows that he is aware of the inadequacy of his first response. He returns to the point he left unfinished and honestly enters into the dynamic of the question-answer dialogue that YHWH has set in motion.

3.3.1.2 Job's Appropriation: "Listen, so that I myself may speak!" (42:4a)

The first half of verse 42:4, $\text{שְׁמַעֲנָא וְאִנִּי אֹדְבָר}$, "Listen, so that I myself may speak", confuses many scholars. The only similarity between this colon and YHWH's challenge in Job 38:3a (40:7a) is the particle בָּא ,

which conveys the imperative mood. The other words do not appear in any of YHWH's speeches. Throughout the book, only Job and his friends used the imperative form of verb שָׁמַע: Job to his friends (13:6, 17; 21:2), Eliphaz to Job (5:27; 15:17), and Elihu to Job (33:1, 31, 33; 34:2, 10, 16; 37:2). YHWH never used this verb form addressing Job, so Job 42:4a cannot be a direct quotation of YHWH's words. On the other hand, as argued above, these words can neither be spoken by Job to YHWH, especially in the context of his confession of ignorance. Even though Job is the speaker, these words cannot represent his demand to YHWH. The most reasonable way to understand Job 42:4a is to consider the expression as Job's free paraphrase of what YHWH said to him. The dissimilarity between YHWH's challenge and Job's rephrasing shows that Job does not actually aim to report exactly what YHWH said but rather to show what YHWH's words meant to him. Based on YHWH's challenging words, Job is now expressing his experience of YHWH's speeches. A close reading of verse 4 in its entirety (cf. Table 19) will justify this insight.

Table 19.
chiastic parallelism between 42:4a and 42:4b

42:4a	b וְאֵנִכִּי אֲדַבֵּר	a שָׁמַע־נָא
42:4b	וְהוֹדִיעַנִי a'	אֲשַׁאלְךָ b'

The two cola of verse 42:4 are arranged in chiastic parallelism. The imperfect verb אֲדַבֵּר at the end of the first colon corresponds to the imperfect verb אֲשַׁאלְךָ at the beginning of the second colon, both in first person singular. Together they emphasise YHWH's act of addressing Job. The verb שָׁמַע at the beginning of the poetic line corresponds to וְהוֹדִיעַנִי at the end, due to their similar mood in the imperative. This parallelism brings to the fore three significant elements conveyed by the words אֲשַׁאלְךָ, שָׁמַע, and אֵנִכִּי, that Job attributes to YHWH.

Firstly, Job emphasises the crucial importance of YHWH's act of speaking. It is worth considering when Job reports the verb form used by YHWH, אֲשַׁאלְךָ, with אֲדַבֵּר. The verb form אֲשַׁאלְךָ comes from the root שָׁאל, which means "to ask, to demand, to request", which refers to a particular manner of speaking and challenging; while אֲדַבֵּר is derived from the root דַּבֵּר, indicating a general way of speaking. By echoing YHWH's verb שָׁאל, Job accepts the challenging character of YHWH's speeches. By the addition

of the verb דבר, Job emphasises the importance of YHWH's act of speaking. No matter how challenging YHWH's words are, the most significant fact for Job is that YHWH has spoken to him. Through the whirlwind, which conventionally signals YHWH's inaccessibility, Job has heard YHWH's own words.¹³⁰ Therefore, all of YHWH's acts of questioning or interrogating mean to Job that YHWH has addressed him personally. His often-expressed desire that YHWH would answer him (cf. 9:16; 13:22; 23:5; 31:35) has come true. YHWH is no longer the silent God in Job's experience. If we remember that in Job's conviction, a dialogue with God is possible only for an upright person (cf. 23:6-7), the fact that YHWH conversed with Job is already a vindication for him.

Secondly, in Job's own understanding, the various requests YHWH has issued for him can be encapsulated in the fundamental appeal to listen, שִׁמַּע. At the beginning of each divine speech, the narrator never said that YHWH appears to Job but rather that YHWH answers (וַיַּעַן) and speaks (וַיֹּמַר) to Job (cf. 38:1; 40:1, 6). YHWH approaches Job with words. If so, the most important faculty for Job to understand YHWH must be that of listening. As the first word in the second strophe, שִׁמַּע is the crucial verb that sets in motion Job's process of declaring his new stance. Just as the verb יָדַע ("to know") was employed at the beginning of the first strophe to identify Job's problem of knowing and thus to reveal his ignorance, so here the verb שִׁמַּע ("to listen") is used at the beginning of the second strophe to highlight Job's problem of listening and thus to signify Job's change in attitude.

As we know, listening describes "not only to the sensory perception of sounds but the recognition of words and their meaning".¹³¹ The act of listening plays an essential role in the relationship and communion between human beings and God. God's address to human beings often begins with an exhortation, such as "Listen to my word!" (Num 12:6), or "Listen, O Israel!" (Deut 4:1; cf. 5:1; 9:1; Jer 2:4; 7:2; Ps 50:7). On many occasions, especially in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic literature, listening also implies obeying.¹³² Human destiny depends on the act of listening or not

¹³⁰ "Si la tormenta lo muestra inaccesible, la palabra lo acerca", thus commented ALONSO SCHÖKEL – SICRE DÍAZ, *Job*, 677.

¹³¹ RÜTERSWORDEN, "שִׁמַּע", *TDOT* 15, 253-279, here 258.

¹³² In various biblical texts, the connotation of obedience is clearly manifested in the occurrences together of the two roots: שִׁמַּע, "to hear, to listen", and נִמַּר, "to observe, to

listening to God's words (Deut 28:1-68). Listening therefore plays a crucial role in the process of education and transformation of human persons, both as individuals and as the people of God.

In 42:4, the two imperative verb forms, *והוֹדִיעֲנִי* and *שִׁמַּע*, associate YHWH's challenge to Job to declare what he knows with the command to listen attentively. As noted by Fokkelman, all four verbs in the poetic line of Job 40:4 are used absolutely. The emphasis of this sentence, therefore, is not on the content of actions but rather on the actions themselves.¹³³ This idea is especially true in the case of the first imperative verb of the poetic line: *שִׁמַּע-נָא*, "listen now!" The whole poetic sentence makes it clear that YHWH speaks to Job in the form of questioning. For Job to answer YHWH's questions in an appropriate manner, he must first learn to listen. As Clines observes, YHWH speaks first and then gives Job the opportunity to respond.¹³⁴ However, the order of the words arranged in this verse strongly suggests that Job's willingness to listen is a necessary condition for YHWH's act of speaking.¹³⁵ It is Job's attitude of listening or not listening that will determine whether YHWH's words to him have an influence on his life or none at all. Thus, in Job's rephrasing of God's words in verse 4, the verb *שִׁמַּע* not only serves "to call for attention at the beginning of a unit of discourse",¹³⁶ which is its usual function in biblical texts, but also reflects Job's understanding of YHWH's fundamental challenge to him. It indicates the imperative condition that enabled Job to enter into an authentic dialogue with YHWH.

As a matter of fact, so far Job has not been characterised as an attentive listener. Loss and suffering have disrupted his ability to listen. Disputes with the friends made him progressively less willing to listen and more eager to be heard (cf. 13:6, 17; 21:2). Even when YHWH spoke to him in the first speech, Job did not prove that he had heard well all that YHWH wanted to teach him. So, in placing the verb *שִׁמַּע* at the beginning of the second

preserve". For instance: "that they may hear (*יִשְׁמְעוּ*) and learn to fear the Lord your God and to observe (*וְשִׁמְרוּ*) diligently all the words of this law" (Deut 31:12; cf. 28:1-2, 15; 30:10).

¹³³ Cf. FOKKELMAN, *Job*, 315.

¹³⁴ CLINES, *Job* 38-42, 1217.

¹³⁵ As indicated by Joüon – Muraoka, in the structure *שִׁמַּע-נָא וְאֵנִכִּי אֲדַבֵּר*, the *ו* is energetic with the nuance of purpose-consecution, and thus can be translated as: "Listen, so that I may speak!". JOÜON – MURAOKA §115c.

¹³⁶ U. RÜTERSWORDEN, *שִׁמַּע*, *TDOT* 15, 253-279, here, 276.

strophe, Job reveals an awareness of his previous lack of ability to listen. In the first strophe, by employing the verb יָדַע, Job confessed the failure of speaking without knowledge and without understanding; now in the second strophe, by employing the verb שָׁמַע, Job pinpoints the cause of that failure, namely, ‘declaring’ before ‘listening’.

Thirdly, the insertion of the personal pronoun אֲנִי is one of the most emphatic elements in Job’s paraphrase. As we have seen in the poetic colon 42:4a, the imperative שָׁמַע stands by itself without a direct object indicating what is to be heard. Nevertheless, the fact that the personal pronoun אֲנִי immediately follows the imperative provides it with a definite orientation. It clarifies the identity of the speaker as YHWH. This means that the focus in this poetic colon is not on *what* Job needs to hear but rather on *to whom* Job must listen. The stress is not on the content heard but rather on the speaker. Moreover, by pointing to the direct speaker in the first person singular, the pronoun אֲנִי has the effect of making the imperative verb שָׁמַע more demanding. As in the case of several texts, when the speaker is in the first person, the imperative verb שָׁמַע often asks not for normal hearing but rather for listening with a caring and attentive attitude: “Listen to me, O coastlands. Pay attention, you people from far away!” (Isa 49:1; cf. Job 13:6; 15:17; 33:1, 31, 33; Gen 27:8; Isa 46:3, 12; 55:2). So too in Job 42:4a, by adding the pronoun אֲנִי after the imperative שָׁמַע, Job reveals his understanding of YHWH’s various challenges as a serious request to listen to YHWH, diligently and very differently from his previous attitude towards his friends. Job highlights the critical importance of listening to the right voice, and the power of a direct encounter with YHWH. Thus, YHWH’s challenge is interpreted by Job as an appeal to listen properly to YHWH and not to limit oneself to a secondary source of knowledge about God.¹³⁷

In short, far from being a “little discrepancy”, as Clines thought,¹³⁸ Job’s words in 42:4 represent both a reception and a deliberate appropriation of YHWH’s words. Job shows how earnestly he has taken into account YHWH’s words addressed to him, as well as how seriously he is meditating on them. Job emphasises the critical significance of YHWH’s addressing him personally. He epitomises YHWH’s challenges in the fundamental command

¹³⁷ Here one can say like Weiser who thus comments: “no one can claim to know YHWH or even speak solidly about YHWH before experiencing a direct encounter with the living God”. WEISER, *Hiob*, 264.

¹³⁸ CLINES, *Job 38–42*, 1216.

to listen. He reveals his awareness of the indispensability of a direct experience of YHWH. Merging YHWH's words with his own interpretation of them is an inventive way in which Job approaches his final stance before YHWH.

3.3.2 From Hearing to Seeing (42:5): Job's Aesthetic Re-shaping Experience

The second poetic line connects to the first through anaphora, beginning with the same root שָׁמַע (cf. 4a, 5a). With this rhetorical device, the poet reminds readers that it is in the aesthetic quality of listening that Job's experience of YHWH is renewed. The aesthetic dimension, therefore, serves as the solid backdrop against which Job is now expressing his experience of YHWH. A close reading of Job 42:5 (cf. Table 20) will bring to the forefront the aesthetic dimension of Job's response, as well as the wisdom of Job's newly acquired knowledge of YHWH.

Table 20.
Linear parallelism between 42:5a and 42:5b

42:5a	b שָׁמַעְתִּיךָ	a לְשִׁמְע־אָזְנוֹן
42:5b	רָאִיתִךָ b'	וַעֲתָה עֵינַי a'

At first glance, this poetic line parallels the two most important types of human sensory perception, and thus the two most common ways of knowing God according to biblical traditions, namely, שָׁמַע – “to hear” and רָאָה – “to see”. These two verb forms are placed at the end of each colon, appended by the same pronominal suffix, ךָּ-. The discourse in the first person singular now refers back to Job, while the pronominal suffix of the second person singular refers to YHWH, Job's addressee. In the middle position of each colon are the main substantives אָזְנוֹן and עֵינַי, which Job uses to chart his shift in aesthetic perception. First, Job re-examines his earlier knowledge of YHWH that was based on auditory perception (42:5a), then he interprets his new insight into YHWH in terms of visual experience (42:5b).

3.3.2.1 Job's Past Experience: "By the hearing of the ear, I have heard of you" (42:5a)

Job's encapsulation of YHWH's words as an appeal to listen in verse 4 prepares the stage for the shaping of his experience in verse 5. The imperative שִׁמַע in verse 4 finds a double correspondence in verse 5, שִׁמַעְתִּיךָ, לִשְׁמַע־אָזְן. By having the root שִׁמַע recur three times in these two poetic lines, the poet is playing with a paronomasia, employing similar words with different meanings. This rhetorical device effectually brings forth the drastic disparity between YHWH's command to listen, שִׁמַע, and Job's act of hearing, שִׁמַעְתִּיךָ, לִשְׁמַע־אָזְן. A careful reading of 42:5a will justify this claim.

To indicate the source of his hearing before the encounter with YHWH, Job employs a noun phrase: לִשְׁמַע־אָזְן.¹³⁹ The first noun of the phrase, שִׁמַע, recurs seventeen times in the Hebrew Bible with a fairly consistent range of meanings. It signifies news, report, information, reputation, or rumour that is perceived from afar.¹⁴⁰ The word conveys information about something that happens at a distance but that affects those who receive it. For example, the information about Pharaoh's army coming out of Egypt disturbs the Chaldeans who are besieging Jerusalem (Jer 37:5); the news of the destruction of Tyre arrives in Egypt and troubles the Egyptians (Isa 23:5); the report about the rising of a people from the north bothers the king of Babylon (Jer 50:43); and news heard about God's people makes others tremble (Deut 2:25). On some occasions, שִׁמַע denotes tidings that a person hears about another person, such as when Laban receives the information of Jacob (Gen 29:13), or when the queen of Sheba hears from far away about Solomon's reputation (cf. 1 Kgs 10:1; 2 Chr 9:1). On other occasions, the term is employed to refer to the account that people hear about God from far away, and thus can be translated as the "fame" or "reputation" of God, as in "the nations [...] have heard about you" (lit. "heard the report of you", Num 14:15; cf. Nah 3:19) and "Lord, I have heard of your fame" (lit. "heard report of you"; Hab 3:2; cf. Isa 66:19).

