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# Job and the Limits of Wisdom

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By

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M.Div., Columbia Theological Seminary, 2005

B.S., North Carolina State University, 2002

Advisor: Carol A. Newsom, Ph.D.

An abstract of

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the  
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

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That Job poses a “crisis” for Israel’s wisdom tradition is a long-held critical consensus. Job’s suffering despite his righteousness is thought to challenge the wisdom tradition which, being grounded in retribution, is supposedly unable to imagine either that a righteous person would suffer or that a sufferer would be righteous. Since von Rad’s analysis in 1970 the trend has been to emphasize the centrality to the wisdom tradition of the sentences in which the sages spoke of the “limits of (their) wisdom.” Yet the idea of wisdom as a rigid system of retribution persists in articulations of the challenge that Job poses to wisdom. The present project discards this demonstrably false idea of wisdom as rigid retribution so as to reassess Job’s place in Israel’s tradition. Does Job pose any actual problems for wisdom? How could one challenge a tradition that celebrates its limits? I propose that such a crisis can be identified wherever it can be demonstrated that the previous tradition’s mode of dealing with its limits has been transformed.

The bulk of the dissertation consists of an exegetical analysis that investigates the nature and function of wisdom and its limits in the book of Job and its tradition. I carry out this analysis with the help of several interdisciplinary resources, especially psychoanalytic and philosophical concepts and categories associated with Jacques Lacan. I reject a number of staid ideas, but the analysis is not simply critical. I dispense with various conventions so as to make room for new frameworks that cast the book’s driving issues in new light. In the end I find that the interpretive community has been right that the book of Job poses a crisis for wisdom, but the grounds on which I make my case are quite different. I raise theological and ethical questions throughout that advance toward a final intervention into the enthusiastic (re)turn to character ethics in biblical studies. I contend that this embrace of character ethics may stand as damned as the tradition stands denounced by Job’s testimony.

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For Stephanie C. Hankins  
In memory of David C. Knauert

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Lacan seminar revealed to me the great potential of the Lacanian orientation for textual analysis. His direction of my qualifying examination forced me to confront the relentlessly (but consistently!) dynamic flux across the decades of Lacan's work. On my committee he courageously remained engaged with my work even as it became wholly engrossed in biblical studies arcana. Finally, as is evident on nearly every page of this dissertation, his written work repeatedly affords me both inspiration and clarification.

Few people hold my trust and admiration to the extent of Brent Strawn. While writing the dissertation and throughout my time at Emory his authenticity as well as his wide-ranging intellect have been sources for me of both astonishment and enjoyment.

I have learned more about Job from Carol Newsom than anyone else. She not only directed but also advocated for this project from its inception to its present form. Carol concludes her monograph—my respect for which is clear in what follows—by advising readers, “go and reread Job in the company of others who will contest your reading.” She has indeed followed her own advice, at every turn rereading Job with me and with my contestations. She corrected and critiqued me only when my own logic became obscure or faulty, and never because it was not more like hers—even though it may have improved if it were. The direction she modeled will orient me long after I leave Emory.

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 Introduction: Job's Critique of Transcendent Theology
 

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The eye with which I see God is  
the same with which God sees me.

---

 Meister Eckhart

The human being is this night. . . pure self—in  
phantasmagorical representations, is night all  
around it, here shoots a bloody head—there  
another white shape, suddenly here before it,  
and just so disappears. One catches sight of this  
night when one looks human beings in the  
eye—into a night, that becomes awful.

---

 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

## 1 WISDOM, WISDOM, AND WISDOM

Ancient Israel's wisdom tradition endows "wisdom" with numerous meanings, many of which can be helpfully and usefully distinguished (e.g., trade skills versus artistic learnings), or even categorized at different levels (e.g., practical knowledge versus ethical prudence).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Most include within the wisdom tradition Proverbs, Job, Qohelet (and often certain Psalms, e.g., 37); with the Greek Old Testament, Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon. For a discussion of the lexical group of words for wisdom and of the ideas of wisdom that they convey, see MICHAEL V. FOX, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 2000), 28-43. Cf. MICHAEL V. FOX, "The Epistemology of the Book of Proverbs" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 126 (2007), 669n.1.

Yet one distinction cuts across all others: on one hand there are the wisdoms that are available to and through the imperfect, lacking, and temporal reality of human experience and understanding; on the other there is the Wisdom that is associated with the divine and with transcendence and that exists outside but not independently of human wisdoms.<sup>2</sup> Fox puts it well in the following quote which, while specifically discussing Lady/Woman Wisdom, should be read in light of his earlier claim that she epitomizes the transcendent, divine entity that he calls the “wisdom–universal”:

Lady Wisdom symbolizes the perfect and transcendent universal of which the particulars of human wisdom are imperfect images or realizations. Like a Platonic ἰδέα, the wisdom–universal exists objectively and not only as an abstraction or mental construct. It dwells in special proximity to God—“before him,” present to his mind—while maintaining a distinct existence. As a universal, it exists in both the supernal realm (universal, atemporal, extramundane) and the human (time-bound, wordly, belonging to particular peoples, realized in specific words). This transcendent wisdom now and ever presents itself to humanity, meaning that the wisdom that people can learn, such as the wise teachings of Proverbs, are manifestations or precipitates of a universal, unitary wisdom. . . . It is the transcendent wisdom that is the universal of the infinity of wise things that humans can know and use.<sup>3</sup>

One could unpack much from this quote. For now it is enough to note the tension within it between the first two and the last three sentences. First, Fox speaks about the human’s *mediated* access to transcendent Wisdom; then he says that transcendent Wisdom is *immediately* available within human wisdoms. The first two sentences distinguish a perfect, transcendent Wisdom–*universal* from its imperfect images in humanity’s *particular*–wisdoms. The last three sentences claim that the transcendent Wisdom–universal “exists in” and “presents itself to” humanity’s immanent particular-wisdoms. Fox has two main incentives behind his second, less popular claim. First, he rejects any qualitative distinction

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<sup>2</sup>Others have also used the typographical distinction between *Wisdom* and *wisdom*; e.g., CAROLE R. FONTAINE, *Smooth Words: Women, Proverbs, and Performance in Biblical Wisdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 2.

<sup>3</sup>MICHAEL V. FOX, “Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 116 (1997a), 630.



between the Wisdom–universal and particular–wisdoms.<sup>4</sup> Ancient Israel’s sages seem less interested—than, for example, some who are more influenced by Greek thought—in wholly separating the mundane realm of particular–wisdoms from the divine realm of transcendent truths.

Yet it seems to me that the entire sapiential enterprise that generates, as Fox puts it, an “infinity of wise things” out of the Wisdom–universal, depends upon taking such a qualitative distinction as axiomatic. To explain I can first ask the question that Fox himself poses: “how does the transcendent wisdom manifest itself in the mundane sphere?”<sup>5</sup> If Proverbs presents the extramundane, atemporal, Wisdom–universal within the mundane and temporal reality of particular–wisdoms, then how and on what basis would Wisdom’s difference from wisdom appear? Fox’s own answer is inadequate since he simply asserts that the Wisdom–universal is both present in particular–wisdoms<sup>6</sup> and “transcends any human wisdom.”<sup>7</sup> While Fox indicates his sense that something qualitative separates particular–wisdoms from the Wisdom–universal,<sup>8</sup> he neither pursues why, when, or where the Wisdom–universal appears, nor how its appearances might be analyzed.

Second, Fox does not consider in this part of his argument the statements from the sages about the limits of their wisdoms. While the sages do not always acknowledge the exclusion of the Wisdom–universal from their particular–wisdoms, they certainly reiterate the folly of ever considering particular–wisdoms as if they were “precipitates of the primeval, universal wisdom.” The teacher clearly admonishes the son “do not rely on your own understanding,” which may be Proverbs’ principle admonition, right before he offers what may be Proverbs’

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<sup>4</sup>“Proverbs emphatically assigns the transcendental wisdom to the mundane as well as the divine realm and does not distinguish degrees of purity or excellence” Fox (1997a), 632n.39.

<sup>5</sup>Fox (1997a), 631.

<sup>6</sup>“The book of Proverbs is one precipitate of the primeval, universal wisdom, as this is transmitted by and filtered through individual sages” Fox (1997a), 632.

<sup>7</sup>Fox (1997a), 633.

<sup>8</sup>For example, “Wisdom, in its essence rather than in its infinite particulars, is God’s gift to humanity,

motto imperatives: “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear YHWH and turn from evil” (cf. 3:5, 7). These admonitions and imperatives are at the core of Proverbs’ wisdom and they insist in no uncertain terms that human wisdom does not realize or present but is unequal and lacking with respect to divine Wisdom. The ethical axiom against being “wise in one’s own eyes” functions to ensure that the qualitative lack and imperfection that distances particular-wisdoms from the Wisdom-universal could never be considered overcome.

Fox’s attention to the similarities and mutually enhancing relationship between particular-wisdoms and the Wisdom-universal leads him to reject any qualitative distinction between them. But Fox’s rejection seems to compel him into a position that he would probably refuse: by treating particular-wisdoms as presentations of the Wisdom-universal, the limits of particular-wisdoms can only be seen negatively, either as indications of the absence of Wisdom or of folly. And yet the fear of YHWH and the recognition that one is not wise preserve the limits of one’s wisdom in ways that positively indicate the presence of wisdom. In fact, I would contend that recognizing the limits to one’s particular-wisdoms acts as the constitutive condition for what Fox rightly calls the “infinity of wise things that humans can know and use.” Consider the common example of Prov 26:4a (“Do not answer a fool according to his folly. . .”) and 26:5a (“Answer a fool according to his folly. . .”). Both are presented as if they were universal and unlimited, and yet their immediate juxtaposition indicates that they (and implies that all proverbs) are framed within a tradition that takes their distance from the Wisdom-universal as axiomatic.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the presence of the transcendent Wisdom-universal is much more strongly indicated by these proverbs’ juxtaposition than it would be by any straightforward claim that they somehow directly presented Wisdom. Indeed, the strongest way to manifest the  

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and Israel partakes in this cosmopolitan wisdom. . . [W]isdom embraces such teachings but is greater than their sum total” Fox (1997a), 632, 633.

<sup>9</sup>Furthermore, is the qualitative distinction between sapiential wisdom and divine Wisdom not one of the simplest ways to characterize wisdom’s distinctiveness with respect to, say, priestly law, where human and divine codes of conduct are identified?

Wisdom–universal may be to present, as palpably as possible, the limit barring particular–wisdoms from identification with the Wisdom–universal. O’Connor puts it well in a section aptly entitled “Ambiguity as Revelatory”:

Because the wisdom literature appreciates the ambiguity of human experience, it struggles against rote religious answers to human problems. Furthermore, it sees in ambiguity and confusion the opportunity for breakthrough into mystery. . . . The point of highlighting ambiguity or paradox is not to bring the individual to an intellectual impasse but to lead her beyond the obvious into deeper, transcendent truth.<sup>10</sup>

In the terms of Prov 21:31, the sage can be sure of the divine presence in the event that all the preparations for battle have been made, and the war is nonetheless lost. The limits of particular–wisdoms open up spaces in which it becomes possible to imagine a beyond in which an unlimited, transcendent Wisdom is located.

My argument, then, is that the Wisdom–universal is not presented by any of the sages’ particular–wisdoms—from the most sublime theological speculation to the most mundane technical calculation. The location of all such wisdoms within the sapiential framework compels the sage to treat them as penultimate, limited, competing and conflicting claims that must be continually (re)negotiated and (re)discovered. Yet I still find it useful to distinguish and to note the similarities between the sages’ limited, particular–wisdoms from their theological speculations about unlimited, universal Wisdom. In fact, I find it most important to identify the limits that beset both, which not only keep them from directly presenting Wisdom, but also open up the spaces within which Wisdom’s presence is indirectly indicated. A third category of wisdom is therefore necessary, which I will indicate with small caps: WISDOM. In short, (i) all sapiential articulations are particular–*wisdoms*, including those that speculate about the content of a (ii) *Wisdom* that may transcend and be indicated by the sages’ particular–wisdoms. (iii) WISDOM thus refers to the internal limits of the sages’ particular–wisdoms whose appearance may be taken

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<sup>10</sup>KATHLEEN M. O’CONNOR, *The Wisdom Literature* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1990),

as an indication of the (excluded) "presence" of a Wisdom that transcends wisdom. In other words, WISDOM is my answer to Fox's question cited above about how transcendent Wisdom can appear within the limited, particular-wisdoms of human thoughts, speech, and desire. WISDOM is what renders the discourse of wisdom ambiguous and paradoxical since it is the negative space that divides, limits, and opposes claims to particular-wisdoms. In its capacity as a gap, however, WISDOM is also constitutive of the sapiential discourse's seemingly infinite flexibility. Since wisdom's limits can be taken as WISDOM, and thus indicative of a transcendent Wisdom that it strives perpetually to approach, wisdom would seem to be unlimited.

One can initially grasp the relationship among these three wisdoms as sequential: first the sage accumulates wisdom; at some moment he inevitably encounters WISDOM when he realizes his wisdom is limited; finally he imagines what unlimited Wisdom might exist beyond the limits of his cognizing abilities. This sequencing is partially misleading because, prior to the sage's encounter with WISDOM that brings him some awareness of the limits of his wisdom, his "wisdom" is not coordinated enough to be called wisdom. The notion of WISDOM stands much critical and biblical doxa on its feet, according to which human, limited wisdom either arises from or generates divine, unlimited Wisdom. On my account, both wisdom and Wisdom emerge from WISDOM.

Some may detect the Hegelian contours of this conception of WISDOM. Just as the ancient sages reckoned the one who is wise in his own eyes a fool, so too did Kant deny that anyone has direct access to divine Wisdom. Kant referred to unlimited/divine Things-in-themselves as noumena. He insisted that limited/human knowledge and experience are cut off from noumenal Things-in-themselves, and are only capable of accessing phenomenal objects-as-appearances. Among the German idealists, Hegel's critique of Kant's noumena/phenomena distinction is best known. Hegel writes:

No one knows, or even feels, that anything is a limit or defect, until he is at the same time

above and beyond it. . . A very little consideration might show that to call a thing finite or limited proves by implication the very presence of the infinite and the unlimited, and that our knowledge of a limit can only be when the unlimited is *on this side* in consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

Kant adheres to a two-tiered model for speaking about the world that is similar to the critical conversation about wisdom up to now. Hegel makes the small but crucial step to say that, in order for the one (human/limited) to even speculate about the other (divine/unlimited), there must be something that indicates the latter *within* the former. In short, limitation precedes and is productive of transcendence, as the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek tirelessly reiterates in his narrations of the relationship between Kant and Hegel:

For Hegel, the gap between phenomena and their transcendent Ground is a secondary effect of the *absolutely immanent* gap of/in the phenomena themselves. . . immanence generates the specter of transcendence because it is already inconsistent in itself. . . the tension between immanence and transcendence is. . . secondary with regard to the gap within immanence itself.<sup>12</sup>

The present project follows this fundamental Hegelian move to shift our critical focus from the tension between immanence (limited, human wisdom) and transcendence (unlimited, divine Wisdom), to the appearance of transcendence within immanence (WISDOM). This study asks, as Hegel puts it, where in JOB does “the very presence of the infinite and the unlimited” appear?

<sup>11</sup>GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL, *The Encyclopædia Logic: Part 1 of the Encyclopædia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze* trans. by T. F. Geraets and W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), §60.

<sup>12</sup>SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 60, 61, 65. Cf. the discussion of the relationship between Kant and Hegel and of Žižek’s interest in and conception of this relationship in JOHNSTON (2008b, esp. ch. 11).

Why has one not heard much about this third category of WISDOM prior to this dissertation?<sup>13</sup> In part I think it is because WISDOM often functions as a kind of “vanishing mediator,” a gap momentarily opened and then (usually) filled in, either by the interpreter’s presumption of some figure of Wisdom as its referent, or by the text’s offering of some figure of Wisdom as its referent.<sup>14</sup> JOB,<sup>15</sup> however, is often directly concerned with this third category of WISDOM and with its active role in generating the appearance of an external split between (immanent) wisdom and (transcendent) Wisdom.<sup>16</sup> Thus, while it is true that WISDOM has not yet been adequately conceptualized, I attend throughout to its inchoate appearances in scholarly and biblical literature.

## 2 “SHORT-CIRCUITING” A CONVENTION

Within these first pages I have already begun what will be an ongoing practice throughout this dissertation: “short-circuiting” the usual categories of interpretation by using concepts drawn from more or less foreign fields to organize and encapsulate the textual material

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<sup>13</sup>For a closely related investigation of WISDOM in the book of Proverbs, see DAVID CROMWELL KNAUERT, *The Limits of Wisdom and the Dialectic of Desire* Ph. D thesis, (Duke University, Durham, 2009).

<sup>14</sup>The term “vanishing mediator” is developed in an insightful early essay by JAMESON (2008d).

<sup>15</sup>To avoid confusion between the book and the character “Job,” this dissertation follows a practice adopted by several scholars to use small caps to specify that I mean the book in those places that would otherwise be unclear because they lack any chapter or verse reference or overt reference to “the book.”

<sup>16</sup>Not to mention Qohelet, whose proximity to Hegel in the consideration of a limit’s relationship to the whole will have to await further work. To give an indication, where the tradition sees what is ephemeral, fleeting, and unclear (*hebel*) as a limitation with respect to the sage’s ability to be wise about everything, Qohelet responds by admitting these limits and affirming his knowledge through his assertion that everything is *hebel*. For Hegel’s part, consider his rejection of the Kantian tradition’s perception of limitation: “With respect to the form of the limitation. . . great stress is laid on the limitations of thought, of reason, and so on, and it is asserted that the limitation cannot be transcended. To make such an assertion is to be unaware that the very fact that something is determined as a limitation implies that the limitation is already transcended” GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL, *Hegel’s Science of Logic* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1989), 134.

and ancient ideas. While some of the concepts and categories I develop will be familiar to some of my readers (e.g., Kant's notion of the sublime), and others are well-established in critical biblical interpretation (e.g., tragedy, comedy), I try to explicate them as clearly as possible to the extent required by my use of them. Aware that I may at times neglect to provide all the needed or desired background, I try to provide sufficient citations of relevant discussions of these concepts and categories. Given my primary audience of biblical scholars, I try neither to belabor nor truncate my discussions of the theoretical discourses. In the end the theoretical elaborations solely aim to produce concepts and categories that are unavailable in current biblical studies, and that allow the text to be heard and seen to say and do things of which biblical studies has remained unaware.

This project reassesses the conventional idea that the wisdom of the book of Job explicitly and implicitly challenges the tradition in which it stands. I will define wisdom at length in CHAPTER 2.<sup>17</sup> Here it suffices to call it a discourse, by which I mean a social link that structures and constitutes relations among subjects, of subjects to objects, and of subjects and objects to wisdom and the divine. JOB's wisdom is made possible by but is not present in the book of Proverbs—commonly considered the normative expression of Israel's traditional wisdom. Furthermore, JOB's new wisdom remains missing from or suffers unfortunate misreadings in the majority of contemporary interpretations.

To be sure, it is by now somewhat hackneyed to claim that JOB challenges traditional wisdom. But perhaps it is for this very reason that we stand to learn so much by reexamining this claim. One way to understand this project is as a rigorously critical and systematic reassessment of everything taken for granted by the often-made off-hand observation that JOB challenges or poses a crisis for traditional wisdom. Throughout I investigate (i) the character and limits of the wisdom that JOB rejects; (ii) I consider how it could be thrown into crisis and what could challenge it; (iii) I investigate the wisdom that JOB presents<sup>18</sup>;

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<sup>17</sup>I refer to this dissertation's chapters in small caps to avoid confusion with Job's chapter divisions.

<sup>18</sup>Mostly for constraints of time and space I have chosen to exclude Elihu's speeches from this considera-

(iv) I consider whether, how, and in what way JOB's wisdom opposes traditional wisdom; and (v) I explore various consequences of JOB's wisdom, its opposition to the tradition, and its misapprehension by interpreters. As is undoubtedly true in many cases, the reality of the situation that the consensus opinion tries to name is much more complex than the consensus allows. Regarding the consensus that JOB challenges the tradition, however, the problems may run even deeper.

To specify the kinds of problems that plague conventional accounts of JOB's wisdom and its meaning, consider the following simplified version of a common notion about the relationship between Job and his friends: Job's emphasis on experience challenges the tradition's emphasis on doctrine insofar as his experience falls outside their theology. Many think that the friends impose their theology on Job and try to force his experience to accord with their thoughts about "how the world works." From this angle, the reader is bound to

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tion of the book. My choice is not arbitrary, since the book itself may indicate the secondary status of these speeches. I do not mean to suggest that the speeches would add nothing to this analysis; on the contrary, the similar exclusion or depreciation of them by many scholars has undoubtedly filled them with a caché of insights that have only recently begun to be appreciated (by scholars such as Clines, Newsom, and Seow). But, in a least the following ways, JOB signals the secondary nature of the speeches. Job's long speech in chs. 29-31 concludes, "The words of Job are ended." YHWH's long speech in chs. 38-41 begins, "Then YHWH answered Job out of the whirlwind." Between these two formulae stands Elihu's long speech in chs. 32-37. A brief prose introduction in 32:1-5—no other speaker receives such an introduction—justifies the addition of these speeches in a way that may seem more like an interpolating scribe's apology to the reader than a comment within the diegetic space of the dialogue. Elihu is the only character with an Israelite name, and this unexpected interlocutor is never mentioned nor responded to outside of his speeches. Perhaps tellingly, YHWH explicitly addresses Eliphaz and the other two friends in the epilogue, but ignores Elihu. Finally, though I cannot develop them here and while these speeches do share a number of similarities with other parts of the book, a number of their features may also signal a different social and historical context. Elihu engages the others differently than they engage one another (cf. the many direct quotations in his speeches e.g., 33:15 // 4:13). And, on a theological spectrum one may draw between Prov 1-9, with its likely Persian period provenance, and Ben Sirah's Hellenistic milieu, many think Elihu's strongly theocentric, philosophical wisdom (cf. 32:8) resonates more with the latter, whereas the other friends seem closer to the former.



face numerous difficulties:

1. How should the complexities of the friends' theology be treated, especially their regular insistences on the lack of understanding that human beings can never escape?
2. What should be done about the rootedness of their theology in experience? Should this rootedness be dismissed since they treat their experiences as normative? How then can Job be treated differently for his insistence on the normativity of his experience?
3. Job's speech does much more than recount a list of symptoms, so will this angle attend adequately to the relationship between experience and theology in his discourse? And how could this angle not distance interpreters from Job's constructions of his experiences that present them as revelatory of truths about God, the world, and wisdom? How could this angle avoid overlooking the way that Job clings to these truths with dogged certitude?
4. And finally, will the theological sophistication of Job's discourse be noticed? Will it be reduced to mere reflexes of experience?

These four sets of questions suggest that the commonly held idea that the friends impose their theology on Job's experience places the interpreter at a considerable distance from the text at the outset. This example illustrates four related problems with conventional interpretations of JOB:

1. The position usually disparaged as the traditional wisdom that JOB rejects and throws into crisis—i.e., the imposition of a rigid conceptual apparatus onto a particular situation whose complexity far exceeds the apparatus—does not characterize traditional wisdom as much as it does the interpretive approach that imposes on this wisdom a rigid dogma and that refuses to appreciate this wisdom's complexity;
2. Consequently, the actual position that the book of Job presents and rejects as the tradition's remains to be formulated;
3. The position usually celebrated as JOB's (the character and the book)—i.e., the insistence on the limits of understanding with respect to the complexities of experience—

actually characterizes the tradition that JOB rejects more than the wisdom that JOB advances in opposition to it;

4. Consequently, the actual position articulated by JOB against that which it rejects remains to be formulated.

In addition to demonstrating that these four inadequacies of conventional readings apply not just to the dialogue but throughout the book, this project will also offer an account of those crucial aspects of the book left unexamined because of the blinders that these conventional accounts create.

In order to decouple interpretation from many currently accepted categories and grasp the text anew, the present project strategically draws on concepts developed in other disciplines. This project should therefore be positioned within the long tradition of works in biblical studies that have generated insights into the text by creating “short circuits” between what is at their time considered “the field” and other approaches reckoned outside this field. Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) can function as a figurehead for this tradition. Though the story is much more complex, Gunkel represents the strong tradition of cross-disciplinary analyses *within* biblical studies.<sup>19</sup> Gunkel’s willingness to create “short circuits” between biblical studies and other disciplines such as folklore studies exposed the presence and function of genres in the text in a way that generated generations of work. Today one finds plenty of debates about the nature of genre, the existence and characteristics of particular genres, and the extent to which a particular text participates in a genre. However, it is more or less universally accepted that no text is genre-free, and that the relationship of a text to genre is not external, but instead affects the very nature of the text itself. That is, even though the sense in which we argue about genre today was only thematized with the rise of modern critical biblical scholarship from Herder to Gunkel to Buss, most have no problem

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<sup>19</sup>For the more complex version of the story that nonetheless highlights the deeply interdisciplinary character of Gunkel’s work, see MARTIN J. BUSS, *Biblical Form Criticism in Its Context* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999).

with the critical treatment of genre as something *internal* to the ancient texts and their contexts. Similarly, I see no *a priori* reason why such a critical internalization could not occur with the concepts developed below such as desire, drive, enjoyment, fear, and anxiety. While a critical conversation is necessary about how and to what extent these concepts are present or represented in the text, this project demonstrates that these concepts are there, walking around throughout the texts, even if they have not yet been thematized by interpreters.

Just after the tumultuous events of May 1968 in Paris, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan resumed his year-long seminar. Some student radicals were deeply informed by and close to Lacan, but others attacked him. They perceived the structuralist jargon and abstract formulas Lacan kept drawing on the blackboard as yet another instance of the university's failure to address the concrete social problems that they were struggling to redress from the streets.<sup>20</sup> In response, Lacan insists throughout the seminar that the four constituent elements of the four discourses that he spends the year elaborating were feet. He characterizes each discourse as "quadrupedal," and he insists that they are not latent, static, or abstract but manifest, mobile, and marching around.<sup>21</sup> Similarly I contend that the Lacanian concepts discussed in this dissertation are not latent, static, or abstract but are instead dynamic and walking throughout JOB's texts.

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<sup>20</sup>Here is a sampling of a few interruptions to a lecture Lacan gave at Vincennes, a newly-created experimental university: "While this little class is purring along peacefully there are 150 comrades at Beaux-Arts who are being arrested by the cops . . . they are not giving classes on the object *a* like this Mandarin here in our presence, and who no one could care less about. . . . So I think that the smooth running of this magisterial lecture is a fairly good translation of the current state of decay in the university." . . . "If we think that by listening to Lacan's discourse, or Foucault's, or someone else's we will obtain the means to criticize the ideology that they are making us swallow, we're making a big mistake. I claim that we have to look outside to find the means to overthrow the university" JACQUES LACAN, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969-1970* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 204, 205.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. LACAN (2007), 20, 105, 187, 188.

## 3 THE CONTENT OF THE ARGUMENT

In this section I condense some of the central questions from each chapter of this dissertation, and the following introduce other material relevant to my interpretive framework. In CHAPTER 2 I demonstrate that, in order to understand the significance of JOB within ancient Israel's wisdom tradition, both scholarship on wisdom literature and the texts themselves suggest the need for what I indicated above as a third category of WISDOM in addition to wisdom and Wisdom. In CHAPTER 3 I begin to use the concept of WISDOM as a tool for understanding how JOB distinguishes its own positions from the tradition. The prose prologue sets the premise for the entire book in these terms by discrediting the traditional idea that God completes and coordinates what seems to humans incomplete and inconsistent. The question asked by *haśśāṭān*<sup>22</sup> in 1:9 renders illegitimate any piety that is based on a sense of a transcendent order, truth, God, or principle. The premise of the book, then, hails unconditional piety as the only legitimate piety. As a result, the prose tale stages a kind of kenotic emptying out of heaven into the limits, disorder, and contingencies experienced by inhabitants on earth. The question is whether Job will respond to his encounter with a disruptive and unconditioned event by proving his ultimate allegiance to some conditioned wisdom/Wisdom, or by persevering with respect to the WISDOM opened up to him by the unconditioned events that overturn him. That he does the latter is indicated by his responses as well as the tale's explicit affirmations.

CHAPTER 4 is the first of four chapters in part two of this dissertation. Each of these chapters deals with some aspect or another of the speeches by Job and his three friends in the dialogue. CHAPTERS 4 and 6 offer close readings of particular texts, whereas CHAPTERS 5 and 7 range broadly over all the speeches in the dialogue. CHAPTER 4 develops the wis-

<sup>22</sup>I will discuss the figure of "the satan" in more detail in CHAPTER 3. Here it will suffice to say that I transliterate it because the definite article indicates that it is a function and not a name. The figure is inherently ambiguous. He is on God's team if not simply on God's side, that is, more devil's advocate than devil. The Devil will not appear for some time in Jewish and Christian literature.

dom of Job's friends by closely attending to Eliphaz's first speech in chs. 4-5. The friends adhere to what I described above as the transcendental structure through which the tradition treats the limits of its wisdom. The tradition posits the existence of a separate divine domain that exists beyond the domain of human existence, and that integrates the various un-coordinated and inconsistent elements of human existence into a fully-functioning harmonious order. I develop the logic behind this tradition at length and am more sympathetic to it than most, since I believe that it conforms to a structure that is not only a constituent component of all discursive realities, but also far more flexible and productive of knowledge than it is usually given credit for being. I continue to refine CHAPTER 4's account of the friends' wisdom in the remaining chapters of part 2 by considering the differences between their wisdom and Job's.

In CHAPTER 5 I attend to some of the differences between Job's and the friends' understandings of the subjective structure of Job's experience, and how these different understandings yield different proposals of the best way for Job to deal with his experience. Job's desire is often interpreted as if it ended in a desire for God's presence, or at least for a different presence of God than the one that traumatizes him in the dialogue. However, this notion of a presence that could be God's is precisely what he repeatedly declares impossible. Job experiences God not simply as a bad presence or an absent presence, but much more terrifyingly as a force that prevents any presence from establishing itself, especially his own. Job's experience of God has devastating effects on Job (he is split from himself), experience (nothing remains the same, everything threatens to turn on him, against him, and into him), and God (God is nothing but this destabilizing and devastating force). Job describes God as the force that repeatedly keeps himself and his world from constituting anything close to a stable presence.

I describe Job's experience of God as an experience of anxiety, which renders him strictly speaking incapable of assuming the posture of fear recommended by the friends. The friends promise Job that by fearing God he will escape his anxiety because their fear is capable

of locating the unknown dimension of his experience at a safe distance from himself. The friends' subjective positions of fear are predicated on their recognition of the exclusion of God and the truth of their experience from what is directly available to them. For the friends, God acts from a place of remote transcendence to disturb reality and what can be known of it. Job's anxiety, however, signals the proximity of God's presence to him as the force that keeps him from being at one with himself. Psychoanalysis provides a helpful frame for thinking about Job's experience of anxiety through its thesis that subjects are unable to coincide with themselves because they experience their own libido as a foreign body that is attached to them.

CHAPTER 6 offers a detailed reading of Job's speech in ch. 23. While Job 23 is inundated with interpretive difficulties, it is also central to many interpretations of Job's position that my own reading rejects. This text therefore provides a good context for demonstrating my own reading's distinctiveness as well as its generative capacities for critical concerns with different interpretive cruxes.

In CHAPTER 7 I investigate the solution(s) by which Job imagines escaping his situation of anxiety. The dominant approach to this question advocates for some form or another of a mediator that could safely and meaningfully relate Job to God. Yet Job always follows his expressions of desire to flee his circumstances by admitting the impossibility of doing so in light of God's character, which precludes anyone or anything from obtaining such a mediating position. After expressing his desires to flee and their impossibility, he often expresses his resolve to persist into the adverse condition he is suffering. In other words, Job's desire to flee disappears, and he subsequently expresses a hopeful drive to explore the bitterness of his soul. In his resolve to pursue this bitterness certain things that had been important motivations for his desire to flee become irrelevant, such as his dignity, innocence, and guilt. His attention turns instead to that aspect of himself that lives beyond his former self and all its dignity, that aspect of himself that survives himself and persists beyond his innocence or guilt. I refer to Job's experience as a sense of shame, which I understand

as his experience of himself as a libidinal subject, and I oppose Job's experience of shame to his desire for guilt, which I understand as a desire to flee the abyssal and terrifying dimensions of himself as a libidinal subject. Job confronts the inconsistent and internally self-defeating ground of his libidinal being, and he resolves to persist into it and even finds hope for his salvation in it as a result of his belief that this groundless ground could produce new conditions capable of outgrowing his currently bitter conditions. In his confrontation with his inconsistent, self-defeating, and therefore definitively undetermined conditions, Job begins to hope that he is not indefinitely determined by anything, neither his conditions nor the whims of a sovereign God.

CHAPTER 8 begins the third and final part of the dissertation with another close analysis of a particular text, the "speculative wisdom poem" in ch. 28. This poem is often read as a reiteration of traditional wisdom, and it certainly participates in the same genre as other speculative imaginings about what the transcendent Wisdom might be like that escapes the limited capacities of human wisdom(s). However, I contend that it is better read as speculation about what I define as WISDOM. If read as a poem about an immanently transcendent WISDOM, then certain interpretive cruxes regarding the poem appear in a different and perhaps less problematic light, including the debates about the relationship of v.28 to the rest of the poem, and the poem's awkward placement within the book itself.

CHAPTER 9 treats YHWH's address to Job from the whirlwind. The message of these speeches to Job, and specifically how they relate or do not relate to Job's speeches about and to God, preoccupies the critical conversation. Many problems plaguing interpretations of these speeches stem from a false point of departure, thinking that Job's ultimate desire, hope, and message to God are rooted in the legal metaphor. Following my argument in CHAPTER 7 in particular, however, one can read YHWH's message in response to a very different message from Job. As for YHWH's message itself, I follow a number of recent interpreters (e.g., Newsom, O'Connor, Beal, Brown, Keller) who see the speeches as a critique of divine transcendence. YHWH's speeches oppose all notions of an order that

harmoniously unites all being, and they describe instead a world of worlds or, as Brown puts it, a “multiverse” from which Job is alienated. I differ from these interpreters in the way that Job relates to this message since I think that Job knows this message all too well. The multiverse that YHWH describes has to be true in order for an experience like Job's to be possible. As for the rhetorical mode of address, it seems to me that YHWH is not judging that Job is guilty of not being able to go to these places, interact with these forces, conditions, animals, and so on. Instead, it seems much more likely that YHWH is emphasizing Job's fundamental alienation from the conditions that make any experience possible, any sight seen, any deed done.

I draw different ethical implications from YHWH's speeches in light of my different understanding of them. I doubt that YHWH rebukes Job for failing to assume his proper place in this “multiverse” since from beginning to end YHWH's speech describes a fundamental separation that divides the subject from the conflict-ridden forces out of which it has come into being. Instead YHWH shows Job (i) that in the beginning there was a fundamentally chaotic, less-than-unified, pulsating, and wild, asubjective multiverse, (ii) that Job has come into being out of this primordial, unbalanced antagonism of forces, and (iii) that Job remains cut off from this groundless ground of his existence. Most interpreters are right to say that the divine speeches leave much unaccounted for. But interpreters usually misidentify the issues that these speeches leave suspended which, on my reading, include: In what sense does Job remain tied to the imbalanced antagonism of forces that exists as the groundless ground of his existence? Correlatively, in what sense is he cut off from it/them? Finally, how does existence as such come into being out of this groundless ground?

In the texts I treat in CHAPTER 10 I claim that some of the issues are at least partially addressed that the divine speeches leave suspended. Many who read God's speeches as an ethical rebuke of Job read Job's response in 42:1-6 in an ethical sense—as, for example, defiance or humility. But I doubt that Job's ambiguous response can finally sustain such an ethical interpretation. Job simultaneously rejects and affirms what he knew and now has



seen and heard from God—that he exists on an ungrounded ground that is fundamentally out of joint and generative of beings that transcend it. The reasons for Job’s rejection seem obvious considering the abyssal experiences he has suffered of the ground opening up and riveting him to its vorticular movement. His affirmation seems no less rooted in his speeches since he discovered in them a hope in the generative capacities of his ontological condition. God’s speeches confirm that these antagonistic forces can somehow generate out of themselves beings that transcend them. God’s celebrations of creatures such as Behemoth and Leviathan emphasize both of these characteristics since they not only seem to transcend their environments, Job, and even God, but are also described as God’s creatures, who arose out of creation, and, in Behemoth’s case, are explicitly likened to Job. In other words, in God’s speech they seem both to be tied to and to transcend their conditions. Job’s ultimate hope is likewise that his conditions would generate a new existence in which he, his world, and God would all be transformed. As difficult and terrifying as it must have been to accept, this is in fact the only condition about which Job has led readers to think he could find consolation.

CHAPTER 10 directly relates this reading of JOB to virtue ethics, which is currently the most popular and widely accepted framework for exploring the ethical implications of biblical texts in general, and wisdom literature in particular. I argue that virtue ethics cannot account for, or even reckons unethical, a number of aspects of JOB that my reading suggests must lie at the center of any ethic. Virtue ethics’ emphases on integrity, continuity, and coherence cannot account for JOB’s premise (God acts to rupture a human from his conditions so as to enable him to act ethically), for Job’s discovery (that his hope lies in his inherently inconsistent and antagonistic conditions and not in overcoming this internal deadlock), or for God’s teachings (about a world[s] that is ontologically less-than-unified and generative of creatures that inhabit it but do not fit into it).

After Job’s affirmation of what YHWH says, YHWH speaks again in the prose epilogue, this time affirming what Job says in the dialogue and rejecting what the friends’ say. Where

God's and Job's affirmations are usually read as departures from the storyline up to that point, I think that they are more like a final plot twist in a psychological thriller that reveals what has been true all along. Job's so-called restoration at the end is far from an attempt to return Job to his pre-afflicted life (plus compensation for the pain and suffering). The "restoration" is better read as a brief glimpse into the nature of a community that is organized around the WISDOM and consequences of Job's testimony and YHWH's speeches.