Besides Job 42:5a, the phrase לִשְׁמַע־אָזְן appears together with the verb שִׁמַע in Ps 18:45, in 2 Sam 22:45, and in Job 28:22. The first two cases

¹³⁹ According to Morrow, the phrase לִשְׁמַע־אָזְן is a strengthened form of the noun שִׁמַע. The phrase highlights the fact that "hearers have no direct experience of what is reported". Cf. MORROW, "Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance", 220.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. HALOT, 9755; BDB 1034.

belong to the context of a song of thanksgiving for victory that the king sings to God, recounting the submission of foreigners once they have heard of him: לשמע און ישמעו – “As soon as they hear, they obey me”.¹⁴¹ In these instances, the phrase לשמע-און signifies news or a report about something that is not immediately perceivable but that can have a direct effect on hearers.

The case of Job 28:22 praises the inaccessibility of wisdom. The personifications of Abaddon and Death pronounce, שמענו באזנינו, “with our ears we have heard a rumour of it”. In the context of Job 28:20-22, the Joban poet claims that wisdom is far from the eyes of all the living, hidden from the birds of the air, and even beyond the reach of the underworld. All of the information that Abaddon and Death have about wisdom is only a kind of hearsay rather than first-hand knowledge.

Thus, by the use of paronomasia the poet contrasts the kind of hearing in the first two poetic lines of the second strophe (vv. 4-5). In the first line, the demand of YHWH employs the verb שמע, insisting that Job listen to YHWH so as to have direct communication with YHWH. The second line employs the noun שמע which means the kind of information that is about remote realities. No matter how true or false this kind of information may be,¹⁴² it is only indirect and second-hand knowledge. The indirect character of knowledge conveyed by the noun שמע thus helps to reaffirm the translation of the verb form שמעתך as “I have heard of you” rather than “I have heard you”. By saying לשמע-און שמעתך, Job is not talking about the divine speeches in which YHWH spoke to him directly. Instead, he refers to his knowledge of YHWH prior to YHWH’s speeches. The perfect tense of the verb form שמעתך indicates that Job is talking about his knowledge of YHWH as an “action grasped entire” in the past, as Good argues.¹⁴³ Based on indirect knowledge, Job complained against YHWH and fought with his friends. Now, by employing the expression לשמע-און, Job acknowledges that his former knowledge of YHWH had been secondary, for he did not have a direct contact with YHWH. In this manner, Job reveals his awareness of the insufficiency of his previous understanding of YHWH, and consequently the

¹⁴¹ The phrase appears in 2 Sam 22:45 with a minor variation, לשמוע און. The meaning, nevertheless, is the same as לשמע-און.

¹⁴² In fact, the term שמע can also refer to false information: “You shall not spread a false report (שמע שוא)” (Exod 23:1).

¹⁴³ GOOD, *In Turns of the Tempest*, 373.

inappropriateness of his way of speaking of YHWH. While in the first strophe Job confesses that he did not know and did not understand (40:3bc), in the second strophe he takes a step further in acknowledging the limitation of his previous knowing and understanding of YHWH. He recognises that his misinterpretation of YHWH and of YHWH's governance over the world was because he had followed only other sources of knowledge. His act of hearing in the past did not have YHWH as speaker.

Tsevat indicates that the apposition of שמע and און in the poetic colon לשמע-און שמעתוך, "to hear with ears", often refers to a positive appreciation of traditions in biblical texts.¹⁴⁴ King David praises the greatness and uniqueness of God on the ground of what God's people had received from traditional teaching: "There is no one like you and there is no God besides you, according to what we have heard with our ears" (שמענו באזנינו; 2 Sam 7:22). On some occasions, the construction "hearing with our ears" is equivalent to hearing the traditions from ancestors: "We have heard with our ears [באזנינו שמענו], O God, our fathers have told us" (Ps 44:2; cf. 78:3). Traditionally, it is the teaching and sharing of former generations that shape people's experience of God. Audibility is one of the constitutional dimensions of tradition handed on from generations to generations (cf. also Exod 10:2; Judg 6:13; Ps 78:4, 6). Thus, by using the structure "hearing with ears" in 42:5a, the poet is connecting Job's previous experience with the traditions and traditional theologies of the people of Israel. In its entirety, the colon 42:5a לשמע-און שמעתוך associates the knowledge passed on to Job from traditions with mere report or second-hand knowledge. Here, Job is indicating that it is not enough to live by theological precepts alone, even if they are as deeply rooted in the tradition as the precepts of retributive theology.¹⁴⁵

As a matter of fact, what Job was hearing during the disputation with his friends is their theological statements and various articulations of the ethics of retribution. Job was also driven by his inner agitations to interpret incorrectly his experience of suffering through the same ethics. Now after his encounter with the beauty and mystery of the universe manifested in the divine speeches, Job is freed from the retributive frame. He recognises both

¹⁴⁴ TSEVAT, "The Meaning of the Book of Job", 21-22.

¹⁴⁵ Hartley thus comments: "Previously Job had heard about God through the tradition in songs sung at the festivals and in the teaching of the elders. Rejoicing in what his ear heard about God, Job zealously lived by the precepts". HARTLEY, *Job*, 536.

the falsification of perceiving everything through the lens of utilitarianism, and the distortion of the image of YHWH fashioned according to the rigid application of the retributive ethics. Thus, the divine speeches provide Job with a profound insight into the mystery of God and teach him that there are other ways of knowing and speaking about God beyond the boundary of retributive ethics. He is now attempting another language to express his newly acquired experience of the living encounter with the reality of God.

3.3.2.2 Job's Present Perception: "But now, my eye has seen you" (42:5b)

The second poetic colon of Job 42:5 brings readers back to the present moment of Job right after the divine speeches. The colon is inaugurated by a combination of the conjunction ו and the adverb עתה. Theoretically, the conjunction ו can be either copulative or adversative, and thus the combination ועתה can be translated as "and now"¹⁴⁶ or "but now"¹⁴⁷. The former favours a simple transition between the two cola of the poetic line, a complementarity between the two modes of sensory perception, "hearing" and "seeing", as well as a continuity in Job's knowledge of YHWH. Instead, the latter advocates a contrast between the two cola and a dramatic change in Job's perception of YHWH. Closer examination will shed more light to see that in reality ועתה is a crucial word that marks a decisive turning point not only in Job's knowledge but also in his final stance before YHWH.

It should be said that Job's statement, "now my eye has seen you", is rather startling. In responding to YHWH so far, Job has referred to knowing, asking, speaking, listening, instructing. Suddenly he here switches to seeing. On the one hand, it is important to note that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible does a human being confidently claim to see God. Seeing God is conventionally considered a fatal experience (Judg 6:22; 13:22). A normal human being cannot see God and live (cf. Exod 33:20). Job himself was also aware of the impossibility for him to see God as a perceptible object: "He

¹⁴⁶ Cf. WILLIAMS, "Job's Vision", 259, 269; GOOD, *In Turns of the Tempest*, 373; JANZEN, *Job*, 251; VAN WOLDE, "Job 42,1-6", 233; CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 1215; PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 232.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. WILLIAMS, "You Have Not Spoken Truth of Me", 233; MACKENZIE, "The Transformation of Job", 56; DHORME, *Job*, 590; POPE, *Job*, 345; TSEVAT, "The Meaning of the Book of Job", 21; GORDIS, *Job*, 491; DAILY, "The Aesthetics of Repentance", 67; HABEL, *Job*, 575; HARTLEY, *Job*, 535; FOKKELMAN, *Job*, 315; *Major Poems*, 324; GRAY, *Job*, 486; MORLA, *Job*, 1459.

passes by me, and I do not see him. He moves on, but I do not perceive him” (9:11; cf. 23:9). On the other hand, it is also important to remember that in the introduction to the divine speeches the narrator was very clear in not saying that YHWH appears, but instead YHWH answers (וַיַּעַן) and says (וַיֹּאמֶר) to Job (38:1; 40:1, 6). Accordingly, YHWH’s communication to Job is auditory rather than visual. Job is not required to behold YHWH, but to listen and speak to YHWH. Therefore, Job’s reference to seeing, must indicate a significant leap in his aesthetic perception of YHWH. So, what does Job mean now by saying “my eye has seen you”? How different is this “seeing” from the “hearing” just mentioned in the same poetic line? An examination of relevant texts dealing with hearing and seeing will shed more light in addressing these questions.

3.3.2.2.1 Hearing and Seeing

Biblical texts often present hearing and seeing as two parallel forms of perception. They are two sensory faculties that God granted to human beings: “The hearing ear and the seeing eye, God has made even both of them” (Prov 20:12). Hearing and seeing often occur as two interconnected modes of perception that support each other: “When the ear heard, it commended me; when the eye saw, it approved” (Job 29:11; cf. Gen 24:30). Occurring together, these two forms tend to indicate a completeness of perception and understanding: “Behold, my eyes has seen all this. My ear has heard and understood it” (Job 13:1). In his distress, king Hezekiah prayed for God’s intervention by invoking both divine hearing and seeing: “Incline your ear, O God, and hear; open your eye, O God, and see” (2 Kgs 19:16). Also, God expresses divine understanding about the situation of the Israelite people with both hearing and seeing: “I have surely seen the affliction of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry” (Exod 3:7). Similarly, both hearing and seeing are mentioned as two reinforcing modes of expressing love’s desires between lovers: “Let me see your face. Let me hear your voice” (Song 2:14). Based on these examples, some scholars contend that the argument about the contrast between “hearing” and “seeing” as two different modes of perception is not quite convincing in the case of Job 42:5.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Some scholars even strongly argue that to regard seeing as a form superior to hearing is simply a “Western intellectualisation” that privileges the former over the latter, rather than a biblical way of thinking. Cf. CLINES, *Job 38–42*, 216; GOOD, *In Turns of the Tempest*, 374.

However, there are significant instances in biblical texts that suggest a definite prevalence of seeing over hearing. Three examples, Gen 45:27, 1 Kgs 10:6-7, and Job 28:22-27, are worth considering.

In the first two cases, it is the act of seeing that eliminates the uncertainty of hearing. Gen 45:27 tells the story of Jacob's sons returning from Egypt and recounting to their father the good tidings about Joseph, his beloved son. At first, Jacob did not believe what he heard. The news brought from a far failed to convince him until he saw the wagon sent by Joseph to carry him. What Jacob saw serves as evidence to verify what he had heard. The act of seeing, therefore, takes priority over hearing. Similar is the case with the Queen of Sheba in her encounter with Solomon: "It is true what I heard in my homeland about you and your wisdom. I did not believe until I came, and my own eyes have seen it" (1 Kgs 10:6-7). The Queen is contrasting her two attitudes based on what she had heard and what she has witnessed about Solomon's wisdom. Her hearing was indirect and from a far. Such hearing could not gain her confidence. Now she comes close and becomes an eyewitness to Solomon's wealth and wisdom. The literary context of 1 Kgs 10:1-7 reveals that the Queen's seeing is the culminating result of a confrontational encounter in which she challenged Solomon with hard questions (10:1), asking him everything she had in her mind (10:2), and eventually beholding all of Solomon's wisdom and wealth (10:4-5). In this case, therefore, the Queen is stating that her seeing in the present moment is more convincing than her hearing in the past. This seeing denotes direct experience, personal impressions, and whole-hearted conviction. The Queen's present seeing thus confirms her past hearing.

More clearly, in Job 28:22-27, the Joban poet contrasts two types of knowledge concerning Wisdom, that of Abaddon and Death on the one hand and that of God on the other. As mentioned above, in praising the inaccessibility of Wisdom, the poet states that wisdom is beyond the reach of even Abaddon and Death. Their knowledge of Wisdom is only a kind of second-hand information, which is conveyed by the hearing of the ear (שמענו שמעה באזנינו, 28:22). On the contrary, the poet affirms that God sees Wisdom (ראה, 28:27). The literary context of Job 28:23-27 helps to clarify the meaning of this seeing. God knows fully the value of Wisdom because God understands its way as well as its abode (28:23). Moreover, God's act of seeing Wisdom is directly associated with other immediately following verbs such as "declare" (ויספרה), "establish" (הכינה), and "search out"

(הִקְרָה) (28:27). This association means that the act of seeing involves the seer in the process of interacting with what is seen. God sees Wisdom in a way that Abaddon and Death can never do by their hearing. Thus, in describing God's seeing of Wisdom as superior to Abaddon and Death's hearing of it, the Joban poet also privileges the value of seeing over that of hearing.

In short, biblical texts provide much evidence that the auditory and visual are often employed as two consonant modes of sensory perception, supportive and complementary to each other. Nevertheless, there are also significant occasions in which these two modes of perception appear contrastive. Hearing conveys information from a great distance, whereas seeing connotes a direct and intimate involvement. As personal and first-hand experience, visual prevails over auditory perception in some particular cases.

3.3.2.2.2 Blending of Hearing and Seeing

The above analysis may lead to a confusion in the case of Job. In fact, during the divine speeches Job directly heard YHWH. This experience of hearing is by no means second-hand. So, does Job really regard what he hears as less significant than what he sees? To answer this question, it should be clear that the contrast Job is making is not exactly between hearing and seeing, but precisely between *hearing* from second-hand knowledge and *hearing* properly from the source of such knowledge. In 42:5a, Job associated hearing with his past knowledge, which is only secondary compared to his experience of a direct encounter with YHWH in the present moment. Thus, the difference lies in hearing about YHWH from different theories on the one hand and hearing YHWH directly on the other.

Therefore, it is not convincing to argue that Job really regards what he has seen as superior to what he has heard from YHWH. Nothing in the book of Job supports the argument that Job has actually seen YHWH.¹⁴⁹ It is Job's listening to YHWH, not his seeing, that opens his eyes. If so, what happens in 42:5b is that Job is interpreting his experience of the auditory event of

¹⁴⁹ DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 372, rightly comment: "the vision spoken of is not the sight of any form or appearance of God; for there is no indication that Job is conceived as having seen such".

YHWH's speeches in visual terms, as Fokkelman reasonably explains.¹⁵⁰ By employing the visual term, the Joban poet assures readers that Job's auditory perception throughout the whirlwind is an authentic and very particular experience with YHWH. This experience of encountering and hearing YHWH is "so unmistakably real", as Hartley calls it, that Job could say "now my eye has seen you".¹⁵¹ This expression is therefore best understood as an idiom for an intimate and authentic encounter with YHWH, as Clines suggests.¹⁵² The experience of hearing God reflects, in James Williams' expression, "a glimpse of the larger Life in the midst of whose grandeur and mystery he [Job] is paradoxically given the opportunity to speak with the One who is other and most near".¹⁵³

It is worth noting that in the Hebrew Bible, not only seeing but also hearing God is a distinctive experience of privileged people.¹⁵⁴ Job is now aware that this distinctive experience has been granted to him, and he expresses such experience in visual term. This means that readers are witnessing a fusion of auditory and visual language in this case. This fusion is graspable on the ground of the correspondence between hearing and seeing as supported by various biblical texts. The fusion becomes even more comprehensible in the light of the tradition of prophetic literature.

As Gerald Harrop points out, the prophetic oracular superscriptions often blend the two senses of hearing and seeing.¹⁵⁵ On the one hand, the word of God appears to the prophet not only audible but also visible: "The word of God that came to Micah [...] which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem" (Mic 1:1). This implies that the word of God involves more than merely auditory influence. The prophets do not only hear, but somehow sees the word of God. On the other hand, the prophet's visual perception of God can sometimes be described in auditory terms, namely, regarding what God says: "The vision of Obadiah: thus says the Lord concerning Edom" (Obad 1:1). There is also a certain mixture of the auditory and visual dimensions

¹⁵⁰ Cf. FOKKELMAN, *Major Poems*, 324.

¹⁵¹ Cf. HARTLEY, *Job*, 537.

¹⁵² Cf. CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1216.

¹⁵³ WILLIAMS, "Job's Vision", 260.

¹⁵⁴ For example, Moses used to remind the people of Israel of this privileged experience: "Did ever any people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live?" (Deut 4:33; 5:26).

¹⁵⁵ Cf. G.G. HARROP, "But Now Mine Eye Seeth Thee", *CJT* 12 (1966) 80–84, here 81.

in the account of the words of a prophet: “The words of Amos which he saw about Israel” (Amos 1:1); “The oracle of Habakkuk the prophet saw” (Hab 1:1). Similarly, in the call narratives of Jeremiah and Isaiah, there is not only a continuity but also a certain merging of what the prophets saw and what they heard (cf. Isa 6:1, 8; Jer 1:11). Therefore, in the prophetic experience of God and of God’s word, “the visual and the auditory shade into one another”.¹⁵⁶ It is the close relationship between a prophet and the word of God that testifies to an intimate and personal encounter with God.

Something similar to the experience of the prophets is found in the case of Job. Just as prophets hear and see the words of God and thus manifest an intimate relationship with the living God, so too Job sees YHWH through the divine speeches and gains insights into a special relationship between himself and YHWH.

3.3.2.2.3 “Now my eye has seen You”

Accepting that “seeing God” is a metaphorical term by which Job interprets his profound experience of encountering YHWH, one may wonder: what the entire statement “now my eye has seen you” might mean? How does this statement relate to Job’s intellectual and theological journey of maturation and transformation? How does it carry forward the manifestation of Job’s final stance before YHWH? To answer these questions, Job’s statement should be situated in the literary context of the final poem, linking to relevant texts in the book of Job and to those in the broader biblical contexts. First, however, a basic understanding of the crucial verb ראה is necessary.

As Hans F. Fuhs designates, the visual faculty of the eyes conveyed by the verb ראה is “constitutive for the apperception of the reality”. The verb denotes “the experience of seeing as a totality, in which sensation and perception merge”.¹⁵⁷ This means that ראה does not only refer to capturing the outward appearance of the perceived object, but rather to perceiving its meaning and nature. As an experience of apperception, seeing fulfils the purpose of an intentional search and imprints itself on the seer’s fundamental being.¹⁵⁸ More importantly, the verb ראה often conveys a full

¹⁵⁶ G. HARROP, “But Now Mine Eye Seeth Thee”, 82.

¹⁵⁷ H.F. FUHS, “ראה”, *TDOT* 13, 208-242, here 214-215.

¹⁵⁸ FUHS, “ראה”, 218, 221.

immediacy of personal encounter. In various cases of personal encounter, the verb רָאָה marks the seeing at first sight that triggers emotional impressions and evokes love, as in the cases of Rebecca and Isaac (Gen 24:63-64), Jacob and Rachel (Gen 29:10), Judah and Shua (Gen 38:2), Samson and Timnah (Judg 14:1-2). Fuhs also states that every conscious apperception is often initiated by seeing with the eyes. Therefore, the conjunction of רָאָה with עֵין, seeing with one's eye, is often employed to emphasise the personal nature of the experience.¹⁵⁹ In the relationship between human beings and God, the expression "seeing God" is meant to stress the reality of the encounter, the authenticity of the experience, as well as the immediacy and personal character of the encounter. Specifically, in the case of afflicted faithful, seeing God conveys a personal encounter that establishes an intimate communion with God. By seeing God, afflicted faithful are convinced that they are God's friends and can count on God's assistance.¹⁶⁰

In Job 42:5b, the statement "now my eye has seen you" signals Job's first experience ever of seeing YHWH. This experience, therefore, is full of meaning and marks a revolutionary change in Job's understanding of YHWH and of himself, signifying not only communication but also communion with YHWH, the One whom Job has long sought.

In the immediate context of the poetic strophe, Job's statement of seeing YHWH represents his innovated way of responding to YHWH. Against the background of his hearing of various second-hand knowledge in the past, Job has reflected on YHWH's appeal to listen. He eventually arrives at the positive response: "my eye has seen you". Listening to YHWH, therefore, represents a profound experience that opens Job's eyes and changes his perspective. In addition, Job's claim of seeing is closely connected with the statement of knowing at the beginning of the poem.¹⁶¹ Job had initiated his confession by stating "I know", acknowledging YHWH's omnipotence and autonomy (42:2). Such a statement now finds its justification in Job's revealing of his experience: "my eye has seen you". It is the experience of a personal encounter with YHWH that illuminates Job's wisdom. Job now

¹⁵⁹ FUHS, "רָאָה", 215-216.

¹⁶⁰ FUHS, "רָאָה", 229-230.

¹⁶¹ In fact, the parallel use of רָאָה and יָדַע is well attested in many biblical texts: "you have seen my affliction. You have known my soul in adversity" (Ps 31:7; cf. Num 24:16-17; Deut 4:35; Isa 5:19). Seeing is a way to obtain knowledge (cf. Gen 8:8, 11).

knows YHWH not by limited knowledge of hearing from afar, but by a living experience of seeing that enriches and completely renews his life. “All the theological chatter about suffering falls into a void, and only the lived experience of the living God can convince Job”, as Dirk Kinet commented.¹⁶²

Moreover, as a response immediately following YHWH’s speeches, Job’s claim of seeing shows that he has well-apprehended the lessons YHWH wanted him to learn. The aesthetics of the divine speeches has opened Job’s mind and set him free from his ethics of retribution. Understanding YHWH’s way of governing in creation provides Job with a totally different way of considering his experience of suffering. Job’s claim to have seen God, therefore, is a convincing assertion that God is on his side, not an adversary against him or indifferent to his suffering. Even though Job is still ignorant as to why disasters have happened to him and to his family, the most significant insight for him is the recognition that they are not divine punishments. This insight is a pearl of enlightened wisdom far more valuable to Job than any answer he could be given about divine justice or human suffering. With this enlightened wisdom, Job is characterised as a true sage.

Furthermore, seeing YHWH means for Job to see his deepest desire fulfilled. With much internal conflict, Job had gone through his search for YHWH with many doubts and frustrations: “I go forward, but he is not there; backward, but I cannot perceive him. On the left hand when he works, I cannot behold; when he turns to the right hand, I cannot see” (23:8-9; cf. 9:11, 16). Like King Hezekiah during his time of illness, Job had experienced the excruciating anguish of being unable to see God: “I said, I shall not see God again in the land of the living” (Isa 38:11). Nevertheless, there were also lucid instances in which Job was mysteriously convinced of the possibility of seeing God with his own eye: “For I myself know that my redeemer lives, and at last on the earth he shall stand. And after my skin has been destroyed, from my flesh I shall see God whom I myself shall see on my side. My own eyes shall see him, not as a stranger” (19:25-26). Amid his suffering, seeing God was Job’s deepest longing and conviction even

¹⁶² D. KINET, “L’Ambiguïté des représentations de Dieu et de Satan dans le livre de Job”, *Conc* 189 (1983) 55-63, here 62-63.

within serious doubts. Now, by stating “my eye has seen you”, Job acclaims that such a longing has been fulfilled and such a conviction attested.

It is noteworthy that Job does not directly say “I have seen you”, but instead “my eye has seen you”. The latter expression may suggest that Job is not actually the active subject of the act of seeing. Rather, seeing YHWH is a grace granted to him.¹⁶³ Job is confessing that his new insight into YHWH comes from YHWH, or in David Thompson’s expression: “from a revelation from beyond himself, from YHWH who has allowed himself to be seen”.¹⁶⁴ With this “gift of sight”,¹⁶⁵ God’s hidden goodness has conceded “what Job dared to hope for in the boldest rush of his faith”.¹⁶⁶ For those who share the traditional conviction that only the upright can behold God (cf. Ps 11:7; 17:15), Job’s claim to see God is a vindication of his own righteousness.

With Job’s statement of seeing YHWH, the Joban poet places his protagonist in the long tradition of privileged figures who are granted a personal and intimate encounter with God. Job’s experience can be compared with that of Hagar who saw God at the worst moment of her miserable situation: “I have seen God and remained alive after seeing him” (Gen 16:13). Just as for Hagar seeing God means protection and deliverance that open up a new future for her and her son, so too for Job seeing YHWH means liberation from a distorted view of ethics that had long oppressed him and thus opens up a new life for him. Similarly, Job’s seeing YHWH can find its echo in Jacob’s experience at Peniel. In the anguished night before the encounter with Esau, his brother, Jacob was wrestling with a mysterious figure. This experience was interpreted by Jacob as seeing God: “I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved” (Gen 32:30). So, just as Jacob had to wrestle with God in order to obtain divine blessing, so too did Job struggle in order to see YHWH and to experience his vindication. Also, Job’s seeing YHWH is reminiscent of the experience of Moses and seventy elders

¹⁶³ This grace of seeing is often explained by scholars as mystical experience, that brings about an existential consonance in the sage’s experience of God. Dailey thus comments: “whereas the triumph of experiential reasoning over impersonal tradition may lead to cognitive dissonance [...], yet the mystical experience of encounter with God provides existential consonance. [...] For the thinker, the inability to resolve the enigma of life remains, yet, for the sage, the ability to supersede this rational demand is offered by and in God”. DAILEY, “And Yet He Repents”, 209.

¹⁶⁴ D.L. THOMPSON, “Yet Another Try on Job 42:6”, *AJ* 72 (2017) 133-142, here 139.

¹⁶⁵ Term used by WILLIAMS, “Job’s Vision”, 262.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. WEISER, *Hiob*, 265.

at the foundational event in the history of the people of God. These privileged people “saw the God of Israel” and experienced a special relationship of trust and protection established by the encounter with God (Exod 24:10-11).¹⁶⁷ As the experience of seeing God marks a fundamental moment of covenant for the chosen people, so also for Job seeing YHWH marks a new dawn for his covenantal life. Job now regains the apperception of the transcendental and covenantal God, who simultaneously is the most far from and yet the most near to his humanity.

In short, Job’s claim to see YHWH is an acclamation of wisdom from the mouth of a pious sufferer who has eventually come to a new experience of the divine presence.¹⁶⁸ The presence Job had long sought has now become a living and proximate actuality. The invisible and silent God has become perceptible and audible to the afflicted faithful. Being able to contemplate YHWH for the first time ever marks a new dawn in Job’s relationship with YHWH, a communion in mature faith and authentic love.

3.3.3 Job’s Final Stance (42:6): Submission and Reconciliation

With the compound conjunction **על־כן**, not only does Job conclude his discourse but also the Joban poet brings the entire poetic corpus to its end. The combination **על־כן** is commonly used for causality, indicating that what has just been said serves as the reason for what is about to be said now, and thus can be translated as “because of that”, “therefore”.¹⁶⁹ Beginning with this conjunction, the last poetic line remains in close connection to all that precedes it. Job’s newly first-hand knowledge of YHWH now gives him reason and motivation to come to a decisive expression of his final stance before YHWH. This stance includes both a submission and a reconciliation.

3.3.3.1 Job’s Submission: “Therefore, I submit” (42:6a)

Technically speaking, the verb form **סמנא** in the first poetic colon (v. 6a) is used absolutely. The rhetorical device of ellipsis is intended not to restrict readers into a limited frame of understanding, but instead to open them to various possibilities of meaning. Once again, readers are invited to engage

¹⁶⁷ FUHS, “**רִאיה**”, 229.

¹⁶⁸ Thus, one may say with Lynne Newell: “Now, not only did Job know that God is sovereign, but also he knew, intimately, the God who is sovereign”. NEWELL, “Job: Repentant or Rebellious?”, 315-316.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. JOÜON – MURAOKA, § 170h.

in the protagonist's process of self-disclosure so as to discover his final position before God.

The root סננ occurs twelve times in the book of Job. Eight times it is used by Job.¹⁷⁰ The verb frequently appears as a transitive verb and basically means "to refuse, reject, despise".¹⁷¹ Nonetheless, this verb is not rarely used absolutely, especially in the book of Job (cf. Job 7:16, 34:33, 36:5, 42:6). As Pope rightly notes: "When the object of the verb is clear from the context, it does not need to be expressed".¹⁷² The question remains, however, as to what is the object of the verb form סנננ in the literary context of Job 42:6? What does Job declare to reject? Even though the ambiguity of the syntax offers various ways of understanding the poetic line, the literary context helps to specify the most likely options. To understand Job's expression properly, the first and fundamental question should be this: What cannot be the object of Job's rejection? Based on the literary context understood so far, we can firmly state that neither Job himself nor God can be considered as the implied object of the verb form סנננ .

Firstly, the implied object of the verb form סנננ cannot be Job himself.¹⁷³ As has been seen, together with the LXX, various versions and translations understand Job 42:6a as a self-humiliation and even self-loathing.¹⁷⁴ This understanding is in fact one of the inevitable consequences of the misinterpretation of YHWH's words addressing Job. If one fell into the pitfall of considering that YHWH had been humiliating Job during the divine speeches, it also becomes easy to fall into the trap of considering that Job is now accepting such a humiliation.¹⁷⁵ However, as has been seen

¹⁷⁰ Job employs the root סננ in 7:5, 16; 9:21; 10:3; 19:18; 30:1; 31:13; 42:6; Eliphaz in 5:17, Bildad in 8:20, and Elihu in 34:33; 36:5.

¹⁷¹ Cf. BDB 549; *HALOT*, 4737.

¹⁷² POPE, *Job*, 349.

¹⁷³ The BDB's authors list four other cases, besides Job 42:6, in which the verb סננ occurs without an object: Job 7:16; 34:33; 36:5; Ezek 21:13. In none of these cases is the verb reflexive. This means that in no case can the subject of the verb סננ be its object.