#### 4 THIS PROJECT'S POINT OF DEPARTURE

The present project could not be introduced without considering Carol Newsom's 2003 monograph, which marks a watershed in critical biblical interpretation of JOB.<sup>23</sup> After briefly considering the new paradigm her work inaugurates in Joban studies, I consider how the present project relates to hers as both supplement and critique. (I return to the contributions and limits of her work throughout.) While JOB has often been characterized as a staged conflict with traditional wisdom, and as a heterogeneous conjunction of different traditions or perspectives, Newsom was the first to wager that this internal differentiation was not (just) an opposition between JOB and the tradition it rejected, or (simply) a conjunction of externally opposed perspectives, but rather was an antagonism constitutive of the book's meaning. Newsom's argument allows one to read JOB's internal differentiation—what she calls its polyphonic character—as indicative neither of an inadequate redactional hand, nor of an inadequate interpretive thought, but rather as an antagonism intended to guarantee that no single, coherent account of JOB's message could be advanced:

Read as a polyphonic work, the purpose of the book is not to advance a particular view: neither that of the prose tale, nor that of the friends, nor that of Job, nor even that of God. Rather, its purpose is to demonstrate that the idea of piety in all its "contradictory complexity" cannot in principle "be fitted within the bounds of a single consciousness." The truth

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<sup>23</sup>CAROL A. NEWSOM, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003a).

about piety can only be grasped at the point of intersection of unmerged perspectives.<sup>24</sup>

According to Newsom, the internal antagonism of JOB's messages constitutes its dialogic truth. Newsom derives her notions of a polyphonic text and dialogic truth in large part from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Dialogic truth, unlike monologic truth, arises at the encounter of distinct voices, is anti-systematic, and open.

After her clear statement of the book's purpose, Newsom immediately retracts it: "dialogue cannot explain and indeed threatens to obscure important dimensions of the book."<sup>25</sup> Newsom identifies several obstacles JOB puts in the path of anyone who attempts to read it as a demonstration of dialogic truth. Some are particular to Bakhtin's notion of dialogic truth, for example: "Bakhtin was consistently reluctant to address the effects of power on dialogic relations."<sup>26</sup> One cannot ignore power relations and read JOB dialogically since unequal power relations underlie and influence its voices. But if this were the only limit of dialogic truth, one could reconceive it such that it would address the effects of power and perhaps account for JOB's truth. However, Newsom identifies other obstacles that stem from bearers of truth in JOB that no dialogic view of truth could voice. She offers various examples of these bearers of unsayable truths, including unconscious motivations, corrupted speech, the dismantled identities of a speaker and the world, and, finally, those pregnant silences that "punctuate the book... [and] gesture to the ultimate limits of dialogue, to the unsayable that shadows speech."<sup>27</sup> This statement concludes Newsom's opening chapter, thus establishing a tension between (i) the assertion that the book's point is to demonstrate a dialogic truth about piety, and (ii) the observation that the book reveals the ultimate failure of dialogue to account for its truth. In all its various modes, the unsayable presents truths that escape dialogic truth.

Newsom's argument explicates these truths—monologic, dialogic, and unsayable—their limits, and the tensions that persist between and among them throughout the book. If at one moment she explicates the truth that a particular genre or perspective presents in

<sup>24</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 30. <sup>25</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 30. <sup>26</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 30. <sup>27</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 31.

a monologic voice, at another she attends to the limits posed to this particular voice by another voice with a different perspective. She explores the dialogic truths that arise when two or more voices are read together as counterpoints, and how this dialogic truth exceeds and limits its constituent voices. Finally, she attends to the limits posed to monologic and dialogic truths by exploring an unsayable truth that exceeds them.

For example, Newsom's second chapter details the prose tale's monologically-voiced moral imagination. Hastily put (the details are unimportant at this point), she thinks the tale proposes that an unalienated piety is possible if one orients oneself with respect to contingency (and not necessity). Just as she argues at the end of her first chapter that the book presents one truth that is "said" and another "unsayable" truth for which the said truth is incapable of accounting, so too does she argue at the end of her second chapter that the prose tale presents another truth that stands in tension with its said truth. While she does not tie the unsayable to any particular thinker in her first chapter, this parallel discussion in her second chapter suggests that Emmanuel Levinas is her primary reference for an unsayable truth indicated by JOB that falls outside of what a dialogical truth can convey.<sup>28</sup> She refers to Adam Zachary Newton's work on narrative ethics that draws on Levinas to argue that everything that is said in a narrative (the Said) is predicated on a "Saying," which Newsom glosses as "the intersubjective relation established in narrative through its performative aspect."<sup>29</sup> As she indicates, the Saying is just one of Levinas's ways of demonstrating an Other on which all meaning depends.

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<sup>28</sup>Linking the unsayable to Levinas finds further support in Newsom's continued references to Levinas (2003a, e.g., 92), and others closely associated with Levinas's work such as Philippe Nemo (cf. 2003a, e.g., 128, 148-49). Furthermore, Levinas himself says as much in a different context: "the inexpressible [i.e., unsayable] is not separated from this saying... [which] hides while uncovering, says and silences the inexpressible" EMMANUEL LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 260.

<sup>29</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 65.

Levinas critiques the philosophical tradition for thinking that the ethical derives from or aims for ontological notions such as unity, identity, the Same, totality, and finitude. Levinas shows how these philosophical notions try to exclude and thereby exercise violence against the absolutely Other, and he celebrates those exceptional places where he thinks Western thought includes the idea of the Other; e.g., Descartes' idea of the Infinite, Plotinus' One, and Plato's Good beyond being (the latter is obviously amenable to Levinas' central designation of "ethics as first philosophy").<sup>30</sup> For Levinas, all philosophy, thought, and language derive from an asymmetrical encounter with an unappropriatable Other to whom the subject is absolutely obliged. Levinas describes the Other's absoluteness in various ways, the easiest to grasp may be his description of the Other's transcendence from the differential order of signification: the "other involves a signifyingness of its own, independently of this signification received from the world. The other does not only come to us out of a context, but comes without mediation; he signifies by himself."<sup>31</sup> For Levinas, every Said issues from a Saying that responds to an asymmetrical relation between the Self and the immediate presence of an absolute Other that cannot be appropriated. The Self is subjected to and completely responsible for this Other whose absolute alterity keeps it unrevealed.<sup>32</sup> It is crucial to Levinas' anti-egoistic ethic of sacrificial responsibility that the absolute Other is Good: "To be for the Other is to be good."<sup>33</sup>

Yet Newsom departs from the ethical implications that Levinas draws from his notion of the Saying as an incarnation of the trace of the Other. First, like Levinas, Newsom thinks that the ethical implications of the prose tale's Saying challenge its Said by exposing its exclusion of the Other. The intersubjective relations that the Saying establishes both within

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<sup>30</sup>Cf. EMMANUEL LEVINAS, "The Trace of the Other" trans. by A. Lingis in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy* Edited by MARK C. TAYLOR. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 347.

<sup>31</sup>LEVINAS (1986), 351. Elsewhere he says that the Other manifests itself "καθ' αὐτό. It expresses itself" (LEVINAS, 1969, 51).

<sup>32</sup>Cf. LEVINAS (1986), 347.

<sup>33</sup>LEVINAS (1969), 261.

the text and between the text and its readers pose problems for its ethic: "Job in the prose tale is a character who has become an instrument in the disagreement between God and *haśśātān*, a mere illustration in the thematic discourse of the didactic narrative."<sup>34</sup> Just as God objectifies Job into a spectacle and an instrument, a spectacular instrument with which God can settle a disagreement with *haśśātān*, so too does the discursive link between the narrative and the reader objectify Job into an illustration of piety. Even the attempt to make Job illustrate a piety that is critical of God requires one to objectify Job into an instrument wielded to settle one's own disagreement (with God). In other words, what is not said—the unethical relations established by the Said—undermines the ethic presented by what is Said. However, unlike Levinas, Newsom does not privilege the approach to the Saying over the Said.<sup>35</sup> She acknowledges that they "are difficult to hold together" and that readers may have to suspend one to hear the other, but she exhorts her readers to attend to both the Said and the Saying for she sees neither as ethically superior and each as insufficient on its own.<sup>36</sup>

Having sketched the monologic ethic of the tale's Said, and the sense in which its Saying interrupts and undermines it, Newsom also considers the sense in which the Said's ethic is challenged from the perspective of Bakhtin's dialogism. Newsom seems to play on the senses in which interruption is explicitly involved in Levinas's thinking about what the Saying as a trace of the Other does to the Said, and implicitly involved in Bakhtin's thinking since dialogism designates the co-presence of more than one voice. The tale presents its ethic with a monologic voice that is undermined by the book's insertion of "another, alien genre, that of the wisdom dialogue, the language, values, and moral perspectives of which are radically different."<sup>37</sup> Newsom explains that the impetus for her appeal to Levinas's idea of interruption derives from the inability of Bakhtin's dialogism to account

<sup>34</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 71; cf. 68. <sup>35</sup>Cf. EMMANUEL LEVINAS, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 143-45, 199.

<sup>36</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 70. <sup>37</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 70.

for the ethical imperative issued by the prose tale's Saying. Dialogism cannot account for the limits "embodied in the prose tale itself" that are exposed by Levinas's notion of a Saying that opens "up the Said by continual interruption, making it acknowledge that aspect of language which is always saying something else, the possibility posed by the Other who speaks, breaking up the closure of identity and essence."<sup>38</sup> But she nonetheless sees Bakhtin's dialogism as functioning in tandem with Levinas's interruption insofar as the author's inclusion of a new genre in which Job gets a voice seems to respond directly to the imperative that issues from the prose tale's ethical shortcomings:

Thus, in the prose tale, attending to the performative aspects of the story discloses an urgency already present that motivates and is answered by the structure of the book as a whole... By interrupting with a wisdom dialogue, in which characters speak without significant narration, the author gives back to the character Job his subjectivity as an unfinalized presence whose last word is not yet spoken.<sup>39</sup>

Though Bakhtin's dialogism cannot perceive the unsayable, it provides a way to read the structure of the book as a whole as a response to the ethical demands of the unsayable.

At this point certain questions become unavoidable for this Bakhtinian–Levinasian framework. Before posing them, however, I believe that a terminological shift will be easier than sustaining the Levinasian categories. From this point on I will refer to the Saying as the Enunciation, the Said as the Statement, and the unsayable as the Excess. When appropriate, I will also add subscripts to each to specify the genres to which they refer (P–prose tale, D–dialogue). The main question that needs to be posed is whether Bakhtin's dialogic view of truth can adequately account for the dialogue and "the structure of the book as a whole" as a response to the prose tale's Excess. First, I should note how well Newsom's hybrid Bakhtinian–Levinasian framework responds to certain shortcomings of both thinkers. Bakhtin's dialogism functions as a corrective to Levinas's unsupportable relega-

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<sup>38</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 71. <sup>39</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 71.

tion of the ethical to the Enunciation alone.<sup>40</sup> And Levinas's Enunciation functions as a corrective to dialogism's inability to account for the unmasterable and internally conflicting Excesses that a voice generates. However, Newsom's framework seems to run into some problems when she turns to the dialogue's Statement as a response to the Excess<sub>P</sub> that she exposes by attending to the Enunciation<sub>P</sub>. The relationship between the Statement and the Excess fundamentally shifts when the the Statement and the Excess being considered derive from two different voices. Up to this point Newsom has presented the Excess much like WISDOM: an *internal* limit—"embodied in the prose tale itself"—that necessarily accompanies every Statement. So, when she treats the Excess<sub>P</sub> as something external to the Statement<sub>D</sub>, what gets lost is the role played by the Excess<sub>D</sub> that must necessarily be present once she transitions from one voice to another. The dialogue's Statement<sub>D</sub> must be grasped with respect to its own Excess<sub>D</sub>, whether or not it is read against the prologue's Enunciation<sub>P</sub> and Excess<sub>P</sub>. Newsom does attend at length to various manifestations of the Excess<sub>D</sub>. She even argues that Job's speech testifies to the Excess<sub>D</sub> as ontological.<sup>41</sup> However, is it possible to offer a sufficient account of the response that the Statement<sub>D</sub> and "the structure of the book as a whole" are supposed to offer to the prose tale's Excess<sub>P</sub> when the dialogue and book are read through a Bakhtinian lens that, she says, is unable to perceive their own Excesses? While Newsom's disregard of the dialogue's (and the whole book's) Excess in her consideration of its Statement occurs at a minor moment in her argument, she does not finally treat the relationship between the Excess and the Statement consistently. In her more Levinasian moments she treats the Excess as an internal, imma-

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<sup>40</sup>Although Newsom neither acknowledges nor explains her departure from Levinas on this matter, I think she is correct to do so. For an amenable critique on which I draw in the critical reflections on Levinas below, see MARTIN HÄGGLUND, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), ch. 3.

<sup>41</sup>Newsom refers to the ontological nature of the Excess<sub>D</sub> (*rōgez*) in Job's first speech (2003a, 96). For another example, see her discussion of "the limits of language itself" that are revealed when "Job speaks a language bordering on madness in a world turned upside down" (2003a, 161, 168).



ment condition of a Statement; in her more Bakhtinian moments she treats the Excess as something outside of a Statement. Sometimes she sees the Statement as a response to the Excess and at others she sees the Excess as problematic for the Statement only in the sense that the Statement fails to say it (and not as an internal limit to what it says). But since the Excess is an internal limit, there is a problem with any attempt to understand a Statement without attending to its Excess.

Contributing to these difficulties is Levinas's own failure to conceptualize alterity adequately. As was evident in my discussion of his work, he insists on the absolute transcendence of alterity,<sup>42</sup> and he characterizes the Other as one who comes "without mediation" and "signifies by himself." His emphases on immediacy and transcendence are difficult to square with the idea that the unsayable Excess is internal to the Statement. I would contend that the Statement is not limited because it depends upon or issues from a transcendent, unconditioned, and immediate Other; it is limited because alterity is unconditionally *immanent* to it as that which prevents it or anything else from ever transcending its mediating conditions or constituting itself. Levinas's notion of the Other is an impossible and inconsistent notion of something beyond alterity and all relations of mediation. Levinas's Other is identical to itself, signifies by itself, and is perfectly infinite and absolved of all relations with others. In short and despite himself, the Other that Levinas celebrates is indistinguishable from the Same that he denigrates.<sup>43</sup> His problem stems from his failure to see that what is unconditional is not an Other that limits conditions by transcending them, but the internal limit that prevents any condition from every becoming transcendent. No condition can be constituted in itself, apart from an internal otherness that disturbs and disrupts it. In short, alterity is the only unconditional.

So, to say explicitly what this extended treatment of Newsom's work has been approaching all along, I define WISDOM in this sense as an immanent, unconditional limit, and I

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<sup>42</sup>He writes, for example, "Only a being that transcends the world can leave a trace" (LEVINAS, 1986, 358).

<sup>43</sup>Cf. the discussion in HÄGGLUND (2008), ch. 3.

analyze it in JOB apart from both Levinas's deficiencies and inconsistencies. I depart from the image of a "tension" between and among monologic, dialogic, and unsayable truths, and instead investigate unsayable WISDOM as the internal and operative condition for each of the book's voiced perspectives. While I also treat a number of the tensions among its voices and perspectives, I primarily focus on the fundamental and internally differentiating limit that grounds each of the book's voices. In ways that are often congruent with Newsom's analyses, I find that the book's voices are not just grounded in but preoccupied with this internal alterity that afflicts every voice. I try to thematize how JOB's most unifying features issue from its concern with this sense of WISDOM. The book of Job struggles to grasp and articulate how a voice can arise out of a fundamentally limited and antagonistic ground, and its voices are often illustrative of or preoccupied with how their internally inconsistent grounds continue to haunt them.

Before introducing the theoretical background to my conception of WISDOM, I can briefly indicate my sense of how WISDOM operates in JOB. JOB explicitly struggles and/or implicitly illustrates the necessity and difficulty of voicing a perspective or a relation among perspectives, as well as the unsayable and inconsistent ground to which these voices remain tethered. In the prose tale Job is challenged to display fear that would be unconditioned by any of his circumstances, and then he is enabled to do so through the systematic removal of all the conditions of his life. The book then transitions to a dialogue in which Job tries to articulate what he knows now that he is unmoored from any of reality's conditions. One may thus speculate that even in its design the book illustrates how all meaningful voices emerge out of a monstrous and traumatic experience of an unsayable limit/excess. After the affliction in the prose tale, Job embodies and represents death—perhaps *the* unsayable condition. The unsayable abyss out of which discourses arise haunts Job's discourse in the dialogue as much as anyone else's. Throughout Job complains that he is unable to experience any consistent subjective position or stable perspective. And Job identifies God as the immanent limit that unconditionally perturbs his strivings for stability and a place

in reality. Job declares that God is the ultimate ontological condition of the fundamentally limited world. Unlike the friends who think that the world is limited with respect to a transcendent God, Job thinks that his world, his language, and himself are all limited insofar as God acts as an internal condition that unconditionally breaches their integrity. The friends fail to communicate with Job for the same reason that Bakhtin's dialogism cannot perceive the unsayable: They cannot communicate with Job since they relate to the limits of their wisdom and experience as if these limits indicated the presence of a truth somewhere else (in [an]other human or divine voice[s]). They thus fail to perceive that the real WISDOM of their discourse and understanding is the decentering obstacle that keeps it limited and that Job manifests, he says, as a result of his encounter with God's abyssal "presence." Finally, nothing may be more emphasized by the divine speeches' rhetorical mode of address than the "presence" of an unsayable, immanent negativity inhering within the ontological fabric of the less-than-fully unified multiverse.

## 5 THE LACANIAN REAL

The central theoretical figures informing my work are the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and various post-Lacanian thinkers such as the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek and others associated with his work. Žižek's corpus consistently reassesses the philosophical work of Kant and German idealism in light of Lacanian psychoanalytic metapsychology.<sup>44</sup> Both the continental philosophers as well as the Freudian psychoanalysts supply the conceptual coordinates of the present project. The way in which I have talked about an unsayable WISDOM that is internal to and constitutive of the discursive field of wisdom is closely related to the ways in which Lacan and various post-Lacanian describe the register of the

<sup>44</sup>The most productive, critical account of Žižek's work is provided by ADRIAN JOHNSTON, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2008b).

Real and its relation to the Imaginary and the Symbolic.<sup>45</sup>

To introduce these three registers to which I will return and develop further, I will offer three different ways to understand the unsayable, one for each register. First I should distinguish these registers from other, common uses of these words. The Imaginary should be associated with images rather than make-believe; the Symbolic should be associated with signifiers—the graphemic and phonemic material that languages uses to create meaning—rather than a literary trope or device; and the Real should be associated with what is impossible to symbolize into either Imaginary or Symbolic materials, rather than what is objective or actual. The registers are intentionally flexible, and Žižek has proposed that each one is refracted within the others, thus generating for the Real, an Imaginary Real, Symbolic Real, and Real Real (he does the same for the Imaginary and Symbolic)<sup>46</sup>:

[T]he real Real would be the horrible Thing: the Medusa's head; the alien from the movie; the abyss; a monster. . . [The symbolic Real ] is simply meaningless scientific formulae. For example, quantum physics can be understood as symbolic Real. . . . As Richard Feynman, the great quantum physicist, himself liked to emphasize, you cannot understand quantum physics, you cannot translate it into our horizon of meaning. It consists of formulae that simply function. . . . [The imaginary Real has] this totally fragile appearance: the Real can be something that transpires or shines through. For example, when you talk with another person and you are charmed by him or her. . . It is something that is Real, but at the same time totally elusive and fragile.<sup>47</sup>

Although I will not consider each register refracted within the others, I think Žižek's discussion is especially helpful since it differentiates the registers on the basis of some common ground, which is also what I can do by way of the unsayable. The Symbolic unsayable refers to those elements that are nonetheless structured within a signifying order. The di-

<sup>45</sup>In what follows I largely disregard the complexity, variation, and development of Lacan's work, which spans many decades and resists systematization in numerous ways.

<sup>46</sup>Cf. SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001b), 82-83.

<sup>47</sup>SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK and GLYN DALY, *Conversations with Žižek* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004), 68-69.

mension of the Enunciation developed by Newsom is one example. The Enunciation is not part of the Statement, but it is structured by the signifying elements that make up the Statement. At a much more basic level, the Symbolic unsayable would also refer to the Qal perfect ending on the 3ms verb in Hebrew. The Imaginary unsayable might refer to charisma, a peaceful silence, mystical feeling, or even certain forms of racism. In all of these there is something unsayable, associated with a plenitude, which endows one's situation with a surplus of meaning. With respect to the Bible, the Imaginary unsayable would also refer to, say, a literary form or type scene. Finally, the Real unsayable refers to a word, smell, voice, sight, or situation that cannot be spoken, smelt, heard, seen, or experienced without some eruption of anxiety or traumatic breakdown. The Real unsayable is in a sense inherent to the Imaginary–Symbolic order of what can be said, seen, and so on, since this order curves around the Real unsayable as what it is incapable of including without in some way disintegrating. The Real always exists as a limit on any discursive order—this order's condition of impossibility and its constitutive condition of possibility. Here it is hard not to think of the harrowing and perilous scene of the Israelites around the mountain, desperate for the mediating distance that the Imaginary–Symbolic law promises to provide between themselves and God's eruptive, holy, and traumatic presence (cf. Exod 19-20). Job, like others such as Nadab and Abihu, does not enjoy the privilege of such mediation.

Lacan famously likened his three registers to the three-ringed Borromean knot. The knot is such that if any of the three rings is cut, "all three are set free."<sup>48</sup> The knot thus illustrates that none of the registers exists apart from the others, and that none is superior to the others. It is sometimes pertinent to lump the Imaginary and the Symbolic together as they interact dialectically to constitute what speaking beings perceive as reality. There are various senses in which the Real is opposed to, or located at the interstices of reality as it is constituted by the Imaginary–Symbolic registers of human experience. First, the Real

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<sup>48</sup> JACQUES LACAN, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, 1972-1973* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 124.

designates our unsymbolized forces that are active in our biological/material bodies. It is crucial to remember the Borromean knot here so that the Real is not considered wholly external to reality as, for example, a material ground or “objective” reality separate from and foundational for the “subjectively” constituted Imaginary-Symbolic reality. From his first seminars in the mid-1950s Lacan consistently distinguishes the Real from a common sense notion of objectivity.<sup>49</sup> Lacan claims that the “actual” or “objective” reality that seems to lie behind our distorted vision of reality is only the projected horizon produced by our distorted vision, and not some “irreducible reality.”<sup>50</sup> In this context, Lacan’s Real refers to the cause of the particular distortions we see, like an unrepresentable vanishing point that is constitutive of an artistic representation.

Despite some of Lacan’s claims and the misunderstandings they have supported, Lacanian theory also rejects references to a raw, bio-material Real with no significant relation to more-than-material Imaginary-Symbolic matrices of representation.<sup>51</sup> Lacan often decried what he saw as a naïve, reductive materialism undergirding many psychoanalytic theories and practices, especially ones that rely on an impossible reference—in the sense that it exceeds what is epistemologically possible in analysis—to a bedrock of instinctual/biological needs underlying the cultural vicissitudes of the analysand’s subjectivity.<sup>52</sup> While Lacan

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<sup>49</sup>So, “the real in question is no doubt not to be taken in the sense in which we normally understand it, which implies objectivity” JACQUES LACAN, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses, 1955-1956* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1993), 186.

<sup>50</sup>Lacan insists that “we abandon the idea, implicit in many systems, that what the subject puts into words is an improper and always distorted enunciation of a lived experience that would be some irreducible reality” LACAN (1993), 118.

<sup>51</sup>On the one hand this means that there is no biological foundation for concepts such as the ego, drive, and unconscious. “To put it succinctly, the instinctual stages are already organized in subjectivity when they are being lived” JACQUES LACAN, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” trans. by Bruce Fink in *Écrits* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006a), 217. But Lacanian theory also does not endorse a social constructivist claim that metapsychology gives biology its proper place.

<sup>52</sup>In response to the excessive reductionism of his colleague’s naturalistic references, Lacan offered his

carried out his work largely apart from recent advances in the neurosciences, the most cutting-edge brain researchers (e.g., Damasio, LeDoux, Panksepp, and Stanovich) reject both naturalism and constructivism in ways that are complementary and largely amenable to Freudian-Lacanian metapsychology.<sup>53</sup> These neuroscientists reject both essentialist naturalism and constructivist anti-naturalism that would reduce/divorce human subjectivity to/from bodily-biological influence. Just as Lacan rejected the idea that cognitive capacities and representational factors operate apart from bodily influence, so too do the neuroscientists recognize the significant role played by cultural, social, symbolic, representational, and other cognitive factors in inflecting emotions and mental life.<sup>54</sup> In one sense the Lacanian Real is thus material/biological need insofar as it is not a force or state in and of itself; instead, it lies at the far end of a two-way street: its presence or influence is evident in the shapings, inconsistencies, and gaps of more-than-material Imaginary and Symbolic registers; and this Real is also and to an indeterminable extent influenced by more-than-material/biological factors.<sup>55</sup>

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own reductive interpretation that “reference to the organic foundations is dictated by nothing but a need to be reassured” JACQUES LACAN, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre IV: La relation d'objet, 1956-1957* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994), 32, (as quoted by CHIESA, 2007, 127). In other contexts, however, he tries to dispel the sense that he denied that the Real, biological body influences the Imaginarily and Symbolically constituted subject: “I do not mean for all that, that if we do not know [the real], we have no relations to [it]” (LACAN, 12/2/64). Cf. ADRIAN JOHNSTON, *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2005), ch. 9.

<sup>53</sup>Several notable Lacanian theorists have begun to engage recent neuroscientific findings with Freudian-Lacanian metapsychology in ways that promise to be deeply productive for both fields. Cf., for example, recent, well-referenced works by JOHNSTON (forthcoming); (2006); (2008a); (2011, forthcoming); and ŽIŽEK (2006).

<sup>54</sup>Panksepp writes, for example, “one can never capture innate emotional dynamics in their pure form, except perhaps when they are aroused artificially by direct stimulation of brain areas where those operating systems are most concentrated” JAAK PANKSEPP, *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 26, cf. 122.

<sup>55</sup>Consider, for example, the dialectical materialism exemplified by what is commonly called the brain's

Lacan himself is primarily concerned with approaching the Real through Imaginary and Symbolic representations. The Real is manifest by the boundaries and contours of Imaginary-Symbolic symbolizations, their distinctive shapings around their unsayable.

The Lacanian real, as manifested in the patient's discourse, is that which makes the analysand come back to the same subject, event, or notion over and over, revolve around it endlessly, and feel unable to move on. The patient dwells on it and feels stuck, something essential remaining unformulated.<sup>56</sup>

Fink's quotation characterizes the Real in three important senses: first, the Real is causal ("that which makes. . ."); second, the Real engenders repetition ("over and over. . . endlessly"); third, the subject experiences the Real as a feeling of being "stuck." Real causality refers to a cause that exists at a different level than Imaginary and Symbolic causality. In the latter, causes and effects exist at the same level. Real causality, however, refers to unconscious causes that are lost to the level of conscious experience. One might think of famous cases in which motor paralysis, involuntary tics, coughs, and so on, result as psychosomatic symptoms in some of Freud's well-known cases of hysteria. The hysteric cathects a part of its body with libido displaced from repressed drives of which it is unaware. This Real, lost cause should not be misread as evidence of psychoanalysis' determinism—i.e., regardless of the subject's complex conscious thoughts, experiences, actions, and nature, psychoanalysis provides its own causal account of a second nature that unifies the inconsistencies of experience. Such a reading misunderstands the place and temporality of the Real. The Real is neither a transcendental condition of possibility for Imaginary and Symbolic experience, nor an objective, corporeal or historical reality underlying it. The Real is instead the internal, unconditional, unsayable, and ahistorical condition without which Imaginary-Symbolic reality would not exist, but because of which Imaginary-Symbolic reality always contains plasticity; on which, see CATHERINE MALABOU, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* trans. by Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

<sup>56</sup>BRUCE FINK, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 47-48.



inconsistencies/antagonisms and remains open to historical shifts/transformations. From the perspective of textual interpretation—which is similar in some important ways to psychoanalytic practice—I will refuse to treat the Real as a positive/substantial entity, and will instead insist that it is nothing but the Imaginary and Symbolic registers when they are conceived as open, incomplete, and inconsistent. Although ahistorical, the Real is not outside of history since its status and function changes with the transformations undergone by Imaginary and Symbolic reality. It is ahistorical in the sense that it is the unconditional condition within history and being that keeps them open, undetermined, and unstable. Imaginary and Symbolic reality tries to keep the perturbing manifestations of this constitutive instability at bay or, if not, then fixated in displaced locations where they do not disturb reality since, for example, they seem to make no sense (as in a hysterical cough that baffles any medical or meaningful reasoning that fails to account for the unconscious). Thus, to return to Fink's three characterizations, the Real refers on one hand to those unsayable deadlocks in Imaginary-Symbolic representations to which they compulsively return and, on the other, the Real refers to a dimension beyond Imaginary-Symbolic reality and to which reality remains open. In other words, the Real is both a conservative and transformative condition inherent to reality. The Real is both a limit to and constitutive of reality; the Real refers both to what remains beyond reality's pleasure principle and to reality when it ventures beyond its pleasure principle.

The ways in which the Real functions for subjects constituted within Imaginary-Symbolic reality follows from the ways in which it functions for reality. The subject's status as Real refers to its internal inconsistency, the metaphorical bar that keeps the self from ever achieving any final identity with itself, and that ensures its interminable engagement in a movement beyond itself that prevents it from ever returning to the same self. Lacan thus strictly distinguishes the Imaginary-Symbolic self/ego from the Real subject. He writes the subject "S" to signify the constitutive lack that divides the self from itself. The split or barred sub-

ject is a negative magnitude that is a constitutive condition for any meaning/identity, and yet that keeps every meaning/identity unfinalized and open.<sup>57</sup> Lacan's sense of the subject thus directly opposes Levinas' idea that anything could "signify by itself." To return to the hysteric, the involuntary cough is a signifier of the hysteric's Real division from herself.<sup>58</sup> The particular symptom manifested depends upon the subject's conscious and unconscious Imaginary-Symbolic conceptions, but these conceptions do not cause her symptom. The Real cause or origin of the symptom is the subject's constitutive self-division that generates libidinal impulses that the subject channels through its Imaginary-Symbolic conceptions. In the hysteric's case these conceptions can be used as outlets for repressed impulses that remain displaced from consciousness's awareness. The symptom incarnates this Real lack internal to her being and localizes outside of the conscious self a truth about the self. Phobic objects similarly incarnate the Real lack that the obsessive tries to keep at bay. The approach of the phobic object causes anxiety because it threatens to close the gap that constitutes the self as a desiring being, that is, it threatens to destroy the subject.<sup>59</sup> Lacan refers to these objects that incarnate the self's constitutive division as "*objet petit a*" or "object (*a*)."<sup>60</sup> I will discuss these objects in more detail in the following section. The subject always encounters these objects as foreign since they incarnate the lack at the core of its subjectivity (and not something with which the self identifies). The subject ( $\$$ ) and the object (*a*) are two sides of the same coin: the subject signifies the self's constitutive situation as lacking, as perpetually failing to coincide with itself; the object (*a*) signifies the

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<sup>57</sup>Cf. Lacan's often-cited definition of the signifier: "a signifier is what represents the subject to another signifier" JACQUES LACAN, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious" trans. by Bruce Fink in *Écrits* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006e), 694.

<sup>58</sup>Lacan thinks that the hysteric's manifestation of the split inherent to subjectivity makes her representative of subjectivity in general.

<sup>59</sup>This is a theme of Lacan's tenth seminar; JACQUES LACAN, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety, 1962-1963*

<sup>60</sup>Lacan says that the *objet petit a* "is in fact simply the presence of a hollow, a void... [an] eternally

self's constitutive situation as excessive, as perpetually exceeding that which it previously was (failing to be).

This conception of the Lacanian Real provides the primary framework within which this dissertation approaches the subjective and objective aspects of unsayable WISDOM. JOB consistently reveals the subject, understood as the constitutive displacement of the self from itself, as well as the *objet petit a*, understood as the material incarnation of the subject's lack that the self encounters as a foreign object. I attend not only to the framework through which the sages locate and deal with WISDOM, but also to the libidinal economies with which they experience and grasp WISDOM.

## 6 THE DRIVE

This section introduces the psychoanalytic conception of the drive, which I will return to throughout the dissertation and which allows for a further discussion of the relationships among the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real registers of human experience. Lacan designates the drive as one of “the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis” (the others are the unconscious, repetition, and transference).<sup>61</sup> In Freud's 1915 metapsychology paper “Drives and their Vicissitudes,” he segments the drive (*Trieb*) into four constituent parts that, Lacan says, “cannot but appear disjointed”<sup>62</sup>: source (*Quelle*), pressure (*Drang*), aim (*Ziel*), and object (*Objekt*).<sup>63</sup> The German is important because of the unfortunate translation of *Trieb* as “instinct” in the standard English edition of Freud's works, as well as the ease with which the drive can be confused with other related concepts, such as a quantity of energy or force of pressure (*Drang*).<sup>64</sup> “Instinct” is a poor translation insofar as it implies lacking object” JACQUES LACAN, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, 1964* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 180.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. LACAN (1977), 12. For a book-length study of the drive, see JOHNSTON (2005). <sup>62</sup>LACAN (1977), 163. <sup>63</sup>SIGMUND FREUD, “Instincts and their Vicissitudes” in *SE XIV* (1955 [1915]), 109–40.

<sup>64</sup>Lacan notes that “drive” is a fine translation in English, and he says “dérive” [drift] would be his last resort in French if he “were unable to give the bastardized term *pulsion* [drive or urge] its point of impact”

a naturalistic impulse with a clear object and set parameters for its satisfaction.<sup>65</sup> The constituent components of the drives are internally inconsistent and incapable of being coordinated in part because of their different temporal logics. The drive's somatic *sources* issue demands for satisfaction that are affectively registered as *pressure*, which the drive *aims* to alleviate through particular *object* choices. But, as Lacan says, the four components do not fit together, and he continues, "if there is anything resembling a drive it is a montage... in the sense in which one speaks of montage in a surrealist collage."<sup>66</sup> The temporal objects available within the lived experience of the subject's history are unable to satisfy the timeless, constant, and reiterated demands that issue from the drive source.<sup>67</sup>

The drives are primarily associated with the erogenous zones identified by Freud and Lacan as privileged sites of libidinal interest in large part because they mark openings between the body and the external environment (e.g., anus, genitals, eyes, ears). I will focus on the oral drive, which is centered around the mouth. To illustrate the metapsychological concept of the drive, consider the emergence of the subject-object division in an infant as illustrated in the following, mythic narration. As others have done before and after him, Freud imagined that an experience of discontent must precipitate the birth of a proto-subjective ego out of its experience of fluid indistinction (i.e., pure subjectless/objectless continuity). Without discontent, Freud plausibly thinks the infant would never need to recognize the existence of the external world.<sup>68</sup> The nascent ego experiences the onset of dissatisfaction as some part of itself separating from itself. Since it did not previously feel this discontent, it must have possessed and enjoyed what it is now lacking. Its ability to achieve partial, temporary feelings of satisfaction from others promotes its sense that what

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LACAN (2006e), 680.

<sup>65</sup>"Instinct has a natural object or state of affairs that it strives to obtain. In the case of the need to eat... the appropriate nutritional materials as objects and, consequently, the sating of hunger as the resulting state of affairs" JOHNSTON (2005), 158.

<sup>66</sup>LACAN (1977), 169. <sup>67</sup>This is the central argument of JOHNSTON (2005), cf., esp., chs. 6-7.

<sup>68</sup>Cf. SIGMUND FREUD, "*Civilization and Its Discontents*" in *SE XXI* (1961 [1929]), 66-67; and SIGMUND

made it “discontent-less” is outside of itself, among others. Of course, the ego neither *had* nor *lost* anything since, prior to the realization of its dissatisfaction, there was neither an ego that could have anything, nor objects that could be had. The point of this mythic account of the genesis of the subject-object division is to illustrate Lacan’s notions of the object (*a*)—the material incarnation of the self’s constitutive lack—and the subject-as- $\$$ —the lack that makes it possible for a self to exist that is also what makes it impossible for a self to exist in itself. Lacan says in this regard that the breast is the child’s rather than the mother’s. The “breast” refers to the “object” that the self feels has been detached from it and attached to the objective world. The breast does not refer to an object in Imaginary-Symbolic reality, but rather to the subject’s (usually unconscious) libidinal investment in such objects as potential sources for the satisfaction of its desire. The breast as *objet petit a* is the object that propels the subject’s desire and it can be delineated as the motivating consistency or repetition that one can trace across the subject’s object choices.<sup>69</sup>

More needs to be said about the drive’s aim and object, however, since the drives do not only fail. They also succeed through the process Freud calls “sublimation.” Freud thus leaves an enigma, claiming both that the drives are aim-inhibited (*zielgehemmt*), and capable of being sublimated, which “is in every instance satisfaction.”<sup>70</sup> Lacan resolves Freud’s enigma by distinguishing the drives’ *goal*, which they fail to attain, from their *aim*, which succeeds through the process that fails to meet the *goal*.<sup>71</sup> Lacan’s distinction between the thwarted

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FREUD, “A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams” in *SE XIV* (1955 [1917]), 231.

<sup>69</sup>JACQUES LACAN, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XIV: The Logic of Fantasy, 1966-1967*, 6/14/67. More interesting than the mother or the breast is Lacan’s discussion of the placenta as the “lost object.” The placenta is an organ that mediates between child and mother and does not allow either one to be seen as autonomous or fused; JACQUES LACAN, “Position of the Unconscious” trans. by Bruce Fink in *Écrits* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006d), 719.