¹⁷⁴ It is enough here to mention two examples: "[L]ike a prophet, who sees a holy God, he [Job] is thrown into the grip of self-aborrence and the awe of self-destruction". TERRIEN, *Job*, 1193. "As a result of seeing God, Job "hated/despised" himself", R.L. ALDEN, *Job* (NAC 11; Nashville 1993) 408. For more scholars who go in the same direction, see NRSV, NIV; ROWLEY, *Job*, 342.

¹⁷⁵ This is the conclusion of Clines about Job's final stance: "He has submitted to the famous omnipotence of Yahweh (as in v. 2), that is all. His eyes have been opened by his

during the divine speeches, the purpose of YHWH's humbling Job is to set him free from his retributive ethics so as to open him to an aesthetic perspective, rather than to humiliate him. Job was not called to despise or loathe himself. On the contrary, various details in the divine speeches indicate YHWH's appreciation for Job. Job had twice been urged by YHWH to behave like a valiant man who can frankly enter into dialogue with YHWH (38:3b; 40:7). YHWH did not accept Job's belittling himself as manifested in his first response (40:4). Moreover, since the beginning of the book, Job had been superlatively praised by the two most authoritative voices, that of the narrator and that of God (Job 1:1, 8, 22; 2:3, 10). Also, the development of Job 42:2-6 shows how seriously Job took YHWH's words to him and how he gradually became aware of his own worth in the eyes of YHWH. Therefore, to have Job despise himself now is nothing more than to betray the narrative line and upset all the ground prepared for Job thus far.

Secondly, the implied object of the verb form *ḥāḥā* can neither be YHWH, as John B. Curtis provocatively concludes: "He [Job] totally and unequivocally rejects Yahweh".¹⁷⁶ According to Curtis, the root *ḥāḥ* does not simply mean "to reject" or "to despise" in the normal sense, but instead conveys "great emotion".¹⁷⁷ In the case of Job, Curtis defines such an emotion as "to feel loathing contempt and revulsion", and then translates the verb form *ḥāḥā* as "I feel loathing contempt".¹⁷⁸ Indeed, Curtis mentions four instances in the book of Job where the verb *ḥāḥ* occurs without an expressed object: 7:16; 34:33; 36:5; 42:6. But then, he disregards 36:5 for its subject is not Job. He also considers 34:33 secondary, for it belongs to

encounter with God, to be sure, but what he has seen has not been his vindication but his ultimate humiliation". CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1222.

¹⁷⁶ CURTIS, "On Job's Response", 497.

¹⁷⁷ Curtis cites about fourteen instances in which he thinks the verb *ḥāḥ* is used with "emotional depth", they are: Lev 26:43, 44; Judg 9:38; Isa 7:15-16; 33:15; Jer 4:30; 14:19; Lam 3:45; Ps 15:4; 36:5; 89:39; 118:22; Job 30:1. His argument, however, is not really convincing, as criticised by NEWELL, "Job: Repentant or Rebellious?", 312, for two reasons. First, the root *ḥāḥ* actually occurs seventy-three times in the Bible. Curtis' analysis pays attention only to fourteen cases and ignore the other fifty-nine. Second, in many of the cases cited, the verb *ḥāḥ* can simply mean "reject" or "refuse" without necessarily conveying any emotional nuance as Curtis has subjectively speculated. For example: "the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone" (Ps 118:2; cf. also Ps 36:5; Judg 9:38; Isa 7:15, 16; 33:15).

¹⁷⁸ Job 42:6a is thus translated by Curtis: "Therefore I feel loathing contempt and revulsion [toward you, O God]". CURTIS, "On Job's Response", 503, 505.

Elihu's speeches. His conclusion on 42:6 is thus based mainly on a comparison with 7:16. In the literary context of lamenting over his miserable situation, Job states that he would choose strangulation and death rather than his body (7:15). The verb form *וַיִּסְתַּח* in the immediately following sentence (7:16), therefore, must somehow associate itself with Job's life with all its problems, as various scholars rightly translate: "I despise my life".¹⁷⁹ Oddly enough, Curtis chooses to interpret the verb *וַיִּסְתַּח* in Job 7:16, as well as in 42:6a, as "Job is said to feel loathing revulsion", and then jumps to the conclusion: "there can be little doubt that the unexpressed object of the loathing is God".¹⁸⁰ There can be little doubt that this conclusion reflects arbitrary conjecture.¹⁸¹ Curtis' connection between Job 42:6a and previous instances is not really convincing. When he equates Job's attitudes before and after the divine speeches, he takes neither the event of YHWH's addressing Job nor its content seriously.¹⁸² In reality, Job's manner of reflecting on YHWH's words to him has demonstrated very well his submission to divine wisdom. Undoubtedly, Job's sincere confession of ignorance, as seen in the first poetic strophe, reaffirms his confidence in the supreme power and sovereignty of YHWH. The inner attitude that YHWH intended to arouse in Job during the divine speeches was not contempt and revulsion but astonishment and reverence. In responding to YHWH's instruction, if Job could not despise himself, much less could he feel loathing contempt and revulsion toward YHWH.

So, what can be the object of the verb form *וַיִּסְתַּח*, and what can this verb form imply in the literary context of Job 42:6? As Lester J. Kuyper's survey points out, the root *סח* in most cases in the book of Job has the basic meaning of "to reject", or possibly "to regard of little value". The verb

¹⁷⁹ In fact, the lack of the direct object in this case troubles many scholars, and not a few choose to regard the verb form *וַיִּסְתַּח* as a gloss (cf. for example FOHRER, *Hiob*, 159, 164; POPE, *Job*, 62). However, many scholars choose to read the text as it is and understand the object of this verb form as implied in the immediate context. Cf. RSV; DRIVER-GRAY, *Job*, BUTTENWIESER, *Job*, 177; HARTLEY, *Job*, 148.

¹⁸⁰ CURTIS, "On Job's Response", 504.

¹⁸¹ See also the criticism of NEWELL, "Job: Repentant or Rebellious?", 314: "his conclusions are based on too little evidence and reveal a strong subjective bias".

¹⁸² Yes, according to Curtis, God's address from the whirlwind is "sublimely irrelevant", "rather than solving Job's problem", it "only makes it far worse". CURTIS, "On Job's Response", 509, 511.

hardly indicates “to despise” or “to abhor”.¹⁸³ The basic notion of rejection is constitutive for Job’s final stance and fits the literary context to which Job 42:6a belongs. The context of Job’s confession of ignorance and his intimate experience of personal encounter with YHWH shed plenty of light for understanding what Job rejects in his final utterance.

Beginning with the conjunction על־כן, 42:6a has a close and consequential connection with 42:5. If so, what Job declares to reject in 42:6a must associate with what he has just said in 42:5 (cf. Table 21).

Table 21.
Job 42:5 and Job 42:6

	b	a
42:5	ועתה עיני ראתך	לשמע־אזן שמעת־ך
42:6	ונהמתי על־עפר ואפר	על־כן אמאס

As has been seen, 42:5 contains two contrasting stages in Job’s aesthetic perception of YHWH: while 42:5a represents Job’s own negative evaluation of hearing in the past, 42:5b connotes a positive estimation of his experience in the present. Instead, 42:6 contains two complementary stages: the first presents a decisive rejection, in connection with the negative evaluation of 42:5a; the second represents a reversal of Job’s attitude, in connection with the positive estimation of 42:5b. Thus, the literary context strongly suggests that what Job rejects must essentially be associated with what he has recognised as being inappropriate in his previous act of listening to YHWH, as well as its various consequences. This rejection might include the variety of possibilities that can be articulated in three interconnected aspects of transformation in Job: in his understanding of YHWH, in his arguments against YHWH, and in his attitude toward YHWH. It is through these aspects of rejection that Job manifests his submission to YHWH, the genuine attitude of a wise sage.

3.3.3.1.1 Rejection of the understanding conditioned by the retributive framework

Firstly, the object of Job’s rejection in 42:6a, על־כן אמאס, can be determined in relation to the negative evaluation in 42:5a. It is plausible to

¹⁸³ KUYPER, “Repentance of Job”, 94.

argue that the noun phrase *שְׁמַע־אִזְנֶךָ* at the beginning of 42:5a can serve as the object of the verb form *סָמַח* in 42:6a. This noun phrase represents, as Morrow renders it, “an elliptical reference to the wisdom theology of retribution heard from the lips of Job’s comforters and which he himself shared”.¹⁸⁴ Job’s reflection on the key term *שְׁמַע*, starting with YHWH’s appeal to listen in 42:4a, continuing with Job’s meditation on his past experience of hearing in 42:5a, eventually finds its conclusion in 42:6a. If Job 42:4-5 brought about Job’s recognition of his erroneous understanding of YHWH caused by his indirect hearing, Job 42:6a consequently represents a decisive statement of rejection. Job rejects his previous understanding conditioned by the conceptual framework of retributive ethics.

To be sure, this rejection does not reflect a step back into an agnosticism in which Job denies any knowledge of YHWH. Instead, this rejection exemplifies a sapiential attitude. Just as in the first strophe, when Job confessed his ignorance, it was also a time for him to gain new knowledge, so too in the second strophe, when Job gives up his previous understanding it is also a time for him to understand more profoundly and authentically. Illuminated by the light of his living and intimate experience of YHWH, Job recognises that the authentic God cannot be imprisoned by human theories, not even by a theory so long rooted in biblical traditions as retributive justice. He thus renounces the secondary and indirect knowledge about God that sought to explain his suffering from the perspective of retributive ethics. He abandons the understanding of traditional theology which tends to impose an inappropriate interpretation of the sufferings of the righteous. He repudiates his own misinterpretation of God’s goodness or evilness as perceived from his ethical perspective. He forsakes his mistaken approach to attribute to YHWH’s justice or injustice based only on principles and the doctrine of retribution. As Gutiérrez well comments:

Job realises that he has been speaking of God in a way that implied that God was a prisoner of a particular way of understanding justice. It is this whole outlook that Job says he is now abandoning.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ MORROW, “Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance”, 221.

¹⁸⁵ GUTIÉRREZ, *On Job*, 87.

3.3.3.1.2 Rejection of polemical words and arguments

Renouncing his previously insufficient understanding of YHWH, Job renounces also his defective way of speaking of YHWH as a result. In the broader context of the poem as a whole, Job's rejection must be related to and influenced by his confession of ignorance in the first strophe. In the first half of the poem, Job has arrived at a thorough confession: "I have declared, though I did not understand. Things too wondrous for me, and I did not know" (42:3bc). As a matter of fact, Job was unaware that he had been bound tightly in the retributive framework for a long time. Under the domain of such a framework, he constructed his polemics and maintained his rebellious attitude against YHWH. Now, YHWH's enlightening words from the whirlwind opened Job's mind and set him free. Job's words of confession in 42:3 suggested that Job actually is, as Kuyper comments, "aware of the inadequacy of his arguments and demands before God".¹⁸⁶ He acknowledged that by arguing against YHWH and criticising divine justice, he had spoken about YHWH ignorantly and entangled himself in matters he could not really understand. Therefore, it is natural that in his final words Job retracts what he had articulated against God during the disputations.¹⁸⁷ There can be different ways of rendering this idea of retraction, such as "I recant",¹⁸⁸ "I repudiate (what I had said)",¹⁸⁹ "I reject all my words",¹⁹⁰ Job rejects his "discourse of the past weeks",¹⁹¹ "Job announces the end of his legal claim for justice",¹⁹² he leaves "his folly in employing words or arguments within a moralistic, reward-retribution framework",¹⁹³ and so on. These various interpretive translations, however, need to be clarified in several respects.

Above all, these various translations must address the challenge that emerges from the immediately following context of YHWH's final verdict. In Job 42:7-8, by stating twice to Eliphaz: "you have not said of me what is

¹⁸⁶ KUYPER, "Repentance of Job", 94.

¹⁸⁷ HALOT, 4737 interprets Job 42:6 in this direction, defining רָשָׁא as: "to reject what one has said previously, revoke".

¹⁸⁸ POPE, *Job*, 347; HARTLEY, *Job*, 535.

¹⁸⁹ DRIVER – GRAY, *Job*, 373.

¹⁹⁰ TUR-SINAI, *Job*, 577-578.

¹⁹¹ FOKKELMAN, *Major Poems*, 328.

¹⁹² CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 1291.

¹⁹³ KUYPER, "Repentance of Job", 94.

right, as my servant Job did”, YHWH prefers Job’s words and arguments over those of his three friends. How could the understanding of Job’s retraction be congruent with this authoritative verdict?

Some elements in YHWH’s verdict require close attention in order that it be understood properly, especially the key term נכונה and the comparative preposition כ.

The term נכונה is the *Niphal* participle feminine singular derived from the root כון, which means “to be firm, correct, established”.¹⁹⁴ The term נכונה therefore is often rendered as “right thing”, “what is correct and consistent with the facts”.¹⁹⁵ Thus, by saying to Eliphaz: לא דברתם אלי נכונה – “You have not spoken of me correctly”, YHWH reproves him and the other two friends because their speaking did not correspond with reality. They spoke of YHWH from their doctrinal points of view, rather than taking seriously the reality of Job, a pious and righteous sufferer. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that YHWH’s verdict does not imply that all that the friends have spoken is completely wrong and all that Job has spoken is entirely right. Neither the friends nor Job are wrong or right in an absolute sense, but in their comparison. This comparative sense is conveyed by the preposition כ at the beginning of the last phrase, כעבדי איוב, “as my servant Job”. Describing “comparison and correspondence”,¹⁹⁶ the preposition כ serves to point out that in reality the three friends did not speak of YHWH *as appropriately as* Job did. The divine verdict thus does not contradict Job’s retraction of his previous arguments against God.¹⁹⁷ At any event, we must

¹⁹⁴ BDB 465.

¹⁹⁵ HABEL, *Job*, 583.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. WALTKE – O’CONNOR, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 11.2.9.

¹⁹⁷ It is worth mentioning here an interesting insight of Manfred Oeming in his attempt to read YHWH’s final verdict against the friends and for Job. Oeming understands the *Niphal* participle נכונה as an adverbial accusative (cf. OEMING – SCHMID, *Job’s Journey*, 97, footnote 37). This means that the point of comparison between Job’s speech and that of the friends is more about the manner of speaking than the content; cf. also D.W. NAM, *Talking about God*. Job 42:7-9 and the Nature of God in the Book of Job (SBLit 49; New York 2023) 23. Moreover, in the phrase לא דברתם אלי נכונה, Oeming suggests that the basic meaning of the preposition אל is “in relation to”, rather than “about”. Thus, the whole phrase is translated as “you have not correctly *spoken to* me”, rather than “you have not *spoken of* me what is right” (pp. 96-97). Based on this reading, Oeming concludes: “God does not praise a specific statement made by Job [...] God does not justify a specific *teaching* about himself but rather the *direction of Job’s speech*, his internal stance, his knowledge of the place to which and from which his thoughts proceed. God praises Job’s speech as a speech to God” (p. 98).

not forget that it was YHWH who rebuked Job for having darkened divine design by words without knowledge (38:2). And Job has sincerely accepted such a rebuke (42:3a). It is therefore plausible that Job now decides to retract his words and arguments that misinterpreted his reality and misunderstood YHWH's rule over the world. His retraction reflects a submissive recognition of a higher wisdom that has enlightened him. What he was pursuing in defending himself becomes no longer important, for he has learned something from YHWH's powerful words and images of beauty and mystery, and therefore got insight into something much more significant.

Nonetheless, Job's rejection of his words and arguments does not mean that he regrets or repents of his act of speaking. Perdue comments well that Job rejects his angry accusation which attempts to destabilise the order of creation and God's providence; and yet Job does not reject "the process of engaging in lament, indictment, and assault which have led him and the implied audience to this point".¹⁹⁸ If Job's experience of YHWH marks a new relationship to his creator, it can be said with MacKenzie that all the preceding experience was necessary to make this new relationship possible.¹⁹⁹ Therefore, there is no reason for Job to repent of his act of speaking. Some authors tend to think that Job must reject the haughtiness in his speaking, especially in his avowal of innocence. For instance, Hartley believes that what Job renounces is "his false pride",²⁰⁰ "he withdraws his avowal of innocence", "he renounces all personal claims that could be construed to put himself above God".²⁰¹ This idea, however, runs the risk of overinterpreting. No evidence in the book can support the argument that Job had attempted to put himself above God. The only instance where the idea that YHWH would pay homage to Job appears in YHWH's challenge to Job (cf. 40:14), but this challenge was actually used as an ironic device for pedagogical purposes. As for Job, he has no reason to reject his avowal of innocence. He said nothing wrong about his righteousness and his perfect morality, for they are matters of fact. Job's problem therefore is not his

¹⁹⁸ PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 236.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. MACKENZIE, "The Transformation", 56-57.

²⁰⁰ Similarly, K. Paul and K. Cho think that Job rejects "his blasphemous hubris", cf. K. PAUL – K. CHO, "Job the Penitent: Whether and Why Job Repents (Job 42:6)", *Landscapes of Korean and Korean American Biblical Interpretation* (ed. J. AHN) (IVBS 10; Atlanta 2019) 145-174, here 152.

²⁰¹ HARTLEY, *Job*, 537; cf. also J. WYCLIFFE, *The Old and New Testaments*, 37; LÉVÊQUE, *Job et son Dieu*, 526.

avowal of innocence, but his accusation that YHWH must have wronged him in his suffering. The object of Job's rejection, therefore, must be associated with his arguments based on the false interpretation of human suffering conditioned by the retributive framework.²⁰² Job rejects the false application of theology which created false images of God.

3.3.3.1.3 Rejection of lamenting and rebellious attitude

Changes in Job's understanding and arguments cannot fail to effect changes in his attitude toward YHWH. If Job's disputations were filled with bitter and accusatory laments characterising his rebellious attitude, now, in the light of his illuminated wisdom, Job gives up that very attitude.

One of the various possibilities for understanding Job 42:6 arises from its syntactic ambiguity. Patrick argues that the true meaning of the verb form אָמַס cannot be fully comprehended until one reaches the final phrase, עֵפֶר וָאֶפֶר, which might serve as its implicit object.²⁰³ Similarly, Good affirms that עֵפֶר וָאֶפֶר actually serves as the direct object of אָמַס seeing that it is the closest nominal phrase, and thus does double duty for both verb אָמַס and נִחַמְתִּי.²⁰⁴ Other scholars, like de Boer and van Wolde, also go in the same direction.²⁰⁵ De Boer compares some cases syntactically parallel to Job 42:6, for example "I shall hunt out and take them" (Amos 9:3; cf. also Deut 8:12; Judg 6:16), in which he argues that the two verbs bind together with a waw-perfect consecutive. The second verb continues the action already initiated by the first verb, and both share a joint object in the sentence.²⁰⁶ Also by way of comparison in the syntagmatic context of 42:1-6, van Wolde points out that there is a parallel between the structure of 42:3bc and 42:6: just as נַפְלְאוֹת is the object of both לֹא יָדַע and לֹא בִין, so also עֵפֶר וָאֶפֶר is the object of both אָמַס and נִחַמְתִּי.²⁰⁷ Insofar as the word pair עֵפֶר וָאֶפֶר in 42:6b can

²⁰² For scholars moving in this direction, see for example TSEVAT, "The Meaning of the Book of Job", 104-105; GOOD, "Job and the Literary Task", 481; MORROW, "Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance", 221.

²⁰³ DALE, "The Translation of Job XLII 6", 369.

²⁰⁴ GOOD, *In Turns of Tempest*, 376.

²⁰⁵ Cf. also PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 237; D. TIMMER, "God's Speeches, Job's Responses", 299.

²⁰⁶ DE BOER, "Does Job Retract?", 192; cf. JOÜON – MURAOKA §119.

²⁰⁷ VAN WOLDE, "Job 42:1-6", 249.

be taken as the direct object for אִמָּאֵס in 42:6a, the question that remains is this: what does עֹפֶר וְאֶפֶר stand for in the structure עֹפֶר וְאִמָּאֵס?

The expression עֹפֶר וְאֶפֶר is an intensified use of alliterative synonyms,²⁰⁸ although each individual word עֹפֶר and אֶפֶר recurs more often separately. The term עֹפֶר literally means “loose earth, dirt, dust, or ashes”. Figuratively, it connotes worthlessness, devastation or humiliation and abasement (Job 30:19; Ps 7:6; 44:26).²⁰⁹ The term also associates with mortality, death or the grave (Job 4:19; 7:5).²¹⁰ By metonymy, it may refer to the mourning practice, in which one sprinkles dust upon one’s head (Job 2:12).²¹¹ Also, the אֶפֶר literally means “dust”, “ashes”, or the waste heaps in front of the village (Job 2:8; Jer 6:26; Ezek 27:30; Lam 3:16). On various occasions, the term indicates dust or ashes sprinkled on the head as a sign of mourning (2 Sam 13:19) or may refer to the mourning rite of sitting or lying on ashes.²¹² The term, therefore, associates with ritual acts of mourning and lamentation.²¹³ Thus, both עֹפֶר and אֶפֶר do serve as “signs of physical and social abasement often adopted by mourners in the Bible”.²¹⁴ Appearing together as a hendiadys, the word pair עֹפֶר וְאֶפֶר is reminiscent of the initial mourning scene in the narrative prologue, in which Job was sitting among the ashes (2:8) while the three friends wept with him in loud voices and threw dust into the air over their heads (2:12). The image of dust and ashes therefore closely associates with the action of mourning and lamenting. It characterised Job’s status as an isolated sufferer, from which derived his rebellious attitude towards YHWH. It is properly this status and attitude that Job decides now to reject,²¹⁵ as Patrick aptly comments:

²⁰⁸ HALOT, 784, cf. Gen 18:27; Job 30:19.

²⁰⁹ BDB 7192; L. WÄCHTER, “עֹפֶר”, TDOT 11, 257-265, here 260.

²¹⁰ PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 237, n.3.

²¹¹ Cf. A. HURVITZ, “The Date of the Prose-Tale of Job Linguistically Reconsidered”, *HTR* 67 (1974) 17-34, here 33-34.

²¹² For example: “They throw dust on their heads, and wallow in ashes” (Ezek 27:30; cf. Isa 58:5; Esth 4:1, 3; Jonah 3:6; Dan 9:3).

²¹³ Cf. also HALOT, 784.

²¹⁴ MORROW, “Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance”, 222.

²¹⁵ Job’s intention of giving up the period of mourning will be further supported if one anticipates Job 42:6b. As indicated by many scholars, the construction נִחַמְתִּי עַל suggests several possibilities of meaning, among which one is associated with the period of mourning in which human subjects have engaged and now comes into its end. For instances, David exits the period of mourning for the death of Amnon (2 Sam 13:39); Pharaoh ends the periods

When Job says that he forswears dust and ashes, he means that he will remove himself from the physical setting associated with mourning and lamentation and cease what he has been doing from 2:8.²¹⁶

After a long period of mourning, to cease wallowing in dust and ashes now means for Job a positive and sapiential attitude. This attitude is far from being a negative resignation or a “hasty abdication” as Elie Wiesel understands it.²¹⁷ Job’s rejection of lamenting and rebellious attitude reflects a decisive reversal, very different from being a reluctant concession like that of the first response (40:4-5).²¹⁸ Nor does Job’s rejection result from a kind of unsatisfactory withdrawal as commented by Clines, who defines Job’s attitude with a number of negative sentences, as follows:

He will not again say a single word [...] He will conduct no more theological disputations with his friends or summon God again to defend himself. [...] He is not content, he is not convinced, he is not now possessed of a totally new outlook on the world.²¹⁹

In one of his articles, Clines further emphasises Job’s dissatisfaction and defiance, stating that Job’s final speech “amounts in reality to a cool

of sorrow for the defeat of his army (Ezek 32:31); the surviving people of come out of the period of catastrophe (Ezek 14:22). Similarly, Job’s rejection of “dust and ashes”, accompanied by the construction על נחמתי, can be understood in the sense of closing his period of mourning for all the disasters he has suffered. Cf. VAN WOLDE, “Job 42:1-6”, 247; DE BOER, “Does Job Retract”, 191; D. LAMBERT, “Job in the Ritual Perspective”, *JBL* 134 (2015) 557-575, here 565; CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1209.

²¹⁶ PATRICK, “Job 42:6”, 370. Cf. also HABEL, *Job*, 576.

²¹⁷ Taking Job’s change of attitude as a cowardly surrender, Elie Wiesel thus expresses his frustration: “Much as I admired Job’s passionate rebellion; I am deeply troubled by his hasty abdication. [...] I was offended by his surrender in the text. Job’s resignation as man was an insult to man”, E. WIESEL, “Job: Our Contemporary”, *Messengers of God. Biblical Portraits and Legends* (New York 1976) 225-250, here 246-247.

²¹⁸ My understanding here is quite different from that of Fokkelman, who states: “Essentially, verse 6a says nothing else than 40:4b, when Job answered in the intermezzo between the speeches of Yahweh: ‘I lay my hand on my mouth’”. FOKKELMAN, *Job*, 318. The emphasising points of reference in the two responses are quite different, Claus Westermann comments: “While the part of the answer appearing in 40:4-5 was dominated by ‘I’ as the subject, in 42:2-6 the controlling point of reference is God”, WESTERMANN, *Der Aufbau*, 125. This difference suggests strongly that the second response is no longer an elusive concession by which Job withdraws into himself. Instead, Job’s rejection proves that he is now seriously working with himself in the light of his intimate experience of YHWH and YHWH’s words to him.

²¹⁹ CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1222.

dismissal of all that YHWH has been saying". Job's words are thus taken as the "ultimate act of despair" of the one who comes out as a defeated person in his legal suit against God.²²⁰ I argue otherwise. As seen in my previous chapter, defeating Job in his legal case is not YHWH's primary purpose. Instead, YHWH has constantly aimed to liberate Job from the framework of retributive ethics so as to open him up to the aesthetic value of the world of creation. If so, it is not appropriate to interpret Job's response in terms of victory or defeat, winner or loser. Deriving from his intimate experience of YHWH's pedagogical words, Job's response should be examined from an aesthetic and sapiential perspective, rather than an ethical and legal one. Even when one accepts that Job is now rejecting his legal case against YHWH, as argued by Habel and Clines,²²¹ this rejection does not signify Job's acceptance of being defeated by a powerful God. Job rejects his legal case, if there is one, simply because pursuing such a case is no longer necessary for one who has just experienced an intimate and personal encounter with YHWH. Far more important than the question of who is right and who is wrong, who is innocent and who is guilty, Job's response to YHWH marks a turning point. As Seán Maher renders it:

He is willing to broaden his vision from the narrow panorama of his own misery to the broader picture of the wonder he has seen. It is a response that allows him to keep his integrity as a human being with a just cause, and, at the same time, permits the radical shift in perspective and paradigm which the whirlwind experience has wrought.²²²

In short, Job's declaration that he rejects the action of mourning and lament signifies the end of his rebellious attitude against YHWH. The rejection conveys an attitude of submission. It means a renunciation, not in the sense of turning back, but rather an abandonment in order to move forward freely and peacefully. This rejection does not follow in the steps of defeat. Instead, it is motivated by the enlightened experience of YHWH, and marks a new dawn in Job's life, as Oeming notes: "In the very moment in which Job is given an actually impossible encounter with the living God, his life is transformed completely".²²³

²²⁰ Cf. CLINES, "The Wisdom of Job's Conclusion", 35, 37.

²²¹ HABEL, *Job*, 582; CLINES, *Job* 38–42, 1207.

²²² S. MAHER, "The Answer of Job to God", *PIBA* 28 (2005) 48–65, here 60.

²²³ OEMING – SCHMID, *Job's Journey*, 83.

3.3.3.2 Job's Reconciliation: "I change my mind concerning human frailty" (42:6b)

One may say like Gordis that, for a sufferer like Job, giving up his complaining and rebellious attitude does not only mean submission, but also reconciliation and vindication.²²⁴ This argument becomes persuasive when the meaning of the combination עפר ואפר is further examined in their occurrence together, as well as in their construction with the verb form על נחמתי in the second half of the poetic verse. In addition to Job 42:6b, the same combination עפר ואפר occurs twice more in the Bible, namely, in Gen 18:27 and in Job 30:19. An overview of these two cases will shed more light for the understanding of Job's very last words.

3.3.3.2.1 The idiomatic expression עפר ואפר: human finitude and frailty

In Gen 18:27, Abraham stands before God to negotiate the rescue of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gen 18:16-33). Abraham dares to challenge God to do justice by a rhetorical question: "Far be that from you. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (18:25). "What is just" according to Abraham in this literary context means not to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah without discriminating between the good and the wicked people. Thus, as Perdue notes, by a rhetorical question Abraham brings God into judgment and challenges God's justice.²²⁵ Precisely in such a rhetorical environment, the combination עפר ואפר occurs. Abraham manifests his awareness of who he is before God: "Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes [ואנכי עפר ואפר]" (18:27). Before God, Abraham humbles himself in full consciousness of his utter frailty as a human being, in relation to the divine.²²⁶ The expression "dust and ashes", therefore, conveys the sense of creaturely status, the sense of humanity's frailty. To be sure, Abraham's expression may be accompanied by a sense of being overwhelmed for the fact that he, a mere mortal, is in negotiation with God, "the Judge of all the earth". Nevertheless, in its literary context, the combination עפר ואפר does not at all express abject humility or a self-

²²⁴ Cf. GORDIS, *Job*, 491.