<sup>70</sup>FREUD (1955 [1915]), 122.

<sup>71</sup>“When you entrust someone with a mission, the *aim* is not what he brings back, but the itinerary he must take. The *aim* is the way taken” (LACAN, 1977, 179). For the reference to sublimation, see LACAN (1977, 165) or, perhaps better, the extensive engagement with sublimation throughout Seminar VII (LACAN, 1992).

goal and the attained aim of the drive renders ambiguous the quality of the satisfaction attained through sublimation.<sup>72</sup> The drive's enjoyment, which Lacan calls *jouissance*, does not (necessarily) feel pleasurable to the subject whose conscious experience (usually) derives from the dissatisfaction of not attaining its goal.<sup>73</sup> The drives' internal conflict keeps them from attaining their goal, but their repeated failures nonetheless afford the subject a sense of satisfaction.

To illustrate this dynamic, I can return to the example of nursing. The infant's demand for milk may have its source in the need of hunger, but it would be difficult if not impossible to reduce this demand to the need to fill the stomach alone. As soon as one is willing to imagine a subject-object distinction (according to Lacan, some time around the first six months of life), the demand for milk must be seen as a nodal point amidst a whole host of related experiences and desires, including:

- various biological-material pressures and sensations (e.g., hunger, warmth, satiation, hiccups, engorgement);
- material and more-than-material pleasures and sensations (e.g., taste and satisfaction associated with feeding, and “the narcissistic sense of omnipotence linked to the control of the mother's behavior as a person/object supplying gratification”<sup>74</sup>); and
- various indications given by the mother that the activity has more meaning for her than it does for the child (e.g., repeated peculiarities such as facial expressions, acts

Later in Seminar XI, he calls the drive's object “the object around which the drive turns” (LACAN, 1977, 243).

<sup>72</sup>“The function of the drive has for me no other purpose than to put in question what is meant by satisfaction” LACAN (1977), 166.

<sup>73</sup> *Jouissance* is often left untranslated because English lacks an appropriate word to capture the uses to which it is put in Lacan's reworking of the Freudian notion of libido, including as Žižek has put it, “the paradoxical satisfaction procured by a painful encounter with a Thing that perturbs the equilibrium of the ‘pleasure principle’” (ŽIŽEK, 1993, 280). *Jouissance*, in other words, can often mean something quite contrary to what is commonly considered pleasantness or enjoyability. It is worth recalling here that psychoanalysis refers to all drives as, in the end, death drives (cf. JOHNSTON, 2005, 175-83).

<sup>74</sup> JOHNSTON (2005), 131.

of physical touching, or vocal inflections; and [conscious and unconscious] signs of pleasure or pain).

The infant's demand for milk involves many more concerns than mere instinct allows because of the biological facts of human beings' deficiencies—"motor impotence and nursling dependence"<sup>75</sup>—that cause them to live extended periods of prematurational helplessness. Once the infant's cognitive capacities develop—despite its motor incapacitation—to the point that it is to some extent aware of its reliance on an other/primary caregiver (to whom I refer as mother), it develops a protosocial bond with that other that affects its experiences. All the ways in which nursing can become a nodal point in a web of significant experiences illustrate how human activities, feelings, satisfactions, desires, and needs are from the outset more than anything for which a reductive description could account.<sup>76</sup>

The sense that needs and desires are irreducibly intertwined in demands lies behind Lacan's claim that drives fail and succeed.<sup>77</sup> The subject's investment in an object (e.g., milk) as a possible source for satisfying its desire elevates (or "sublimates") milk into something more than milk and something more than nutritional—all of this is intended by referring to the oral drive object not as milk but as the non-nutritional and sexualized breast.<sup>78</sup> The drive's necessary dissatisfaction arises from the subject's (usually unconscious) investment in its object as a potential source for satisfying what no object could satisfy since such satisfaction would turn into its opposite by eliminating the constitutive lack on which the subject and object depend. However, the dissatisfaction that the subject feels at the milk's

<sup>75</sup>JACQUES LACAN, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" trans. by Bruce Fink in *Écrits* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006c), 76.

<sup>76</sup>See Johnston's account of the neuroscientific findings that the human brain is genetically pre-programmed to be open to epigenetic/non-genetic influences of a Symbolic/linguistic sort; as he puts it, "hard-wired to be re-wired" (JOHNSTON, forthcoming); cf. ADRIAN JOHNSTON, "Conflicted Matter: Jacques Lacan and the Challenge of Secularizing Materialism" *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, 19 (2008a), 177-81.

<sup>77</sup>LACAN (2006e), 689.

<sup>78</sup>Cf. JOHNSTON (2005), 206-7.

inability to fulfill its desire for the breast must mean that the subject's investment has somehow also made the breast present to the subject in order for the subject to know that the milk did not correspond to the breast. The breast is, in other words, nothing but the subject's investment in the object that enables it to present more than it is and satisfy more than it could.<sup>79</sup> Lacan says that the *objet petit a* "is in fact simply the presence of a hollow, a void. . . [It] is not introduced as the original food, it is introduced from the fact that no food will ever satisfy the oral drive, except by circumventing the eternally lacking object."<sup>80</sup> Lacan's image of the hollow or void allows me to clarify the important distinction between desire and drive to which I will return throughout the dissertation.

Desire corresponds to the lack felt by the subject as the objects encountered (e.g., milk) fail to correspond to and satisfy the drive pressure. Explicitly following Jacques-Alain Miller, Žižek emphasizes the difference between desire's lack and drive's hole:

lack is spatial, designating a void *within* a space, while hole is more radical, it designates the point at which this spatial order itself breaks down (as in the "black hole" in physics). That is the difference between desire and drive: desire is grounded in its constitutive lack, while drive circulates around a hole, a gap in the order of being. In other words, the circular movement of drive obeys the weird logic of the curved space in which the shortest distance between the two points is not a straight line, but a curve: drive "knows" that the shortest way to attain its aim is to circulate around its goal-object.<sup>81</sup>

For Žižek, desire emerges from and strives to overcome the unbalanced libidinal economy by elevating ordinary objects into sublime Things that promise balance, whereas the drive is the satisfactory perpetuation of the unbalanced space of this economy. A couple of pages later, Žižek continues his discussion by saying that desire differs from drive in that desire

<sup>79</sup>Cf. "The milk fills more than the stomach, it fills the gullet of the drive" JOAN COPJEC, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 60.

<sup>80</sup>LACAN (1977), 180.

<sup>81</sup>SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 60-61. For a nearly identical discussion that nonetheless advances toward a different conclusion, see SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *In Defense of Lost*



“transcendentalizes” the imbalance that characterizes the drive by transposing it into a lack that some Thing could fill. “A drive,” however,

does not bring satisfaction because its object is a stand-in for the Thing, but because a drive, as it were, turns failure into triumph—in it, the very failure to reach its goal, the repetition of this failure, the endless circulation around the object, generates a satisfaction of its own. As Lacan put it, the true aim of the drive is not to reach its goal, but to circulate endlessly around it.<sup>82</sup>

Much of Žižek’s project entails an exploration of his wager that the “subject” of this psychoanalytic conception of the drive—conceived of as a largely unconscious satisfaction gained from the endless circulation around and repetition of failure—is equivalent to the subject as described by the German idealists as absolute self-relating negativity or, in Hegel’s epigraph to this chapter, a night that becomes awful.<sup>83</sup> He often depicts the distance from Kant to Hegel as the same as from desire to drive.<sup>84</sup>

The usefulness of this extended consideration of drive may now become clear: the structure and logic of desire characterizes traditional wisdom’s treatment of its limits as indications of a transcendent Thing—God, Wisdom, Truth—that escapes them. However, the structure and logic of drive characterizes the wisdom that the book of Job opposes to traditional wisdom. JOB treats its limits as immanent and as generative of a surplus dimension that desire mistakenly thinks escapes it—God, Wisdom, Truth.

## 7 ŽIŽEK AND JOB

The book of Job stages this alternative between drive and desire not only as one between different dispositions but also between different conceptions of the world. JOB explores the

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*Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 327-29.

<sup>82</sup>ŽIŽEK (2006), 63-64.

<sup>83</sup>ŽIŽEK and DALY (2004), 61-63; cf. SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996), 121-22; JOHNSTON (2008b), esp. ch. 13.

<sup>84</sup>I discuss the difference between Kant and Hegel on page 6. Cf., for example, ŽIŽEK (1996), 95-99.

many implications of this alternative at both ontological and epistemological, as well as ethical and political levels. The present project explores both the dimensions of theoretical philosophy as well as practical philosophy and, in so doing, makes an important step beyond Žižek's engagements with JOB. Žižek has long been interested in exploring the significance of JOB for the traditional concerns of ideology-critique, but has not really attended to what JOB might contribute to the theoretical dimension of philosophy.

Žižek takes several lessons from the book of Job, chief among them is a concern with the critique of ideology. First, regarding Job's relationship with the friends in the dialogue, Žižek shows his enthusiasm for JOB by referring to it as

the first exemplary case of the *critique of ideology* in human history, laying bare the discursive strategies of legitimizing suffering: Job's properly ethical dignity lies in the way he persistently rejects the notion that his suffering can have any meaning, either punishment for his past sins or a trial of his faith, against the three theologians who bombard him with possible meanings – and, surprisingly, God takes his side at the end.<sup>85</sup>

Žižek's position, which I will nuance in part 2, is that Job refuses the discursive practices of the three friends that try to make Job's experience meaningful. In his refusal Job exposes various ideological tactics. In the epilogue, Žižek thinks that God offers an important, anti-hermeneutical endorsement of meaninglessness over and against attempts to make meaning.

Žižek also reads the divine speeches as a display of ideology critique. They strike him as an (over)reaction typical of an emperor who discovers his nakedness:

Far from providing some kind of satisfactory account of Job's undeserved suffering, God's appearance at the end ultimately amounts to a pure argument of authority grounded in a breathtaking display of power: 'You see all that I can do? Can you do this? Who are you, then, to complain?' So what we get is neither the good God letting Job know that his suffering is just an ordeal destined to test his faith, nor a dark God beyond the Law, the God of pure caprice, but, rather, a God who acts like someone caught in the moment of

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<sup>85</sup>SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* 2nd edition. (London: Verso, 2002), lii.

impotence – weakness, at least – and tries to escape his predicament by empty boasting.

What we get at the end is a kind of cheap Hollywood horror show with lots of special effects.<sup>86</sup>

In the spectacle of the whirlwind God proves as weak and helpless as the friends' discursive strategies before the difficulties of human suffering. Žižek sees what is essentially Job's silence after God's speeches as an indication of Job's awareness of this dynamic. He asks why, if Job took God seriously, he would keep silent rather than answer: "“OK, if you can do all this, *why did you let me suffer in such a meaningless way?*” Do not God's thundering words make [Job's] silence, the absence of an answer, all the more palpable?”<sup>87</sup> More recently Žižek has gone in a different direction, one that explicitly follows the lead of his favorite theologian, G. K. Chesterton.<sup>88</sup> In this case Žižek sees God's speeches not as an attempt to answer or distract one from riddles but, as Chesterton says, “to propound them.” Now, in both the epilogue and the speeches Žižek thinks God opposes the friends' attempts “to obfuscate the impact of the trauma with a symbolic semblance.”<sup>89</sup> Chesterton writes, God “insists on the inexplicableness of everything... on the positive and palpable unreason of things.” “God,” Chesterton goes on to claim, “becomes for an instant a blasphemer; one might almost say that God becomes for an instant an atheist.” Žižek explains why he thinks the legacy of JOB as an image of a divine atheist is so important:

The legacy of Job precludes such a figure of taking refuge in the standard transcendent figure of God as a secret Master who knows the meaning of what appears to us to be a meaningless catastrophe, the God who sees the entire picture in which what we perceive

<sup>86</sup> ŽIŽEK (2002), li. Cf. ŽIŽEK and DALY (2004), 162.

<sup>87</sup> SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 126.

<sup>88</sup> G. K. CHESTERTON, *Introduction to The Book of Job* 1907. Cf. SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, “The Fear of Four Words: A Modest Plea for the Hegelian Reading of Christianity” in SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK AND JOHN MILBANK, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* Edited by CRESTON DAVIS. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 52-57.

<sup>89</sup> ŽIŽEK (2009), 53.

as a stain contributes to global harmony. When we are confronted with an event like the Holocaust, or the death of millions in Congo in recent years, is it not obscene to claim that these stains have a deeper meaning?<sup>90</sup>

This reading of the divine speeches allows Žižek to conclude that Job “remained silent neither because he was crushed by God’s overwhelming presence, nor because he wanted thereby to indicate his continuous resistance—the fact that God avoided answering his question—but because, in a gesture of silent solidarity, he perceived the divine impotence.”<sup>91</sup> In other words, Job realizes that God is not opposed to but beside him, equally impotent before and aware of the absence of any transcendent guarantee of meaning. Below I will argue that God appears in JOB precisely when the impossibility appears, not just of a reference to transcendence, but also of a reference to any sort of closure or self-presence of the immanent and material conditions of life.

My reading is consistent with Žižek’s at the most important level of his latest discussion: the legacy of JOB is fundamentally a rejection of transcendence that nonetheless does not abandon all reference to transcendence, but instead explores where and how and why transcendence is related to a world that is ontologically incomplete. Of course, my interpretation goes much further than Žižek’s could: it departs from his at various important moments and it remains much closer to the text than he. But ultimately my analysis sanctions his interest in JOB. The present project testifies in many ways to the productivity of those who have been the most important thinkers for Žižek’s framework (e.g., Kant, Hegel, Freud, Lacan), as well as of his framework itself, even as this project contributes to this framework through its deployment of these resources within the unique context of biblical criticism.

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<sup>90</sup>ŽIŽEK (2009), 54-55. <sup>91</sup>ŽIŽEK (2009), 55-56.

## Part I

# Job and Wisdom: Tracing the Contours of a Crisis

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**Job, Crisis of Wisdom**


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Either a thing has properties that nothing else has, in which case we can immediately use a description to distinguish it from the others and refer to it; or, on the other hand, there are several things that have the whole set of their properties in common, in which case it is quite impossible to indicate one of them.

For if there is nothing to distinguish a thing, I cannot distinguish it, since otherwise it would be distinguished after all.

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Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* §2.02331

## 8 INTRODUCTION

Discussions of JOB's radical contribution to ancient Israel's intellectual history tend not to confine themselves to specifics, though many specific intellectual revolutions are attributed to JOB. Clines writes this strongly worded summary of the point at which "JOB confronts the ideology of Proverbs":

The book of Job is an assault on the general validity of the doctrine of retribution. In the framework of the thought of Proverbs, the man Job is an impossibility.<sup>1</sup>

Interpretations of JOB often offer such theses in the service of the more global thesis that JOB confronts the wisdom tradition *tout court*. Such macro-characterizations of JOB vis-

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<sup>1</sup>DAVID J. A. CLINES, *Job 1-20* (Dallas: Word, 1989), lxii.

à-vis wisdom often set the notion of conceptual difference (i.e., the doctrine of retribution versus the doctrine of absolute divine freedom) in an historical narrative about the *crisis of wisdom*. To be sure, certain scholarly efforts elaborate, develop, and account for this notion of crisis as an historical phenomenon, situated within a broader ANE context, and so on.<sup>2</sup> Here, however, I am interested in the less concrete but altogether pervasive account of (i) an orthodox foundation—linked to the sages who wrote/redacted the book of Proverbs, characterized by the discovery of order, perhaps excessively hardened into a “deed-consequence” ideology represented by Job’s friends—that is (ii) unsettled first by Job’s insistence on the truth of his suffering as an irruption of *disorder*, and second by Qohelet’s overall skepticism about any order whatsoever. One can find this narrative retold

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<sup>2</sup>The thesis of SCHMID (1966) marks a signal departure from the designation of wisdom literature as non-historical. Moving away from the limited valuation of historicity (that view which judges the historical meaning of literature via its reference to historical facts), Schmid suggested an historical function of wisdom that related not to events but to the macro-structural situations, as Schmid interpreted them, of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Israel. The particular criticisms of Schmid’s argument, which are significant to be sure, should not distract us from the important lesson of his work, a lesson that bears directly on the project at hand of analyzing JOB as a “crisis” for the wisdom tradition, a notion that to some extent requires an historical matrix to be intelligible.

in introductory texts,<sup>3</sup> studies aimed specifically at JOB<sup>4</sup> or at another book,<sup>5</sup> or in monographs aimed at the whole of the wisdom tradition.<sup>6</sup> At the outset I will be less concerned with the details motivating *particular* tellings of this narrative. Instead I want to clarify those assumptions (usually implicit) that ground *all* representations of “JOB as crisis.” Two such assumptions are basic, to the point that they are often invisible. But without their being in some way justified or accounted for, the story of wisdom’s crisis that they support loses its intelligibility. These basic assumptions will guide the ensuing analysis:

1. Wisdom is a *thing* that can be objectively described.
2. JOB is an *event outside of wisdom* that wisdom could not assimilate without being transformed.

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<sup>3</sup>“It has become a commonplace to speak of the ‘crisis’ of Qoheleth (as well as the author of Job). The crisis is located for many scholars (e.g., H. Preuss) in the failure of the religion of traditional wisdom. This religion was governed by a faith in an *Urhebergott*, a God of origins or creator God, whose mechanical order of retribution, according to which good is a reward for a good act and evil is the punishment of an evil act, broke down” (MURPHY, 2002, 212). Murphy strongly opposes this view and instead, following KRÜGER (1997), argues that traditional wisdom is not bankrupted but rather critiqued and developed by JOB and Qohelet (MURPHY, 2002, 274).

<sup>4</sup>“It is because JOB calls into question many traditional wisdom stances and raises doubts about the validity of the wisdom exercise that it is usually regarded, with Ecclesiastes, as a development within wisdom, on the edges of the wisdom tradition. . . The traditional doctrine is seen to have hardened into a dogma of which Job underlines the limitations, providing a personal wisdom which does not accept things at face value” (DELL, 1991, 74).

<sup>5</sup>Lange’s thesis locates 4QInstruction as a reactionary response that seeks to recover the notion of a world created by wisdom that is present in Proverbs but put into a “crisis” that is exemplified by JOB and Qohelet (LANGE, 1995, 60).

<sup>6</sup>“The anomaly that Job presents to his friends requires a fundamental change in the cultural framework in which traditional wisdom has had its home” (BROWN, 1996, 67). For Bergant, JOB’s purpose was to show the limitations of the practice of wisdom. “Job is an example of a challenge thrown in the face of the claim of an ordered world” (BERGANT, 1982, 20). For Scott, JOB, Qohelet, and the Sayings of Agur in Prov 30:1-4 are “wisdom in revolt.” In JOB, “a wisdom rooted in shattering personal experience revolts against scholastic dogma” (SCOTT, 1971, 136).



Before it is argued that this is ridiculous—that wisdom is hardly a singular thing but rather a complex multiplicity, that the sages represented a diverse intellectual movement, and so on—I want to emphasize that a *degree of complexity* can have no bearing on the statement “wisdom is a thing.” I do not mean to imply that wisdom is a “simple thing.” My point is this: the thesis that *JOB is a crisis of wisdom* entails an idea of some thing that *JOB* is the crisis of. What is this thing? How can “it” be talked about? How could an event transform “it”? Wisdom scholarship has been vigorously engaged with such questions since its renaissance in the 1970s.<sup>7</sup>

Before engaging these questions in detail, it will help to outline briefly my argument. The following two sections respectively survey the critical discussions of wisdom’s characteristic content and of forms and the limits faced by these attempts to describe wisdom. The second subsection of each section treats the event that would pose a crisis for the description of wisdom surveyed in the first subsection. While subsections 9.1 and 10.1 identify precise limits to form- and content-based approaches to wisdom, and while I do level critiques against various (mis)treatments of these limits, I do not think that these approaches as such should be abandoned or even altered. The limits inhere to form and content as such, and I aim to identify their particular manifestations in our approaches to wisdom. These limits are not problems to be overcome, but rather inherent aspects of our approaches that need to be conceptualized. Many of these limits are already well-known and scholars almost universally insist that wisdom be approached on the basis of both form and content since each is a limited aspect of a larger or fuzzy set of wisdom’s characteristics.<sup>8</sup> My aim is to

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<sup>7</sup>The publication of von Rad’s *Weisheit in Israel* (1970) is often marked as the signal of a renewed scholarly interest in wisdom literature. Admittedly, this is only a convenient shorthand for a more involved story, on which see CRENSHAW (1995 [1993]a).

<sup>8</sup>I use the term “fuzzy set” simply to mean what it sounds like even though the term is used in much more specialized and complicated senses, all of which are associated with the work of L. A. Zadeh; see GEORGE J. KLIR and BO YUAN, editors, *Fuzzy Sets, Fuzzy Logic, and Fuzzy Statements: Selected Papers by Lotfi A. Zadeh* (River Edge, NJ: World Scientific, 1996). In the prototype theory of concepts a fuzzy set designates a

conceptualize these limits as clearly as possible.

Subsections 9.2 and 10.2 then demonstrate how these limits impede and frustrate the attempt to define the crisis that JOB poses for wisdom in terms of content and form, respectively. To be sure, those who say “JOB is a crisis of wisdom” rarely frame their statement as a matter of form. However, formal discussions do nonetheless serve as vehicles for the dissemination of this story of wisdom’s crisis. Furthermore, both form and content need to be treated since neither can finally be isolated from the other.

## 9 WISDOM AS A SAPIENTIAL WORLDVIEW

### 9.1 *The Failure to Define the Content of Wisdom*

Crenshaw defines two opposing approaches to “the assessment of Israelite literature in terms of wisdom thought,”<sup>9</sup> a wording that highlights the problem of starting with either thought or literature.

At one extreme is the critic who seeks to define wisdom literature as broadly as possible, specifically as nonrevelatory speech. . .

At the other end of the spectrum is the interpreter who chooses to define wisdom literature as narrowly as possible so as to retain the distinctiveness of that body of texts.<sup>10</sup>

The latter approach I treat below (in section 10.1). As for the former, the question of breadth should be set aside. Crenshaw is correct that the specification “non-revelatory” is very broad, or at least subject to being appropriated broadly. However, one could just as easily imagine a much stricter criterion of admission to the wisdom corpus that, like the term “non-revelatory,” understood wisdom as a *non-literary essence*, manifest across *multiple* set whose members have varying degrees of value or membership. The set is imperfect and unstable but no less identifiable as a conceptual entity. Although I am not aware of its use in wisdom studies, this simplified notion of a fuzzy set is functionally at work in many treatments of wisdom.

<sup>9</sup>JAMES CRENSHAW, “Wisdom” in *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions: Collected Writings on Old Testament Wisdom* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995 [1974]), 46.

<sup>10</sup>CRENSHAW (1995 [1974]), 46.

*literary forms*. And in the remainder of the paragraph, Crenshaw goes on to add a number of other criterion to “non-revelatory”: i.e., “anthropocentric,” “didactic,” “humanitarian,” “akin to apocalyptic,” and “preoccupied with human suffering.”<sup>11</sup> Crenshaw correctly ranges this diverse series of predicates under a singular approach to defining wisdom as something that cannot be restricted to a *form* of literature but must instead be distinguished at the level of *content*.

One can see how this principle of discovery works by taking up the exemplary predicate Crenshaw highlights. Enumerating different permutations of (non)revelatory<sup>12</sup> with forms of speech will suffice to demonstrate content-level distinctions between a non-revelatory proverb:

A wise son is the joy of a father, but a foolish son is a mother’s grief.

Prov 10:1

and a non-revelatory non-proverb:

I searched with my mind how to cheer my body with wine—my mind still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, until I might see what was good for mortals to do under heaven during the few days of their life. I made great works; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself; I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house; I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem . . . Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all

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<sup>11</sup>CRENSHAW (1995 [1974]), 46.

<sup>12</sup>The criterion “non-revelatory” may call for some elaboration. For my purposes it is enough to posit distinct sources of knowledge: on one hand “general” knowledge, available to all, by careful observation of the world, society, and so on; on the other hand “special” knowledge, mediated by and restricted to the

was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained  
under the sun.

Qoh 2:3-7, 11

over and against a revelatory proverb within a didactic lecture:

For YHWH gives wisdom;

from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Prov 2:6

The non-revelatory text is neither limited to the *proverb* form (it can also be expressed as a *royal autobiography*),<sup>13</sup> nor does the *proverb* form belong exclusively to non-revelatory texts (thematizations of “revelation” can be expressed as a proverbial saying). The approach to wisdom as (non)revelatory proceeds regardless of form, on the basis of something that is more intuitively grasped. The attributes enumerated by Crenshaw as examples of a “broad” definition of wisdom seek to describe just such a “spirit” or “mode” of wisdom that persists across its multitudinous forms.

A well regarded approach along these lines is von Rad’s attempt to define biblical wisdom as a particular “understanding of reality” (*Wirklichkeitverständnis*).<sup>14</sup> Von Rad chooses the scale and quality of the object of analysis so as to register what is distinct about the sages’ thought without reducing the matter to a series of formal or lexical criteria, which he thinks the wisdom books do not share. Von Rad is quite frank in admitting his skepticism about the existence of a singular, distinctly sapiential *Wirklichkeitverständnis*.

If, in fact, one removes this blanket term [wisdom], then one comes face to face with literary documents of the most diverse type. The designation of a text as ‘wisdom’... is  
divine word.

<sup>13</sup>Again, the precision and productivity of the formal critical categories will be taken up directly below. All that is being assumed here is formal discontinuity between Prov 10:1 and Qoh 2, against the same, “non-revelatory” backdrop.

<sup>14</sup>GERHARD VON RAD, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 6; GERHARD VON RAD, *Weisheit*

by no means directly rooted in the sources. It first emerged in the scholarly world and has since become established. It belongs, therefore, to the fairly extensive number of biblical-theological collective terms whose validity and content are not once for all established and which have to be examined from time to time from the point of view of whether they are being correctly used.<sup>15</sup>

It is only alongside such cautionary remarks that von Rad will posit the existence of wisdom as a productive concept:

For all its fluidity and variability; the ideological world to which the teachings belong is nevertheless an indivisible unity.<sup>16</sup>

And it is only at the conclusion of the book that von Rad will suggest what such a concept might include by way of “content”:

To speak of Israel’s ‘wisdom’, as if there were only one kind of wisdom, is always risky . . . Nevertheless, one can discern an important common factor which bound all wisdom efforts together: What was wisdom, if not Israel’s attempt to unfold her humanity in the very sphere of reality which she experiences quite specifically, that is, a humaneness on Israel’s part? What goal was served by the main efforts, so characteristic of wisdom, to master the contingent? There was surely only one goal, to wrest from the chaos of events some kind of order in which man was not continually at the mercy of the incalculable.<sup>17</sup>

Wisdom is located in relation to three reference points, the constellation of which would form the distinct *Wirklichkeitverständnis* von Rad set out to describe. Wisdom literature revolves around the unfolding of Israel’s *humanity*, in the context of a *sphere of reality*, which is a contested locus for the establishment of *order*.

On one hand, these qualifications are consistent with many attempts to define wisdom and especially to distinguish it from other similar designations of biblical texts (i.e., legal, prophetic, cultic, and so on).<sup>18</sup> One can identify, for example, resonances between von Rad’s

*in Israel* ([Neukirchen-Vluyn]: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), 17.

<sup>15</sup>VON RAD (1972), 7. <sup>16</sup>VON RAD (1972), 6. <sup>17</sup>VON RAD (1972), 308.

<sup>18</sup>For a thorough (even if excessively polemical) discussion of such definitions, see BRUCE K. WALTKE,

foregrounding of humanity and the frequent references to wisdom's *anthropocentrism*.<sup>19</sup> The same may be said of von Rad's admittedly roundabout formulation, "the very sphere of reality [in] which she experiences quite specifically... a humaneness on Israel's part." While von Rad nuances this position considerably (i.e., he specifically refuses any notion of secular in ancient Israel that would oppose the sacred<sup>20</sup>), this is clearly related to various characterizations of wisdom as "worldly," concerned first and foremost with the "practical knowledge of the laws of life and of the world, based on experience."<sup>21</sup> And finally, no attribution is more common than von Rad's last one—the idea that wisdom is wholly taken up with the project of discerning and living in harmony with a principle of *order*.<sup>22</sup> For two reasons this picture of consensus nonetheless does not really enable one to name the X that distinguishes wisdom from non-wisdom.

First, while terms like humanity, reality, and order are helpful and productive, they are also *ultimately* inadequate for determining the scope of the normative expressions of wisdom literature. For example, Prov 8 and Job 28 may both be concerned with human

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*The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 2004), NICOT, 50-55.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Zimmerli's early and often cited summary: "The formulations [of wisdom's central question] universally show the anthropological position from which the question is put... [T]he question's orientation cannot be raised above its anthropological point of origin; it has its center of gravity in the individual unhistoric person towards whose good fortune it asks" WALTHER ZIMMERLI, "Concerning the Structure of Old Testament Wisdom" in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* Edited by JAMES CRENSHAW. (New York: KTAV, 1976 [1933]), 176.

<sup>20</sup>"The process of secularization which definitely began in the early monarchy does not, in the teachings of the wise men, go hand in hand with a disintegration of faith in Yahweh's power... Rather, we see the teachers – with what sometimes appears to us as an uncanny confidence – holding together the awareness of inherent determinism on the one hand and faith in Yahweh's power on the other" (VON RAD, 1972, 60).

<sup>21</sup>GERHARD VON RAD, *Old Testament Theology, Vol. 1: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 418.

<sup>22</sup>"The fundamental assumption, taken for granted in every representative of biblical wisdom, consisted of a conviction that being wise meant a search for and maintenance of order... the right time and place for each deed or word" JAMES L. CRENSHAW, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* Rev. and enl. edition.

access to wisdom, but what notion of “the human” could unite them? In Proverbs, humanity is the privileged object of Wisdom’s attention, the object, in fact, of Wisdom’s *delight* (cf. 8:31).

Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?

On the heights, along the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand,

Beside the gates at the front of the city,

at the entrance of the doorways she cries aloud

To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to human beings.

Prov 8:1-4

In Job 28 the relationship between wisdom and the human is exactly reversed. The human pursues Wisdom but to no avail.

But where shall wisdom be found?

And where is the place of understanding?

Mortals do not know its shape,

and it is not found in the land of the living.

Job 28:12-13

It may be tempting to posit a consistent axis—call it the axis of “accessibility”—on which there is an ongoing debate *within* the literature. On this account, Prov 8 and Job 28 would disclose a “tension” within the wisdom literature about the human. However, this axis cannot work with other texts, such as the following observations about nature:

Four things on earth are small, yet they are exceedingly wise:

the ants are a people without strength,

yet they provide their food in the summer;

the badgers are a people without power,

yet they make their homes in the rocks;

the locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank

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(Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 11.

the lizard can be grasped in the hand, yet it is found in kings' palaces.

Prov 30:24-28

While the ant et alia are being used as sources for human wisdom, humans are not in this case the privileged points of access (Prov 8) or non-access (Job 28) to wisdom. And in YHWH's dramatic rebuke of Job the tone is not so much anti-human (as it was in Job 28) as it is *non-human*, the human being beside the point:

Who has let the wild ass go free?

Who has loosed the bonds of the swift ass,  
to which I have given the steppe for its home,  
the salt land for its dwelling place?

It scorns the tumult of the city; it does not hear the shouts of the driver.

It ranges the mountains as its pasture,  
and it searches after every green thing.

Job 39:5-8

Similar experiments could be conducted with the notions of reality, order, and others so often linked to wisdom literature. To say that wisdom begins with the human, concerns itself with reality, or aims at order is not in any way to constitute a coherent thing but rather to displace the incoherence (of "wisdom") to another term (i.e., "the human," "reality," or "order"). One can subscribe to the thesis that *Wisdom begins with the human* only if one admits that "the human" lacks substantial content and instead stands for a site of contestation dividing wisdom literature from itself. Properly altered, the thesis that *Wisdom is a field of contestation concerning what it means to be human* requires one to turn back on the subject ("wisdom") and admit that the predicate does not render "it" as a coherent set that could be thrown into crisis by some notion of the human. Von Rad's specifications do not need to be abandoned; but their limits do need to be clarified so that they do not illicitly determine the thing for which JOB poses a crisis. If the human, reality,



and order are already contested within wisdom, how could JOB's voice on these matters throw wisdom into a crisis?

The second reason why von Rad's specifications do not finally help one distinguish wisdom from non-wisdom is an inverted form of the first, and has been outlined in detail by Crenshaw's early, aptly titled article: *Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon 'Historical' Literature*.<sup>23</sup> In what sense "inverted"? If the first point indicated an incoherence *within* wisdom literature, Crenshaw points to an inability among scholars to distinguish the wisdom literature *from* the broader ideological constructs that inform Israel's intellectual history in general:

Wisdom influence can only be proved by a stylistic or ideological peculiarity found primarily in wisdom literature. This implies the exclusion of a common cultural stock, much of which is environmental or derives from the period of family/clan before the separation into distinct compartments of prophet, priest, and sage.<sup>24</sup>

If one says that JOB poses a crisis for wisdom, it cannot simply be a crisis for *a* truth about wisdom; it must be a crisis for *the particular* truth about wisdom that makes wisdom what it is and not prophetic or priestly.

Two points of Crenshaw's argument coincide specifically with the terms I have investigated: wisdom's alleged humanistic orientation and its preoccupation with a retributive order. Against von Rad's attempt to understand the Joseph narrative as "as an ideal portrait of the courtly wise man, written during the Solomonic enlightenment, characterized by anthropological interests,"<sup>25</sup> Crenshaw reminds us,

wisdom influence can only be proved by stylistic and ideological peculiarities. The argument

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<sup>23</sup>JAMES CRENSHAW, "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon 'Historical' Literature" in *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions: Collected Writings on Old Testament Wisdom* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995 [1969]), 312–325.

<sup>24</sup>CRENSHAW (1995 [1969]), 315.

<sup>25</sup>GERHARD VON RAD, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom" in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 292–300.

from psychological interest in the phenomenon of man in its broadest sense [i.e., “the human’] overlooks the fact that this is a concern common to much of the ancient literature.<sup>26</sup>

And then against Whybray’s attempt to describe the succession narrative (2 Sam 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2) as “set[ting] out deliberately to illustrate specific proverbial teaching for the benefit of the pupils and ex-pupils of the school,”<sup>27</sup> Crenshaw again points out a failure of *distinction*:

The fundamental error of this work of Whybray is the failure to search for the stylistic and ideological peculiarities found primarily in wisdom literature. The book suffers grossly from this standpoint. The various themes from Proverbs said to be consciously illustrated by the story are common ones in legal and prophetic literature. It is difficult to see how any story could fail to “illustrate” themes in Proverbs, for this book covers the whole gamut of human existence.<sup>28</sup>

Whereas the first failure of coherence suggested that there is no *unified* sapiential vision of the human, Crenshaw describes an inverted form of this failure by suggesting that there is no crisp *distinction* between the sapiential human and the prophetic (or priestly, apocalyptic, juridical, &c.) human. In short, there is no aggregate of particular content that coincides with wisdom conceived as absolute or universal, i.e., Wisdom. This lack of coincidence between particular content and the abstract universal that stands for it can appear in one of two ways:

1. everything one can say about wisdom comes up short; i.e., the set of particular attributes is *deficient*, finally unable to cohere into a stable and unified field;
2. anything one says about wisdom always seems to say too much, so that wisdom’s attributes identify it with other types of literature rather than delimit its identity;

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<sup>26</sup>CRENSHAW (1995 [1969]), 318-19.

<sup>27</sup>R. N. WHYBRAY, *The Succession Narrative* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 95; cited in CRENSHAW (1995 [1969]), 320.

<sup>28</sup>CRENSHAW (1995 [1969]), 321.

the set of particular attributes is *excessive*, unable to be contained by the field as a distinct, bounded entity.

I will return to this twofold failure below to specify how these points of discord operate between every universal and its particular content, at all times.

### 9.2 *JOB and the Crisis of Exile*

Even though content is finally incapable of providing a solid basis for defining wisdom as a coherent and distinct thing, interpreters often enlist the content of JOB as evidence that the sapiential worldview has been thrown into crisis. Sometimes such arguments appeal to an historical experience such as the exile that lies behind wisdom's confrontation with something for which it cannot account. Characteristic in this regard is Albertz's reading of JOB, although he locates the confrontation a century after the exile.

Now the book of Job as a whole bears witness that this personal theology of the upper class underwent a serious crisis. The reason for this is . . . the severity of the crisis which shook the community of Judah in the second half of the fifth century. In particular, the most zealous advocates of this theology, who like Job lived up to their high claims and wanted to prevent the mass impoverishment of the small farmers by the unselfish commitment of all their possessions and their social influence (Job 29.16f.; 31.16ff.), saw that their sacrifice was not paying off, that God was not rewarding them but that on the contrary they were being overtaken by others of their class . . . The optimistic promises of their personal theology and the bitter social experiences that they underwent became hopelessly incompatible.<sup>29</sup>

The key movement from optimism to skepticism in Albertz's quotation is now a scholarly convention, with optimism usually referring to Proverbs, and skepticism to Qohelet, with JOB either as some kind of mediator or as a movement away from Proverbs's optimism in a different direction than Qohelet's. What are taken to be increasingly modest claims of the human's ability to know are connected with a growing incredulity toward what

<sup>29</sup>RAINER ALBERTZ, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, Vol. 2: From the*

we have learned to call, following Koch, the “destiny producing deed.”<sup>30</sup> The book of Job’s incredulity toward the epistemological optimism of Proverbs, according to Albertz, “reflects the social crisis [of the second half of the fifth century] on which Neh 5 puts a spotlight.”<sup>31</sup> In short, the belief that wisdom or righteousness yields well-being becomes untenable in the period of sustained political and economic subjugation that characterizes Second Temple Judaism.

Although the book of Job is notoriously difficult to date, as it includes little by which one can locate it with respect to historical events, persons, or places, I have no contention with the (post)exilic dating of JOB. One of the only means by which one can get a rough (even if) problematic idea of JOB’s provenance is through the somewhat sketchy practice of isolating intertextual references between it and other texts that are more historically datable. The large number of intertextual references between JOB and Jeremiah,<sup>32</sup> JOB and Lamentations,<sup>33</sup> and especially JOB and Deutero-Isaiah<sup>34</sup> certainly lend support to the idea that JOB should be dated to some time during or shortly after the exile.

Even so, the more important question is how JOB could represent Israel’s wisdom in crisis? The specific narrative recounted by Albertz relies on a reference to “wisdom” as *Exile to the Maccabees* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 514.

<sup>30</sup>This point, famously articulated in KOCH (1955), has come increasingly under criticism as an adequate account of Proverbs’ ideology. Exemplary in this regard are GLADSON (1978), BROWN (2002b), and YODER (2005). Whether these criticisms refute the essential validity of Koch’s insight or simply offer it important footnotes continues to be debated.

<sup>31</sup>ALBERTZ (1994), 636n.15.

<sup>32</sup>As cited in C. L SEOW, *Job: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming), Introduction, on which this brief discussion draws heavily; Job 3:3, 10-11 // Jer 20:14-18; Job 10:18-19 // Jer 20:14-18; Job 19:7 // Jer 20:8; Job 19:24 // Jer 17:1; Job 21:7-20 // Jer 12:1-3.

<sup>33</sup>Again, as cited in SEOW (forthcoming), Introduction; Job 6:4 // Lam 3:12; Job 7:20 // Lam 3:12; Job 9:18b // Lam 3:15a; 12:4 // Lam 3:14; Job 16:9-10 // Lam 2:16; Job 16:12 // Lam 3:12; Job 19:7-8 // Lam 3:7-9; Job 30:9 // Lam 3:14.

<sup>34</sup>Also cited in SEOW (forthcoming), Introduction; Job 9:8a = Isa 44:24c; Job 12:9b = Isa 41:20a; Job 16:17a // Isa 53:9b; Job 26:12a // Isa 51:15b.

a substantive thing with determinate content that, in light of the previous section, would seem to be unsubstantiable on the basis of the biblical text. It is crucial to clarify the precise dimension of this failure, especially to note its irreducibility to a matter of interpretative accuracy. The problem with Albertz's construction of pre-exilic wisdom as retrospectively seen from JOB's point of view is *not* that he unfairly reduces an inherently complex discursive field to an ideological slogan (which is not to say that Albertz's distillation of Proverbs and Job's friends into the word "optimistic" is not symptomatic of the problem); the problem is rather that Albertz posits a totalized thing "wisdom" (unified in its affirmation of retribution, bounded so that it cannot incorporate the theological and social data linked to Israel's experience of exile), whose existence I have thus far found impossible to establish. In other words, while it is perfectly fine and helpful to describe wisdom in numerous ways, it is not enough to say that wisdom's content is fuzzier than Albertz allows; one must affirm the much more radical stance that no unified or bounded content of wisdom exists. To insist simply on wisdom's fuzziness continues to abet the notion of wisdom as some thing that could be upset by an historical event outside of it. While I ultimately offer a way to conceive of wisdom as something radically transformed by JOB, I do so in different terms than these.

## 10 WISDOM AS A CHARACTERISTIC SET OF LITERARY FORMS

### 10.1 *The Failure to Define the Forms of Wisdom*

I turn now to Crenshaw's second approach, quoted at the beginning of section 9.1. This approach relies heavily on form-critical classifications as opposed to the approach to wisdom as a worldview. While wisdom's crisis is rarely framed as a matter of form, form is central to characterizations of wisdom and so should factor into any judgments about a crisis or change in wisdom. Furthermore, I will argue below that formal discussions tacitly function as vehicles for the particular narrative of wisdom's crisis that I reject. Regarding this second approach, Crenshaw writes,

On the basis of this literature it can be stated that wisdom literature is of four kinds: (1) juridical, (2) nature, (3) practical, and (4) theological ... Similarly there exists (1) family/clan wisdom, the goal of which is the mastery of life, the stance hortatory and the style proverbial; (2) court wisdom, with the goal of education for a select group, the stance secular, and method didactic; and (3) scribal wisdom, with the aim of providing education for everyone, a stance that is dogmatico-religious, and a dialogico-admonitory method.<sup>35</sup>

Crenshaw then specifies the literary forms that correspond to the “four kinds” of literature, and he contextualizes them in the three settings listed in this quotation. To the family/clan stage belong “many of the proverbs. . . [and] the onomastica, in rudimentary form, or lists of character traits and experiences of nature.”<sup>36</sup> With court wisdom and a scribal class arose the multiplicity of other literary forms found in the books designated wisdom literature; Crenshaw devotes extended treatment to eight: “proverb, riddle, fable and allegory, hymn and prayer, *Streitgespräch* or dialogue, confession, lists, didactic poetry and narrative.”<sup>37</sup> The identification of stages, which Crenshaw resists thinking of simply as historical periods, has in part to do with the development and transformation over time of forms in wisdom texts. Dell summarizes the phenomenon as follows, “By the time of Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon, rarely does a proverb appear in a simple form without an accompanying interpretation, and, instead of the proverb, the didactic essay and hymn and prayer forms are prominent.”<sup>38</sup> Dell goes on to warn against the knee-jerk presumption that, because of the historical fact of formal developments over time, any difference one perceives in the forms used by a wisdom text is a reflex of a wisdom form’s internal development. Such a presumption would render the critic blind to the presence of non-wisdom forms in wisdom texts. Just because a text is in a piece of wisdom literature does not mean that its form should be considered sapiential. But neither are wisdom forms always and everywhere the same; their developments over time do not necessarily render them more or less sapiential.

<sup>35</sup>CRENSHAW (1995 [1974]), 46. <sup>36</sup>CRENSHAW (1995 [1974]), 47.

<sup>37</sup>CRENSHAW (1995 [1974]), 48; for a slightly different list, see CRENSHAW (1998), 27.

<sup>38</sup>KATHERINE J. DELL, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 58.

For obvious reasons such complications pose problems for any attempt to say, absolutely, that form could function as a basis for defining a text as wisdom or not. Similar problems to those present in discussions of wisdom's content afflict discussions of wisdom's forms. Since wisdom forms develop and change over time and since forms from other, non-wisdom texts are co-present with wisdom forms in wisdom literature, there is something about wisdom that is not conditioned by its formal grounds.

The approach to wisdom that is guided by the dominance of the material medium stems from the conviction that "the literary forms within Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, and Wisdom of Solomon comprise a special world of communication, which can be understood only in terms of its own categories. . . the peculiar wisdom forms."<sup>39</sup> Crenshaw's recourse in this quotation to "a special world of communication" constituted by the unique combination of forms present in texts designated sapiential marks his awareness that form is not enough: "prophets employed aphorisms and allegories, priests and lyrical poets wrote laments and hymns, genealogists and historiographers compiled lists. Therefore, form alone cannot suffice to set wisdom literature off from all the rest."<sup>40</sup>

### 10.2 JOB and Generic Discontinuity

Despite scholars' awareness of the insufficiencies of form for delimiting wisdom, wisdom nevertheless functions as something formally delimited and thrown into crisis on account of certain formal features of JOB.<sup>41</sup> This may seem surprising since the crisis is usually framed in terms of content or worldview, and since the notion of crisis has such strongly

<sup>39</sup>CRENSHAW (1998), 27. <sup>40</sup>CRENSHAW (1998), 32n.26.

<sup>41</sup>This distinction between status and function, a permutation of the philosophical difference between something in-itself and for-us, is deployed by B. Strawn in his course on Old Testament Interpretation to address problems associated with "canons within canons." A number of problems in and with churches can be illuminated by a consideration of the material that *functions* as their canon and the substantial differences of this material from the material upon which they bestow a canonical *status*.

existential connotations. Thus, form continues to function in the narrative about wisdom's crisis even though its role differs from that played by content.

At times JOB's form is described as *sui generis* ("of its own kind"), as in the following statement by Pope:

there is no single classification appropriate to the literary form of the Book of Job. It shares something of all the literary forms that have been ascribed to it, but it is impossible to classify it exclusively as didactic, dramatic, epic or anything else. The book viewed as a unit is *sui generis* and no single term or combination of terms is adequate to describe it.<sup>42</sup>

The refusal to cast JOB as an exemplar of this or that established literary genus admirably reflects an increasingly acknowledged suspicion about the typologizing abuses of the practice of form criticism in the middle of the last century.<sup>43</sup> It is not clear, however, how one might put into practice such a disavowal of any classificatory decisions whatsoever so as to read the Bible as a succession of radically autonomous sentences.<sup>44</sup>

Statements about how JOB has *combined* or *transformed* traditional forms are much more commonly found than statements about how JOB's forms are "of their own kind." Thus, according to Habel, JOB

does not conform to any single traditional genre structure. Traditional forms are incorporated, adapted, and transcended through the integration of curses, disputation, lament, trial speeches, wisdom poems, and hymnic materials into an underlying narrative plot.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup>MARVIN H. POPE, *Job* 3rd edition. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973), xxx. For other references to JOB as *sui generis*, see CRENSHAW (1995 [1974], 68) and (1995 [1976], 95).

<sup>43</sup>On which, see the critical remarks of ERHARD BLUM, "Formgeschichte—A Misleading Category?" in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* Edited by MARVIN SWEBNEY and EHUD BEN ZVI. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 32–45.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. BUSS (2003, 312–313), which notes the connection between the rise of historical criticism and the focus on the "particularity of a text," whose extreme form is the philosophical position of "nominalism, [which] holds that all general terms and all terms for relations are human constructions—'names'—while in reality itself there are only particulars."

<sup>45</sup>NORMAN C. HABEL, *The Book of Job* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 101.



The question I am interested in is not Habel's—whether JOB conforms to any single traditional genre structure—but whether wisdom does. As seen in the previous section, most agree that it does not.<sup>46</sup> The point, then, is that no unique integration or transformation of forms can be used as a determining factor for deciding whether JOB poses any sort of crisis for wisdom.

Consider Fohrer's classification of the different techniques JOB uses to take old forms, recontextualize them, and thus transform their function.<sup>47</sup> For example, if YHWH uses onomastica in the response to Job, then their function there would be opposed to their original use. In traditional wisdom, such list-type wisdom “properly belongs to the realm of control of the world through encyclopaedic knowledge, but here is used to convince Job of the limits of wisdom.”<sup>48</sup> It is deeply informative to know that onomastica are used in one text to shore up knowledge and in another to reveal its limits. But by itself such knowledge cannot support any conclusions about which one is proper to wisdom, which one reiterates the same old wisdom, which one does not belong to wisdom proper, or which one is proper to some qualitatively different or new notion of wisdom. There is no basis or point at which one could conclude that a transformation in form constitutes a crisis for an old wisdom or an altogether new wisdom. The function of a form can change, even to contradictory ends, without necessitating the conclusion that its uses present two different or even opposed senses of wisdom.

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<sup>46</sup>Whether a “traditional genre structure” as such exists is addressed at the end of the chapter, where I follow the lead of some recent work in genre criticism to argue for a new conception of wisdom. Even though I have recourse to genre criticism to help me define what I think wisdom is, I do not finally wish to say that wisdom is or is not a genre as such a nomination tends, in my experience, to lead to unhelpful pedantries based largely on differences of definition.

<sup>47</sup>GEORG FOHRER, *Das Buch Hiob* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1963), Kommentar zum Alten Testament; and GEORG FOHRER, “Form and Funktion in der Hiobdichtung” in *Studien zum Buch Hiob* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1963 [1959]), 60–77. For a discussion and summary of Fohrer's work, see DELL (1991), 112–21.

<sup>48</sup>DELL (1991), 118.

Formal arguments that lend themselves to conclusions about a crisis JOB may pose for wisdom are not limited to JOB's particular combination, manipulation, or transformation of forms. One can also find arguments that, because JOB includes a particular form deemed "not-wisdom," it should be placed beyond the bounds of wisdom. Thus LaCoque writes,

Although the dialogical part of the book is clearly sapiential, Job 38-41 constitutes a literary genre *sui generis* as it distances itself from the customary pattern of wisdom literature. True, God's address is also akin to wisdom but only partially so, if only because we are dealing with a theophany and, with Dermot Cox, we must stress that "theophanies have no real function in wisdom literature, where reason and experience, not revelation, are normative."<sup>49</sup>

I have already dealt with the insufficiency of Cox's notion that non-revelatory content is normative for wisdom, but his quotation and its approval by LaCocque further illustrate this notion's pervasiveness in scholarship. The problem here is with the idea that JOB steps outside wisdom when it uses a particular form when, I have already shown, wisdom is irreducible to any particular set of forms. Because the boundary of wisdom cannot consist of forms, no form can place JOB outside, or inside, wisdom.

Dell too admits the impossibility of defining the boundaries of what counts as wisdom literature according to formal requirements alone. Form is simply one of three criteria she uses to delimit wisdom, along with content and context (which many biblical scholars treat as an inherent part of form). She argues that JOB "is not characteristically 'wisdom' in terms of major forms used in the book,"<sup>50</sup> and she supports her thesis by showing that JOB uses existing traditions to radically criticize them. She compares

the form in JOB with the same form being used in a traditional way in another book of the Old Testament. This [comparison] will demonstrate that the form did exist and had a

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<sup>49</sup>ANDRÉ LACOCQUE, "The Deconstruction of Job's Fundamentalism" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 126 (2007), 84. He cites DERMOT COX, "Structure and Function of the Final Challenge: Job 20-31" *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association*, 5 (1981), 55-71, esp. 65.

<sup>50</sup>DELL (1991), 72. The thesis involves the questionable exclusion of the dialogue from those forms considered characteristic of wisdom.

'proper' use opposite to the use the author of *JOB* makes of it.<sup>51</sup>

I take the quotation marks Dell places around the signifier *proper* to indicate her awareness that wisdom cannot be reduced to a formal definition, that one is always mistaken when some form is isolated as a necessary or proper essence of wisdom. I presume, therefore, that "proper" is specially designated so as to refer to that which the author of *JOB* considered proper, or to another similar qualification. In other words, Dell's argument that *JOB* "is not characteristically 'wisdom'" means only that *JOB* includes certain content and uses certain forms differently than the tradition *JOB* inherited, not that *JOB* lies outside of that tradition.<sup>52</sup>

To summarize, one cannot say that *JOB* poses a crisis for wisdom because it uses wisdom forms in a unique way or in a unique combination with forms that are nowhere else found in wisdom literature. What defines a text as wisdom or not-wisdom is as irreducible to a form or its function as it is to its content, which means that the crisis *JOB* poses or represents for wisdom cannot be reduced to any formal cause.

## 11 FROM UNIVERSAL FAILURE. . .

The preceding sections have all been leading up to the conclusion that definitions of wisdom literature universally fail to coincide with their referent. Yet why not instead approach wisdom in terms of content *and* form,<sup>53</sup> a multifaceted definition whereby

formally, wisdom consists of proverbial sentence or instruction, debate, intellectual reflection; thematically, wisdom comprises self-evident intuitions about mastering life for human

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<sup>51</sup>DELL (1991), 125.

<sup>52</sup>"Notably, it is what Job himself says that is really unorthodox in content, particularly on issues that are traditionally treated in wisdom and cultic circles, and this is matched by the forms which the author of *JOB* uses in order to misuse them" DELL (1991), 135.

<sup>53</sup>Or, as in Dell's position cited above, content, form and context; "These categories of form, content, and context, taken individually, generally suffer from being too wide. However if we narrow the discussion to texts which show strong evidence of all three categories, we may be able to define the 'limits of wisdom'

betterment, gropings after life's secrets with regards to innocent suffering, grappling with finitude, and [a] quest for truth concealed in the created order and manifested in a feminine persona. When a marriage between form and content exists, there is wisdom literature. Lacking such oneness, a given text participates in biblical wisdom to a greater or lesser extent.<sup>54</sup>

This "marriage between form and content" is more comprehensively worked out and commonly cited in J. Collins' parallel attempt to define the apocalypse as "a group of written texts marked by distinctive recurring characteristics which constitute a recognizable and coherent type of writing."<sup>55</sup> The problem Collins identifies is the same I have shown in wisdom literature, that of describing an essence that neither "loses all the distinctiveness of apocalypses over against other types of revelation" nor "fails to account for too many texts usually regarded as 'apocalyptic.'"<sup>56</sup> Collins' solution is an approach that accounts for both formal features (which he identifies with "the manner or form of revelation") as well as characteristic apocalyptic content ("the content of the things revealed"). With this paradigm in hand Collins discovers a

common core of constant elements [that] permits us. . . to formulate a comprehensive definition of the genre: 'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient [i.e., the formal elements], disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world [i.e., the content of what is revealed].<sup>57</sup>

One can easily see how this parallels Crenshaw's earlier quotation. Two independent intellectual projects are carried out: the first establishes the set of texts exhibiting sapiential *forms*, the second the set of texts containing sapiential *content*. The space of conjunction defines an objective field that is the essence of wisdom.

and come closer to a definition of what the essence of 'wisdom' is" (DELL, 1991, 61-62).

<sup>54</sup>CRENSHAW (1998), 11. <sup>55</sup>JOHN COLLINS, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre" *Semeia*, 14 (1979), 1. <sup>56</sup>COLLINS (1979), 5. <sup>57</sup>COLLINS (1979), 8.

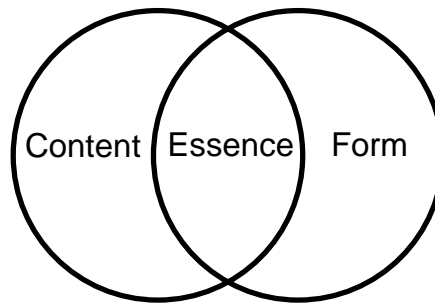


Figure 2.1: The Generic Conjunction of Content and Form

The *thing* that would reside at the conjunction of content and form would necessarily be conceived of as a hybrid substance: an inert substratum of stuff, shaped by an active principle of organization. Wisdom as the notion of retributive justice, for example, is manifest, *formed* in various ways: from the proverbial saying to the admonition to the didactic narrative, and so on. But this is hardly satisfactory, for one can equally and with as much empirical justification speak of wisdom as *essentially* a complex of forms that stamps its “sapiential character” on a diverse variety of experiences and ideas: a *wise* engagement with royal officials, a *wise* determination to work hard in the harvest season, a *wise* decision to hold one’s tongue; for every possible experience a *formation* of that experience according to the essence of wisdom.

A problem arises from the inability to marry these two different ways of speaking about wisdom since content and form do not give different perspectives on the same object—as in the famous example of five blind men attempting to describe an elephant. Neither can content and form be understood as reflections of an interpreter’s methodological preferences—content for the hermeneut, form for the structuralist or semiotician. Rather the content of wisdom and the form of wisdom must be grasped as radically incommensurable objects, whose paradigmatic model (since Saussure) is the abyssal gap between the signified (content) and the signifier (form). In other words, descriptions of wisdom ultimately founder

on an antimony built into language itself, which “necessarily projects two distinct and discontinuous dimensions (or ‘objects of study’) which can never be conceptually unified.”<sup>58</sup> The double bind is simple and inescapable: any description of wisdom must necessarily be conducted in the universal medium of language, which ensures that the description will be marked by the formal deadlocks of language. The failure to say the sense of the wisdom that these texts speak about is not an inadequacy of our language (the Symbolic medium) to correspond to an object (the Real). This failure is an inadequacy of the Symbolic to itself, since its field is riven by an endless division of signifier from signified. Should the task of defining a crisis of wisdom therefore be rejected as impossible? Are we condemned to “die without wisdom” (Job 4:21)?

## 12 . . . TO A FAILURE OF THE UNIVERSAL

To address this question I need to broaden my level of engagement. Borrowing the useful concepts *etic* and *emic* from cultural anthropology, thus far I have been speaking from an *etic* perspective *about* an artifact of Israel’s intellectual history, and I have attempted to bracket the *emic* perspective which seeks alongside the historical sages to understand wisdom *as such*. It is one of the characteristic features of biblical wisdom scholarship (and I do not say I have avoided the pitfall) to blur this boundary, to vacillate between the descriptive task of scholarship and the prescriptive task of the sage.

Crenshaw quite self-consciously testifies to this interpretative confusion under the section heading “The Elusive Quest,” when he evokes *two* elusive objects, or two ways in which “wisdom” eludes apprehension. Here are the first sentences of the section:

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<sup>58</sup>FREDRIC JAMESON, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 108. In this distinction Jameson follows VOLOŠINOV (1973, 45-63) who, in a chapter entitled “Two Trends of Thought in Philosophy of Language,” concedes the impossibility of mediating between the objects of study delimited by distinct approaches to language, termed respectively “individualistic subjectivism” and “abstract objectivism.”

- “Reflection upon wisdom’s inaccessibility prompted Ben Sira to utter an enigmatic truism that, *like her name*, *ḥokmāh* is not accessible to many (6:22). For ancient sages like Ben Sira, Job (chap. 28), and Qoheleth, wisdom remained an elusive creature.”<sup>59</sup>
- “Modern lovers of wisdom have also found her to be a slippery word. One by one, they pronounce her name, only to have her essence slip away like oil through one’s fingers. ‘She is humanistic, international, nonhistorical, eudaemonistic,’ they have claimed, but each term has required a qualification.”<sup>60</sup>

On the one hand, wisdom, the ineffable moral and intellectual quality *sought by the sages* is judged to be elusive, inaccessible. But what is to be made of the second elusion? What “slips away like oil” from wisdom’s modern lovers? It cannot be Ben Sira’s *ḥokmāh* (to test this hypothesis, just try to imagine Ben Sira describing wisdom as humanistic, international, etc.). Scholarly “love” must be read as displaced, a love of the lovers of wisdom.

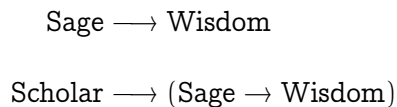


Figure 2.2: Assymetries in Sapiential Love/Desire

Whenever these levels of sapiential love have been conflated, one can be sure that various scholarly enterprises, including attempts to conceive wisdom as a thing, have been bedevilled. So it is not surprising that Crenshaw recognizes their difference. What is surprising is that, recognizing the distinction, he suggests that the (proper) sapiential object and the

<sup>59</sup>JAMES CRENSHAW, “The Wisdom Literature” in *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions: Collected Writings on Old Testament Wisdom* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995 [1985]), 14.

<sup>60</sup>CRENSHAW (1995 [1985]), 14.

(meta) scholarly object share the same elusiveness.<sup>61</sup> To feel the affront of this idea one need only recall von Rad's cautionary warning, "The designation of a text as 'wisdom' . . . is by no means rooted in the sources. It first emerged in the scholarly world and has since become established."<sup>62</sup> Von Rad wants to divorce once and for all wisdom's distinct usages: wisdom as a scholarly *Gestalt* that may (or may not) aid our analysis of a corpus of texts, versus Wisdom as the "indivisible" understanding of reality subscribed to by the sages. The implication of value, highlighted by the change in case, is equally clear: the former is an interpretative crutch, to be abandoned once its heuristic value is used up; the latter is the enduring "real thing."

Von Rad's strong dissociation of "scholarly construct" from "original source" certainly seems cogent since, as I suggested, any confusion of the two creates more problems. But there are also problems with his strict separation since the notion of *Gestalt* could not avoid the failures rehearsed throughout this chapter. His notion of scholarly artifice seems to require interpreters to posit an essence or shape of wisdom, and then to identify its features in particular wisdom texts.

Since the argument is here at a precipice, let me pause to summarize. I have said that wisdom does not exist as a coherent thing, that any predicates finally fail to render a subject "wisdom," a failure which either appears as a lack—the predicates do not cohere

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<sup>61</sup>To show that this is no misreading, I cite the concluding paragraph of Crenshaw's introduction: "In short, we ourselves have pursued knowledge, searched for divine presence, chased after meaning, engaged in a quest for survival, and widened the hunt at every juncture. In doing so, we have labored to carry on the quest that our remote ancestors began. Like them, we encounter the limits of knowledge precisely at the point where ultimate issues impinge on the intellect. Like them, too, we confess an inability to know anything that would enable us to master the universe for human good, for God excels at concealing things. Still, we have learned some things—and that valuable link connects us through the centuries with Israel's sages. For the opportunity to think their thoughts, and thus to enrich our own, we owe an immense debt to the wise men and women who ventured forth on an endless search more than three thousand years ago" (CRENSHAW, 1998, 229).

<sup>62</sup>VON RAD (1972), 7, cited above on page 54.



because some X is missing from them, leading them always to come up short of designating wisdom—or as an excess—the predicates describe something more than wisdom, and the X cannot be subtracted from them so that they could render wisdom.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, I have insisted upon the *structural* quality of these failures, so that any *particular* deficits and excesses are not seen as contingent shortcomings against the backdrop of wisdom’s “real” objective fullness. To evoke the typographical convention introduced in CHAPTER 1, this means that any gap one encounters between Wisdom and wisdom never runs between the (finite, human) subject and the (infinite, noumenal) object. Rather, it is the irreducible gap between the *one* subject and the aggregate series of *all* the predicate terms in statements of the form,

– Wisdom is  $S_1, S_2, S_3, \dots S_\infty$ .

That is to say, the gap is purely immanent to the Symbolic (i.e., linguistic) field.

In light of this reminder one must ask whether the same is not true of the gap that runs between the *scholarly* subject and the *original* object. If so, then this would undermine von Rad’s strict separation between the “scholarly construct” of wisdom and its “original source.” It will help at this point to consider contemporary discussions of genre. First, as I said above apropos the designation “*sui generis*,” “a text cannot belong to no genre.”<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, genres are not categories that avoid implication “in the literary history and the formal

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<sup>63</sup>In other words, these failures are related in a paradoxical relationship not unlike the one that Zeno attributes to Achilles and the tortoise. Achilles either tries indefinitely to catch up to the tortoise but is always unable to do so; or, with Achilles’ first step he is already beyond the tortoise, and the race never gets going.

<sup>64</sup>JACQUES DERRIDA, “The Law of Genre” in *Modern Genre Theory* Edited by DAVID DUFF. (Harlow, Eng.: Longman, 2000), 224; Derrida is, of course, not the first to make this point. Todorov, for example, warns in his discussion of genre in his book on the fantastic, “Failing to recognize the existence of genres is equivalent to claiming that a literary work does not bear any relationship to already existing works. Genres are precisely those relay-points by which the work assumes a relation with the universe of literature” TSUVETAN TODOROV, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre* trans. by Richard Howard (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973), 9.

production they were traditionally supposed to classify and neutrally to describe.”<sup>65</sup> So instead of a text “belonging” to a genre, Derrida would rather “speak of a sort of participation without belonging—a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set.”<sup>66</sup> From this Newsom proposes that one “think of texts as participating in [genres], invoking them, gesturing to them, playing in and out of them, and in so doing, continually changing them.”<sup>67</sup> I propose that wisdom might be beneficially approached as sharing these characteristics of genre. If texts participate in but do not belong to genres and continually change genres, then the approach to wisdom could be reoriented so that wisdom would not be an ahistorical classification, a scholarly artifice, but instead a dynamic effect of “its” texts, something which each of “its” texts produces but which somehow escapes determination by these texts. Wisdom should be treated, like genres, as a more-than-textual entity that is generated out of an antagonistic and incomplete textual ground and that is, at the moment of its production, inconvertibly alienated from its particular textual-material substratum in the sense that it cannot be reduced to this substratum.

Returning to Crenshaw’s quotation—“When a marriage between form and content exists, there is wisdom literature. Lacking such oneness, a given text participates in biblical wisdom to a greater or lesser extent”<sup>68</sup>—I can now specify that such oneness is always lacking, and that every wisdom text should be said to participate in wisdom to a greater or lesser extent. The failure of a text to participate fully in wisdom is in no way accidental or contingent, since the coincidence of text and genre is subject to the same linguistic antimonies as content and form.

There is an upshot to the fact that Crenshaw’s “confusion”—his identification of *our* (scholarly) quest and the *sages’* quest for wisdom—rebounds on us with a vengeance, which enables us to avoid Eliphaz’s fate of “dying without wisdom.” The parallel between

<sup>65</sup> JAMESON (1981), 107. <sup>66</sup> DERRIDA (2000), 230.

<sup>67</sup> CAROL A. NEWSOM, “Spying out the Land: A Report from Genology” in *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 439.

<sup>68</sup> CRENSHAW (1998), 11, cited above on page 69.

the failures of the etic and emic approaches opens up a different way to consider a singular and synchronic wisdom with respect to its diverse and diachronic articulations. The generic “misreading” that has hereto been attributed to scholarly artifice or ignorance must be read back into the texts themselves. The singular and synchronic wisdom, in other words, can be considered as that which its diverse and diachronic articulations fail to designate. At various moments a particular wisdom may recognize its limits, or fail to designate what it sets out to say, or fail to render by its statements a coherent, totalized, or delimited notion of Wisdom. However, this very failure generates the specter of such a Wisdom as that “thing” with respect to which the particular wisdom is limited. To indicate the difference between the sense of Wisdom as something that lies beyond the limits of any particular wisdom’s signifying field and the sense of WISDOM as something that is generated out of and corresponds to this field’s immanent or internal limits, I write the latter with small caps. After a brief, conceptual elaboration of this WISDOM, I will turn to the biblical text itself so as to render it more concretely.

We can identify such a notion of WISDOM when we treat the failures of all attempts to articulate Wisdom as rooted in limits that are inherent to wisdom as such, rather than as arising from these attempts’ inadequacies with respect to some unlimited Wisdom that lies beyond them. WISDOM exists as a specter of a universal Wisdom that is generated at the moment a particular wise act or saying confronts a limit. WISDOM is a surplus with a spectral or virtual existence over and above the actual substance of the text. As Deleuze says about meaning and as I described Lacan’s Real in CHAPTER 1, WISDOM does not exist except as a specter that subsists at the limits, disturbances, curves, openings, and torsions in what the text expresses.<sup>69</sup> WISDOM is not something with predicates of its own.

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<sup>69</sup>“Let us consider the complex status of sense or of that which is expressed. On one hand, it does not exist outside the proposition that expresses it; what is expressed does not exist outside its expression. This is why we cannot say that sense exists, but rather that it inheres or subsists. On the other hand, it does not merge at all with the proposition, for it has an objective (*objectité*) which is quite distinct. What is

It is not subject to the differential order of signification since it escapes this order, not by virtue of its existence outside this order, but because it is the name for an excess that this order internally generates. WISDOM is a virtual and inarticulable excess that is exposed at/as the limit of all (failed) attempts to articulate it. WISDOM insistently realizes itself in the limits of the statements about it; it is continuously formed by the statements that it subsists at/as the limit of. In accordance with what I said earlier, the moments of failure at which WISDOM appears will have two modes, either lack or excess, since the texts will either say more or less than they intend.

Now I can turn straight to the Bible, for WISDOM is not alien to the literature but something that the texts are everywhere hoping to recognize, celebrate, and put into practice.

### 13 JOB, CRISIS OF WISDOM

The chapters that follow continue to explore what I want merely to indicate here, namely, the relation between JOB's wisdom and the traditional wisdom that JOB participates in and transforms. At least in Proverbs, the gap between wisdom's statements and the WISDOM that they produce is characteristically attributed to YHWH. Among the many positive statements about wisdom, the sage includes a negative recognition of wisdom's inaccessibility, its lack of self-sufficiency, and pins this incompleteness to the person and activity of YHWH. In such statements YHWH stands for what wisdom cannot speak, for that of which nothing can be said other than that it subsists, it inheres as a limit for all thought and speech.

To humans belong the plans of the mind;  
but from YHWH, the answer of the tongue.

Prov 16:1

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expressed has no resemblance whatsoever to the expression" GILLES DELEUZE, *The Logic of Sense* trans. by Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 21.

The human mind plans its way, but YHWH establishes its steps.

Prov 16:9

Many plans are in a human mind,

but it is the purpose of YHWH that is established.

Prov 19:21

There is no wisdom, no understanding,

no purpose that could oppose YHWH;

The horse is readied for the day of battle,

but to YHWH belongs the victory.

Prov 21:30-31

In Proverbs' wisdom YHWH is not a figure that allows true wisdom to shine through our—human—failures to grasp it. YHWH is instead that which prevents the sage's wisdom from coinciding with itself. This notion of YHWH as the cause of wisdom's limit can be read in two different ways.

On one hand, as I have thus far suggested, YHWH could play a role such as I have attributed to WISDOM. These texts do not register YHWH behind or anywhere other than on the surface of sapiential (mis)articulations. YHWH does not precede the failures of wisdom, but rather is posited, at the moment of failure, as the agent who must have been behind the failure. The future perfect or retroactive sense in which the effect precedes the cause is crucial here. YHWH is retroactively evoked as the agent behind wisdom's self-sundering, the one who alienates wise statements from the wisdom they set out to speak, and who thereby makes visible the spectral product that is WISDOM.

On the other hand, this role played by YHWH is susceptible to a different interpretation, one which I will mostly find characteristic of traditional wisdom, and which posits YHWH as the "essential thing" existing beyond or behind the aporias of the Symbolic field or, more broadly, "human experience." One may think of the friends' exhortations to Job to attend to the "inscrutable," "ineffable," "indescribable," "mystical" qualities of wisdom or God.

Were you the first person to be born?

And were you brought forth before the hills?

Have you overheard the council of God?

And do you limit wisdom to yourself?

Job 15:7-8

Eliphaz does not refute Job's traumatic *experience* of contradiction and suffering. Instead, he appropriates its meaninglessness to attest to a Beyond that eludes Job's grasp, an inaccessible point of transcendence in relation to which Job infuriatingly refuses to relinquish his claim of access. Does Job's position (or Eliphaz's construal of it) amount to a naïve hubris or obdurate refusal to acknowledge any limits? Such an impression of Job's position may seem possible when it is opposed to the friends' insistences that Job recognize the limits of his knowledge of God and the possibility of his guilt.

This question allows me to pause momentarily to indicate the philosophical background to my argument before concluding with a comment on the central role played by the fear-of YHWH in the tradition's management of its immanent limits.

Kant and the post-Kantian German idealists Schelling and Hegel are undoubtedly chief among this dissertation's most important philosophical interlocutors. The critique issued by the latter to Kant has been supremely important to understand and articulate the differences between JOB and the tradition it critiques. My grasp of the relationships between these modern German philosophers is deeply influenced by S. Žižek and a few other contemporary philosophers.<sup>70</sup> The central feature of Kant's critical-transcendental turn in the first *Critique* is to insist that noumena—ontological essences, "the Thing-in-itself" (*das Ding an sich*)—are beyond the limits of possible experience and knowledge, and thus that one only ever knows and experiences phenomena—deontologized objects-as-appearances.

<sup>70</sup>I introduced the difference between Hegel and Kant on page 6. The best account of Žižek's work, which happens to be organized into three sections that address "Žižek's Lacan-inspired theoretical appropriations

The limits, contradictions, aporias, and impasses that permeate our thoughts all arise from the fact that our knowledge can only originate in the synthetic operations of our minds, and not from any immediate access to objective reality existing in and of itself.

In demarcating a division between epistemology and ontology as well as arguing for a distinction between phenomenal objects-as-appearances and noumenal things-in-themselves, Kant assumes—he simply takes it for granted—that contradictions dwell within the confines of subjective cognition alone. According to this presupposition, only thinking can harbor antinomies and antagonisms; substantial being must be internally at one with itself and without contradiction.<sup>71</sup>

Thus the project of Kant's first *Critique* is to construct an epistemology that would avoid the problems faced by previous philosophies as a result of their failure to operate independently of what can be known through subjectively accessible experience. (The similarly central role of finitude in both the Kantian and the traditional sapiential edifices should be clear and will be developed throughout the dissertation.)

I will follow the common practice of reductively bypassing important intervening figures (Schelling, Fichte, et al.) in the critical reception of Kant's foundational distinction between noumena and phenomena, and proceeding directly to Hegel. In his critique of Kant Hegel is sometimes misunderstood as a reactionary metaphysician reasserting the possibility of "absolute knowledge" that Kant prohibited. Žižek, who has tirelessly tried to correct this misreading, insists, "Hegel goes beyond Kant *within* Kant's horizon of knowledge,"<sup>72</sup> "Hegel. . . is not external to Kant,"<sup>73</sup> and he calls Hegel "the most consequential of Kantians."<sup>74</sup> Hegel fully accepts the limits prescribed by Kant, but he goes a step further by

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of Kant, Schelling, and Hegel," can be found in JOHNSTON (2008b).

<sup>71</sup> JOHNSTON (2008b), 129. <sup>72</sup> ŽIŽEK (2002), xxv, emphasis in original, cf. 217-19. <sup>73</sup> ŽIŽEK (2006), 25.

<sup>74</sup> SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 21. Earlier he writes, "it is advisable to forget the standard textbook phrases on Hegel's 'absolute idealism' in which—or so the story goes—the Notion's self-movement overcomes formalism by generating the entire content out of itself and thus becoming able to dispense with the external instigation

ontologizing them:

It is the supreme inconsistency to admit, on the one hand, that the understanding is cognizant only of appearances, and to assert, on the other, that this cognition is *something absolute*. . . . Something is only known, or even felt, to be a restriction, or a defect, if one is at the same time *beyond* it. . . . [R]estriction and defect are only determined as restriction and defect by *comparison* with the Idea that is *present*—the Idea of the universal, of something-whole and perfect. It is only lack of consciousness, therefore, if we do not see that it is precisely the designation of something as finite or restricted that contains the proof of the *actual presence* of the Infinite, or Unrestricted, and that there can be no knowledge of limit unless the Unlimited is *on this side* within consciousness.<sup>75</sup>

Hegel makes a very simple observation that turns out to have the most radical consequences: to recognize a limit, one must have already in some sense transgressed it. Hegel transposes the limit that for Kant amounted to an *apparent* limit within the *phenomenal* field, onto an immanent field of being; Hegel *ontologizes* Kant's *epistemological* prescriptions. Hegel does not claim that the noumenal beyond is somehow accessible to rational inquiry. His point is rather that its inaccessibility reflects an immanent, ontological inconsistency on account of which the subject posits some hard kernel of a Real subtracted alterity dwelling on the other side of its experience.<sup>76</sup> In other words, to resort to a famous line from Hegel's *Phenomenology*, on the other side of the split in substance, where the subject posits the presence of the wholly other, lies only what the subject has already put there.<sup>77</sup> Subject is of the Thing-in-itself" (ŽIŽEK, 1993, 19).