²²⁵ PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 237, n. 3.

²²⁶ As indicated by Curtis, this understanding is supported by several other sources. For instance, Ibn Ezra rendered Job 42:6b in ואנכי עפר ואפר – "I am dust and ashes"; LXX reads ἡγησάμην δὲ ἐμαυτὸν γῆν καὶ σποδόν – "and I deem myself dust and ashes"; 11QTgJob reads – "and I have become dust and ashes". CURTIS, "On Job's Response", 501.

abasement before God in repentance. On the contrary, it portrays the noble standing of Abraham, a human being who bravely stands and intercedes for his fellow human beings before God. Thus, being “dust and ashes” in this case reflects both a humble position of the human being before God, and simultaneously the honourable position of a person who dares to address God directly for the sake of other human persons.

In the second example, Job 30:19, Job is expressing the miserable situation of life he is undergoing. Job laments that God has acted violently against him and brought him to the fringe of death: “He has cast me into the mud [חמר], and I have become like dust and ashes [ואתמשל כעפר ואפר]”. In Job’s lament, the combination עפר ואפר is used in parallelism to חמר. The latter is a term often employed to denote human beings as mortal, who “dwell in houses of clay” (Job 4:19). Thus, חמר represents the constitutional element of the human body: “You have fashioned me as clay” (Job 10:9). Its characteristics are unstable and weak, like in the expression “defences of clay” (Job 13:12). In various prophetic texts, the term חמר is often used as a parable to connote the worthlessness and insignificance of a human being before his creator: “Shall the clay ask him who fashions it: ‘what are you making?’” (Isa 45:9; cf. 29:16; Jer 18:4,6). Parallel to חמר, the combination עפר ואפר therefore connotes the existential composition of human life with all its finitude and frailty. Indeed, if עפר can refer to the dust of the ground from which God formed the human being (Gen 2:7), and אפר may refer to “the residue of what was once organic life”, as Terrien fittingly comments, “dust and ashes” are an appropriate figure for fragile humanity, representing humankind with regard to both origin and destiny.²²⁷

Thus, in both Gen 18:27 and Job 30:19 the combination עפר ואפר functions as an idiomatic expression for the human condition in its finitude and frailty. In Job 42:6b, the phrase shares the same sense. The peculiarity of Job 42:6b, however, lies in the use of the two idiomatic expressions, namely, the verbal idiom על נחמתי and the nominal idiom עפר ואפר. The combination of these two expressions aptly expresses Job’s final attitude regarding his own humanity.

²²⁷ TERRIEN, *Job*, 209.

3.3.3.2.2 The idiomatic expression על נחמתי: “I change my mind about”

Various versions read the term על as a spatial-locative preposition connected with עפר ואפר.²²⁸ This spatial-locative sense is often associated with the ash-heap where Job has been located since the end of the narrative prologue. When the verb form נחמתי is translated as “I repent”, the phrase עפר ואפר becomes the physical place upon which Job performs this act of penitence.

However, there are serious difficulties in this reading of separating נחמתי from על. Nowhere in the Bible is the combination of the phrase עפר ואפר and the preposition על attested in its spatial-locative sense. Furthermore, nowhere in the book of Job is the protagonist found to be ‘upon’ or ‘in’ “dust and ashes”. To be more precise, Job’s place of mourning is defined as “among the ashes” (בתוך־האפר; cf. 2:8), or most likely at the pile of ashes outside the city.²²⁹ In mourning, the “dust” is what people spread over their heads, rather than being a spatial location on which they are located. It is unlikely that Job is located upon both dust and ashes.²³⁰ Therefore, it is improbable that in the construction על עפר ואפר, the term על serves as a locative preposition in relation to the phrase עפר ואפר.

It is preferable to connect the preposition על with what precedes it. This means that the verb form נחמתי should be examined in its construction נחמתי על,²³¹ instead of being read separately only according to its lexical meaning, as “repent, become remorseful, repent of something, regret, be sorry”.²³² Only a reading that pays little attention to the literary context of Job 42:1-6 could support Job’s repentance in the sense of turning away from

²²⁸ Cf. for example KJV, RSV, NAB, JB, NIV, NEB. The Masoretes support this reading by placing an *atnach* under נַחֲמֵתִי, indicating a major break between the verb form נחמתי and the preposition על. Accordingly, the preposition על is considered to belong to the construction על־עפר ואפר, which is translated as “upon/in dust and ashes”.

²²⁹ Cf. BALENTINE, *Job*, 62; CLINES, *Job 38–42*, 1210.

²³⁰ Cf. CLINES, *Job 38–42*, 1221; cf. also DE BOER, “Does Job Retract”, 191.

²³¹ The insight to link the preposition על to the verb form נחמתי, rather than to the nominal phrase עפר ואפר, was brought to light in PATRICK, “Job 42:6”, 369-371. The same viewpoint was also suggested by de Boer, who stated that he was developing his study independently of Patrick’s. Cf. DE BOER, “Does Job Retract”, 194, n. 26. However, L.K. Kaplan in his reaction to Patrick’s article pointed out that indeed this insight was first given by the Jewish jurist Maimonides, around 1185, see KAPLAN, “Maimonides, Dale Patrick, and Job XLII 6”, 356-358.

²³² Cf. SIMIAN-YOFRE, “נחם”, *TDOT* 9, 340-355, here 324.

transgressions of moral law or turning away from sins. Such repentance would not only falsify the two authoritative voices since the beginning of the story, namely, that of YHWH (1:8; 2:3) and that of the narrator (Job 1:1, 22; 2:10), but also contradicts YHWH's final verdict (42:7-9). Moreover, if Job repents in the sense that he is contrite for his past conduct, becoming penitent, feeling self-rebuked or sorry for his sin or guilt, such repentance would be nothing more than a vindication of the theology of the friends.²³³ As Good says:

Those who find in these lines “self-abhorrence” and abject repentance do not take seriously that just this is what the friends urged on Job all long [...]. If the outcome of Job's confrontation with Yahweh is that he slips back into taking the counsel of the friends, it is very disappointing.²³⁴

An investigation into the broader context of the Hebrew Bible will shed more light to understand the idiomatic construction *נָחַם עַל* in the literary context of Job 42:1-6. The investigation will prove that this construction primarily indicates a change of mind, rather than the penitent or contrite attitude of a human being before God.

Indeed, the construction *נָחַם עַל* occurs twenty times in the Hebrew Bible. This construction has God as the subject in these thirteen instances: Exod 32:12, 14; Isa 57:6; Jer 16:7; 18:8, 10; Joel 2:13; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:10; 4:2; Ps 90:13; 1 Chr 21:15. One or more human persons serve as the subject

²³³ Among recent authors who argue for Job's repentance, notable is the attempt by K. PAUL – K. CHO, “Job the Penitent: Whether and Why Job Repents (Job 42:6)”, 145-174. These authors regard Job's attitude as haughtily looking down on fellow humanity and blaspheming God with pride and arrogance (p. 166). Job is judged as the one who “looks down on creation and finds no evidence of God, no need of God, finds that he has been not only God's ambassador but in fact God's replacement, God's better” (p. 172). In my opinion, several points in this article are not really convincing. It seems that these authors still follow the approach as to who is right and who is wrong in the dialogue between Job and God, which one is right and which one is wrong in discerning Job's words, an approach that YHWH refused to follow. Above all, by insisting that Job must repent for his blasphemous attitude towards God and haughty arrogance towards others, these authors seem to align themselves more with the arguments of three friends, rather than to recognise the aesthetic value of God's speeches as well as their import in transforming Job.

²³⁴ GOOD, *In Turns of the Tempest*, 376. Many critics express total disappointment in interpreting Job's final attitude as repentance. Here is a representative voice: “By repenting sins he did not commit, by justifying a sorrow he did not deserve, he communicates to us that he did not believe in his own confession; they were nothing but decoys”. E. WIESEL, “Job: Our Contemporary”, 248.

in seven other instances: 2 Sam 13:39; Jer 8:6; 31:15; Ezek 14:22; 32:31; Job 42:6, 11. A similar construction with נָחַם עַל, which shares the same meanings, is נָחַם אֵל.²³⁵ This latter always has God as its subject and recurs on seven occasions, namely Judg 21:6; 2 Sam 10:2; 24:16; Jer 26:3, 13, 19; 42:10. The occurrences of the construction נָחַם עַל / נָחַם אֵל in the Bible can be summarised as follows:

Table 22.
Meanings of 27 recurrences of נָחַם אֵל / נָחַם עַל in the Bible

“To comfort, console” (3x)	“To be comforted, consoled” (4x)	“To be sorry for, to have compassion” (2x)	“To repent” (1x)	“To change one’s mind” (17x)
2 Sam 10:2 Jer 16:7 Job 42:11	2 Sam 13:39 Jer 31:15 Ezek 14:22; 32:31	Judg 21:6 Ps 90:13	Jer 8:6	Exod 32:12, 14; 2 Sam 24:16; Jer 8:6; 18:8, 10; 26:3, 13, 19; 42:10; Isa 57:6; Joel 2:13; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:10; 4:2; 1 Chr 21:15; Job 42:6.

Of all these twenty-seven cases, only in three instances does the verb נָחַם occur in *Piel*, with the meaning concerning the act of comforting toward one or more persons. Thus, David sent his messenger to comfort the new king Hanun for the death of his father (2 Sam 10:2). God warns the people of Jerusalem that there will be no one to comfort them for the death of their relatives (Jer 16:7). Job’s acquaintances comfort him for all his adversities (Job 42:11). In these three cases, the direct objects of the verb נָחַם are persons, recipients of the act of comforting by someone else. In the case of Job 42:6b, instead, there is no person serving as a direct object in the

²³⁵ In the three cases of 2 Sam 24:16 and Jer 26:3, 13, the critical apparatus of the BHS points out that there are actually several manuscripts in which the construction employed is נָחַם עַל instead of נָחַם אֵל. This suggests that these two constructions are somewhat interchangeable.

construction **נָחַם עַל עֵפֶר וְאֶפֶר**. The meaning as “to comfort”, therefore, does not fit the literary context of Job 42:6b.

In twenty-four other instances, the verb **נָחַם** occurs in *Niphal*. The *Niphal* forms of this verb, in the combination with the preposition **עַל**, offer a wide range of meanings.

There are four cases in which the construction **נָחַם עַל** means “to be consoled, comforted”. David is comforted over the death of his son, Amnon, after having mourned for him day after day (2 Sam 13:39); Rachel refuses to be comforted for the loss of her children (Jer 31:15); the remnant of the Jerusalemites is consoled after the adversity that God had brought upon Jerusalem (Ezek 14:22); Pharaoh is consoled after the loss of his army (Ezek 32:31). In all these cases, what immediately follows the construction **נָחַם עַל** is a negative event relating to death or loss or adversity that directly strikes the people. To be comforted over these tragedies does not mean that the people are now in denial about the events they suffered, nor that they are somehow recompensed for them. Rather, it is a personal decision to close the period of mourning and to live on, “to turn a new page in the book of one’s life”, as de Boer comments.²³⁶

In two cases, Judg 21:6 and Ps 90:13, the construction **נָחַם עַל** bears the meaning “to be sorry for” or “to have compassion for”. Judg 21:6 relates that after the slaughter of the Benjaminites, “the Israelites had compassion for Benjamin their brother, and said: ‘Today, one tribe is cut off from Israel’”. Ps 90:13 is a petition with which the psalmist pleads for God’s compassion: “Return, O Lord! Until when? Have compassion for your servants”. In this sentence, the construction **נָחַם עַל** is used in parallel with the verb **שׁוּב**. This latter, when it has God as subject, often indicates the act of a radical change in God’s attitude toward his people. For example, Moses asks God: “Turn (**שׁוּב**) from your fierce wrath; change your mind, and do not bring disaster on your people” (Exod 32:12; cf. Isa 12:1). Similarly, in Ps 90:13, the root **שׁוּב** is employed in imploring God to relent in the sense of changing his attitude from wrath (Ps 90:11) to compassion toward his servants (Ps 90:13-14). The construction **נָחַם עַל** in this sentence, therefore, expresses God’s act of changing attitude and having compassion on human beings. It is noteworthy that in both Judg 21:6 and Ps 90:13, the direct objects of the verbal construction **נָחַם עַל** are actual persons, “Benjamin” and

²³⁶ DE BOER, “Does Job Retract”, 192.

“the servants of God” respectively. Instead, in Job 42:6b, there is no person serving as a direct object in the construction *נחמתי על עפר ואפר*. Therefore, meanings such as “to be sorry for” or “to have compassion for” do not fit the literary context of Job 42:6b.

Jer 8:6 is the only case in which the construction *נחם על* properly means “to repent”, in the sense of a moral penitence. In describing Israel’s obstinate perversity, God denounces: “I have given heed and listened, but they do not speak honestly. No one repents of their wickedness (*אין איש נחם על־* (רעתו)). In this sentence, the subject of the verb form *נחם על* is the people of Israel, and the direct object is their wickedness (*רעתו*). The object *רעת* brings to the construction *נחם על* the meaning of a moral repentance. To repent in this context refers properly to the sense of turning away from moral wickedness or ceasing to follow the path of sin, and thus returning to God. The Israelites not repenting of their sins is the reason for the announcement of various forms of divine punishment articulated throughout Jer 8.

In the remaining seventeen cases, the construction *נחם על* conveys the reversal of a decision in the sense of changing one’s mind. In most of the cases, God is the subject whose mind is changed about what was planned to be done or who relents about what had already been done.

In Exodus, faced with the people’s grave sin against God in making and worshipping the golden calf, Moses begged God to relent and not bring evil upon the people (Exod 32:12). And eventually, God’s mind is changed regarding the intended evil to bring upon the people (Exod 32:14). In 2 Sam 24:16 and 1 Chr 21:15, after having struck Israel with a pestilence for the sin of David’s census, God’s mind is changed from doing harm to Jerusalem. In all these cases, the changing of God’s mind means that God no longer acts according to divine wrath responding to the people’s sins, but according to divine forgiveness and mercy.