<sup>75</sup>HEGEL (1991), 105-6 §60. Cf. ŽIŽEK (2002), xcvi n.23; ŽIŽEK (2006), ch. 1; and JOHNSTON (2008b), 129-30.

<sup>76</sup>Cf. ŽIŽEK (2006), 25; and the discussion in JOHNSTON (2008b), ch. 11. It strikes me as plausible, though of course unverifiable, that Hegel learned this maneuver from JOB.

<sup>77</sup>"It is manifest that behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless *we* go behind it ourselves, as much as in order that we may see, as that there may be something behind there which can be seen" GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL, *Phenomenology of Spirit* trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 103.



the Hegelian name for the split in substance.<sup>78</sup>

To draw a clear connection that I will have to work out in what follows, Kant, like the traditional sages, insists on the ultimate finitude of the subject, and on the subject's confinement to the world of appearances. Hegel, like JOB, does not extinguish these limits, he just insists on their immanence to the field of phenomenal appearance, and not a division separating phenomena from contradiction-free noumena. JOB and Hegel alike struggle to work out similar insights into the fact that the objective ground of being, and not simply of subjective thought, is incomplete and riddled with tensions and antagonisms.

Prior to that brief, philosophical excursus, I let Eliphaz stand as representative of a tendency in the tradition to treat YHWH as a substantial and causal presence behind or beyond the limits of sapiential attempts to comprehend their experience. To conclude, I want to grasp Eliphaz's position in the context of his role as a fearer of God, for the fear-of YHWH is the sapiential principle with which the tradition characteristically deals with its immanent limit, and it is the singular point of attachment between the tradition and its subjective adherents. By saying that the tradition characteristically deals with its immanent limits through the fear-of YHWH, it should be clear that I think that the immanent limits are primary, and the ways in which they are negotiated are secondary. Unless the relation between YHWH or WISDOM and wisdom texts is understood first in negative terms such as I have presented them here—i.e., in terms that do not grant them an independent existence but read them instead as insistent virtualities—the significance of the “fear-of YHWH” in Proverbs will remain unaccounted for.

The fear-of YHWH functions in several ways in Proverbs but, by the time one gets to

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<sup>78</sup>“[A]lthough this negative appears at first as a disparity between the ‘I’ and its object, it is just as much the disparity of the substance with itself. Thus what seems to happen outside of it, to be an activity directed against it, is really its own doing, and Substance shows itself to be essentially Subject” (HEGEL, 1977, 21). The connections between this description of Hegel's subject and the discussion of Lacan's subject in CHAPTER 1 should also be clear. Žižek often and productively explores these connections.

the “motto” that baptizes it the beginning of wisdom (e.g., 1:9; 9:10), it has clearly assumed a more specific and conceptual sense.<sup>79</sup> On one hand, the fear-of YHWH functions as the starting point of Proverbs’ wisdom because it provides a place for the sage to locate the limits of his wisdom which, I have said, are internal to any wisdom. The sage fears YHWH because, wise as he may be, his wisdom will never directly coincide with true wisdom. This noncoincidence can appear in two modes, either as lack or as excess. Those verses from Proverbs just cited (i.e., 16:1, 9, etc.) can be read in either sense. From one angle they testify to a *lack* of the sapiential subject’s ability to access a totalized wisdom and, from the other, to a *surplus* of YHWH’s activity in the world thwarting the wisdom that the sage relies upon. For the former, the fear-of YHWH should be read together with the many statements prohibiting the sage from assuming the predicate “wise,” from being “wise in his own eyes” (e.g., 3:7; 26:5). For the latter, the sense of excess, the sapiential life can be seen as doxological, a radical openness to something new, a sense celebrated by a number of scholars.<sup>80</sup> For my purposes the crucial point is that the fear-of YHWH locates the limits and failures of wisdom not in something outside of wisdom, but rather in the limits of the sapiential subject or in the excesses of YHWH who acts from within wisdom as that which intrudes on it and causes it to fail. The idea that the sage fears YHWH as someone who stands outside or beyond wisdom is a secondary idea, subsequent to the idea that the sage’s fear is the subjective position by which he observes, acknowledges, and relates to the limit that keeps his wisdom and his world incomplete. In this latter sense alone is the fear-of YHWH logically necessary for the existence of wisdom.

There is a further significance to the function of the fear-of YHWH in Proverbs, which has less to do with a condition of possibility for an inherently limited wisdom and more to do with the sustenance of subjective adherents to such a wisdom. By adhering to a wisdom

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<sup>79</sup>For a more detailed treatment of Proverbs and the fear-of YHWH in Proverbs, see KNAUERT (2009), ch. 5.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. VON RAD (1972) and WALTER BRUEGGEMANN, *In Man We Trust: The Neglected Side of Biblical Faith* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1973).

rooted in the fear-of YHWH, the sage is infinitely capable of accounting for new phenomena by which the internal limit of his wisdom might be revealed. This in turn sustains him within a discursive framework that is infinitely assured of progress with respect to a limit that is ultimately unsurpassable. The fear-of YHWH compels sapiential desire/fear for something that is in excess of wisdom, that negates it and grounds it. Fear in Proverbs is, in other words, desire, and this desire does not impose some subjective tarnish on the objective wisdom that the sage seeks, but instead, with his fear, the sage posits an *incompleteness* to (his) wisdom that is *completely* registered by (his) wisdom. That is, the sage locates within his wisdom the incompleteness inherent to his wisdom such that any phenomena for which his wisdom could not account would nonetheless not oppose it.

To put the last steps of this argument in the form of crisp, propositional statements, I have said of wisdom

- that the unification of its *objective* field founders on the impossibility of reconciling its universal character with the fact of its radically particular existence, and
- that the interpellation of *subjective* adherents occurs by locating this impossibility *within* the self-enclosed universal field itself.

and of Proverbs

- that the name it gives to what the Symbolic network excludes, disavows, or fails to include is the fear-of YHWH, and
- that this signifier of *lack* and *excess* is the singular point of attachment between the sapiential subject and the objective field to which he relates as something he fails to apprehend.

Thus I believe that one should take quite literally Crenshaw's suggestion that the vocation of the sages was "an *endless* quest,"<sup>81</sup> absorbing fully the Sisyphean overtones of "endless."

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<sup>81</sup>CRENSHAW (1998), 46.

Through the fear-of YHWH the wisdom tradition accommodates the limits, failures, and inconsistencies that inhere to its structure. Recognizing this structure finally enables me to state, explicitly and succinctly, how something like a crisis of wisdom might be discerned. I have thus far been unable to do so because of the perplexity inherent to the idea that a tradition (i.e., wisdom) for which crisis is essential, is thrown into crisis by one of its texts (i.e., JOB). If JOB simply presents a crisis within a tradition of crisis, then JOB leaves wisdom unchanged and unchallenged. But what if JOB poses a crisis for the tradition's previous management of its crisis? The thesis of this dissertation can therefore be succinctly stated as an argument for the maintenance of the basic plot of the reigning scholarly narrative—JOB poses a crisis for wisdom—that insists only on an additional negative sign—JOB *poses a crisis for wisdom's crisis*.

I need not look far for an indication of where to begin to work this thesis out, for the sapiential principle at which JOB first takes aim is none other than the fear-of YHWH. What happens to the tradition's fear when it is suggested that it must be *ḥinnām*, “for naught”? What happens when the structure of transcendence to which the fear-of YHWH is traditionally susceptible, is deemed unwise and replaced by that most demanding of ethical postures, the fear-of YHWH *for naught*? The next chapter's engagement with the prologue will take up these and other questions.

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 Job 1-2: A Critique of Pure Fear
 

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You have made us filth  
and rubbish among the peoples.

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 Lam 3:45

We have become the rubbish of the world,  
the scum of all things, to this very day.

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 1 Cor 4:13

## 14 ESTABLISHING THE CONSENSUS ON THE TEST

YHWH's initial question to *hasśāṭān* in the prologue to JOB is provocative: "Have you set your mind on my servant Job, for there is none like him on the earth, blameless and upright, one who fears God and turns from evil?" (1:8).<sup>1</sup> YHWH's incitement could lead in a number of directions, and it is really *hasśāṭān*'s response in 1:9-11 that gets this narrative going.<sup>2</sup> There, *hasśāṭān* asks, "Is it for naught that Job fears God?" He conjectures that

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., J. GERALD JANZEN, *Job* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 39; or HABEL (1985), 80. CLINES (1989, 24-25) disagrees, "God's question can be heard as a 'straight,' unloaded question arising from God's pleasure in Job." But then admits, "Of course, once the next sentence is uttered, it becomes plain that the matter of Job's piety is not as simple as it sounds; herein lies the 'false' naivety of the storyteller's style: God's question is both guileless and pregnant with implication. To hear it simply as a challenge to the Satan is too sophisticated; to take it purely at its face value is to fall prey to the artful naivety of the narrative."

<sup>2</sup>Commentators often recognize the import of these verses. For example: "Here is the crux of the issue, the question which provoked the cruel experiment" POPE (1973), 12.

YHWH has blessed Job with a protective hedge surrounding his entire world such that, if YHWH were to take it away,<sup>3</sup> Job would fail to act piously and thereby prove that his piety is not “for naught.” The test would thereby expose Job’s piety as inauthentic and Job as an imposter. Having primed us with its introduction to the exceedingly pious and wealthy Job in 1:1-5, the story hooks readers with *haśśātān*’s challenge to the story’s claim about Job: will Job’s piety withstand the challenges? Is authentic piety even possible? How will we know it when we see it?

Let the following quotations from thirteen interpreters stand as strong evidence for the existence of a single starting point for critical approaches to the prologue. Reading them with a few questions in mind allows for a more nuanced understanding: (i) Why does *haśśātān* cast doubt on Job’s piety? (ii) On what basis could this test take place? And, (iii) How do we know whether Job has passed or failed the test, and therefore whether *haśśātān* or YHWH is right about Job?

– S. Balentine:

Suffering, the satan implies, will change the calculus between God and humans. Will Job worship God for nothing, for no reward? The wager is that without the reward, there will be no devotion.<sup>4</sup>

– J. Crenshaw:

The cynical charge that Job’s piety depended upon favorable external circumstances struck at the heart of ancient religion. The radical denial of genuine religious devotion was met by an equally adamant claim on God’s part that his servant Job rose above selfish interests in relating to his creator. The suffering that befell God’s servant provided the means by which to adjudicate the two opposing convictions.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Literally, *haśśātān* says, “But stretch out your hand and touch all that is his. . .” The hand, which often symbolizes power (cf. Gen 9:2; 16:6; Exod 3:8, 20), is elsewhere stretched out by God in order to smite (cf. Exod 3:20; 9:15), but also to touch (cf. Jer 1:9). At the least, here it means more than “touch”; see CLINES (1989), 28.

<sup>4</sup>SAMUEL E. BALENTINE, *Job* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 54. <sup>5</sup>CRENSHAW (1998), 92.

– K. Dell:

Satan denies the possibility of genuine religious devotion when he remarks, cynically, “Does Job fear God for naught?” (1:9) implying that Job’s piety depends solely on favourable external circumstances. God on the other hand insists that Job’s fear of God rises above selfish interests. The suffering which befalls Job thus provides the means for adjudicating between these two opposing convictions.<sup>6</sup>

– E. Dhorme:

The whole essence of Satan’s irony is expressed in this question... man acts from motives of self-interest. If he does good, good fortune follows; if he does ill, he is punished by misfortune. Hence he has no merit in fearing God and avoiding evil. For Satan, the problem set in the Book of Job is solved by asserting that self-interest dictates man’s moral conduct. The trials of Job are intended to prove that it is indeed for nothing that the hero of the story is “perfect and upright.”<sup>7</sup>

– S. Driver and G. Gray:

The Satan disputes the inherent worth of this character: Job, he insinuates, had lived as he had, not simply with the result that he had become outwardly prosperous, but in order that he might prosper; he had served God not for God’s sake, but to obtain the handsome price of such service: human nature is incapable of pure devotion to God, human conduct is not disinterested; if the payment for it ceases, or becomes uncertain, man’s service of God will cease, man will no longer address God reverentially, or affectionately, but blasphemingly. . .

Thus Job left at last only with bare life, without which he could be no subject of testing, and his character which had been called into question, but which he had maintained intact under the last test that the Satan could suggest, by these words [2:10] proves his disinterested attachment to Yahweh, that he had not served him for what He gave, and thus finally and completely puts the Satan in the wrong.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>DELL (1991), 30. <sup>7</sup>E. DHORME, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1984), 7.

<sup>8</sup>SAMUEL R. DRIVER and GEORGE BUCHANAN GRAY, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), lii, liii.

– N. Habel:

The doubts injected by the Satan challenge this principle of retributive justice from another angle (1:9-10). Mortals, he proposes, only worship God out of self-interest; they are righteous because they expect to be rewarded. Their integrity is therefore suspect. God will have to afflict an innocent mortal to prove otherwise.<sup>9</sup>

– J. Hartley:

God confidently praises Job before the Satan, who questions the integrity of Job's fear of God, claiming that Job does not fear God for nought, but for the great wealth God freely gives him. The Satan then challenges God to let Job's devotion be tested. God accepts the challenge and permits the Satan to afflict Job. Nevertheless, despite his losses and his debilitating illness, Job continues to fear God.<sup>10</sup>

– D. Mathewson:

*haśśātān* voices the fundamental issue of the prose tale when he inquires of God, "Is it for nothing that Job fears God?" (1:9). This question is not merely about the greatness of Job's piety or nature of his sincerity, but is a profound and troubling inquiry into the coherence of a powerful Israelite moral system. Are humans pious only because God showers them with blessings? If blessings were withheld, would humans still be pious? What really *is* the source of human piety? As the prologue unfolds, God and *haśśātān* test Job's virtue by removing all of his blessings, and then seeing how Job responds: Will he maintain his integrity, or will he curse God?<sup>11</sup>

– M. Pope:

Yahweh calls the Satan's attention to Job's unexampled probity and piety and the Satan questions the disinterested character of this piety and suggests that Job bereft of his material blessings would curse Yahweh to his face. The implied wager is accepted by Yahweh who grants the Satan permission to test Job. . . Job accepts the calamity

<sup>9</sup>HABEL (1985), 61.

<sup>10</sup>JOHN E. HARTLEY, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), 43. <sup>11</sup>DAN MATHEWSON, *Death and Survival in the Book of Job: Desymbolization and Traumatic Experience* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 36.



with resignation and instead of cursing Yahweh, as the Satan had predicted, he utters a blessing.<sup>12</sup>

– H. Rowley:

Satan is unable to point to any flaw in Job, but ascribes his integrity to mere selfishness by pointing to the prosperity with which he is rewarded. His apparent piety is thus represented as based on love of self, and not love of God.<sup>13</sup>

– M. Weiss:

There is in Satan's question no rejection, nor even any doubt, of God's claim that Job is God-fearing. His question is "Does Job fear God *for nought*?" Does Job serve God without reward, and not, rather, in order to receive reward? . . .

As long as the present situation exists, Satan claims, as long as You have blessed the work of his hands, Job fears You. But the moment You put out Your hand and even touch something of his, then he will "blaspheme You to Your face".<sup>14</sup>

– G. Wilson:

*The Satan* raises this question in his discussions with God: Is it possible to hold on to faith in God without receiving benefit? The upshot of the double tests Job endures in the first two chapters is to show that, indeed, it is possible for a human like Job to continue to live in fear of God even when he loses everything and stands on the brink of death without the hope of restoration.<sup>15</sup>

Again, the three questions to which these diverse, representative interpreters respond in concert are:

1. Why does *haśśātān* cast doubt on Job's piety?
2. On what basis could the test take place?
3. How can we know whether Job has passed or failed the test and therefore whether *haśśātān* or YHWH is right about Job?

<sup>12</sup>POPE (1973), xvi. <sup>13</sup>H. H. ROWLEY, *Job* (London: Nelson, 1970), 32.

<sup>14</sup>MEIR WEISS, *The Story of Job's Beginning: Job 1-2: A Literary Analysis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1983), 45, 46.

<sup>15</sup>GERALD H. WILSON, *Job* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 12.

These interpreters' responses basically suggest that:

1. the self-interest of Job's piety is what gives rise to *haśśātān*'s suspicion;
2. Job's affliction makes a display of authentic piety possible; and
3. Job's pious behavior after the affliction will prove YHWH right about Job, whereas *haśśātān* needs Job to reject or curse YHWH to be right.

In what follows I take up each question, I critique the underlying consensus' response, and I propose a different answer.

#### 15 THE OBJECT OF *haśśātān*'S DOUBT; OR, THE MEANING OF *hinnām*

Taking up the first question first, according to most interpretations it is the potential self-interest or selfishness of Job's piety that gives rise to *haśśātān*'s suspicion. Habel writes: "Mortals, [Satan] proposes, . . . are righteous because they expect to be rewarded."<sup>16</sup> And Clines: "Is there anything at all that can be said against the exceptional piety of Job? Yes, says the Satan, his piety may be conditioned by self-interest."<sup>17</sup> I include Clines in the set represented by the interpreters cited above even though he positions his reading against them because he often, as in this particular quotation, voices an opinion close to the consensus:

The test is not exactly a test of Job's motives, for despite the opinion of many commentators, it is not suggested, not even by the Satan, that prosperity is the motive of Job's piety; rather, it is because the prosperity is intertwined with the piety that the prosperity must be removed in order to uncover the relationship between the two.<sup>18</sup>

Clines denies that the story accuses Job of being pious so as to gain riches. Instead, Clines proposes that the test aims to discover whether "the causal link [is] not in the reverse direction, from prosperity to piety."<sup>19</sup> Clines neither pinpoints *haśśātān*'s concern nor, as Clines claims, divorces the issue from questions of motive. If prosperity causes Job's piety, the problem with Job's piety is that it lacks an authentic, genuine, motivating drive. I do

<sup>16</sup>HABEL (1985), 61. <sup>17</sup>CLINES (1989), 25-26. <sup>18</sup>CLINES (1989), 28. <sup>19</sup>CLINES (1989), 25.

not think it matters to *haśśātān* whether Job is pious so as to get rich or pious because he is rich; *any condition connecting piety to prosperity compromises piety.*<sup>20</sup>

If any condition connects piety to prosperity, then *ḥinnām* —translated “for naught” in *haśśātān*'s question “Is it for naught that Job fears God?”—cannot be read in a purely compensatory sense. *ḥinnām* does have meanings associated with recompense or compensation in several of its contexts, e.g., “wage-free” in Gen 29:15; Jer 22:13; “debt-free” in Exod 21:2, 11; “cost-free” in Num 11:5; 2 Sam 24:24. Yet more often and outside these contexts associated exclusively with compensation, it means “without purpose,” “without cause,” “in vain,” or “for no end,” often relating to random acts of violence perpetuated against innocent victims,<sup>21</sup> but not always.<sup>22</sup> For my purposes, Ezek 14:23 provides the most interesting occurrence of the word outside Job 1-2. Immediately after stating that even Job could not save Jerusalem from the destruction YHWH has prepared for it (Ezek 14:14, 20), YHWH promises to leave a remnant whose ways and deeds will be enough for the exiles to know that YHWH did not act “without cause” (*ḥinnām*). In other words, the mercy of YHWH will extend to a portion of those who remain in Jerusalem, sparing them from the awful destruction to come, so that those exiled with the prophet can observe the Jerusalemites' abominable behavior and know that the seemingly excessive violence of the events has not superceded the meaningful boundaries of YHWH's justice. YHWH takes care to communicate to the exiles that YHWH's justice lies behind the sphere of causality that they experience and perceive as Neo-Babylonian aggression, Judean expansion, and Egyptian enticements.

Given that all these meanings of *ḥinnām* are related, there is no reason to deny it a compensatory connotation in Job 1:9. An exclusively compensatory translation (e.g., “Does

<sup>20</sup>Cf. the following, similar statement, “In my view, Satan is not questioning the direction of causality, but raising it as an issue in the first place” ALAN COOPER, “Reading and Misreading the Prologue to Job” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 46 (1990), 70.

<sup>21</sup>1 Sam 19:5; 25:31; 1 Kgs 2:31; Job 9:17; Ps 35:7; 69:4; 109:3; 119:161; Prov 1:11; Lam 3:52.

<sup>22</sup>*ḥinnām* means “in vain” in Prov 1:17; Mal 1:10; “without reason” in Prov 3:30; Ezek 14:23; “without cause” in Prov 23:29; 24:28; 26:2; Ezek 6:10; “to no end” in Isa 52:5. Cf. DAVID J.A. CLINES, editor, *The*

Job fear God for no reward?”<sup>23</sup>), however, does not simply limit the meaning of *ḥinnām*; it excludes other connotations. If *ḥinnām* is translated, for example, “without compensation,” then *haśśātān* is not interested in Job’s piety being “for *nothing*,” “*without* cause,” that is, in it being *un*-conditional, just in it being unconditioned by compensation. In other words, there are many conditions other than compensation that could render Job’s piety inauthentic by grounding it in something other than fearing God for the sake of fearing God alone. Although *haśśātān* implies that God’s blessing is a condition that renders the authenticity of Job’s piety at least indeterminable and at most suspect, he does not simply question whether Job would fear God if he were not compensated for fearing God; he questions whether Job fears God unconditionally.<sup>24</sup>

#### 16 *haśśātān*’S “COPERNICAN REVOLUTION” IN WISDOM

If I am right that *haśśātān*’s challenge means that authentic fear of God is not about pious behavior except insofar as it is unconditional, then we might see his notion of fear as a precursor to Kant’s notion of the ethical.<sup>25</sup> The crucial feature of Kant’s “Copernican revolution” in ethics is that “the law is no longer regarded as dependent on the Good, but on the contrary, the Good itself is made to depend on the law.”<sup>26</sup> Kant writes,

Thus the moral worth of an action does not lie in the effect expected from it and so too does not lie in any principle of action that needs to borrow its motive from this expected

*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew. III. Zayin-Teth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 271-72.

<sup>23</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 54. Others, e.g., ROWLEY (1970), 32; and WILSON (2007), 12, 23, also commend such a translation.

<sup>24</sup>Of course, other interpreters use a variant of the word “unconditionally” to describe that fear which *haśśātān* doubts Job displays, but their interpretations fail (some more, some less) to articulate the notion of unconditionality aimed at here. Newsom comes close when she reads the fear of God for naught as the “Fear of God as an absolute value,” and when she sees what is at stake “not simply as the testing of a virtue but the testing of the conditions that make this virtue possible” (2003a, 56).

<sup>25</sup>I am deeply influenced by discussions of Kant’s notion of the ethical in ALENKA ZUPANČIČ, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London; New York: Verso, 2000); and COPJEC (2002).

<sup>26</sup>GILLES DELEUZE, *Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 82.

effect. For, all these effects (agreeableness of one's condition, indeed even promotion of others' happiness) could have been brought about by other causes. . . Hence nothing other than the *representation of the law* in itself. . . insofar as it . . . is the determining ground of the will, can constitute the preeminent good we call moral.<sup>27</sup>

Kant argues that nothing but the law, nothing but duty,<sup>28</sup> "can give [our] actions. . . unconditional and moral worth."<sup>29</sup> All other motives he deems "pathological"<sup>30</sup>—meaning they affect humans and thus oppose their freedom to act.<sup>31</sup> With Kant, the moral law is unconditional; it "is itself the ground for any possible definition of the good."<sup>32</sup>

That this is congruent with the prologue of *JOB* should be obvious. Just as Kant's favorite examples of questionable morality describe philanthropists, honest merchants, those esteemed by the community as honorable, so too does *haśśātān* question someone whose pious behavior is sufficiently unquestionable not to distract from the true object of his challenge—authentic fear of God. The congruence between *haśśātān* and Kant, therefore, lies in the fact that *haśśātān* does not consider pious behavior as a true measure of authentic

<sup>27</sup>IMMANUEL KANT, "Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals" in *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996b), 56. Cf. Lacan's exhortation not to miss the radicalism even to the point of near insanity of the formula for the categorical imperative and Kant's second *Critique* more generally insofar as the ethical is therein divorced from the good: "That formula, which is, as you know, the central formula of Kant's ethics, is pursued by him to the limits of its consequences. His radicalism even leads to the paradox that in the last analysis the *gute Wille*, good will, is posited as distinct from any beneficial action. . . one must have submitted oneself to the test of reading this text in order to measure [its] extreme, almost insane character" JACQUES LACAN, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 77.

<sup>28</sup>KANT (1996b), e.g., 78. <sup>29</sup>KANT (1996b), 55. <sup>30</sup>KANT (1996b), 45.

<sup>31</sup>See, for example, IMMANUEL KANT, "Critique of Practical Reason" in *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996a), 237. De Kesel writes, "Desires, sorrow, passion (also the most noble ones) are 'pathological' in the sense that they affect and move people" MARC DE KESEL, *Eros and Ethics: Reading Jacques Lacan's Seminar VII* trans. by Sigi Jötkandt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 300n.8. Cf. ZUPANČIČ (2000), 7.

<sup>32</sup>ALENKA ZUPANČIČ, "The Subject of the Law" in *Cogito and the Unconscious* Edited by SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK.

fear of God. It is irrelevant whether Job acts out of self-interest, or genuinely thinks he is doing what is in the interest of his community, or even whether or not he wants to be wise or righteous; authentic fear of God is now defined only as the fear of God “for naught.”<sup>33</sup>

I am not suggesting that Kant has the same idea about morality as *haśśāṭān*, only that Kant’s distinction between the morality and the legality of an act helps clarify the terminological confusion that *haśśāṭān*’s question creates between authentic and inauthentic piety. “The mere conformity or nonconformity of an action with law, irrespective of the incentive [*Triebfeder*] to it, is called *legality* (lawfulness); but that conformity in which the idea of duty arising from the law is also the incentive to the action is called its *morality*.”<sup>34</sup> So, actions that are done in accordance with one’s duty are legal, but not yet ethical; but if they are done exclusively for the sake of duty, then they are ethical. The ethical is “essentially a supplement,”<sup>35</sup> “a surplus or an excess”<sup>36</sup> over legality.

With Kant’s distinction in mind, I propose that piety be associated with legality; pious behavior is behavior done in accordance with sapiential norms of activity. This is what Job was already doing and not what *haśśāṭān* challenges. As Weiss writes, “There is in Satan’s question no rejection, nor even any doubt, of God’s claim that Job is God-fearing.”<sup>37</sup> Kant’s (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 49.

<sup>33</sup>This evacuation of any motivating content from the fear of God reverses the later tradition that the Satan is cast out of heaven by God’s angels (cf. Rev 12:7-9). Since the fear of God epitomizes wisdom (cf. Job 28:28; Prov 1:7; 9:10), it is fair to say that *haśśāṭān* here reaches up into heaven to cast out Woman-Wisdom as a temptress who can only lead to inauthentic wisdom and make fools of sages—by her encouragement of wise activity on the basis of her qualities, her appeals to the self-interest of the sages, to their notion of the good, and so on.

<sup>34</sup>IMMANUEL KANT, “The Metaphysics of Morals” in *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996c), 383.

<sup>35</sup>ZUPANČIĆ (2000), 16.

<sup>36</sup>ZUPANČIĆ (2000), 12.

<sup>37</sup>WEISS (1983), 45. Others recognize this as well, e.g., Clines: *haśśāṭān* “assents to the assessment of Job expressed by the narrator (v 1) and God (v 8)! He cannot call into question Job’s incomparable piety” (CLINES, 1989, 25); and Janzen: “That Job is pious (fears God), the Satan has no doubt” (JANZEN, 1985, 39).

conception of the ethical act congrues instead with *haśśātān*'s conception of the authentic fear of God as an act conditioned by nothing but the fear of God. In other words, *haśśātān* challenges what Kant calls the morality of Job's actions, what I here term wisdom. Wisdom is the most appropriate term since the fear of God encapsulates and epitomizes wisdom in Israel's wisdom tradition (cf. Job 28:28 and Proverbs' motto verses of 1:7 and 9:10). Rather than challenge whether Job is faithful to some general or objective sense of wisdom or sapiential duty, *haśśātān*'s question constructs a new conception of what it means to be wise by grounding the fear of God in a purely subjective capacity.

So, with regard to my redress of the first of the consensus' answers, what *haśśātān* challenges is whether Job's behavior is not only pious but also wise, the wise being a surplus dimension above and beyond questions of piety and impiety.<sup>38</sup> With *haśśātān*'s challenge the wise act becomes the pious act accomplished for nothing other than the act of fearing God itself. (Whence the chapter's title.) This need not imply that the sage is unconcerned with the consequences of his fearful act, only that he is not motivated by them.

Before proceeding to the next section, I pause to make two observations to which I will return below.

1. Thus far I have referred to piety in a more or less formal sense as that behavior which the community judges to conform to duty and be worthy of praise and encouragement. The prologue takes for granted that its readers will know whether or not Job's act is pious and asks instead whether this act is *not only* pious *but also* wise. That this sense of piety in the prologue lacks content need not be seen as evidence of the prologue's oversight or (illicit)

<sup>38</sup>This is to arrive at a conclusion that is quite close to that at which Newsom arrives in her monograph, albeit on a path guided by a different set of philosophical categories. She calls *haśśātān* a "proto-Nietzschean figure" whose question proposes a "clever genealogy of piety. . . In this surprisingly philosophical tale, what is at stake is not simply the testing of a virtue but the testing of the conditions that make this virtue possible" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 56). Of course, describing the question as one about "conditions of possibility" cannot help but make us think she has Kant in mind even if she does not pursue the allusion as this dissertation tries to do.

assumption that pious behavior is an unproblematic or ahistorical. I will argue instead that this absence stems from the book's claim that all wisdom and piety is conditioned upon a *particular* event, which thus prevents it from speaking about any *general* sense of piety.

2. Kant provides a helpful point of access to the ethical quandary of *ḥinnām*, and Kant's notion of the "pathological" allows us to conceptualize the notion of authenticity with greater semantic precision than usual. These benefits notwithstanding, there is a problem with the attempt to transpose Kant's ethical act, which I showed to be determined by nothing other than "the *representation of the law* in itself," with a sapiential equivalent: "the fear of God for the sake of fearing God alone." The question is whether these evocations of "in itself" or "for its sake alone" meet *ḥaśśātān*'s requirement of *ḥinnām*. In short, is fear for fear's sake the same as fear for nothing? In the end, as the ensuing argument demonstrates, I think not, since I think that the book does not endorse any notion of a transcendental a priori. The nothing for which one fears is not an a priori moral principle, but is instead conditioned by what is nothing or unconditioned within a particular situation.

#### 17 REREADING JOB'S PRE-AFFLICTED PIETY

Up to now I have argued that *ḥaśśātān*'s challenge aims not merely at some particular condition(s) of Job's piety, but rather at what would be universally unconditional about it. The consequences of this argument for the rest of the consensus interpretation outlined above I treat in detail below. Before getting to these implications I want to analyze how, if at all, this (re)interpretation of the challenge compels a different understanding of Job's pre-afflicted piety.

Recall that Job's only act of piety that the prologue reports prior to his afflictions are his regular sacrifices for the potential sins of his children. The text reads:

And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "It may be



that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” Thus Job did continually.

(1:5)

Newsom explains why one should especially attend to this act:

Since this is a didactic story, the words and actions of the main character are some of the most important guides to its values. Although Job's character had been briefly described in the opening words of the book, verses 4-5 provide the narrative example that gives content to the general description.<sup>39</sup>

There seem to be two basic ways of understanding these sacrifices. When interpreters allow no shadow of *has̄s̄āt̄ān*'s doubt to be cast on Job's piety, they usually see in the sacrifices a display of Job's excessive piety, the way it seems “over the top” and perhaps already extends beyond any zero-sum cost-benefit analysis. Wilson, for example, writes,

A single example of his almost compulsive caution and scrupulous attention to religious detail illustrates Job's piety. . . . Job performed this sacrificial ritual early in the morning as a sign of his seriousness and diligence, not allowing anything to intrude to inhibit his purpose. . . . Job takes great care to respond with effective sacrificial precautions to even a hint of a possible curse (in their hearts). Verse 5 concludes with the assurance that such scrupulousness characterized Job's regular custom.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, if interpreters grant *has̄s̄āt̄ān*'s challenge some credibility, they seem to be on the lookout for Job's selfishness and find in the sacrifices an outward expression of Job's inner conviction that he has a contract with God, that he and God are mutually subjected to a law of retribution that protects and blesses him if he remains pious. So, Van Wolde writes,

He gives the impression of being a believer who thinks that he must be in control of everything. He appears to be someone who implicitly knows what is right and what is wrong and what pleases or displeases God, as if he could have God's perspective. What at

<sup>39</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 54. <sup>40</sup>WILSON (2007), 19-20.

first sight seemed to be clear proof of Job's piety later begins to look a little ambiguous and perhaps less favourable.<sup>41</sup>

Seen from this angle, Job tries to control with his sacrifices even what is beyond his person but what threatens his or his children's prosperity according to their contract with God.

These divergent interpretive directions share a common understanding of the subjective position from which Job offers his sacrifices. Whether it is confident piety or cocksure dogmatism, both think Job sacrifices from a position of certitude. However, one of the only details we are given about Job's piety tells us that he fears God on account of a truth that he does not know and about which he is uncertain—whether his children have somehow transgressed. Job sacrifices out of a subjective position of uncertainty. With them he tries to anticipate, capture, or satisfy the desire of God. Job performs them regularly, literally “all the days,” and so one should understand Job's sacrifices not only as responses to some contingent detail that has escaped his knowledge but also as evidence of his disciplinary devotion to sustaining himself in a state of ignorance about a truth he does not know.

One of Lacan's statements on sacrifice may clarify where I think many interpretations of Job's sacrifices err. Sacrifice is made in the hope that it will capture God's desire, but it is not simply a matter of course.<sup>42</sup> “This is not to say that [the gods] are going to eat what is sacrificed to them, nor even that it can be of any use to them; but the important thing is that they desire it and, I would say further, that it does not make them anxious.”<sup>43</sup> Lacan's point is that sacrifice is never a zero-sum activity, a contractual certainty. Out of his anxiety before the desire of an Other that is, by definition, finally unknowable, the sacrificer offers objects that attempt to capture the desire of this Other but, necessarily,

<sup>41</sup>ELLEN VAN WOLDE, “The Development of Job: Mrs Job as Catalyst” in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature* Edited by ATHALYA BRENNER. (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1995), 202.

<sup>42</sup>“Je vous dirai brièvement que le sacrifice n'est pas du tout destiné à l'offrande ni au don, qui se propagent dans une bien autre dimension, mais à la capture de l'Autre dans le réseau de désir” JACQUES LACAN, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X: Angoisse, 1962-1963* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004), 320.

<sup>43</sup>LACAN (2004), 321; cf. LACAN, 5.6.63.

can never do so with confident certitude. A surplus of the Other's desire always potentially exceeds or escapes the sacrifice (as in the phenomenon of rejected or inadequate sacrifices present throughout the Bible and perhaps most strikingly so at its very beginning, with the rejection of Cain's sacrifice<sup>44</sup>). The practice of sacrifice thus instills a lack of knowledge on the side of the sacrificer by locating true wisdom in an Other, but this practice also gives the sacrificer something to do about this lack—*ad infinitum*.

I will refer to the subjective structure that characterizes Job's practice of regular sacrifices as an obedience to a law or logic of *sacrifice*.<sup>45</sup> This logic of sacrifice also characterizes wisdom literature more generally. The book of Proverbs forms fearers of YHWH in relation to a universal wisdom that is the organic whole linking all creation<sup>46</sup>—the Cause of causes, complete understanding—but that is not finally a possible object of human knowledge.<sup>47</sup> Banished from the realm of human understanding, the sages can seek and incrementally advance toward wisdom, but cannot finally claim to have found it (thus the many admonitions to fear, be open to instruction, and especially, never to be "wise in one's own eyes"

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<sup>44</sup>W. Brueggemann, who has amply appreciated this point about the surplus of God's desire over any act of sacrifice, writes the following about God's rejection of Cain's sacrifice in Gen 4, "Both brothers do what is appropriate. Both bring their best. . . Inexplicably, Yahweh chooses—accepts and rejects. Conventional interpretation is too hard on Cain and too easy on Yahweh. It is Yahweh who transforms a normal report into a life/death story for us and about us. Essential to the plot is the capricious freedom of Yahweh" WALTER BRUEGGEMANN, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 56.

<sup>45</sup>For another of Lacan's meditations on sacrifice to which this discussion is indebted, see LACAN (1977, 275-76).

<sup>46</sup>The standard citation here is Prov 3:19: "The LORD by wisdom founded earth, he established heaven by understanding."

<sup>47</sup>The modality of the universal is that of an exclusion. For a discussion of various debates about universalism in resources to which my discussion here and below is inextricably tied, see KENNETH REINHARD, "Universalism and the Jewish Exception: Lacan, Badiou, Rosenzweig" *Umbr(a)*, (2005), 43-71, and especially the work cited therein by Hegel, Freud, Lacan, Laclau, Badiou, Žižek, and Copjec.

e.g., Prov 12:15; 16:2; 21:2; 26:5, 12, 16; 28:11).<sup>48</sup> The sapiential framing of life as a path and of wisdom as a search or process (e.g., Prov 1:15; 2:8, 13, 20; 3:17; 4:11, 18-19; 5:21; 7:27; 8:32; 9:6; 12:28; Job 17:9; 22:3, 15; 23:11; 28:23; 31:7),<sup>49</sup> offers the promise of progress but requires that progress remain infinite. Wisdom is universalized by the sages' collective renunciation, their sacrifices of any universal assertions on the basis of their particular wisdoms. Said differently, the sages form a set, become an "All," on the basis of an exception, i.e., the transcendent Other who has access to wisdom. The sages pursue a wisdom that is not limited by anything within the world, and they do so by maintaining a level of contempt for their own wisdoms, ever fearfully searching for evidence that they have failed to attain what they have in mind to become.<sup>50</sup> Important in understanding Job's pre-afflicted piety (and the fear of God in traditional wisdom) is therefore the ignorance and uncertainty Job sustains in carrying out his perpetual sacrifices.

#### 18 THE CONSENSUS ACCOUNT OF WHAT MAKES THE TEST POSSIBLE

Having proposed that *hasśātān* incites a test aimed at discovering whether Job's piety is *unconditional* rather than *not self-interested*, and having reconsidered Job's pre-afflicted subjective position as disciplined devotion to uncertainty rather than dogged certitude, the argument turns now to the remaining two questions I defined at the outset as foundational for any understanding of the prologue:

<sup>48</sup>Cf. E. Davis' recent comment: "The willingness to be ignorant in this deepest sense is what the biblical writers call 'the fear of YHWH.' It is 'the beginning of wisdom' (Prov 1:7), for its essence is the rejection of arrogance and intellectual dishonesty" ELLEN F. DAVIS, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 35.

<sup>49</sup>CRENSHAW (1998) can be taken as representative of the common conception that these are appropriate metaphors for wisdom; cf. FOX (2000), 128-31; and NORMAN C. HABEL, "Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9" *Interpretation*, 26 (1972), 131-57.

<sup>50</sup>My language here intentionally follows IMMANUEL KANT, *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996d), 109n. This part of Kant's teaching on morality is discussed

- On what basis could the test take place? And,
- How can we know whether Job has passed or failed?

The thirteen interpreters cited at the outset attest to these consensus responses:

- Job’s affliction makes a display of authentic piety possible; and
- Job’s pious behavior after the affliction will prove YHWH right about Job, whereas *haśśāṭān* needs Job to reject or curse YHWH to be right.

In this and the next few sections I deal with the consensus’ response to the second question. After offering an account of the meaning and the basis for this response, I raise an issue that seems to me to (ex)pose an ultimately fatal problem for this response. After surveying the uncoordinated set of issues raised by the tale and made visible by the consensus approach’s failure to coordinate them, I develop an alternative approach for understanding those issues.

On the one hand, the idea that Job’s affliction provides the condition that makes the test of his piety possible is a truism. The logic of the story clearly requires that the reader understand the affliction as a precondition for the test. But how is it that this affliction makes this test possible? The most common answers appeal to two related reasons: first, that once Job is afflicted with the loss of everything he has, he has nothing for which he can be said to fear God and so, if he fears God, it must be for naught.<sup>51</sup>

The second reason involves a theological dimension of the test that I have not yet acknowledged and that requires a bit more explanation. *haśśāṭān*’s challenge—does Job fear God unconditionally? (1:9)—raises suspicions not only that Job may not truly fear God but also that God Godself is not truly feared. Job fears on account of some condition, not God-for-Godself. Despite the fact that God may have created the condition, or may desire to be associated with the condition, or any other apparently mitigating factor that connects God to whatever conditions Job’s fear, if Job’s fear is conditioned by anything in a particularly relevant way by COPJEC (2002, ch.5), to whom I am here and throughout indebted.

<sup>51</sup>Recall Wilson’s statement cited above, “The upshot of the double tests Job endures in the first two chapters is to show that, indeed, it is possible for a human like Job to continue to live in fear of God even when he loses everything and stands on the brink of death without the hope of restoration” (WILSON, 2007, 12).

other than his desire to fear God, God is not truly feared. Of course, as plenty of interpreters note, that *haśśātān* follows his question about Job's fear in 1:9 with another in 1:10 that is "directed at God's activity in protecting and blessing Job"<sup>52</sup> suggests that he is also thinking of this theological dimension. Janzen nicely articulates the necessary theological correlate of unconditional piety:

Is the creator of the world and the divine benefactor of humankind worshipful only by virtue of what deity does for humankind? Or is God intrinsically worshipful? Is deity capable of creating a creature who, somehow, attains to such freedom and independence, such spiritual and moral maturity, as to be in a position to choose to offer God worship and service because of God's intrinsic worthiness to be loved?<sup>53</sup>

The way God becomes disengaged from "what deity does" in the minds and worship of humanity is by acting in such a way that cannot be construed as conditional, as following a law. So, Clines writes, "Job has been smitten 'for nothing' (*ḥinnām*). That means to say: the law of retribution has been broken!"<sup>54</sup> To summarize, the act of God in afflicting Job is supposed to make the test of Job's wisdom (authentic fear of God) possible because (i) it leaves Job with nothing on account of which he can be said to fear God, and (ii) it disconnects God from any predictable, causal condition on account of which Job could be said to fear God.<sup>55</sup> Thus, if Job exhibits pious behavior after the affliction, one can surmise that it is for naught, that Job has passed the test, and that God has been truly worshiped.

<sup>52</sup>CAROL A. NEWSOM, "The Book of Job" in *The New Interpreter's Bible* Volume 4. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 348.

<sup>53</sup>JANZEN (1985), 41.

<sup>54</sup>CLINES (1989), 43.

<sup>55</sup>"Privy to the heavenly give-and-take, the reader learns that Yahweh desires unconditional loyalty – fear of God 'for naught'. . . Yahweh, like any ruler, naturally wants his subjects' loyalty, but only the reader learns just how important it is to him. He needs it. He takes pride in it. He wagers on it. He breaches his own justice to make it possible. . . One cause of unwarranted suffering, perhaps the only one, is nothing less than God's need for human fidelity" (MICHAEL V. FOX, "Job the Pious" *ZAW*, 117 (2005), 362, 363). The problem with Fox's interpretation will soon be clarified if it is not already apparent in the difference between

19 *haśśātān*'s WAGER

But there may be reason to doubt the apparent soundness with which this argument accounts for the conditions that make the test of Job's fear possible. I approach this critique by way of the figure of *haśśātān*. In JOB, *haśśātān* is best described as "a particular divine being in the heavenly court, one whose specialized function was to seek out and accuse persons disloyal to God."<sup>56</sup> This is not the Satan who is opposed to God in a later dualistic cosmology, but "Yahweh's subordinate, presenting himself before him as one of his courtiers, responding to Yahweh's initiatives, and powerless to act without Yahweh's authorization."<sup>57</sup> He may be YHWH's subordinate but, as Alter observes, in contrast to the short, direct speech of God,

in his relatively longer speeches, [*haśśātān*] shows a fondness for verse-insets, clever citation of folk-sayings, argumentative positioning of syntactical members for the most persuasive effect. In short, as befits a prosecuting attorney, he is a master of conscious rhetoric, alongside of whom God seems plainspoken.<sup>58</sup>

If Alter is correct, then the riches of *haśśātān*'s rhetoric pale in comparison to the poverty of his behavioral analysis, for it is a true gamble to bet that people suffering unfavorable circumstances lose their piety. Persons without "favourable external circumstances"<sup>59</sup> are often those who exhibit the most pious behavior. Witness Daniel when faced with the lions' den (Dan 6:11, 24) or King Hezekiah surrounded by the Neo-Assyrian army (2 Kgs 19:1-4). People who suffer great loss often describe faith as the only response they considered possible in the event of their loss, as if the event itself were the cause of their turn toward faith. Are such sufferers not the ones who often wax most eloquent about the blessing and goodness of God? Of course, this is not always the case: "The baby lies gravely ill, and the

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his notion of unconditionality and the one proposed here.

<sup>56</sup>NEWSOM (1996), 347. <sup>57</sup>CLINES (1989), 20.

<sup>58</sup>ROBERT ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 74. <sup>59</sup>DELL (1991), 30.

father rejects God,”<sup>60</sup> is how Newsom describes one failure of the test. But when it comes to challenging YHWH, is the latter really what the clever and masterful *śāṭān* bets Job will do?

Yet does Job have to reject or curse God to fail the test? In *haśśāṭān*'s incitement there lies a well-known ambiguity. The word translated “curse” actually means “bless,” supposedly a euphemistic substitution necessitated by a pious scribal aversion to write anything approximating a curse of God. Although there is not enough evidence to support the idea that this substitution is in any sense standard,<sup>61</sup> there is at least one other example where it is used in an ironic and/or antithetical sense (in 1 Kgs 21:13 it is unimaginable that Naboth would be charged, convicted, and sentenced to death for “blessing” God and king<sup>62</sup>), and it is not used in any straightforward sense here or, for that matter, in most if not all of its other five occurrences in the prologue (1:5, 10, 21; 2:5, 9). In any case, if the test is not simply a test but also a kind of wager between YHWH—who bets that Job will remain pious—and *haśśāṭān*—who bets that Job will curse YHWH—it is odd that *haśśāṭān* actually bets that Job will bless YHWH.

Scholars have dealt with this interpretive peculiarity in several ways. Traditionally and most often, interpreters are content to substitute “curse” for “bless” in the name of the euphemism thesis and proceed as if there were no surplus of meaning created by the substitution.<sup>63</sup> More recently, interpreters have paid greater attention to the peculiar use of this root here and throughout the prologue. So, for example, Van Wolde decides that *brk* means bless in 1:10 and 1:21, but curse in 1:5, 11; and 2:5. The experience of having encountered the root used for both meanings forces the reader to appreciate that it could have either

<sup>60</sup>NEWSOM (1996), 358. <sup>61</sup>See TOD LINAFFELT, “The Undecidability of *BRK* in the Prologue to Job and Beyond” *Biblical Interpretation*, 4 (1996), 162.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. LINAFFELT (1996), 160.

<sup>63</sup>See LINAFFELT (1996), 154–72, for a list and discussion of the representative resources.



meaning in its final use by Job's wife (2:9).<sup>64</sup> In what has become the standard reference for the question of  $\sqrt{brk}$ 's meaning in the prologue, Linafelt argues for more far-reaching consequences:

My contention is that this semantic undecidability is an indicator of a theological faultline that runs the length of the book. Tremors associated with this faultline will no doubt be felt at various points in the book, but are felt most keenly on points of blessing and curse, life and death. That is, the book of Job functions to redefine (or at least reexamine the assumptions of) the meaning of *brk*.<sup>65</sup>

In other words, Linafelt and others<sup>66</sup> think this ambiguity is best read as a meta-level indication that this story and this book unsettle any straightforward meaning of blessing and cursing. This profound thesis nonetheless stops short of accounting for any sense in which Job could be said to have passed the test for unconditional fear. My reading of 1:11 is thus a bit different than Linafelt's, and it derives from my thesis that what *haśśātān* challenges is whether Job fears God *unconditionally*.

What kind of a victory would it be for YHWH to win the wager because Job exhibits piety despite suffering? In avoiding the charge that the faithful relate to YHWH as a crude mechanism of retribution, how could YHWH avoid the risk of being perceived as, to borrow a phrase from Freud, "a kind of prosthetic God"<sup>67</sup> whose qualities support reality when and where it fails to stand on its own? How could God's intrinsic worthiness of worship be proven if Job worships when something bad happens? Does worship not often follow an opposite logic to that of fair-weather-fans so that many faithful persons experience guilt

<sup>64</sup>"He can curse God, which might make God leave him and result in his death. Alternatively, Job can bless God and die with that blessing on his lips" (VAN WOLDE, 1995, 204). SEOW (2007, 371-73), also concludes that 2:9 presents the only ambiguous case, the other five dividing into clear euphemistic or literal uses.

<sup>65</sup>LINAFELT (1996), 168.

<sup>66</sup>E.g., COOPER (1990), 77: "It seems to me that Job 1-2 is raising profound questions about what b-r-k really means. Is it, after all, so obvious what it means to bless, or to be blessed?"

<sup>67</sup>FREUD (1961 [1929]), 91-92. In the original, "eine Art Prothesengott" SIGMUND FREUD, *Gesammelte*

about inauthenticity when, during times of hardship, they find themselves turning to God more often and with more earnestness? It is at such times that pious people often find themselves vowing never to let their faith lapse again, or always to persist in the zeal that they presently feel, or offering various other conditional commitments.<sup>68</sup>

The nub of the argument is this: if *hasśātān* were really interested in challenging God's intrinsic worthiness to be worshipped, rather than that Job would lose his faith if he suffered, it would be much more clever for him to suggest that suffering would make Job ever more faithful, would make Job *bless* God. Thus the indeterminate bless/curse problem in 1:11 is the result of a test that befits the function of *hasśātān* in content as much as it does in rhetorical style: from this perspective blessing could curse Job's worship with inauthenticity as much as cursing. If Job worships God, such worship does not necessarily have anything to do with God's intrinsic worthiness to be worshipped and Job's unconditional fear. Why would *hasśātān* not accuse Job of looking to God as a prosthesis, hoping for a way to overcome his failures and afflictions or to avoid losing his soul, which is all that is left to him? If Job's fear cannot be determined as wise because it appears to be conditioned by his affluence, then his affliction can no less appear to condition his fear. And if one cannot be sure that God is worshipped unconditionally when Job's worship appears to be conditioned by God's blessing, God's affliction cannot but lead to the same suspicion. God will seem to have scared rather than blessed Job into fearing God. Of course, if Job curses God, as all recognize, Job will seem to have only ever worshipped God for the sake of his favorable external circumstances. *hasśātān*'s cleverness is thus to set up a test that will not allow the kind of fear to be displayed that he bets Job will not exhibit.

Before asking whether *hasśātān* has succeeded in setting up a wager he cannot lose, it is worth noting that the consensus approach similarly frames Job's post-affliction acts such that they cannot accommodate any sense of an unconditional act. By treating the

*Werke* (GW) (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), band 14, p.451.

<sup>68</sup>It is for this reason, of course, that one rarely finds atheists in foxholes.

affliction as the condition for Job's act of free fear, and his post-affliction piety as proof of such an act, the consensus approach treats the empirical condition of Job's affliction as the basis on which his fear could be judged free and unconditional, and so it never even gives Job a chance to act unconditionally. The most conspicuous blindspot generated by the consensus' mistaken approach is its failure to perceive that unfavorable circumstances, hardship, and affliction can condition piety as much as favorable ones. Job was pious before his affliction but that was not enough to prove his wisdom, and his pious behavior after his affliction is no less unable, on its own, to display wisdom. After *haśśātān*'s challenge, what matters is not pious behavior except insofar as it is accomplished *ḥinnām*, unconditionally. Piety conditioned by the failure to perceive a causal chain connecting historical events is as unwise as piety conditioned by the perception of causality because neither is the unconditional piety that *haśśātān*'s challenge defines as authentic.

Far from solving anything, this critique of the consensus has instead clarified a deeper issue facing all readings of the prologue: how can the affliction (which creates certain conditions) be coordinated with the test (of something unconditional). On the one hand, according to the logic of the story, the affliction is a precondition for the test. On the other, the tale is set up as a question about the possibility of unconditional fear. How can an unconditioned act be grasped as contingent upon certain preconditions? For now I will leave this question suspended on the promise that I will return to it below.

## 20 YHWH'S POSITIVE JUDGMENT AND CURIOUS CHARACTERIZATION

YHWH clearly thinks that a wise act is possible and actualized by the post-afflicted Job. Here is YHWH's judgment and confession to *haśśātān* after the affliction: "Still [Job] perseveres in his blamelessness though you incited me against him to swallow him up for naught" (2:3b). While it may be that YHWH is as mistaken as the commentators, this could only be admitted after one had failed to discern any basis in the tale for YHWH's judgment. Since neither *haśśātān*, nor the narrator, nor anyone else registers any disagreement or

discomfort with YHWH's judgment, such a possibility seems implausible. Perhaps, then, while I have tried to give the devil his due by accounting for the complexity of his wager, YHWH's judgment implies that his wager does not completely account for the situation.

This question of whether there is any basis in the tale for YHWH's judgment is not the only one raised by 2:3. What does God mean by claiming to have acted "for naught," (*ḥinnām*, discussed at length in section 15)?<sup>69</sup> It is an odd predication of this act, and it is all the more intriguing in light of the crucial role *ḥinnām* plays in the development of the narrative. All those slain by the affliction hinder reading *ḥinnām* as "to no end" in the sense of "without consequence." Clearly, YHWH's act had consequences. Some read it as "in vain," thinking that YHWH says that the affliction was ineffective or unnecessary.<sup>70</sup> However, it is difficult to grasp the affliction as unnecessary or ineffective when it clearly creates the conditions that allow YHWH to judge Job's wisdom. That is, the logic of the tale suggests that the affliction is necessary since YHWH can only judge whether Job's fear is free *after* the affliction. The affliction is not "in vain" since it enables the test to take place.

How then can one understand *ḥinnām* in 2:3? In one of two ways. First, *ḥinnām* could indicate that YHWH's act was unconditioned in the sense that no conditions in Job's situation could reasonably account for the swallowing up that YHWH carries out.<sup>71</sup> That is, none of the conditions of Job's pre-afflicted life are sufficient to account for the affliction he suffers.

<sup>69</sup>Although YHWH clearly confesses responsibility for "swallowing Job up" here in 2:3, and although *ḥaśśātān* at least only acts on God's authority and at most should be understood as a hypostasis of divine doubt, YHWH does not stretch forth his hand to strike all that is Job's as *ḥaśśātān* suggests (1:11), and instead places all that is Job's in *ḥaśśātān*'s hand (1:12). But, as Newsom contends, "the difference is not significant. Yahweh and the *satan* have, metaphorically, joined hands to destroy Job" (NEWSOM, 1996, 350).

<sup>70</sup>E.g., FRANCIS I. ANDERSEN, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1976), 90.

<sup>71</sup>For example, see NEWSOM (1996), 354. Cf. the quote by FOX (2005, 363), cited above on page 104.

However, this is not the only way to understand the predication of an act as “for nothing.” As opposed to denying a predicate to the subject, one might also read the predication as affirming a non-predicate of the subject. Let me explain by example. If one wants to negate the statement “this is real,” one could either say “this is not real,” which would deny the predicate to the subject, or, “this is unreal,” which affirms a positive sense of “not-realness” of the subject. “This is not real” clearly means something different than “this is unreal.” I believe that one could read 2:3 in similarly different senses: either “the affliction lacks some condition,” or, “the affliction creates something unconditioned.” I will explain this difference below. For now, suffice it to say that, like the example, the latter sense affirms a non-predicate of the subject, designating a certain unconditioned condition that the affliction creates within Job's conditions. I will argue below that YHWH's act creates a positive sense of “nothingness” within Job's conditions for which he can act (or not) and thereby pass (or fail) the test.

## 21 THE AFFLICTION AS JOB'S SYMBOLIC DEATH

This section begins a lengthy engagement with the details of the affliction so as to understand better YHWH's characterization of it as *ḥinnām* in 2:3 and thereby to understand better how the affliction makes the test possible. What is different about Job after YHWH's act? Two opposed responses immediately come to mind. On the one hand, nothing seems to change. The predicates shared across 1:8, 2:3, and 2:9—“blameless and upright, fearing God and turning from evil,” and “still persevering in his blamelessness”—strongly identify the pre-afflicted with the post-afflicted Job. On the other hand, everything is different and identifying these subjects thus predicated seems nearly obscene. The person Job is after the affliction is far from the one he was at the story's beginning. As for the latter, that Job has been devoured; it is he whom YHWH claims to have “swallowed up” (*bl*).

The word YHWH uses to characterize the affliction, *bl*, is often associated with destruc-

tion and death.<sup>72</sup> For all intents and purposes, YHWH's act kills the pre-afflicted Job; YHWH severs Job from the conditions of his life, destroys his ties to the community, and unmoors him from any context.<sup>73</sup> Job is gone, subtracted from the world. His friends recognize this when they perform symbolic actions in 2:11-13 about which Clines says, "Everything in their actions treats him as one already dead (not as one on the point of death, as Terrien thinks), and the seven days and nights fit in as a period of mourning."<sup>74</sup> YHWH does not *extract* Job out of his historical context, but *subtracts* from him all that he identified with and all contexts in relation to which he located himself so that only his "bare life"<sup>75</sup> remains. Mathewson notes, apropos the reports Job receives about the affliction, "The order in which Job's livestock are lost and/or killed. . . is almost the complete reversal of the order in which the introduction lists his blessings."<sup>76</sup> The narrative depicts the affliction as a nearly point-by-point removal of all that has been predicated of Job.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup>The earth swallows the Egyptian pursuers after the exodus in Exod 15:12; the earth swallows the Korahites et al in Num 16 and 26 (cf. Deut 11:6; Ps 106:17); Isaiah, in a typical poetic flourish, promises YHWH will swallow up death itself in Isa 25:7-8; Sheol is depicted as swallowing lives in several places (Num 16:30; Prov 1:12; cf. Ps 69:15); Lam 2 characterizes YHWH's destruction of Israel as a swallowing up (vv. 2, 5, 8, 16). Cf. MATHEWSON (2006), 29, who includes *bl* in 2:3; 8:18; and 10:8 under his "sub-category of death words in *Job*. . . that, by themselves, have several meanings—some of which do not necessarily pertain to death—but in their particular contexts in *Job* likely refer to death."

<sup>73</sup>Cf. 19:13-19, translated and discussed on page 308, wherein Job describes his loss as God's alienation of him from all his social relationships.

<sup>74</sup>CLINES (1989), 64.

<sup>75</sup>Although I suppose dependency cannot be ruled out, a concept of "bare life" that is more rigorous and famous than that found in DRIVER and GRAY (1921, liii), who use this term to refer to Job in the quote cited at the beginning of this chapter, has been developed by GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>76</sup>MATHEWSON (2006), 51. The same point is made by BALENTINE (2006), 56.

<sup>77</sup>SAM MEIER, "Job I-II: A Reflection of Genesis I-III" *Vetus Testamentum*, 39 (1989), 187-88, opposes the movement in Genesis from chaos to a "very good" cosmos, to the prologue's disintegration of Job's perfect world. He therefore names what takes place in the prologue a "de-creation" which, although my concern is

Swallowed up, Job declares himself naked (1:21a), stripped, and he identifies YHWH as the agent who has given and taken away (1:21b) that objective substance to which his bare life, his naked subjectivity, had previously been related.<sup>78</sup> It is remarkable that, in the event of his encounter with YHWH, which has ended in the destruction of himself, Job recognizes the gap that always separated him from his identity and identifications. Job acknowledges that the latter were not him; they were not external emanations from, or realizations or reflections of, his subjective essence, but rather were objective substances given to him by YHWH, impositions from an Other.<sup>79</sup>

Job's subjectivity, then, lies in what is essentially a force of negativity, of differentiation or distance of himself from any of his imaginary traits or symbolic predicates. In other words, Job's statement implies some sense of a distinction between (i) his ego-level identity and identifications, and (ii) himself as a substance-less subject.<sup>80</sup> In the affliction Job's ego is destroyed since the affliction subtracts from him any meaningful, socio-symbolic context.

So what could YHWH's claim to have swallowed Job up and Job's statement that YHWH stripped him naked teach us about what enables an unconditional act to be carried out? *In the divine encounter that makes a wise act possible, there is not a couple, a meeting* strictly immanent to the tale, is not a bad name for what I am describing.

<sup>78</sup>Newsom has pointed out that the formal and grammatical parallelism between his first and second statements "invites one to treat the two statements as part of a paradigmatic set, with the similar terms analogous to one another. The going forth and returning of birth and death are simply one way of describing what can also be expressed as YHWH's giving and taking. Thus, the two verbs, 'give' and 'take,' negotiate the space between the first and final nakedness. One is naked, and YHWH gives those things that clothe life; YHWH takes those things, and one returns naked to death" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 59).

<sup>79</sup>About Job's statement in 1:21, Newsom similarly writes, "Implicitly, the saying analogizes both property and human relationships to clothes. They are put on, yet... one does not inalienably possess such things" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 58).

<sup>80</sup>This difference between a positive or substantial ego and a negative or substance-less subject is not only something I will return to below, it is also foundational to the philosophical and psychoanalytic coordinates of this dissertation. For the most thorough discussion of the Lacanian/Hegelian conception of subjectivity that informs my work, see JOHNSTON (2008b).

*of two ones, a meeting of a one and an Other, but a splitting of the one from itself.* Every predicate reckoned to Job up to this point in his life is devoured in the affliction; Job is split off from what or whomever one may have thought of as Job.

## 22 THE *nepeš* THAT SURVIVES; JOB'S LIFE BETWEEN TWO DEATHS

The question that then arises is: what is the subject, person, or thing that survives this encounter with YHWH? On first approach, the answer is clearly: YHWH demands that Job's self (1:12) and his *nepeš* (2:6) survive the affliction. However, once one tries to understand what this is—I will just call it his *nepeš*—in light of the text's testimony about what happened to Job, one must conclude that what YHWH calls *nepeš* takes on a new, or at least a more specific, meaning.

*nepeš* was classically translated "soul" (e.g., the KJV) but, in the interest of distinguishing it from the Greek and specifically (Neo-)Platonic conception of the soul as an (immortal) essence distinct and separable from the body (both corporeal and social), recent translations (e.g., the NRSV) often use "living being."<sup>81</sup> The clearest basis for grasping the range of meanings *nepeš* assumes in the Hebrew Bible derives from its etymological tie to the throat. The throat is one of the privileged zones of the human body where the "inside" meets the "outside." Breath, food, and speech, all of which sustain life, pass through the zone of the throat. To include speech in this list is to account for the sense *nepeš* has of being more than a primitive notion of biological or "mere life." In many contexts its meanings extend into notions such as "will" (Gen 23:8), "appetite" (Prov 13:25), and "desire" (Gen 34:3).<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup>For a recent discussion of biblical perspectives on personal identity and their treatment by scholars, see ROBERT A. DI VITO, "Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 61 (1999), 217–38.

<sup>82</sup>Cf. DAVID J.A. CLINES, editor, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew. V. Mem-Nun* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 724-733.



Whatever meaning one gives the “*nepeš*” that survives the affliction, he/it is something that lives, so to speak, “between two deaths,”<sup>83</sup> still alive despite his social/symbolic death. Here, *nepeš* cannot mean anything like a personality, an identity, the One of Job, his essence or totality, since the affliction has destroyed all such identifying traits. The affliction does not recenter Job in the *nepeš* that remains but radically decenters him. What was previously thought of as Job, his ego-level identity and identifications, has been split off from him as a dispensable object, and the thing that survives—the *nepeš*—is now Job.

To say that the text divorces from Job any identifying features that were previously attributed to him is to say that the *nepeš* that remains of him, that he now is, does not reflect him at all. This is why the prologue ends by telling us that *his friends* looked at him from a distance, but did not recognize him (2:12).<sup>84</sup> This detail ensures that we readers—who look at Job from an even greater distance—do not doggedly maintain the fantasy that Job remains recognizable by some essential trait. The effect of YHWH’s act can therefore be described both negatively and positively: YHWH has *subtracted* Job’s personal and social context from him and *added* him back into the world as an unrecognizable *nepeš*.

### 23 *ḥinnām*, ONCE AGAIN

It is at this point possible to return to the question introduced at the end of section 19 and in section 20 about the sense in which YHWH’s act can be considered both *ḥinnām* and

<sup>83</sup>“*Entre deux morts*” is how Lacan famously characterized Antigone who, in her act to bury her brother Polynices, defies Creon and is carried beyond her ties to the imaginary-symbolic world of the city. Lacan’s commentary on *Antigone* can be found in LACAN (1992), 241-83. The normal order, of course, is that the biological body dies first and then, some time later, the person dies a symbolic death as their legacy is forgotten. Funerals can thus be seen as affirmations of the symbolic life that survives biological death. One reason figures such as Antigone and Job seem so uncanny, therefore, is because they reverse this order. They become “dead (wo)men walking,” alive even after their symbolic deaths.

<sup>84</sup>Job’s appearance, in other words, is uncanny in the sense described by SIGMUND FREUD, “The Uncanny” in *SE XVII* (1955 [1919]b), 217–56. One of his examples is of a time when he, riding in a train car, misrecognized his own image in the mirror as another passenger who had mistakenly barged into his compartment.

generative of the conditions that could make Job's unconditional act possible.<sup>85</sup> The thesis I introduced at the end of section 20 can be understood now that I have shown that the affliction is simultaneously a subtraction and an addition. I suggested above that *ḥinnām* in 2:3 may be read both negatively—as an indication of an inability of the conditions of Job's life to account for the affliction—and positively—as an indication of a certain nothingness or unconditioned condition added to the conditions of Job's life. Whereas the notion of an unconditioned condition may have seemed abstract and amorphous above, it can now be seen as concretely as the image of Job on the ash heap scraping his discharging boils. The act of God is *ḥinnām* in the sense that it is surprising and could not have been anticipated by anyone within the conditions in which it occurs. First, it disturbs the sense of causality at work in the Imaginary-Symbolic world in which it occurs. Second, it creates an effect which appears to have come into being “out of nowhere,” an effect that appears within the world as unrecognizable to it. Objects, persons, things, &c., are recognizable when they are related to other objects, persons, things, &c., within a specular field. Job's unrecognizability implies that he is visible as a kind of stain or smudge within the specular field. After being swallowed and digested by YHWH, Job is deposited atop a pile of dung as a *nepeš*,<sup>86</sup> a

After getting up to redirect this passenger whose appearance he did not like, he realized he was looking at a mirror. The uncanny is not simply unfamiliar, it is the familiar once its familiarity has been sucked out of it.

<sup>85</sup>Although understandable on the basis of my exegesis and without knowledge of the use of such terms in the work of J. Lacan and others influenced by Lacan, especially the French philosopher A. Badiou, I should indicate their influences and acknowledge my debt to their important explorations of concepts such as an “event” or an “act.” Badiou's major, immense works, recently translated into English, are ALAIN BADIOU, *Being and Event* trans. by Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005); and ALAIN BADIOU, *Logics of Worlds* trans. by Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009). His smaller piece on Paul may be of more interest to biblical critics, ALAIN BADIOU, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* trans. by Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). For Lacan's part, he spoke in several places about a notion of the psychoanalytic act, but most significantly devoted an entire year's seminar to explicating it (and it was a significant year in Paris to explore what is involved in an act), JACQUES LACAN, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XV: The Psychoanalytic Act, 1967-68*

<sup>86</sup>The tradition about Job sitting upon a dunghill comes from the LXX, which has κοπριάς.

gratuitous, useless byproduct excreted from the Imaginary and Symbolic coordinates in which he is nonetheless “located.” YHWH’s act has been committed “for nothing” in the sense that it includes within the world Job *qua nepes̄* —an empty placeholder with no substantial link to the world. Job is included as excluded; there for the counting, Job cannot be counted as anything.

How could such an act enable Job’s unconditional fear of God? YHWH’s act fractures the conditions within which it occurs. After it, certain things or persons within the world are unrecognizable; because of it, events occur within the world that cannot be anticipated. YHWH’s act does not save Job from his inauthenticity, or from his folly, or from his impiety, but from himself, from determination by his own empirical conditions. YHWH’s act renders these conditions internally limited, a state I will refer to as “not-All.”<sup>87</sup> YHWH’s act interrupts the “natural” processes of cause and effect, generation and corruption, by cutting through the causal chains that connect the conditions of the world. YHWH’s act prevents these conditions from wholly determining their subjects, in this case, Job. Job and the world are not opened up toward some place or thing “beyond” themselves; they are simply opened up. Because Job and the world are opened up and rendered not-All, there can occur within and from them acts that could be unconditioned by them.

The following section demonstrates this thesis by considering a sense in which the logic operative in post-affliction fear fundamentally differs from that which is operative in Job’s pre-afflicted fear of God, which I characterized above (in section 17) as a “logic of sacrifice.” From this I will be able to proceed smoothly into a discussion of the third and final question defined at the outset of the chapter as fundamental to any understanding of the prologue.

#### 24 WISDOM BEYOND THE SACRIFICIAL PRINCIPLE

In this section I aim to demonstrate that the wisdom made possible by the prologue is radically incommensurable with that which characterizes Job’s pre-afflicted fear of God.

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<sup>87</sup>Cf. COPJEC (2002), 154.

According to what I called the law of sacrifice, Job's body, history, and wisdom remained limited because, being anchored to them, he could not traverse the infinite distance between them and the divine locus of their truth. Ultimately, wisdom is banished to a transcendent realm beyond the perceptible, finite order of time and space. No sage can finally claim the predicate wise but instead must commit to an infinite search for wisdom. The sage must accept the conditions in which he finds himself and be dedicated to struggle with the circumstances and knowledge he inherits from those who have come before, so that he can fashion the best possible future for those who come after. In short, one could say that the sapiential life is understood as the participation in the construction of a future that will not be without the knowledge gained in the past and the present. What the sage gained by this external limitation was historical continuity, the promise of infinite progress, ever-increasing wisdom and pleasure.

Paradoxically, however, Job's actual activity showed that this limit leads not to a celebration of progress, but rather to perpetual contempt and suspicion of human thought and activity. The fear of God is, in this conception, the subjective posture that maintains a respectful contempt towards one's perceptions and knowledge as penultimate or potentially foolish, given wisdom's location outside the sage's capacities to understand. The sage thus maintains a perpetual state of deferential dissatisfaction, always ready to revise her wisdom in the event of the experience of *instruction*.<sup>88</sup>

YHWH's activity in the prologue contravenes this notion of the wise life as an infinite progression toward an external limit (and, I will argue below, so too does Job's). What now makes wisdom possible is an act of God, not in the sense that it is recognizably divine, but in the sense that it occurs but cannot be recognized in its state of affairs, cannot be connected to a locatable causal agent within its world. In short, wisdom's very possibility is predicated on an act whose occurrence ensures that that no ultimate, transcendent Cause

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<sup>88</sup>In CHAPTER 4 I argue that *the* message of Eliphaz's first speech (chs. 4-5) is contained in the "instruction" about which he admonishes Job, "do not reject the instruction (*mûsar*) of Shadday" (5:17).

stands behind and promises to make sense of the historical and meaningful conditions of life. Said differently, the conditions that can serve as the preconditions for an act *for nothing* are those that have no-thing as an ultimate, transcendent referent. Wisdom is no longer considered an organic whole, the bond linking all life into a harmony that the fearer of God only partially and imperfectly perceives.<sup>89</sup> Instead, *wisdom is a human response that emerges out of and constitutes itself with respect to an event that happens ḥinnām*.<sup>90</sup> In more logically precise terms, my thesis is that the prologue transforms wisdom from one logic of universalism to another, from the logic of an All constituted on a principle of exception, to the logic of a not-All made possible by an act of subtraction.<sup>91</sup> Job will have been wise, will have feared God *ḥinnām*, if his actions after the affliction conform to the logic of a not-All universality.

## 25 JOB'S NON-VERBAL RESPONSES; *ḥinnām* EMBODIED

With this thesis in place, I can finally turn to the third question, the question to which the thesis responds, and consider how we can understand Job to have passed or failed the test. Job responds to the afflictions that create the conditions for the tests with both non-verbal

<sup>89</sup>Such a notion of harmony is especially prominent in Fox's recent article on wisdom. He contends, "There is no prime axiom from which all ideas are spun out; the system itself is primary. But, I suggest, an ideal of harmony is central to the system, and a sense for what is harmonious—the moral equivalent of a musical ear—is important in both the formation of a wise person and the validation of new wisdom." FOX (2007), 677.

<sup>90</sup>Not unrelatedly, Lacan says in his eleventh seminar, "the cause of the unconscious. . . must be conceived as, fundamentally, a lost cause" (LACAN, 1977, 128); or, "In short, there is cause only in something that doesn't work" (LACAN, 1977, 22). Cf. JOHNSTON (2005), 37-42, for a discussion of causality in Lacan, philosophy, and psychoanalysis.

<sup>91</sup>These two structures of universality I take primarily from LACAN (1998), which defines masculine and feminine being according to them, but also from Copjec's commentary on Lacan's formulas of sexuation that connects them with the Kantian antinomies of pure reason in JOAN COPJEC, *Read my Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), ch. 8. To make explicit the feminist insight that undergirds the logic of this entire dissertation, I understand the crisis JOB poses for the wisdom tradition

and verbal actions. For each test the narrative reports Job's non-verbal responses before his verbal responses. To the first affliction Job responds with "a series of five actions. The first four are expressions of grief ('Job rose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell upon the ground,' 1:20)."<sup>92</sup> Scholars debate whether the fifth ("and he worshipped") is conventional or out of place in the context of mourning rites,<sup>93</sup> perhaps suggesting neither the one nor the other but instead that it serves some function for the test, i.e., the plot. In any case, as Newsom says, Job's "actions do not of themselves clarify the moral imagination that would unite grief with worship rather than with curse."<sup>94</sup> As Newsom goes on to put it, Job's first non-verbal response is "not self-interpreting" as a passing or failing of the test.

Regardless of all that one could say about the meaning of Job's first non-verbal response, such acts ritually separate mourners from the community and their (normal) lives. Although such separation does not indicate the mourner's wise (unconditional) action, it does bring Job into the kind of interstitial social space from which any act that could be considered unconditional would have to arise. No fear of God that could be characterized as *hinnām* can be directly generated out of the positive, substantial conditions in which it is carried out; it must arise *ex nihilo* and its purpose must be indeterminate.<sup>95</sup> Job's first non-verbal responses indicate these conditions.

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as, from the prologue on, a feminization of the tradition's (masculine) structure of wisdom.

<sup>92</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 57.

<sup>93</sup>See MATHEWSON (2006), 53n.65.

<sup>94</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 57. The observation is not unique to Newsom—e.g., "[The actions] may, however, express sorrow or despair, faith or disbelief" WALTER VOGELS, "Job's Empty Pious Slogans (Job 1,20-22; 2,8-10)" in *The Book of Job* Edited by W.A.M. BEUKEN. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 370. But her thesis that the prologue is interested in Job's "moral imagination" (and not his piety) does bring her argument closer to my own—that the test tests Job's wisdom as a surplus dimension over his piety—than most others.