In the teachings of the prophet Jeremiah and a few minor prophets, the construction *נחם על* is also employed to indicate a reversal of mind with respect to what God intended to do or even with regard to what God had been doing. In Jeremiah, the prophet’s words reveal that God’s plan for people can be changed depending on their moral conduct: if they forsake their wrongdoings, God’s mind will be changed regarding the evil God plans to bring upon them (cf. Jer 18:8); if they do not, the same construction *נחם על* is employed to show God’s change of mind regarding the good (*הטובה*)

God intends to bestow upon them (cf. Jer 18:10).²³⁷ Thus, God sent the prophet Jeremiah to the people in the hope that they will change their life in order that God will change God's mind: "It may be that all of them will listen and will turn from their evil way, that I may change my mind about the disaster that I intend to bring on them because of their evil doings" (Jer 26:3; cf. 26:13, 19). In Jer 42:10 and Amos 7:3, 6, God's reversal of mind concerns the change of not continuing to punish the people. In Jer 42:10, it is God who regrets the disaster that has been brought upon the people. In Amos 7:3, 6, the prophet presents visions in which God is punishing the house of Jacob by creating locusts to destroy the grass of the earth and by sending fires from heaven to devour the land. Thanks to the prayer of the prophet, God's mind is changed, and the disasters cease. In the later prophets, Jonah and Joel, God's change of mind is one of the most important expectations of the people. Thus, the people of Nineveh fasted and covered themselves with sackcloth in expectation of God's change of mind regarding the disaster pronounced by Jonah (3:9). It is noteworthy that in the contexts of praise to God, the phrase "to change/relent from doing harm" is employed as an emblem of God, associated with the more general phrases describing God's benevolence and mercy: "I knew that you are a benevolent and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing" (Jonah 4:2; cf. Joel 2:13).

Thus, in all cases except Jer 18:10, the construction **נָחַם עַל** is employed to convey positive changes, both in human persons and in God. Having as its subject one or more human persons, the construction **נָחַם עַל** marks a turning point in one's life, signifying the end of a sorrowful and challenging period and opens to a renewed and promising future. In the cases where the construction **נָחַם עַל** has God as subject, the direct object is most often the term **הָרָעָה**, "evil, disaster, or harm". The construction of **נָחַם עַל הָרָעָה**, therefore, reflects a reversal in God's intention toward human beings, and thus brings about a radical change in their fate. God's change of mind also reflects a radical change in the portrayal of God: a God of mercy and compassion rather than of wrath and punishment.

²³⁷ Jer 18:10 is the only case in which the construction **נָחַם עַל** recurs together with the object **הַטּוֹבָה**: God's mind can be changed even with regard to the good things, appropriate to human moral conduct.

3.3.3.2.3 נחמתי על עפר ואפר: Job's reconciliation

The above survey helps to highlight the significant distinction and precision of the construction על נחם in the particular case of Job 42:6. Seeing that Job 42:6 and the context of the entire poem 42:1-6 do not support the various types of interpretation of על נחם as “to comfort”, “to repent”, “to have compassion” or “to feel sorry for”, there remain two main possibilities for discerning the meaning of the idiom על נחם, which are related to each other: the one concerns the notion of being comforted or consoled, the other concerns the notion of reversal of mind.

There is an increasing number of scholars who understand Job's final words in terms of comfort or consolation. Job 42:6b is thus translated: “I am consoled for/over/in dust and ashes”,²³⁸ “I am comforted for my lot of dust and ashes”,²³⁹ or “I am comforted that I am dust”,²⁴⁰ and so on. As has been seen in the four cases of 2 Sam 13:39, Jer 31:15, Ezek 14:22 and 32:31, the direct object of the construction על נחם is often negative events relating to death or loss or adversity that have directly struck people and for which people are consoled or comforted. So also here, the direct object עפר ואפר is understood as representing the human condition of fragility, suffering, and mortality: “I have been comforted for [my suffering as a creature of] dust and ashes”.²⁴¹ Some scholars even understand the direct object עפר ואפר as Job's humiliation, for which he is now consoled.²⁴² For those who interpret Job as being comforted, the consolation or comfort does not derive from the reality of his humanity, but instead from his personal experience with YHWH. O'Connor argues that for a religious person like Job, the experience of YHWH's presence is indeed a deep consolation for his sorrows.²⁴³ Job had not been able to find consolation from his friends through long disputes. Nor did he receive any comfort from the traditional dogma of retribution, which his friends did their best to apply to his case. Finally, however, Job finds consolation in YHWH. His physical suffering is not yet gone, and his losses

²³⁸ Cf. O'CONNOR, “Job's Final Word”, 181; D. O'CONNOR, “The Comforting of Job”, *ITQ* 53 (1987) 245-257, here 255; PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 237; FOKKELMAN, *Job*, 193; KRÜGER, “Did Job Repent?”, 225.

²³⁹ Cf. BUTTENWIESER, *Job*, 66.

²⁴⁰ MITCHELL, *Job*, 88.

²⁴¹ FOKKELMAN, *Major Poems*, 329.

²⁴² Cf. O'CONNOR, “Job's Final Word”, 195.

²⁴³ Cf. O'CONNOR, “Job's Final Word”, 190-191.

are not yet recovered, but Job no longer feels that YHWH is hostile to him. His suffering is no longer taken as a sign of YHWH's enmity against him. This is for Job a profound consolation.

Moving in the same direction, de Boer sees Job's consolation in terms of recognition of YHWH's unfathomable greatness. Faced with the greatness of YHWH manifested in creation, all ethical theories that Job had in mind vanish into thin air. Appreciating life as full of mysteries, Job also recognises that he is part of the miracles of life. This is Job's consolation, which enables him to leave "dust and ashes" behind and accept life again.²⁴⁴ Similarly, Perdue also understands Job's final status as comforted by his personal encounter with YHWH. Through this consoling encounter, Job recognises that "the time for lament and accusation is at an end".²⁴⁵ Other scholars, instead, understand Job's consolation or comfort in a more active manner: "I even take comfort for dust and ashes",²⁴⁶ "I accept consolation for my dust and ashes".²⁴⁷ Clines even explains it as a self-comfort or self-consolation: "To be comforted is not a matter of being on the receiving end of comfort from others, but a decision one makes for oneself, that one will accept comfort and thus cease the period of mourning and resume normal life".²⁴⁸

I agree that the understanding of 42:6b as "comforted concerning human condition" is possible. This understanding is supported by both the grammatical syntax of the poetic colon and some occurrences of the construction *נָחַם עַל*. Nevertheless, I see two major pitfalls in limiting the meaning of this poetic colon to the sense that Job is now comforted or consoled for misfortunes in his life. First, Job's consolation understood in this way reflects a passive acceptance of the human condition that he cannot change and for which he needs to be comforted. "Dust and ashes" are still limited to the negative aspects of the human condition. Second, if one tries to turn this understanding into an active acceptance in the sense of self-consolation or self-comfort as Clines renders it, one runs the risk of underestimating the divine speeches and their impact on the transformation of Job. Therefore, we must take a step further in understanding Job's final

²⁴⁴ Cf. DE BOER, "Does Job Retract", 193-194.

²⁴⁵ PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 237.

²⁴⁶ SCHEINDLIN, *Job*, 155.

²⁴⁷ CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 1205.

²⁴⁸ CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 1221.

attitude before YHWH, going beyond the fact of being consoled or comforted. If we take the divine speeches seriously, what we should expect from Job is not only a form of comfort or consolation, but also a sense of illumination, correction, reorientation, a sense of transformation and reconciliation. Indeed, all these senses are skilfully wrapped in the poetic colon, *נַחַמְתִּי עַל עֶפֶר וָאֶפֶר*, which I render as “I change my mind regarding human frailty”. This change of mind reflects Job’s peaceful acceptance of his humanity and reconciliation with himself.

The notion of change and reversal in attitude is prevalent in all occurrences of the idiomatic construction *נַחַם עַל* in the Bible. Even though the subject in Job 42:6b is Job, and not God, the notion of change and reversal conveyed by the construction *נַחַם עַל* remains. Just as God had relented about what has been done in various instances of *נַחַם עַל* in the Bible, so too Job now relents and changes his mind regarding dust and ashes. It is noteworthy that nowhere else do we have *עֶפֶר וָאֶפֶר* as direct object of *נַחַם עַל*. Literally, Job 42:6b means: “I change my mind about dust and ashes”. What does this poetic colon imply? What does Job change his mind about? I argue that Job changes his mind about the realities of human frailty and suffering, and simultaneously, about his ethical perspective in facing such realities. This change is an indication of Job’s vivid transformation in the encounter with the aesthetic perspectives that YHWH had brought before him through the divine speeches.

In disputing with his friends, Job used the image of “dust and ashes” as a representation of his state of being oppressed and suffering (Job 30:19). Conditioned by the ethical framework of retribution, both the three friends and Job himself have taken such a state as the result of divine punishment. Job accused God of being the cause of all the tragedies in his life. Now, Job has changed his mind. The experience of his personal encounter with YHWH radically alters his perspective, especially on YHWH’s sovereignty and on human suffering. On the one hand, the experience of hearing YHWH helps Job to acknowledge that human beings, as *עֶפֶר וָאֶפֶר*, are indeed far from being able to comprehend divine design and governance. The mysterious and miraculous characteristics of the world created by YHWH reflect the mysterious and miraculous character of YHWH before whom Job must learn

to humble himself as עֹפֵר וְאָפֵר, to be a creature.²⁴⁹ On the other hand, the experience of personal encounter with YHWH also helps Job to discover the existential image of himself as a human being in relation to the natural world and to YHWH. One may say with David Thompson: “Job became a critical realist regarding his existence as עֹפֵר וְאָפֵר”.²⁵⁰

As an idiomatic expression for humanity in its finitude and frailty, the connotation of the phrase עֹפֵר וְאָפֵר also includes positive perspectives of creaturehood and contingency, vulnerability and even suffering. Illuminated by YHWH’s descriptions of creation, Job comes to recognise that just as vulnerability is inherent in the creaturely world, so too are contingency and suffering inherent in human life. Once accepted as belonging to human finitude and frailty, human suffering does not necessarily imply moral outrage. Once recognised as included in human contingency, human suffering is no longer exclusively to be understood as a sign of divine punishment.²⁵¹ This insight has crucial significance for Job. The divine speeches have confirmed what he had intuited earlier, namely that his suffering was not caused by his sins. From the divine speeches Job has learned that there exists innocent and unjustified suffering in human life. Simultaneously, it also reveals that neither the sufferer nor God is to blame in such suffering.²⁵² From an ethical perspective, there may be underserved and unjustified suffering of the righteous. From an aesthetical perspective, however, the sense of undeserved or unjustified is removed simply because suffering is perceived as belonging to human finitude and frailty rather than exclusively as divine punishment. Job’s changing his mind regarding dust and ashes reflects an illuminated wisdom resulting from the collision of the

²⁴⁹ Contra Jack Miles who comments: “He [Job] realises that his situation is hopeless and is willing to admit anything “to get this blustering tyrant to shut up; an alternative, even freer translation of the last verse is ‘I shudder with sorrow for mortal clay’”, MILES, *God*, 325.

²⁵⁰ THOMPSON, “Yet Another Try on Job 42:6”, 141.

²⁵¹ In the same direction and in relation to the divine speeches, Newsom thus comments: “the vulnerability of the human existence can be understood not in terms of divine enmity, but in terms of a creation within which the chaotic is restrained but never fully eliminated”, NEWSOM, *Job*, 629.

²⁵² To my opinion, Job’s change of mind can be translated as “repent of”, as many scholars render it, if this term is not understood in the sense of of moral repentance or sorrowful penance. To “repent of” can be taken as synonymous with to change of mind and to act accordingly, as Good explains: “To repent of dust and ashes is to give up the religious structure that construes the world in terms of guilt and innocence”. GOOD, *In Turns of the Tempest*, 377.

two perspectives, ethics and aesthetics, in confronting human finitude and frailty.

Job's change of mind implies not only an acknowledgment of his very humanity, but also an acceptance of its contingent and vulnerable dimensions. As a matter of fact, changing one's mind about something conventionally considered negative is tantamount to recognising its positive significance. Job's change of mind about dust and ashes signifies positive considerations regarding humanity, despite its contingency and vulnerability. Job is now convinced that being dust and ashes does not mean a divine punishment. No person is punished for being frail and vulnerable. These characteristics are constitutional to human beings and the process of life. If all creatures with their mysterious idiosyncrasies have a place in God's plan as confirmed in the divine speeches, so does Job with all his finitude and frailty.

Thus, by combining the two idiomatic expressions, עפר ואפר and נחם על, the poet is highlighting the fact that Job does not only accept his humanity in its finitude and frailty, but more importantly, discovers something meaningful about it. The positive meaning conveyed by the combination עפר ואפר in Job 42:6b finds a correlation in Abraham's pleading for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:27). As we have seen, the phrase עפר ואפר portrays the noble standing of Abraham who, while well-aware of his humble state as a human being, is able to stand and intercede for his fellow human beings before God. Similarly, at the very end of Job's address to YHWH, the phrase עפר ואפר recurs and reflects Job's noble standing before YHWH.²⁵³ The phrase "dust and ashes" representing humanity is not incompatible with the noble status of the vocation of fragile humanity. As Terrien comments, the affirmation of oneself "as dust and ashes" can be understood as "an act in which the royal vocation of humanity – the royal vocation to become humanity – is accepted and embraced with all its vulnerability to innocent

²⁵³ In fact, the poet parallels the two patriarchal figures, Job and Abraham in several instances. At the beginning, Job is characterised as a righteous patriarch like Abraham. Before God, both present themselves with the same phrase עפר ואפר. At the end of Job's story, this parallelism becomes more evident in YHWH's final verdict in the epilogue. YHWH confers on Job the role of an intercessor for his three friends, the same role Abraham assumed for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. More emphatically, YHWH explicitly mentions Job by the dearest title "my servant, Job" (cf. 42:7, 8abc), just like the title God used for Abraham (cf. Gen 18:17; 26:24).

suffering”.²⁵⁴ At the beginning of the disputes (Job 3), adversity and suffering had led Job to deny the royal status and vocation of humanity. And yet, YHWH’s challenges in the divine speeches eventually made him change his mind and he learned that “the royal status and vocation of humanity includes both suffering and glory”, as noted by Clinton McCann.²⁵⁵ Yes, human beings in their creaturehood are but mere mortals. And Job, as עֶפֶר וְאֶפֶר, shares the common lot with his fellow human beings. Nonetheless, amid his suffering and crisis, Job has succeeded in engaging YHWH into a face-to-face dialogue with him and has experienced YHWH in a personal and intimate manner. After all, Job discovers that YHWH is on his side, YHWH mentions him with the noble title: “my servant, Job”, as well as granting him the role of intercessor for his friends (Job 42:7-8). It is, therefore, through personal experience of suffering that Job can be representative for all humanity and be worthily called by YHWH “my servant, Job”. It is through the personal experience of encounter with YHWH that Job can assume the role of intercessor for his friends.