<sup>95</sup>Lacan notes, apropos the discussions of cause in Aristotle and Kant, "that the problem of cause has always been an embarrassment to philosophers. . . Cause is to be distinguished from that which is determinate in a chain. . . [from] what is pictured in the law of action and reaction" (LACAN, 1977, 22).

Job's non-verbal response to the second affliction lends further support to this reading: "He took a potsherd with which to scrape himself and he was sitting amidst the ashes" (2:8). The participle translated "sitting" suggests "Job is already sitting among the ashes when the disease is inflicted upon him."<sup>96</sup> Job's affliction has located him "upon the trash-heap outside the city gate where garbage such as ashes and broken pots was dumped and where people excluded from the community"<sup>97</sup> gathered. So too, Clines adds, "those who psychically identify themselves with the rejected and destitute."<sup>98</sup> In other words, through his non-verbal (re)actions Job positions himself in that place to which society assigns that which has no place in society. Thus placed out of place, he scrapes himself away from himself. It is from such an out of joint place, from such a fractured, inhuman being, that an act could occur that gives WISDOM a concrete existence. In order to better grasp the genesis of WISDOM out of this constitutively unfinalizable or not-All structure, what follows analyzes Job's verbal responses in detail.

## 26 FROM LIFE TO DEATH

I can get far along this path toward understanding whether and how Job passes the test for unconditional fear by following the lines of Mathewson's recently published dissertation, which argues for the rhetorical function of death in the prologue's plot. Death has already been important to my discussion. I have said that YHWH confesses to destroying Job and that Job's friends relate to him as, in Clines words, "one already dead." Now, in Job's non-verbal responses, I have shown him mourning, positioned outside the life of the social body, and even scraping his body away from itself. In his first verbal response, Job acknowledges that YHWH has subtracted everything from him so that only his bare life remains. In other words, Job joins almost every other character in this tale by acknowledging his death.

Mathewson's argument about Job's verbal responses demands some nuance to this account. He thinks, overall, that the prologue's plot moves "from a scene of the coherent world

<sup>96</sup>CLINES (1989), 49. <sup>97</sup>VOGELS (1994), 372. <sup>98</sup>CLINES (1989), 50.

of the piety/life/relationship complex to a scene of incoherent death. . . from symbolic unity and wholeness, with its related emphasis on life and liveliness, to symbolic incoherence with its connected emphasis on death.”<sup>99</sup> This movement passes through an intermediate moment wherein Job resists, yielding three logical moments of Job’s relationship to this narrative movement. Simplifying a bit,

- (i) Job first thrives within his symbol system (i.e., the “piety/life/relationship complex”) to stave off the death that functions as its horizon;
  - (ii) then, when confronted with death’s desymbolizing power, Job’s first response is to try to resymbolize it into a symbolically coherent world;
  - (iii) in his second response Job moves beyond such death-denying resistance. Sadly, he is unable to locate himself before death in any meaningful way, and thus the tale ends with Job sitting, silent, stunned by the impotence of his symbol system before death.
- Even though such an ending could hardly qualify as liberative, Mathewson’s argument suggests that each moment nonetheless advances toward truth and authenticity since each more directly confronts the death that functions as the enabling condition of all life, every symbol system, every social and cultural order.<sup>100</sup> In what follows I consider each moment in more detail.

*Moment 1.* Mathewson begins with Job’s pre-afflicted condition: “In the lone example of Job’s piety that the narrative offers (1:4-5), themes of life and liveliness predominate. . . Movement, merry-making, eating and drinking: life and liveliness to the fullest.”<sup>101</sup>

<sup>99</sup>MATHEWSON (2006), 45.

<sup>100</sup>Mathewson defines culture as a system of symbols that gives individuals “a sense of life and vitality *in light of the knowledge of death*, a sense of life that Lifton names ‘symbolic immortality’” (MATHEWSON, 2006, 24, emphasis added). Life comes to be because of death, in the social coordination of individual drives for immortality and eternity in the face of mortality and finitude. The psychohistorian R. J. Lifton informs much of Mathewson’s theoretical orientation.

<sup>101</sup>MATHEWSON (2006), 40-41.



Death is, for the Job depicted at the beginning of the tale, viewed both positively and negatively. Positively, death is “The crowning achievement of abundant life,”<sup>102</sup> that is, that which comes only at the end of a life filled with prosperity, progeny, comfort, coherence, etc.; negatively, death is the flip-side of that which characterizes abundant, meaningful life, e.g., the lack of stability, coherence, integrity, prosperity, health.<sup>103</sup> Mathewson calls the symbol system that structures Job’s pre-afflicted life the piety/life/relationship complex. In other words, in Job’s pre-afflicted world, life is defined as that which puts death in its proper place, in the after-life, not within or during life. In Mathewson’s words, “Death-in-life. . . is the type of death that abundant life overcomes.”<sup>104</sup>

A considerable distance separates my interpretation of Job’s pre-afflicted life (elaborated in section 17 on page 98) from Mathewson’s. What I called the “the logic of sacrifice” suggests Job’s pre-afflicted life is more intermixed with death than Mathewson’s description allows. The life that is actually enabled by Job’s subjective position is one that is bound and defined by death. When the text describes Job’s only act of pre-afflicted piety as sacrifices, it presents him as one who, in trying to stave off death—as Mathewson recognizes—submits his life to it—unrecognized by Mathewson. I am not alone in seeing a dimension of death operative in Job’s pre-afflicted life, for this recognition is implicitly present in those commentators who consider Job’s actions as curiously obsessive. Often such interpreters use a form of the word scrupulous, with its dual senses of upstanding and punctilious, to describe Job.<sup>105</sup> French Psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche has said that the obsessive

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<sup>102</sup>MATHEWSON (2006), 49.

<sup>103</sup>This theological and moral position is not unique to Job; one can find ample textual support in the Bible for the pairing of abundant life with right living. The texts he cites mainly come from Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Proverbs; MATHEWSON (2006), 41-44.

<sup>104</sup>MATHEWSON (2006), 49.

<sup>105</sup>E.g., “Job’s piety is scrupulous, even excessively so, if not actually neurotically anxious. It would not be absurd to see here an almost obsessional *manie de perfection*, a hypersensitivity to detail” (CLINES, 1989, 15); Clines cites JACK H. KAHN, *Job’s Illness: Loss, Grief, and Integration. A Psychological Interpretation*

installs death in his life, he “plays dead,” that he creates for himself a sort of shell precisely so that these excitations [of conflict or pleasure] cannot reach him directly, but only in a filtered form, completely reconstituted. Excitations are taken up into a system that aims to deaden them (“to deaden” is to put a sort of cushion in their way, so as ultimately to reach a state close to death).<sup>106</sup>

An obsessive perpetually seeks to secure his place in situations that are ensured of unity, coherency, connectivity, integrity, predictability. Where Mathewson<sup>107</sup> takes these as characteristics of “life,” an obsessive shows that they could just as easily characterize situations of death, attempts to keep life at bay.

In addition to the obsessive, consider also R. Barthes’ idea that, with the arrival of photography, death is found in the click of a lens, the freezing of life in photographic eternity.<sup>108</sup> This idea is remarkably similar to the following contention by Mathewson, part of which quotes Lifton (from whom he takes no distance on this matter), “The very core of human life is dependent upon the integrity of the image, for its absence or breakdown threatens life.”<sup>109</sup> What I am suggesting is, however, that the integrity of the image figures death as much as does the image’s disintegration. Mathewson’s one-sided description of the life that supposedly permeates the beginning of the prose tale leaves unaccounted for the

(Oxford: Pergamon, 1975), 18. Or, “generally unnoticed is the way this supposed paragon of virtue carries his piety to paranoid extremes” ALAN COOPER, “The Sense of the Book of Job” *Prooftexts*, 17 (1997), 232. Or, “It is the scrupulousness of Job that is indicated” (ROWLEY, 1970, 29). Or, “Scrupulously he offered sacrifices continually, seeking to expiate every possible sin” (HARTLEY, 1988, 70).

<sup>106</sup>JEAN LAPLANCHE, *The Unconscious and the Id: A Volume of Laplanche’s Problematiques* trans. by Luke Thurston and Lindsay Watson (London: Rebus, 1999), 198; cf. JOHNSTON (2008b), 45, and the other resources cited therein that speak of “a profound relation between obsessional neurosis and mortality.”

<sup>107</sup>MATHEWSON (2006), 47.

<sup>108</sup>“La Vie/la Mort: le paradigme se réduit à un simple déclic, celui qui sépare la pose initiale du papier final.” ROLAND BARTHES, *La Chambre Claire: Note sur la Photographie* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1980), 144-45.

<sup>109</sup>MATHEWSON (2006), 46.

death in the service of which this life is staged. Perhaps, then, his notion of life and death as two poles between which the prologue moves needs to be reconsidered.

*Moment 2.* Mathewson derives the second moment of Job's relationship to the plot's development from Job's first verbal response to his affliction:

Naked I came out of the womb of my mother  
 and naked I shall return there.  
 The LORD gives and the LORD takes away.  
 Blessed be the name of the LORD.

(1:21)

Mathewson contends that the servant's enunciation of *mw̄t* ("death") in the final report to Job (1:19) confronts Job with a "cold reality" that avoids the palliating euphemisms of the previous servants' reports (1:14-17). But:

With one simple phrase [i.e., 1:21], Job has taken all of the cold reality announced by the word *mw̄t*—problematic, incoherent, desymbolized death—and resymbolized it into a symbolically coherent, simple narrative of the universal human life cycle, for which Job stands as the prime exemplar. "Death" (*mw̄t*), now, is not that which disrupts the symbolically coherent world of the life/piety/relationship complex; "death" (*šmh*) rather, is the return to the womb of the mother/earth—that protective, safe place. What was desymbolized through *haśśātān*'s plan has now been resymbolized in Job's response. One might say that Job refuses to concede *mw̄t*. When confronted by it he transforms it into "womb" (*bṭn*) ... In Job's resymbolization of death, Yahweh is the very guarantor of the coherence of death, the very one who brings about the "return" (*šwb*) to the womb.<sup>110</sup>

The servant presents Job with an opportunity to stand authentically before the death that Mathewson calls "desymbolized," by which he means death not only as the presentation of an absence, a negative materiality without all the cultural content that deflects it into positive meanings and false representations, but also death as the horizon of social and

<sup>110</sup>MATHEWSON (2006), 54.

cultural existence.<sup>111</sup> Job turns away from this opportunity and instead subjects death to a coherent horizon of meaning ensured by YHWH. Life overtakes death, the womb supplants the tomb.

Again I need to register my distance, just as I did from Mathewson's interpretation of life and death in Job's pre-afflicted life. Job's resymbolization does not efface death.<sup>112</sup> Job rethinks death as a return to his place of birth. Job likens his nakedness at birth to his nakedness at death; the mother's womb to which he will return is the tomb of mother earth (cf. Ps 139:13-15) and, when he names this place "there," he uses a reference to Sheol attested elsewhere.<sup>113</sup> Mathewson is correct that the metaphorical substitutions of "there" for "womb" and "womb" for "death" make "death" absent but, since they are metaphors, they work by evoking death's presence. A metaphoric substitution does not efface the latent word, but transforms it.<sup>114</sup> Below I ask what it might mean for Job to liken his death to his (re)birthplace, to conceive of his death as a locus from which someone or something could be born.

*Moment 3.* It is only the third moment, Job's response to the second affliction, that Mathewson regards as an authentic relationship of Job to desymbolized death, i.e., one that does

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<sup>111</sup>"Death stands for that which is beyond the realm of human knowledge and it can only be discussed as the negation of what is known: it is not-life, not-being. . . the word 'death' foregrounds as a presence what is finally and ultimately absent and 'beyond'" (MATHEWSON, 2006, 17-18). The notion that the particular, positive meanings given to death are "deflections" derives from K. Burke. The early philosophy of M. Heidegger undoubtedly informs the sense of authenticity and of death as a horizon that makes life possible.

<sup>112</sup>*Pace* MATHEWSON (2006, 53): "Having been confronted by this messenger with the stark and bold reality of desymbolized *mw*, Job now in essence 'effaces' this reality with the most genteel of all euphemisms. . . even using a euphemism ('there') for a euphemism ('womb') of death." With regard to the notion of euphemisms (about which Mathewson speaks often), what I never understood from his analysis is the sense in which any reference to death, given his definition of death as a signifier with no positive content, could escape such a charge. All would seem to share an absolute failure in their attempts to carry a positive signification for death.

<sup>113</sup>Cf. CLINES (1989), 36-37.

<sup>114</sup>I discuss metaphor in more detail on page 361 and in section 87 below.

not subject death's desymbolizing power to a death-denying resymbolization but instead leaves the symbol system open such that it could possibly "include" or sustain a relationship to death. Furthermore, contrary to the opposition between YHWH and desymbolized death that characterized Job's response to the first affliction, Mathewson thinks that Job's response to the second affliction makes possible a *theology* of desymbolized death.

According to Mathewson there is a striking contrast between Job's first and second responses.<sup>115</sup> Again a figure confronts Job with "literal death." Before it was his servant; this time it is his wife. And this time, the offer includes a lethal factor, an opportunity for Job to choose his own death. At this point the prologue's form and content, its structural order and style, have begun to slip into something less coherent and more ambiguous. The heavenly scene vanishes, the narrative integrity cracks; time and death pulverize the connections that give the symbol system an appearance of immortality. "On [Job's wife's] lips," he writes, "*mw* stands far from any symbolic system that would ground it and give it symbolic sense. Literal death is desymbolized, and paradoxically, stands for this very desymbolization."<sup>116</sup> Again Job rejects death. If he were to have accepted desymbolized death as such, Mathewson tells us, he would have proven *hasšāṭān* right by demonstrating that his previous resymbolization that professed that God was the cause of his experience (1:21) was false. But this time he resymbolizes with two terms that do not try to seal up the symbol system, that do not try to exclude the desymbolizing power of death. He resymbolizes by coupling *ṭwb* with *ꞛ*—"Shall we receive the good (*ṭwb*) from God, but not receive the bad (*ꞛ*) from God?" (2:10)—about which Mathewson says,

In Job's mouth *ṭwb* and *ꞛ* do not even signify in the same symbolic system. . . . The terms *ṭwb* and *ꞛ* are not just a simple binary in an either/or symbolic system, but they stand for the entire system (the *ṭwb* of the life/piety/relationship complex) *and* that which calls this entire system into question (desymbolized, incoherent, unintelligible *ꞛ*) . . . [N]ow, in Job's resymbolization, God is also responsible for *ꞛ*—for that which calls the system into question including its center, namely God. God, therefore, is responsible both for the system

<sup>115</sup>MATHEWSON (2006), 57. <sup>116</sup>MATHEWSON (2006), 61.

in which God can be known (*tub*) and for the collapse of this system and the collapse of the ability to know God (*r̄*). The implications of this resymbolization are dizzying. And so Job sits in an astounded, death-like silence.<sup>117</sup>

Stunned by his near encounter with the impossible “object” of experience, i.e., death, Job does not try to construct a symbolic immortality into which he could escape, he avails himself of the chance to articulate a symbol system that could include the desymbolizing implications of the dualistic system he evokes here. But his “resymbolization” is not effective; it remains incoherent and failed. Job names a dimension “beyond good and evil” but can only sit, stunned by the impotence of the symbol system before death. Paralyzed by uncertainty about the meaning of his experience, he finds himself unable to secure any “life,” unable even to speak. This place in which Mathewson’s reading locates Job is, I argue below, the same place Job’s wife would have him occupy, and is therefore co-implicated by Job’s rebuke of her.

#### 27 OR, LIFE BEYOND DEATH

Back to Job’s first verbal response in 1:21 (quoted on page 125) and the notion that Job reconceives of the death toward which he is heading as a locus from which someone or something could be born. Above, I critiqued Mathewson’s reading that claims Job’s statement effaces death. My criticism of moment 2 was once again that Mathewson falsely isolates life from death instead of appreciating the ambivalence that characterizes their relationship in the text—as he does in moment 3 wherein *r̄* functions as an internal limit of the symbol system, a force from within of incoherence.<sup>118</sup> For Mathewson the symbolic social order is the locus of life, vitality, immortality, and happiness. But the symbolic order is no less a place of mortification. It alienates an individual’s being into images and identificatory marks or words by means of which one can relate to others. Because of the rift that divides someone from the images and words that precede and persist beyond him, he must give

<sup>117</sup>MATHEWSON (2006), 63. <sup>118</sup>Such an internal limit is similar to the unsayable as discussed in section 4.

up life (i.e., die) in order to achieve life (and death, insofar as knowledge about mortality is only available vicariously). The measure of life available to human beings through the social, Symbolic order brings with it a minimal sense of mediation or alienation from their being.<sup>119</sup>

In order to conceive of life and death in the psychoanalytically informed terms I am proposing here, one must say that life comes by means of a dead entity that has a life of its own—i.e., the symbolic order—and one must simultaneously imagine a certain form of life that persists in a real dimension outside the symbolic order and that threatens the life constituted by the symbolic order as a force of death.<sup>120</sup> One of Žižek's recurring points is that these two supplementary dimensions, the living dead and deadly life, constitute the two faces of what psychoanalysis infamously refers to as the death drive.

For a human being to be 'dead while alive' is to be colonized by the 'dead' symbolic order; to be 'alive while dead' is to give body to the remainder of Life-Substance which has escaped the symbolic colonization. What we are dealing with here is thus the split between... the 'dead' symbolic order which mortifies the body and the non-symbolic Life-Substance of *jouissance*.<sup>121</sup> These two notions [of life and death] in Freud and Lacan are not what they are in our everyday standard scientific discourse: in psychoanalysis, they both designate a properly monstrous dimension. Life is the horrible palpitation of the 'lamella', of the non-subjective ('acephalous') 'undead' drive which persists beyond ordinary death; death is the symbolic order itself, the structure which, as a parasite, colonizes the living entity. What defines the death drive in Lacan is this double gap: not the simple opposition between life and death, but the split of life itself into 'normal' life and horrifying 'undead' life, and the

<sup>119</sup>I have offered a simplified description in ontogenetic terms but do not mean to imply any sense of conscious intentionality behind the "choice" of the symbolic order. For a more precise and detailed discussion of these issues on which I depend, see JOHNSTON (2008b), esp. part 1; and COPJEC (2002), esp. ch. 1.

<sup>120</sup>To say that a form of life "persists" need not imply that it pre-exists the subject's entry into the symbolic order as a substantial entity. Cf., for example, ŽIŽEK (1993), 180-82.

<sup>121</sup>On Lacan's notion of *jouissance*, see the discussion in footnote on page 40.

split of the dead into 'ordinary' dead and the 'undead' machine.<sup>122</sup>

Immortality, in other words, does not only belong to the social, symbolic order as something in which the individual is permitted a limited participation. Immortality is also experienced in the domain of the drives that compel one toward an existence without regard for and often at odds with any calculations of life and death.<sup>123</sup>

For psychoanalysis, therefore, life is joined with death not in the sense that the body is subjected to a transcendent finitude, but in the sense that the body has lost its connection to mere biological or organic existence. The body becomes a more-than-material substance, "the site of a *jouissance* that opens a new dimension of infinity, immortality,"<sup>124</sup> a dimension of life beyond death. This sense of an enjoyment "beyond the pleasure principle" and these non-literal notions of life and death are better conceptual tools for grasping what I think Job accomplishes through the substitution of womb for tomb, mediated by "there."

In contrast to Mathewson, I suggest that Job's first verbal response does not refer to the womb in order to "represent a zero-sum gain: a human is born, a human dies; God gives, God takes."<sup>125</sup> The womb is only ever the site of a negation when it is negated, paradigmatically in barrenness; at all other times the womb is the site of generation. In 1:21 Job directs his experience not outward, into an immortal, social, symbol system constituted on the basis of its exclusion of desymbolized death (i.e., its resymbolization of death), but backward, at a time before he found himself where he is, to a restored state as yet unaffected by temporal change. When Job says he is returning "there"—which represents "Sheol" but parallels "my mother's womb"—he gives the womb a kind of mythical status akin to Sheol. Just as he has never been to Sheol, so too must one imagine that Job is not thinking of his experience of the womb as something that was ever actual for him. Instead, it is a sort of primordial loss, a state that he had to give up—even though he was never really in it—when he received from God all life's trappings that have now been taken away from him. This experience of

<sup>122</sup>SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 89.

<sup>123</sup>Cf., for example, JOHNSTON (2005), 165; 238. <sup>124</sup>COPJEC (2002), 32. <sup>125</sup>MATHEWSON (2006), 55.



loss, of subtraction, has in turn prepared him to go "back to the future," so to speak. Job previously related to this state as lost, as a mythical state prior to his reception of all the trappings of his life that have now been taken away. Now, in the loss of all these trappings, something of this lost state has been made present to him. Of course, Job does not go all the way "there" (and he complains about this inhibition in ch.3). But, if Job knows about this naked existence at all, it must be because he has experienced some partial representative of it in God's act. Job's statement expresses a movement beyond his reality made possible by the subtraction of his reality.

#### 28 GOD'S ROLE IN JOB'S EXPERIENCE

I am opposing the reading that understands Job's first verbal response in 1:21 as the affirmation of life as a zero-sum equation guaranteed and carried out by a God who stands outside of it. I have made Mathewson exemplary of this position but there are other ways of reading Job's statement according to the same structure. One such way contends that Job is indifferent to the content of his experience and is only concerned with God,<sup>126</sup> another that Job thinks his experience is woven by God's invisible hand into a great divine tapestry,<sup>127</sup> and another that Job sees "something more," an ineffable, divine dimension behind his experience. I want to reverse this orientation and suggest that Job's statement does not position God beyond or outside experience, but rather infers God from the fact that his experience does not add up, that there is something more to his experience that is made available to him by his experience.

Job blesses God for exactly what God has done, which is not at all unfathomable to Job or even in question. When Job speaks of his experience as something God has done, he

<sup>126</sup>E.g., "It is the very formula of oriental resignation. The only course is to allow the sovereign Ruler of the world to act as He wills" (DHORME, 1984, 13).

<sup>127</sup>E.g., referring at first to Job's second response, "It is rather some kind of trustfulness that God knows what he is doing, and the very same piety we have witnessed in Job's blessing the Yahweh who had given

does not evoke a divine plan beyond his experience; his experience is itself the plan. To be sure, insofar as he recognizes God at work in his experience at all, he shows that he does not relate to his experience as an All, that is, that he recognizes “something more,” some surplus dimension in his experience, but Job gives no sign that this surplus is inaccessible or located in a beyond. On the contrary, he expresses no doubt about it; YHWH hath given and YHWH hath taken, pure and simple.<sup>128</sup> His experience is not a means to an end, does not reflect some higher truth, but is itself productive of something more than itself.

Therefore to Job God is not beyond his experience in the sense that God is external to his experience, but only in the sense that God is that which fissures his experience from itself, the minimal difference fracturing his experience from within. God is thus conditioned by Job’s experience as the one who makes it irreducible to his conditions, that is, as the one who keeps Job’s experience open to the transforming event he is suffering. His experience splits him from himself and projects him on a return curve to a place he has never really been. He has never been “there” but he must have stumbled upon some partial representative of it if he knows anything about it at all. God is the fracturing of his experience that makes available to him such a “partial object of lack,” an avatar of the void of “there.” It is for this minimal difference fracturing his experience from within and for this surplus dimension thereby made present to him that Job elevates his experience into an experience on account of which he erupts in doxology. This means that Job, like YHWH in 2:3b, locates God in a surplus dimension vis-à-vis his experience. I argued above that *hinnām* refers not only to a lack of conditions for the affliction but also to a surplus, unconditioned condition produced out of the affliction. With respect to God’s act, Job is constituted as a surplus unrelated to his conditions; with respect to Job’s experience, God is a surplus over and above his conditions. In the structure of the story, Job and God occupy analogous, out-of-place places with respect to the affliction.

and taken away (1:21)” (CLINES, 1989, 54).

<sup>128</sup>Thinking Job continues to relate to God as an unfathomable Other, some, e.g., VAN WOLDE (1995,

Clines offers a similar statement about the place of God in Job's experience when he insists,

It is not the expression of a rational theological position or of some long-standing habit of life; Job has never before encountered "harm," at least as far as we know from the story. What we read here is a religion on the hoof, a faith that instinctively fashions new stances for new crises out of a trust that goes deeper than any theology.<sup>129</sup>

Although I would want to change Clines' register from the instincts to the drives, he is certainly correct that there is *neither* any romantic piety here, no sage who remains devoted to the faith in which he has long been immersed, *nor* any loss of faith, no questioning or doubt, for Job's experience has located him far beyond both piety and impiety, in the terrible neutrality that is wisdom. It does not really matter, *pace* Clines, whether Job ever experienced "harm" before; the story would be unintelligible if Job's experience were taken as anticipatable. Job is beyond both piety and loss of faith not because of what he has supposedly experienced outside the story, but rather because, within the story, Job is nearly eclipsed by his experience. Something similar happens when a soldier's mortal wound pushes him beyond considerations of courage and cowardice, victor and vanquished.<sup>130</sup> Job disappears behind his experience and becomes identified with what he proclaims. He is split between the one to whom much was given and the other that remains after the taking. Out of this splitting into two, he affirms One, God, as cause. Thus the readings must be turned around which speak either of a display of heroic piety or an inauthentic domestication of the traumatic encounter with death. There is nothing on the basis of which the two involved in this encounter—God and Job—could be added together. Job does not fear God as one to another because he is overcome and made other than himself by his encounter with God. Job refuses to justify his statement, gives no reason for it, calls on no authority, no tradition, no experience, no law to sanction it. He simply says YHWH has done this, blessed be YHWH. In responding this way he displays a fear of God that is not a fear of

204), disparage his first response as cocksure.

<sup>129</sup>CLINES (1989), 54. <sup>130</sup>A discussion of this example can be found in DELEUZE (1990), 100-2.

some quality of God's (acts), but neither is it indifferent to God's qualities or acts; instead this fear is what effectively renders what God is worshippable.<sup>131</sup>

#### 29 JOB'S WIFE AND THE DEADLOCK OF DESIRE

Job makes his second verbal response—"You speak like one of the fools. Shall we receive the good from God but not receive the bad from God?" (2:10)—in response to his wife's provocation—"Do you still persist in your blamelessness? Curse God, and die" (2:9). Job's wife is an ambiguous character. She appears out of nowhere in the story at the exact moment that the story breaks its formal pattern of alternating between scenes of heaven and earth. Driver puts it well: "the scene in heaven dissolves into the picture"<sup>132</sup> on earth. After this dissolution of the heavenly realm, Job's wife is the first to speak, and in so doing she "signals the impingement of the divine world upon the human."<sup>133</sup>

Her words are radical and provocative: "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die" (2:9). What she says echoes God's assessment of Job as one who persists in his integrity (2:3b), but the course of action she urges would end the wager on the satan's terms (2:5).<sup>134</sup>

Job's wife represents heaven but she does not represent all of it equally. She prompts an act by Job that would decide the test and, apparently, in *haśśātān*'s favor since she commands what he predicts (again, literally: "*bless* Elohim").

But her tie to *haśśātān* goes even further; the structure of the choice she poses to Job also locks him in a double bind by requiring that he incur guilt and/or die. The ambiguity

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<sup>131</sup>This is similar to M. Fox's recent reminder about the function of faith and personal responsibility in the determination of anything as wise, "empiricism is irrelevant to most of Proverbs. It is inconceivable that proverbs such as [10:3; 12:21; 16:7] were extracted from experimental data. . . To claim that these dicta describe an observed reality is simply to affirm the sages' beliefs. They are statements of faith, not abstractions from experiential data" (FOX, 2007, 671).

<sup>132</sup>DRIVER and GRAY (1921), 22. <sup>133</sup>CLINES (1989), 9. <sup>134</sup>CAROL A. NEWSOM, "Job" in *The Women's Bible Commentary. Expanded Edition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998), 139.

of her words is well known, but few commentators notice how she, like *haśśātān*, puts Job in a dilemma he cannot get out of on its own terms.<sup>135</sup> Newsom describes the dilemma as

one that revolves around the thematically crucial word "integrity." The term "integrity" (*tummah*) denotes a person whose conduct is in complete accord with moral and religious norms and whose character is one of utter honesty, without guile. Job's wife's disturbing question hints at a tension between these two aspects of the word. Her question could be understood in two different senses. She could be heard as saying: "Do you still persist in your integrity (=righteousness)? Look where it has gotten you. Give it up, as God has given you up. Curse God, and then die." Or she could be understood as saying: "Do you still persist in your integrity (=honesty)? If so, stand by it and say what is truly in your heart. Curse God before you die."<sup>136</sup>

Job's wife offers Job a choice between maintaining his honesty but sacrificing his religious innocence, or following his religious duty but sacrificing his moral integrity.<sup>137</sup> Righteousness implies dishonesty; honesty demands unrighteousness. In both cases he must follow one law and thereby incur guilt before the other and, no matter which he chooses, he will die. For Job's wife, then, Job's position is structurally limited and a truly "wise" act is impossible; facing certain death, he stands guilty before one law or another. Just as I argued above (on page 108), what appears to be a problem with the meaning of "bless/curse" proves to be its solution at another level, for both to bless and to curse lead Job to one and the same end.

Note the similarity between the choice Job's wife offers him and the choice with which Mathewson leaves him at the end of moment 3. Faced with two conflicting symbol systems, Mathewson argues, Job can only sit, stunned, and wait. Neither Mathewson nor Job's wife allow for the possibility of an act of wisdom; for both, Job's ability to act wisely depends upon his relationship to a symbol system that is presently lacking. For Job's wife, there is no symbol system in which he would be innocent: he is guilty before one or the other

<sup>135</sup>Cf. NEWSOM (1996), 356; JANZEN (1985), 49-51; and MATHEWSON (2006), 57n.81.

<sup>136</sup>NEWSOM (1998), 139-40. <sup>137</sup>NEWSOM (1996), 356.

of those between which he is torn (the moral and the religious). Mathewson acknowledges the possibility of a symbol system that would include *twb* and *r* only as something as yet unavailable to Job. For both positions Job's problem is that he lacks an adequate Third (Law/symbol system) on the basis of which the two (Job and God/death/integrity) could be meaningfully related. Job is stuck waiting and looking for an ideal that is, at least for now, impossible to attain.<sup>138</sup> Both Mathewson and Job's wife leave Job dangling before an impossible object of *desire*. In the following section I argue that Job rejects this structure and inhabits instead the structure of the *drive*, and thereby accomplishes an unconditioned and wise act.

### 30 JOB'S REJECTION OF DESIRE, LODGING IN DRIVE

I discussed the difference between desire and drive at length on page 37. It basically concerns the difference between an ever-deferred *pursuit of knowledge/enjoyment*, and an always-already attained *experience of JOUISSANCE*. The drive achieves its aim of satisfaction through desire's failure to attain its goal in the process referred to as sublimation. I identified the structure of desire with Job's wife, Mathewson's analysis, and the logic of sacrifice informing Job's pre-afflicted piety. In desire, Job stands in a fixed subjective position before a bewilderingly indeterminate objective world that lacks a mediator up to the task of relating him to the objects of his experience in a finally meaningful way. This structure is inadequate for understanding Job's verbal responses because it fails to account for the crucial difference between Job's postures before and after the affliction. The same Job whose constant sacrifices for his children's potential sin arose out of and sustained his posture of

<sup>138</sup>In this sense what Mathewson and Job's wife share is that any action that they allow for Job depends upon what psychoanalysis calls the superego. The superego is not the psychical representative of society's laws but the vicious agent who commands and accuses without concern for the law. Mathewson's superego injunction would be: "Job, if you want to live, one more resymbolization!" Job's wife's position illustrates how the superego operates above every law so that any action, regardless of its lawfulness, automatically makes the subject guilty.

deferential contempt toward his knowledge, this same Job responds to the events of his affliction by expressing no curiosity about how they might be connected to his activity. He does not try to sacrifice objects that may satisfy the desire of God. He does not even wonder what God's desire might be. Job's words and actions are not driven by his desire to know—by his lack of knowledge about—who or what he is for God.

If not his desire to know, then what drives Job's responses? Both Job's verbal responses concern what his experience of God has made available to him: first, the removal of himself from himself, and second,  $\mathcal{r}$ . And yet both are also quite general, nearly asubjective. That is, both his verbal responses affirm general statements about his subjective condition that express no sense of dissatisfaction. Is Job's position therefore disinterested, dispassionate, or unmotivated, which is what many think that the test challenges?<sup>139</sup> On the contrary, as Job's wife would attest, his passion is intense. And furthermore, no distance separates that which he is pious about from his experience. In fact, this closed circuit between his passion and his experience indicates an important difference distinguishing Job's subjective stance from the structure of desire that characterizes his wife and others. Job unequivocally rejects the "choice" with which his wife imputes guilt and death to him, but he does so by affirming his choice of  $\mathcal{r}$ . What differentiates the *mw* that Job refuses from the  $\mathcal{r}$  that he affirms? Job's wife commands or represents death (*mw*) to Job in the abstract, as a state to which he is heading.  $\mathcal{r}$ , on the other hand, represents the concrete sense of a death that has already intersected him. Thus Job rejects the sense of a death that opposes his conditions from the outside, and testifies instead to an experience of  $\mathcal{r}$  as a force of negativity within his conditions. Job's testimony to an experience of  $\mathcal{r}$  thus approximates the death drive as a force of negativity that afflicts and compels subjects beyond the life (i.e., pleasure principle) that is available through the Symbolic order (i.e., reality principle).<sup>140</sup>

<sup>139</sup>POPE (1973, xvi), for example, says that the test challenges "the disinterested character of [Job's] piety."

<sup>140</sup>Žižek draws numerous consequences out of Freud's vague notion of the death drive: "In trying to explain the functioning of the human psyche in terms of the pleasure principle, reality principle, and so

Where the structure of desire has Job paralyzed and dissatisfied before a lacking object, Job testifies to an experience of the lack itself as an object, and he expresses no dissatisfaction with it.

I can say more about the difference between the subjective position of desire and what seems to drive Job's responses in the prologue. Job's rejects his wife's attempts to get him to relate his present stance—his perseverance in blamelessness—to an external law so that he would be blameless with respect to either the law of morality or the law of religion. Instead, Job first worships and, second, he eschews dissatisfaction by refusing recourse to anything beyond his experience. Job tries to justify neither his experience—by explaining his attribution of it to God—nor his stance—by explaining how he is innocent. The blamelessness with which he perseveres is therefore the expression of a subject who has lost the support of communal norms or the social order. Job's stance is not guided by the possibilities that the community prescribes or anything other than itself. Job does not appeal to any pre-given laws or rules, and so assumes a seemingly timeless stance. Thus located at a place where the temporal and the eternal are conjoined, Job's stance concretely materializes the timeless truth of WISDOM. Job speaks and stands as one who has lost any support in an order or an Other. That is: Job acts as an autonomous subject; he fears freely.

But we can only understand this characterization (autonomous, free) if we admit that the autonomy or freedom of the drive is not the same as the autonomy or freedom often disparaged these days as Cartesian or Liberal or Romantic. Job acts free not only of his conditions but also of himself. In the subversion of the ego has come the autonomy of the subject/*nepeš*, not because he is at one with himself, but rather because he is located fully in on, Freud became increasingly aware of a radical non-functional element, a basic destructiveness and excess of negativity, that couldn't be accounted for. And that is why Freud posed the hypothesis of death drive" ŽIŽEK and DALY (2004), 61. Žižek repeatedly links the death drive to the human being's "radical and fundamental *dis*-adaptation, *mal*-adaptation, to his environs... The 'death drive' means that the organism is no longer fully determined by its environs, that it 'explodes/implodes' into a cycle of autonomous behavior" ŽIŽEK (2006), 231. Cf. JOHNSTON (2008b), ch. 13, 222-23.



that place where “himself” meets what is not-himself, where the inside meets the outside: on the trash heap—where the waste produced inside the social body is externalized—with the potsherd—with which he scrapes the pus excreted from inside his corporeal body through his boils into the external world.<sup>141</sup> Job incarnates the excesses that are produced by and yet have no place within town and body.

The prologue thus seems aimed at dissipating the twin illusions that the act of wisdom hinges either upon subjective will or upon objective (im)possibility. According to the first, which is the illusion of voluntarism, what Job demonstrates is heroic piety, the subject's ability to raise himself above his historical conditions and act despite them. According to the second, which is the illusion of historicism, every act is conditioned and the idea that one could act *hinnām* is a fantasy. Both illusions are operative in what I have called the consensus reading of the prologue. What Job demonstrates instead is that, against historicism, free fear is possible and, against voluntarism, free fear occurs not by a centered subject who determines to be wise, but rather at the moment that the distance between the sage and WISDOM disappears. At the moment God acts *hinnām*, at the moment of the silence of all that was previously held as wise, Job is capable of giving WISDOM his own voice, but at a terrible cost.<sup>142</sup>

In the prologue, WISDOM is a product that emerges with the subject out of an event that (dis)locates the subject to a site of potential transformation. A gap normally separates the sage from God and WISDOM—the truth and ground of his being. Job's (dis)location onto the other side of this gap enables him to fear God *for-Godself* and *for-naught* by alienating him from all that he could know about God and his truth and ground. The gap between

<sup>141</sup>The topological image here is that of the Möbius band, wherein one can go from one side to another side on the same surface.

<sup>142</sup>To return to a question raised but deferred on page 97, piety must not be defined by the prologue because the prologue's very conception of WISDOM demands that piety remain open to transformation by an act of WISDOM.