Some scholars state that by changing his mind and attitude, Job closes the period of mourning and returns to normal life again.²⁵⁶ Strictly speaking, this “return” to normal life, as it were in the prologue, is impossible. Illuminated by the divine wisdom, Job is also transformed into a new person, as MacKenzie comments: “Job at the end of the book is a nobler and more admirable character than he was at the beginning, and at the same time more

²⁵⁴ TERRIEN, *Job*, 255-256.

²⁵⁵ J.C. MCCANN, *Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms*. The Psalms as Torah (Nashville 1993) 713.

²⁵⁶ Cf. HABEL, *Job*, 583; CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 1222. Clines even understands Job’s return to normal life as a form of concessive retirement by which Job again lives the life he used to live and enjoys the position in the patriarchal world he used to enjoy: “[he] will retire to cultivate his garden [...] He will devote himself to his family and his farm”. CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 1222; cf. also CLINES, “The Wisdom of Job’s Conclusion”, 41. In fact, this understanding stems from Clines’ underestimation of the divine speeches and their impact on Job: “It is almost as if Yahweh had not spoken from the tempest, for Job has chosen not to hear in the divine speeches the sunny side of the world’s structure and management, and he has learned nothing except to have his worst fears confirmed, that he will not get justice from God”. CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 1224. Therefore, “Job’s response, so modestly expressed, is a standing rejection of the principles by which God acts and governs the universe”. CLINES, “The Wisdom of Job’s Conclusion”, 42. My understanding is radically different from these unsatisfying comments.

fully a human".²⁵⁷ Job cannot return to his normal life as it was before, because he is not the same person after the personal experience of suffering and especially after the intimate experience of encounter with YHWH.²⁵⁸

Indeed, the two verb forms employed in the last sentence of the poem, *נָחַם עַל* and *אָמַאס*, depict Job as a new creature standing before God. While the former reveals that Job "turns away" from his past, the latter suggests that he "turns toward" a new future, as van Wolde comments.²⁵⁹ And yet, there is a continuity and an overlap between the two verb forms, as both signify a radical change in Job's perspective. Job has moved away from retributive ethics and turned toward the aesthetics of divine wisdom. Thus, throughout the book, readers witness a process of growth and transformation in the character of Job. In the prologue, Job is characterised as a person of integrity based on an untested piety. In disputes with the friends, Job suffers a disintegration caused by the misapplication of the ethics of retribution to his experience of suffering. In the dialogue with YHWH, Job ultimately finds reintegration through YHWH's aesthetic perspective of gazing at human experience through beauty and mystery. It is the collision of ethics and aesthetics that brings forth the wisdom that transforms Job's life.

²⁵⁷ MACKENZIE, "The Transformation of Job", 56.

²⁵⁸ Even though the epilogue tells that YHWH restores the fortunes of Job (42:10), this does not mean that Job returns to his former life. The narrator is very clear in stressing that Job's latter days are much more blessed than his beginning: Job's blessings are manifested in the doubled number of his stock (42:12), as well as in Job's long life and in his death in a state of culmination (42:16-17). Job's new life is distinguished by his role in interceding for his friends (42:8-9), as well as his full participation in the community's life (42:11). Interestingly, Job's new life is marked also by the eloquent beauty of his three daughters, to whom Job gives not only their proper names, but also their portion of inheritance along with their brothers (42:14-15).

²⁵⁹ VAN WOLDE, "Job 42:1-6", 250.

A CONCLUSION

The starting point of this study was a particular question: “What is the final stance of Job, a righteous sufferer, before God?” Artistically wrapped up in the final poem (42:2-6), Job’s final stance is the culmination of a journey of maturation in his understanding of God, in his relationship with God and with himself. In this journey Job goes through different stages of transformation, starting with an initial integration, passing through different levels of disintegration, and achieving reintegration at the end. To understand Job’s final stance, the text concerned was read in the light of its literary framework formed by both its immediate and remote context in the book as a whole.

Chapter one showed how Job’s final stance has been a daunting challenge for most scholars in both antiquity and modernity. Patristic traditions that supported Job’s repentance are questioned by several modern scholars, while modern interpretations that turn Job into a rebel against God are far from satisfying. My work is an attempt to prove that the final stance of Job displays a sapiential attitude which can only be properly understood when one takes into account the collision between the two essential viewpoints supported by the book as a whole, that is, ethics and aesthetics.

Chapter two examined Job’s original integration as expressed by his traditional faith in the narrative prologue (Job 1–2). The chapter revealed how the exposition for the entire book is established and how the ethics of retribution are implanted throughout this exposition. On the one hand, it was shown that both Job’s moral quality and his way of living out his faith in God in the midst of calamities were carefully described to serve as a paradigmatic exemplar of a true sage, an authentic fearer of God. Job’s greatness is manifested by his ability to transcend the boundaries of retributive principles and not to be conditioned by a utilitarian perspective. On the other hand, however, the chapter highlighted literary evidence that raises questions about what is still hidden behind the veil of Job’s heroic manifestation of faith. The full truth about Job’s reaction to the calamities that befell him has not yet been revealed, the story of Job’s faith is not yet concluded, and his theological stance is not yet fully exposed in the prologue.

Chapter three analysed Job's disintegration as affected by the misapplication of the principles of the ethics of retribution. Different ethical standpoints of the main characters in the poetic disputes (Job 3–37) were examined. The chapter demonstrated that both Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Job himself actually move within the limited framework of retributive ethics in their disputes. Interpreting Job's suffering as divine punishment, the friends conclude that Job's immorality is the cause of his suffering and earnestly advise him to repent. As for Job, although he too interprets his suffering as divine punishment, Job stubbornly insists on his innocence, thus arriving at various accusations against God. The ethical principles of retribution bring the various conflicting arguments of the disputers to a dead end.

Chapter four uncovered the importance of aesthetics in the process of Job's transformation as advocated by the two divine speeches (Job 38–41). This chapter considered the shift of perspectives, from ethics to aesthetics, as an effective way to break out of the dead end of misapplied retributive ethics. YHWH presents before the imagination of Job a mysterious world of creation in which human concepts of morality are shown to be unable to explain the mystery of life in its beauty and in its vulnerability. Various conventional perceptions of life seen through the lens of the ethics of retribution are seriously challenged. Job is taught to acknowledge the limit of his own knowledge and to recognise the intrinsic wisdom of YHWH's design for the world of creation. Thus, to answer Job's various questions based on retributive ethics, YHWH trains him to contemplate the entire creation through different eyes and from different perspectives. This radical change of view liberates him from the framework of retributive ethics and encourages him to celebrate the aesthetics of life. By means of poetic descriptions, YHWH provides the suffering protagonist with alternative resources to transform his perspectives on the world, on God, and indeed on his very existence.

Chapter five was a close reading of the final poem of the book of Job (42:2–6) in the light of the findings of previous chapters. This chapter proceeded in two stages. The first identified Job's confession of ignorance in Job 42:2–3 as a manifestation of an illuminated wisdom that shed plenty of light on the understanding of Job 42:4–6. The second highlighted Job's change of mind in the direction of a reconciliation with God and consolation with humanity.

The result of the study is an affirmation that throughout the entire drama of Job's situation from the prologue right to the epilogue, the author of the book of Job does not present Job as a penitent, but rather as a righteous sufferer. A thorough reading of the book of Job shows that the final stance of its protagonist before YHWH reflects a sapiential attitude deriving from a direct experience of the righteous sufferer with the aesthetic dimension of the mysterious God.

From an ethical point of view, Job has been characterised by a perfect morality. The author of the book is very careful to make readers understand that it is Job's exceptional piety, not his immorality, that leads him to extraordinary trial and suffering. Throughout the narrative, the author has Job courageously insist on his integrity because he and readers are well-aware of his own innocence. By affirming both the blamelessness and the suffering of the protagonist, the Joban author calls into question and challenges the simplistic way of understanding and applying the doctrine of retribution, which advocates a causal nexus between piety and prosperity, impiety and suffering. The book highlights a double mistake made by both Job and his friends, and perhaps also by many readers over the centuries, namely, to take human suffering simplistically as evidence of human immorality, and thus to regard human suffering as divine punishment. If even Job, the most upright person on earth, is not exempt from sorrow and misfortunes, suffering in human life should not always be interpreted according to the moral status of the persons. The vicissitudes of life cannot serve as a benchmark for assessing the moral quality of a person.

From an aesthetic point of view, YHWH's way of describing the cosmos, the world of wild animals, and even the chaos monsters, represents a radical challenge to the righteous sufferer Job, as well as to all those who obstinately cling to an ethical perspective as the only explanation for life's adversities. Pointing to the beauty of the created world in all its splendour, mystery, and unfathomable characters, YHWH invites Job and sufferers of all times to free themselves from a limited ethical perspective so as to contemplate and appreciate the beauty and mystery of creation. The contemplation of creation takes Job beyond his pursuit for justice. It leads him to appreciate the meaningfulness of the existence of a righteous sufferer, as well as the presence and the role of God in all the vicissitudes of such an existence. Thus, to the various interpretations of suffering from the perspective of ethical retribution, YHWH responds with the invitation to celebrate the

beauty and mystery of life. To the various accusations of divine incompetence and injustice, YHWH responds by revealing the aesthetical dimension of human sufferings. From the divine speeches, we learn that even chaos and evil are part of YHWH's mysterious design for creation. No one can destroy chaos and evil without destroying life itself. Therefore, the sufferings of the righteous should not be read as signs of the failure of divine justice and governance. Instead, YHWH's aesthetical description of creation indicates that human suffering is part of human life, just as contingencies and vulnerability are constitutional characteristics of all creatures. YHWH remains a solicitous supporter of creation, who lovingly cares for all creatures in all circumstances.

The wisdom of divine pedagogy in the book of Job makes an appeal to readers for a journey of transformation: from ignorance to illumination, from protestation to submission and reconciliation. Job comes out of his tragedy not as a penitent but rather as a sage who has experienced suffering in his own flesh, who has struggled to defend his integrity against unjust condemnation, who has loyally appealed to God even by challenging and accusing, and who eventually has intimately experienced the otherness of God with his own ear and eye. Likewise, human beings are invited to deepen their insight into God and let themselves be transformed through the experience of loss and suffering. The book of Job points out that in the various perplexing situations of life it is not enough for faithful ones to live by theological theories. Like Job, we are invited to recognise that the authentic God cannot be imprisoned in human categories. The uncritical application of any human theory runs the risk of portraying false images of God, bleak images of humanity, as well as distorted images of the relationship between God and creation. The redeeming feature of all Job's struggles with God, with his friends, and even with himself is his unquenchable quest to meet God, to have a direct response from God. This quest is fulfilled in his personal encounter with YHWH. In such an encounter, Job can truly appropriate the sapiential attitudes of a sage, such as attentive listening, openness to dialogue, sincere confession of ignorance, and humble and reverent submission to God.

Thus, Job's final stance as a sage testifies to the transformative power of the divine words. At the beginning of the story, Job is presented as a man of integrity shaped by popular piety. During the disputes with the friends, Job experiences a disintegration caused by the incompatibility between

retributive ideas and the reality of his life. Precisely in the light of the very words of YHWH does Job find reintegration at the end. Job's final transformation occurs when he takes the words YHWH addressed to him seriously, allowing himself to be questioned and challenged. He engages in a living dialogue that exposes his limited understanding and reveals the problems of his reasoning and interpreting of the tragedy of his life. It is on the basis of YHWH's words that Job's life is reconstructed. From the living experience of hearing and seeing, meditating and appropriating the words of YHWH, Job gains a new insight into God. He also discovers the existential image of himself as a human being in relation to the natural world and to God. From being a pious and righteous sufferer, Job has been transformed into a sage with an authentic faith in God, and with a realistic wisdom of what it means to be a human being of dust and ashes.

The message from Job's final stance before YHWH is particularly relevant to the Israelite communities experiencing the national disaster in 587 BCE. The author of the book of Job suggests an alternative interpretation of the miserable situation of the people of God, radically different from the one commonly promoted by the prophets. For those prophets promoting a Deuteronomistic covenantal theology, a national disaster such as exile raises immediately the retrospective question of a corresponding guilt. Exile is often justified as a consequence of God's righteous judgement and punishment. Now, it is precisely this line of reasoning that the Joban author challenges. When human misfortunes are unequivocally understood as the result of human sin, one runs a double risk: either condemning all sufferers as sinners or accusing God as unjust in the suffering of the righteous. Both conclusions lead the interpretation of human suffering into a blind alley. The Joban author skilfully shows how irrelevant and even erroneous it can be to approach the problem of human suffering simply from an ethical perspective. The book of Job firmly claims that innocent suffering exists. For the sake of all righteous sufferers, Job must not repent of any imagined sin. Instead, the book introduces the story of a journey of sapiential transformation for righteous sufferers towards a reconciliation with God, with humanity, and even with the cosmos. It is a challenging journey, shifting from an ethical to an aesthetical perspective, to enable righteous sufferers to become wiser and truer God-fearers.

The message from Job's final stance before YHWH is also particularly relevant to the world today, a world continually beset by uncertainty and

vulnerability. For many people who are struggling to find meaning in their lives in the midst of loss and suffering, it can be a true message of liberation when misfortunes are not taken as retribution, when the justice of God is not defended at the cost of accusing humanity or condemning all sufferers. It is a message of reconciliation when vulnerability and contingency are embraced as part of creaturely existence, and therefore neither God nor human victims are to blame in many painful situations of human life. It is a message of consolation when loss and suffering can be acknowledged as an invitation to deepen and renew our insight into God. Through the vicissitudes of human life, we are all invited to be transformed, to reach the maturity of a sage like Job, an authentic fearer of God and a fuller human being.

For scholars and readers of the book of Job, the study of this book emphasises that it is of fundamental importance to recognise the significance of the aesthetic dimension of creation and its crucial influence on the understanding of Job's final stance. In the last poetic section, and especially in the final poem, the Joban author proves to be a genuine poet, who does not constrain but rather inspires and leads readers to a profound understanding and insightful appreciation of Job's wisdom. The procedure of the Joban character to arrive at a sapiential stance, to see beauty and meaning in all human limitations, is at the same time the procedure to discover the aesthetic dimension of the world of creation through all its beauty and mystery, as well as its contingency and vulnerability. It is through his aesthetic experience that Job gains new insight into God. For a future prospective, therefore, further considerations and studies on the aesthetic and poetic dimensions of the biblical texts would greatly contribute to the understanding of the book of Job in particular and of the Hebrew Bible in general. It is the sensitivity to the aesthetic dimension of biblical texts that will bring readers closer to the threshold of experiencing the glory and beauty of God, the author of all beauty (cf. Wis 13:3).

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