WISDOM/God and the sage disappears in Job's experience, and he knows it.<sup>143</sup> WISDOM becomes indistinguishable from the act of the sage—the concrete act of the subject literally produces the universal WISDOM—when the gap that normally separates her from WISDOM is embodied by herself, in the split between the *nepeš* that she is and what she used to be. Job experiences the impossible and he embodies the unknown and the unrecognizable—to those such as his friends who are only capable of seeing the possibilities outlined by the previous situation. Finally, therefore, Job presents the unrepresentable: WISDOM.

One issue remains unclear and prevents this analysis from concluding here: how to understand the sense of continuity implied in Job's characterization as one who *perseveres* in his blamelessness? One commentator captures the sentiments of many readings of Job's reaction when he writes, "Throughout the narrative. . . an almost superhuman Job *continues to* embody sapiential virtue. . . Even when faced with enormous loss, Job *continues to* bless, not curse, the One who gives and takes away."<sup>144</sup> But nothing I have said thus far would justify understanding Job's response in any sense as a fixation, a preservation of continuity with his pre-afflicted self. On the contrary, Job's response is an affirmation of Job's perseverance with what is overturning him, with what is swallowing him up, with the impossible *hinnām* of his experience that opens him up to the possibility of an unconditioned act and requires him to ceaselessly re-seize this possibility.

### 31 LOOKING AHEAD: GUILT AND ANXIETY

Those familiar with Newson's conclusion that the moral imagination of the Joban prose tale articulates a logic of piety that is both unalienated and unassailable<sup>145</sup> will undoubtedly

<sup>143</sup>I intend to evoke Freud's statement, repeatedly cited and reinterpreted by Lacan, "*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*," usually rendered, "Where it was, I shall come into being."

<sup>144</sup>LEO G. PERDUE et al., editors, *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 82, emphasis added. Cf., for example, "Job remains what he has always been, a righteous and reverent exemplar of humankind" (BALENTINE, 2006, 57-58).

<sup>145</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 64-65.

recognize much in common with my own. Yet what of the difference between her description of Job's position as heteronomous and unalienated and my own as autonomous and alienated? On the one hand, what she means by unalienated—Job's relationship to God is not characterized by a mediating distance proper to retribution theology—is precisely what I identified as the cause of Job's alienated stance that makes his unassailable act of wisdom possible. On the other, what I have described as the autonomy of the driven (and not desiring) subject certainly comes at the cost of the autonomy of the ego *qua* the seat of reason and consciousness, which, for Newsom, is what Job lacks. So much for any apparently simple opposition between the two studies!

Just after her conclusion about the moral imagination of the tale, Newsom astutely changes her perspective on the position from which she led us toward her conclusion.<sup>146</sup> In a reversal the likes of which are rare in biblical studies, she whom we thought was beside us rustles the leaves behind us. She catches off-guard those of us who are concentrating so hard to catch a glimpse of Job's moral imagination, and makes us responsible to what we see.<sup>147</sup> Whereas we thought we were objectively analyzing the subject Job, she exposes us as subjects participating in the construction of Job as an objectified spectacle. The shame that this point in her chapter incites sticks to its readers because it is the result of an encounter with our own *jouissance*, the ineradicable connection of interpretation with our bodies.<sup>148</sup> If the moral imagination Newsom constructs is an unalienated and unassailable piety, the construction involves a dimension of our *jouissance* that is unassimilable. For Newsom, there is no getting beyond this dimension, noting its presence, she moves on to the next genre.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 65-71.

<sup>147</sup>The idea that the voyeur's gaze is disturbed by the rustling of leaves, or some other sensible form, was an insistence of the famous analysis of the voyeur in JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, *Being and Nothingness* trans. by Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square, 1992).

<sup>148</sup>She suggests the reader may feel "contaminated" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 70).

<sup>149</sup>This dimension comes from "the Saying" of the tale which, she writes, "is always present... in every

What she thereby leaves behind, however, are the two very different ways we can relate to this shame that is the affective correlate to an encounter with *jouissance*. We could relate to this shame by feeling guilty, which would be to see our shame as a result of Newsom standing behind us, an external agent who represents the accumulated knowledge of the interpretive community. But the response to shame with guilt ignores that, in her scenerio, she is both beside us and behind us, inviting us to imagine that we too are back there rustling the leaves. This second option relates to our shame as the affective correlate to an encounter with our own unassimilable *jouissance*, a feeling I call anxiety. In contrast to guilt, anxiety does not approach *jouissance* as something potentially decipherable, and thus does not bestow on us a task that requires ever-renewed sacrifices of this *jouissance* so as to make room for an ever-accumulating knowledge. Instead, to feel anxiety is to treat our *jouissance* as something that remains necessarily opaque to our knowledge but that, as such, sustains our knowledge in its satisfying openness.

In part 2, this dissertation takes up these and other opposed modes of relating to *jouissance*, and I find that the difference between guilt and anxiety corresponds to that which separates Job's position from his friends'.

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instance of the Said" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 71).

## Part II

# The Limits of Wisdom in the Dialogue

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**Job 4-5: The Wisdom of Job's Friends**

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## 32 CROSS-WORD-PLAY

On Tuesday morning November 5, 1996, election day in the United States, the New York Times published its crossword puzzle with the apparently presumptuous clue for 39A, a seven letter answer: "Lead story in tomorrow's newspaper (!), with 43A." 43A directly follows 39A at the center of the grid and so, together, these two answers provide one of the puzzle's "theme entries." 43A is "ELECTED." A further clue comes from the theme entry at the bottom of the grid; clue: "Title for 39A next year;" answer: "MISTER PRESIDENT." Far from presumptuous, this puzzle is set up to work if one fills in the seven letters of 39A with BOBDOLE or with CLINTON, the answers to the related down clues in 39D, 40D, 41D, 23D, 27D, 35D, 42D could each be filled in with the letter from either name. For example, 39D, "Black Halloween animal," could be either "BAT" or "CAT."

Even knowing that the puzzle has two possible answers, one can still imagine what it would be like to work it for the first time. At the outset, the naïve reader would not know that the clues are ambiguous, or even that he/she is making decisions that disambiguate the ambiguous clues every time a provisional meaning is determined, e.g., when the reader decides 39D is probably BAT. Filling in BOBDOLE for 39A would seem to confirm this decision and correct or confirm any other, related ambiguities that may have occurred to the reader. Once the puzzle is complete and all the evidence accounted for, any ambiguities that remain—e.g., whether 27D ("Short writings") is BITS or BIOS—would appear to be resolved. However, having learned one way or another about the alternative solution to the

puzzle,<sup>1</sup> it becomes clear that, somewhere along the way, a decision was made or a possibility failed to occur to the reader, who thus finds him/herself complicit in the meaning of the puzzle. In other words, the puzzle subverts a common assumption—reading is a passive process of uncovering a meaning that is somewhere in or behind the text—by exposing a degree of activity, whether intentional or not, on the side of the reader, thus exposing reading as a process of the production, more than of the uncovering, of meaning. The puzzle suggests that whenever a reader pulls the rabbit of meaning out of a hat, one can be sure that the reader has, at the very least, taken part in putting the rabbit there in the first place.

The range of reactions from those who worked the puzzle are not surprising. Will Shortz, the long-time editor of the New York Times crossword puzzle, has often referred to this puzzle as his favorite.

When the puzzle appeared on Election Day, my phone at the *Times* started ringing at 9:00 and continued the whole day. Almost nobody seemed to realize that either answer fit the grid! The solvers who filled in CLINTON thought that I was being presumptuous at best, and maybe that I was inserting a political opinion into the puzzle. And the solvers who filled in BOB DOLE thought that I'd made a whopper of a mistake!<sup>2</sup>

Those who worked the puzzle not only misrecognized their role in the production of its meaning, they also identified the intention of the editor or author (presumptuous, mistaken, ideological) with the cause of the problems or uncertainties that the meaning they took to be final left them with. A myriad of similar speculations and ambiguities plague scholarship on Job 4-5. This dissertation wagers that the essence of (the puzzle's or the speech's) WISDOM is not found in the point of view of the editor/author or in any other substance transcendent to the text, but rather is produced on the text's immanent plane of meaning, at the places its limits are communicated.

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<sup>1</sup>I learned about it from Patrick Creadon's 2006 documentary *Wordplay*.

<sup>2</sup>As quoted in, CORAL AMENDE, *The Crossword Obsession* (New York: Berkley Books, 2001), 302.

## 33 WHY JOB 4-5?

This chapter focuses on a particular text, Job 4-5, but does not shy away from drawing conclusions about larger swaths of material. Even though the final section (48) and CHAPTERS 5 and 7 increasingly incorporate the friends' other speeches into the analysis of their wisdom initiated in my treatment of chs. 4-5, I nonetheless should defend this chapter's focus on Eliphaz's first address to Job. After all, the critical reader will immediately notice that Job 4-5 is a convenient text for my thesis since, as all interpreters have found, Eliphaz seems in these lines to shape his speech to achieve maximum ambiguity. Consequently, a question about the extent to which the structure of this particular speech inheres in the friends' speeches as a whole will likely linger even after I have drawn some conclusions on the basis of Job 4-5.

At the same time it is at least doubtful that Eliphaz's first speech is anomalous, i.e., at odds with what Eliphaz or the other friends say "on the whole." Indeed, most commentators find Job 4-5 exemplary, articulating the jist of the friends' message to Job. For this reason, although subtle and not so subtle differences *between* their speeches are recognized and important,<sup>3</sup> and although the point is rarely pushed very far or leaned on too heavily, scholars often privilege Eliphaz's first speech, an honor that has been justified for various reasons:

1. First—a matter of literary structure—in the narrative sequence of the book this is the first of the friends' speeches and as such defines the initial terms of the discussion, whether or not the discussion can be reduced to these terms. This speech forms a background to which each subsequent speech can be said to respond (or not).
2. Second—a characterological judgment—one may note the position of Eliphaz as Job's

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<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of the differences among the arguments of the three friends, see NEWSOM (2003a), 96-129; and DAVID J. A. CLINES, "The Arguments of Job's Three Friends" in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* Edited by D. CLINES, D. GUNN and A. HAUSER. (Sheffield: JSOT, 1982), 199-214.



*primary* interlocutor. He has been called the “leader of the group,”<sup>4</sup> “definitely the most prominent and eloquent statesman of the three . . . the most articulate of the three friends.”<sup>5</sup> Whether intentional (a result of editorial decisions) or, what seems less likely, inadvertent (a contingent result of the history of textual transmission), Eliphaz speaks the most words in response to Job, “in each cycle his speeches are significantly longer than those of the other comforters.”<sup>6</sup> In the first cycle of speeches Eliphaz’s speech is ninety-eight lines long whereas Bildad’s and Zophar’s speeches are less than half as long, forty-three and forty lines, respectively. Furthermore, some scholars suggest that he is the oldest and most respected of the friends because he is honored with the first position in the dispute.<sup>7</sup>

3. Finally, though not isolatable from (1) and (2), some such as Newsom have commented on the proleptic nature of Job 4-5: “In his first speech in chaps. 4-5, Eliphaz actually presents the whole repertoire of arguments that the friends will employ in all three cycles.”<sup>8</sup>

This chapter aims to give a more adequate theoretical basis to the claim supported by this more or less empirical evidence, namely, that Eliphaz’s first speech presents the essence of the friends’ wisdom to Job. In line with the approach to wisdom worked out in CHAPTER 2, I will show *how* the speech presents to Job the friends’ wisdom, and specifically how the transcendent essence of wisdom arises immanently from this speech.

Before delving into the interpretative issues that have long preoccupied the scholarly field, and then my own exegetical deductions, I put the text before us.

#### 34 JOB 4-5: TEXT AND TRANSLATION

*wayya'an ʾēlîpaz hattēymānî wayyōmar* 1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and

<sup>4</sup>GUSTAVO GUTIÉRREZ, *On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 21.

<sup>5</sup>HARTLEY (1988), 103. <sup>6</sup>HARTLEY (1988), 103. <sup>7</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 103. <sup>8</sup>NEWSOM (1996), 363.

		said:
<i>h<sup>a</sup>nissāh dābār ʾēlēkā til<sup>e</sup>eh</i>	2a	If one tries a word with you, will you be wearied?
<i>wa<sup>e</sup>šōr b<sup>e</sup>millîn mî yûkāl</i>	2b	but who is able to restrain speech?
<i>hinnēh yissar<sup>e</sup>tā rabbîm</i>	3a	Look, you have instructed many;
<i>w<sup>e</sup>yādayim rāpôt t<sup>e</sup>ḥazzēq</i>	3b	and you strengthened the hands of the weary;
<i>kôšēl y<sup>e</sup>qîmûn mîlēkā</i>	4a	Your speech supported the stumbling;
<i>ûbir<sup>e</sup>kayim kōr<sup>e</sup>ôt t<sup>e</sup>ammēš</i>	4b	and you made feeble knees firm.
<i>kî ʾattāh tābô ʾēlēkā wattēle</i>	5a	But now it comes upon you and you are wearied;
<i>tigga ʾādēkā wattibbāhēll</i>	5b	it touches you and you are terrified.
<i>h<sup>a</sup>lō yir<sup>e</sup>āt<sup>e</sup>kā kis<sup>e</sup>lātekā</i>	6a	Is not your fear your confidence, <sup>9</sup>
<i>tiq<sup>e</sup>wāt<sup>e</sup>kā w<sup>e</sup>tōm d<sup>e</sup>rākēkā</i>	6b	your hope the blamelessness of your ways? <sup>10</sup>
	...	
<i>z<sup>e</sup>kor-nā mî hû nāqî ʾābād</i>	7a	Think now, what innocent person perishes;
<i>w<sup>e</sup>ēypōh y<sup>e</sup>šārîm nik<sup>e</sup>ḥādû</i>	7b	and where are the upright effaced?
<i>ka<sup>a</sup>šer rāʾitî</i>	8a	Just as I have seen,
<i>ḥōr<sup>e</sup>šēy ʾāwen w<sup>e</sup>zōr<sup>e</sup>ēy ʾāmāl yiq<sup>e</sup>š<sup>e</sup>ruhû</i>	8b	those cultivating trouble and sowing misery reap the same.
<i>minniš<sup>e</sup>mat ʾēlō<sup>a</sup>h yō<sup>b</sup>bēdû</i>	9a	From the breath of Eloah they perish;
<i>ûmērû<sup>a</sup>ḥ ʾappô yik<sup>e</sup>lû</i>	9b	and from the spirit of his anger they are finished.
<i>ša<sup>a</sup>gat ʾar<sup>e</sup>yēh</i>	10a	The roar of the <i>aryeh</i> -lion

<sup>9</sup>As discussed in the chapter and noted by many others, this word means confidence in its other two occurrences (Ps 85:9; 143:9) but the masculine form of the substantive means both confidence (Job 8:14; 31:24; Ps 78:7) and folly, stupidity (Qoh 7:25; Ps 49:11, 14).

<sup>10</sup>Taking the *tm drkyk* as *casus pendens* with the *w-* of the apodosis. See SEOW (forthcoming).

	<i>w<sup>e</sup>qôl šāḥal</i>	10b	and the voice of the <i>shaxal</i> -lion
	<i>w<sup>e</sup>šinnēy k<sup>e</sup>pîrîm nittāû</i>	10c	and the teeth of the <i>kephir</i> -lion are removed. <sup>11</sup>
	<i>layiš ʾōbēd mibb<sup>e</sup>lî-ṭārep</i>	11a	The <i>layish</i> -lion perishes from lack of prey,
	<i>ûb<sup>e</sup>nēy lābî yit<sup>e</sup>pārādû</i>	11b	and the <i>labi</i> '-lions are scattered. <sup>12</sup>
	...		
	<i>w<sup>e</sup>ēlay dābār y<sup>e</sup>gunnāb</i>	12a	A word came to me furtively;
	<i>wattiqqaḥ ʾoz<sup>e</sup>nî šēmeṣ men<sup>e</sup>hû</i>	12b	and my ear took a whisper from it;
	<i>biš<sup>e</sup>appîm mēḥez<sup>e</sup>yōnôt lāy<sup>e</sup>lāh</i>	13a	amid anxieties from nighttime visions, <sup>13</sup>
	<i>bin<sup>e</sup>pōl tar<sup>e</sup>dēmāh ʾal-ʾnāšîm</i>	13b	when deep sleep falls upon people;
	<i>paḥad q<sup>e</sup>rāʾanî ûr<sup>e</sup>ādāh</i>	14a	Dread befell me, and trembling,
	<i>w<sup>e</sup>rōb ʾaṣ<sup>e</sup>mōtay hip<sup>e</sup>ḥîd</i>	14b	so that the mass of my bones were in dread.
	<i>w<sup>e</sup>rû<sup>a</sup>ḥ ʾal-pānay yaḥ<sup>a</sup>lōp</i>	15a	Then a wind passed over my face,
	<i>t<sup>e</sup>sammēr ša<sup>a</sup>rat b<sup>e</sup>šārî</i>	15b	a storm <sup>14</sup> made my flesh prickle.
	<i>ya<sup>a</sup>mōd w<sup>e</sup>lō-ʾakkîr mar<sup>e</sup>ēhû</i>	16a	It stood still, but I did not recognize its appearance;
	<i>t<sup>e</sup>mûnāh l<sup>e</sup>neged ʾēynāy</i>	16b	a form was before my eyes;
	<i>d<sup>e</sup>māmāh wāqôl ʾeš<sup>e</sup>mā</i>	16c	silent, and then I heard a voice, <sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup>A hapax in Hebrew, SEOW (forthcoming) plausibly suggests the verb *ntw* belongs with the Hebrew roots beginning with *nt-* that suggest elimination or removal; e.g., *ntḥ*; *ntk*; *nts*; *nts*; *ntq*; *ntr*; *ntš*.

<sup>12</sup>The five words for lions in vv.10-11 appear to carry indeterminate differences.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. 20:8; 33:15; Dan 2:19; 7:2, 7, 13; Gen 46:2; Num 12:6.

<sup>14</sup>Most versions read this as the construct of the word for “hair,” i.e., “a hair of my flesh,” despite several problems detailed by SEOW (forthcoming). Tg. takes it as “whirlwind.” While a play between “storm” and “hair” should be admitted, I think it is better to read this as an absolute form of *š<sup>e</sup>ʾārāh* (“storm”; cf. 9:17), as in *naḥ<sup>a</sup>lat* in 27:13.

<sup>15</sup>Here I follow SEOW (forthcoming) who departs from many who read a hendiadys here, “a silent/hushed

...

<i>ha<sup>ē</sup>nôš mē<sup>ē</sup>lô<sup>h</sup> yiš<sup>e</sup>dāq</i>	17a	“Can a human be righteous before Eloah?
<i>im mē<sup>ō</sup>sēhû yiṭ<sup>e</sup>har-gāber</i>	17b	Or a person be pure before his maker?”
<i>hēn ba<sup>α</sup>bādāyw lō<sup>̄</sup> ya<sup>α</sup>mîn</i>	18a	If <sup>16</sup> he does not trust his servants,
<i>ûb<sup>e</sup>mal<sup>e</sup>ākāyw yāšîm toh<sup>α</sup>lāh</i>	18b	and charges his messengers with folly, <sup>17</sup>
<i>ap šōk<sup>e</sup>nēy bāttēy-ḥōmer</i>	19a	how much more will those dwelling in houses of clay,
<i>š<sup>α</sup>er-beāpār y<sup>e</sup>sōdām</i>	19b	whose foundation is of clay,
<i>y<sup>e</sup>dakk<sup>e</sup>ûm lip<sup>e</sup>nēy-āš</i>	19c	be crushed before a moth, <sup>18</sup>
<i>mibbōqer lā<sup>e</sup>reb yukkatû</i>	20a	from morning to evening they may be shattered;
<i>mibb<sup>e</sup>lēy mēšîm lāneṣah yō<sup>b</sup>bēdû</i>	20b	they may perish forever without

voice,” though I have no real stake in his argument that Eliphaz may be evoking a tradition of receiving a revelatory word amidst the calm of a storm. The reading of a hendiadys fails to account for the verse’s use of *casus pendens*, emphasizing “it stood,” “a form,” and “silent.”

<sup>16</sup>Many versions have “Look” (cf. COTTER, 1992, 191), which is certainly possible here especially considering the frequency with which JOB uses *hēn* (instead of *hinnēh*) to form presentative exclamations. On the latter, see BRUCE K. WALTKE and M. O’CONNOR, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §40.2.1. However, *hēn* means “if” and states a premise when followed by *ṗ* or *ṗ ky* in the friends’ speeches in Job 15:15-16; 25:5-6; but also elsewhere, as in Deut 31:27; Prov 11:31. Cf. F. BROWN, S. DRIVER and C. BRIGGS, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1906), 243b.

<sup>17</sup>A hapax; some read *hll*, “to be deceived, a fool, mad,” but the *t-* preformative occurs nowhere else (cf. the *m-* in Qoh 2:2). Others cite the Ethiopic and Arabic root meaning “to wander,” and so translate something close to “error.” *thillāh* is a common word meaning praise so some read the *lō<sup>̄</sup>* doing double duty and cite the parallel of *mn* and *thlh* in Ps 106:12. The wisdom-folly motif throughout the speech suggests, along with the reason above, make “folly” the most likely meaning here. Cf. DAVID W. COTTER, *A Study of Job 4-5 in the Light of Contemporary Literary Theory* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), SBLDS 124, 192.

<sup>18</sup>A very difficult verse. I offer this translation tentatively; it matters little to my larger argument. Cf. the discussions in SEOW (forthcoming); or COTTER (1992), 187, 194.

		anyone understanding. <sup>19</sup>
<i>h<sup>alō</sup>-nissa<sup>c</sup> yit<sup>e</sup>rām bām</i>	21a	Will their remnant <sup>20</sup> not be plucked up with them?
<i>yāmūtū w<sup>elō</sup> b<sup>e</sup>ḥok<sup>e</sup>māh</i>	21b	They will die, without wisdom.
	...	
<i>q<sup>e</sup>rā-nā h<sup>a</sup>yēš ḥonekkā</i>	5:1a	Call now! Is there anyone who will answer you?
<i>w<sup>e</sup>el-mî miqq<sup>e</sup>došîm tip<sup>e</sup>neh</i>	1b	To whom among the holy beings will you turn?
<i>kî-le<sup>ē</sup>wîl yah<sup>a</sup>rog-kā<sup>a</sup>s</i>	2a	Surely vexation <sup>21</sup> kills the fool,
<i>ûpōteh tāmîṭ qin<sup>e</sup>āh</i>	2b	and passion slays the naïve. <sup>22</sup>
<i>ḥ<sup>a</sup>nî-rā<sup>ṭ</sup>tî ḥ<sup>ē</sup>wîl maš<sup>e</sup>rîš</i>	3a	I myself have seen a fool fixating, <sup>23</sup>
<i>wā<sup>e</sup>qqōb nāwēhū pit<sup>e</sup>ōm</i>	3b	and I noted his habitation; suddenly, <sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup>It is difficult to make sense of the text as it stands. One expects an object of the verb *mēšîm*, and so at least since Rashi many have taken it as elliptical for *mibb<sup>e</sup>lēy mēšîm lēb*, “without anyone noticing.” A similar problem occurs in 23:6b. Others (e.g., Habel), following Dahood’s proposal to read an enclitic *mem*, vocalize *mbly-m šm*, “without a name.” I chose to follow a reading present in the Vulg. (“and because no one understands”), which probably reflects the former, elliptical reading, but gives the idiom a sense more like a verb of perception as, for example, in Isa 41:22. I chose this reading in light of its accord with the v.21b.

<sup>20</sup>Or, with others, “tent-peg,” which accords nicely with the focus on housing.

<sup>21</sup>On the meaning of this word, see the discussion on page 173.

<sup>22</sup>DHORME (1984, 57) suggests that *kās* refers to inward irritation or annoyance and *qnḥ* to outward indignation.

<sup>23</sup>On this translation, see the discussion on page 175.

<sup>24</sup>This line affords a number of different translations. The verb is often read as the geminate *qbb* or *nqb*, both meaning “to curse,” i.e., “I cursed his habitation,” but *nqb* also means “to note” (e.g., Num 1:17; Amos 6:1; 1 Chr 16:41; cf. HALOT, 718-19), which would be a close parallel of *rḥ* (“to see”) in the second line (SHOW, forthcoming). Secondly, it is unclear what the adverb *pit<sup>e</sup>ōm*, “suddenly,” is supposed to modify. Gordis reprints it to the abstract noun *p<sup>e</sup>tā'im*, an unattested form of the root *pth*, which appears in the previous verse as a parallel to *wyl*. The noun, however, always contains the *y*. See *ptym* in Prov 1:22, 32;

<i>yir<sup>e</sup>ḥ<sup>a</sup>qû bānāyw miyyeša<sup>c</sup></i>	4a	His children are far from salvation,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>yiddakk<sup>e</sup>û bašša<sup>c</sup>ar w<sup>e</sup>ēyn maššîl</i>	4b	they are crushed at the city gate, with no one to help;
<i>ᵅšer q<sup>e</sup>šîrû rā<sup>c</sup>ēb yō<sup>c</sup>kēl</i>	5a	whose harvest the hungry will eat,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>el-miššinnîm yiqqāhēhû</i>	5b	and take it in baskets;
<i>w<sup>e</sup>šā<sup>c</sup>ap šammîm ḥēylām</i>	5c	trapped ones will pant after their wealth. <sup>25</sup>
<i>kî lō<sup>c</sup>-yēšē<sup>c</sup> mē<sup>c</sup>āpār āwen</i>	6a	Surely trouble does not grow from the dirt,
<i>ûmē<sup>a</sup>dāmāh lō<sup>c</sup>-yiš<sup>e</sup>maḥ āmāl</i>	6b	nor does misery sprout from the ground.
<i>kî<sup>c</sup>-ādām l<sup>e</sup>āmāl yûllād</i>	7a	However, a human is born <sup>26</sup> to misery,
<i>ûb<sup>e</sup>nē-rešep yag<sup>e</sup>bîhû ûp</i>	7b	as sparks <sup>27</sup> fly high.
	...	
<i>ûlām ᵅnî ᵅed<sup>c</sup>rōš ᵅel<sup>c</sup>ēl</i>	8a	But as for me, I would seek El;
<i>w<sup>e</sup>el-ᵅlōhîm ᵅšîm dib<sup>e</sup>rātî</i>	8b	And to Elohim, I would present my word;
<i>ōšeh g<sup>e</sup>dōlōt w<sup>e</sup>ēyn ḥēqer</i>	9a	who does marvels unfathomable,

*ptyym* in Ps 119:130; or *ptym* in Ps 116:6; Prov 8:5; 9:6. There are several ways to read the adverb here without amending the consonantal text or denying a possible allusion to the *pty*, the simpleton. For example, one could read, “I noted/cursed his sudden habitation”; “Suddenly, I noted/cursed his habitation” (NRSV, JPS); “I noted/cursed his habitation; suddenly. . .” I opted for the last because the adverb is regularly used to characterize the fate of the fool or wicked person which the speech goes on to detail. The sages regularly oppose the staying power of the righteous to the sudden downfall of the wicked (e.g., Prov 3:25; 6:15; 7:22).

<sup>25</sup>This is the most difficult verse and the only triplet in this problematic section (vv.1-7). I discuss it in some detail on page 176 but do not provide any definitive interpretation. The point in any case seems to be that a precarious ephemerality plagues any wealth that a fool may (temporarily) accumulate. SĖOW (forthcoming) provides the best discussion; cf. CLINES (1989), 115-16.

<sup>26</sup>Out of their concern with the coherence of vv.6-7, many reprint this verb to give it an active sense (e.g., Duhm, Dhorme, Clines, Gordis, Terrien). The relationship between vv.6 and 7, and my decision to render the verb as a passive, are discussed below on page 177.

<sup>27</sup>Given the mythological associations of *rešep* (cf. Deut 32:24), many transliterate rather than translate this word: “as sons of Resheph fly high” (e.g., Clines, Gordis, Habel). The allusion is possible but not necessary, which is why I elected to translate the word. Cf. the discussion in CLINES (1989), 141-142.

<i>nip<sup>e</sup>lā·ôṭ ad-ēn mispār</i>	9b	wonders innumerable;
<i>hannōtēn mātār al-p<sup>e</sup>ēy-āreṣ</i>	10a	who gives rain on earth;
<i>w<sup>e</sup>šōkē<sup>a</sup>h mayim al-p<sup>e</sup>nēy ḥûṣôṭ</i>	10b	and sends water on fields;
<i>lāsûm š<sup>e</sup>pālîm l<sup>e</sup>mārôm</i>	11a	sets <sup>28</sup> the lowly on high,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>pōd<sup>e</sup>rîm šāg<sup>e</sup>bû yeša<sup>c</sup></i>	11b	and the abject are elevated salvifically <sup>29</sup> ;
<i>mēpēr maḥ<sup>e</sup>š<sup>e</sup>bôṭ a<sup>r</sup>ûmîm</i>	12a	who frustrates the machinations of the crafty,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>lō-ta<sup>a</sup>šênāh y<sup>e</sup>dēyhem tûšiyyāh</i>	12b	so that their hands do not achieve success;
<i>lōkēd ḥ<sup>a</sup>kāmîm b<sup>e</sup>or<sup>e</sup>mām</i>	13a	who captures the wise in their craftiness,
<i>wa<sup>a</sup>ṣat nip<sup>e</sup>tālîm nim<sup>e</sup>hārāh</i>	13b	and the plans of the crooked are precipitated.
<i>yômām y<sup>e</sup>pagg<sup>e</sup>šû-ḥōšek<sup>e</sup></i>	14a	Daily they encounter darkness,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>kallay<sup>e</sup>lāh y<sup>e</sup>maš<sup>e</sup>šû baṣṣoh<sup>a</sup>rāyîm</i>	14b	and at noon they grope as at night.
<i>wayyōša<sup>c</sup> mēḥereb mippîhem</i>	15a	But he saves from their sharp mouth, <sup>30</sup>
<i>ûmiyyad ḥāzāq eb<sup>e</sup>yôn</i>	15b	and the needy from the hand of the strong;
<i>watt<sup>e</sup>hî laddal tiq<sup>e</sup>wāh</i>	16a	so hope exists for the poor,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>ōlātāh qāp<sup>e</sup>šāh pîhā</i>	16b	and wrongdoing shuts its mouth.

<sup>28</sup>Many discuss the awkwardness of the infinitive here. Its relationship to v.10 is unclear (that God sends rain *in order to* set the lowly on high is farfetched, as Gordis notes), and so the best solution may be to take it as equivalent to a finite verb. Alternatively, one could read it in close succession to v.8, where the same verb (*šym*) is present, yielding something like, “I would present (*šym*) my word to Elohim—*who does all kinds of mighty deeds*—(in order for him) to set (*lšwm*) the lowly on high”; cf. COTTER (1992), 215-16.

<sup>29</sup>Reading *yeša<sup>c</sup>* as an adverbial accusative.

<sup>30</sup>This line, too, is quite awkward. There are two major issues. First, “from the sword” and “from their mouth” present a redundancy that I eliminate (following Gordis) with a hendiadys combining these two, commonly associated words: “from their sharp mouth.” Second, there is no object, which some resolve (e.g., Dhorme, Rowley) by repointing *mēḥereb* to *māḥ<sup>a</sup>rāb*, a hophal participle meaning “the desolated one.” See the discussion in CLINES (1989), 117.

	...	
<i>hinnēh aš<sup>e</sup>rēy nōš yōcihennū lō<sup>a</sup>h</i>	17a	Look, blessed be the one whom Eloah reproves,
<i>ûmûsar šadday al-tim<sup>e</sup>ās</i>	17b	so do not reject the instruction of Shadday.
<i>kî hû yak<sup>e</sup>ib w<sup>e</sup>yeḥ<sup>e</sup>bāš</i>	18a	For he injures and he binds;
<i>yim<sup>e</sup>ḥaš w<sup>e</sup>yādāyw tir<sup>e</sup>pēnāh</i>	18b	he smites but his hands heal.
<i>b<sup>e</sup>šēš šārôt yaššilekkā</i>	19a	Amidst six adversities, he will deliver you,
<i>ûb<sup>e</sup>šeba lō-yigga b<sup>e</sup>kā rā</i>	19b	amidst seven, no harm will touch you;
<i>b<sup>e</sup>rāāb pād<sup>e</sup>kā mimma<sup>w</sup>et</i>	20a	Amidst famine, he will ransom you from death,
<i>ûb<sup>e</sup>mil<sup>e</sup>ḥāmāh mîdēy ḥāreb</i>	20b	amidst war, from the hands of the sword;
<i>b<sup>e</sup>šôt lāšôn tēḥābē</i>	21a	You shall be hidden amidst the scourge of the tongue,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>lō-tîrā miššōd kî yābō</i>	21b	and you will not fear devastation when it comes;
<i>l<sup>e</sup>šōd ûk<sup>e</sup>kāpān tiš<sup>e</sup>ḥāq</i>	22a	You will laugh at devastation and starvation,
<i>ûmēḥayyat ḥāāreṣ al-tîrā</i>	22b	and you will not fear the creatures of the earth.
<i>kî im-ab<sup>e</sup>nē hasšādeh b<sup>e</sup>rîtekā</i>	23a	For your covenant will be with the stones of the field,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>ḥayyat hasšādeh hoš<sup>e</sup>l<sup>e</sup>māh-lāk<sup>e</sup></i>	23b	and the creatures of the field will be peaceable with you.
<i>w<sup>e</sup>yāda<sup>e</sup>tā kî-šālôm oh<sup>a</sup>lekā</i>	24a	You will know that your tent is at peace,
<i>ûpāqad<sup>e</sup>tā nāw<sup>e</sup>kā w<sup>e</sup>lō teḥ<sup>e</sup>ṭā</i>	24b	you will visit your habitation and will not fail.
<i>w<sup>e</sup>yāda<sup>e</sup>tā kî-rab zar<sup>e</sup>ekā</i>	25a	And you will know that your progeny will



		be great,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>ṣe<sup>ḡ</sup>ṣā<sup>ḡ</sup>ēkā k<sup>e</sup>ēṣeb hā<sup>ḡ</sup>āreṣ</i>	25b	and your issue like the grass of the earth.
<i>tābō<sup>ḡ</sup> b<sup>e</sup>kelah<sup>ḡ</sup> ṣ<sup>ḡ</sup>lēy-qāber</i>	26a	You will enter the grave in full-vigor, <sup>31</sup>
<i>ka<sup>ḡ</sup>lōt gādāš b<sup>e</sup>ittō</i>	26b	like the stacking of grain in its season;
		...
<i>hinnēh-zōṭ ḥ<sup>ḡ</sup>qar<sup>e</sup>nūhā ken-h<sup>ḡ</sup></i>	27a	See, this is what we have searched out;
<i>š<sup>e</sup>mā<sup>e</sup>ennāh w<sup>e</sup>attāh da-lāk<sup>e</sup></i>	27b	thus you can hear it <sup>32</sup> and know it for yourself.

## 35 A HISTORY OF AMBIGUITY IN INTERPRETATIONS OF JOB 4-5

*Fullerton.* K. Fullerton proposed the most eloquent and useful early articulation of the meaning of ambiguity in Job 4-5. Sounding remarkably similar to many contemporary ideological critics, Fullerton describes his project as an attempt to incorporate the presence of double entendre into his interpretation of the meaning of JOB. Referring to his 1924 article, “The original Conclusion to the Book of Job,” which applied the same technique to other passages in JOB that this, his 1930 article applies to chs. 4-5, Fullerton writes, “These passages were all supposed to be written in such a way that the orthodox reader could peruse them with approval, whereas the more attentive reader would find in them an indirect but none the less real criticism of the orthodox position.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, below the surface of

<sup>31</sup>It is often noted that this word, which only appears here and in 30:2, has no convincing Semitic cognate. I am inclined toward Seow’s solution, which proposes that the word is a conflation of *kl* and *lh* (cf. Deut 34:7), with the assimilation of the shared consonant, so that it functions somewhat like a composite noun, “full-vigor,” both here and in 30:2.

<sup>32</sup>It should be mentioned that no other versions have the imperative here but rather the 1cp, which would read “thus it is we have heard, so you should know it yourself” (Cf. SEOW, forthcoming).

<sup>33</sup>KEMPER FULLERTON, “Double Entendre in the First Speech of Eliphaz” *Journal of Biblical Literature*,

straightforward orthodoxy spoken by Eliphaz Fullerton finds a meaning subversive of this orthodoxy which, though “only faintly sounded,”<sup>34</sup> can be heard by those with ears to hear and which furnishes “the key to all that follows.”<sup>35</sup> “In order to detect this subtle overtone,” Fullerton teaches, “one must consider exactly in what mood Eliphaz addressed Job . . . and also, and this is all important, what impression he was likely actually to make upon a man of Job’s temperament, and experience.”<sup>36</sup> Eliphaz’s first speech ambiguates between a first order of meaning associated with its sender and a second order generated by a perspectival shift to its receiver. These two orders create Fullerton’s double entendre.

*Hoffman.* Fullerton’s work is explicitly supplemented some fifty years later in an article of just over five pages by Y. Hoffman. Though he does not present it as such, Hoffman’s study brings the ambiguity Fullerton splits between the perspectives of the sender (Eliphaz) and the receiver (Job) into the message itself, and thus into one’s perspective on Eliphaz. Hoffman highlights six instances of equivocal terms in chs. 4-5 whose meaning matters significantly to one’s interpretation of this speech and Eliphaz’s posture. Hoffman concludes his brief study with the following three interpretive options,

It remains a question for a separate study whether this phenomenon [i.e., the exceptional use of ambiguous words in chs. 4-5] leads us to regard Eliphaz as either a hypocrite, or a good, sensitive friend who does not wish to inveigh harshly against Job, or rather a harsh doctrinaire whose dogmatism, when confronted by Job’s misfortune, causes him internal confusion, manifest in the ambiguity of his words.<sup>37</sup>

Hoffman rightly directs our attention to Eliphaz’s posture as an ambivalence that Fullerton took too much for granted. Hoffman proves himself quite prescient when he suggests that the problem to be addressed by future studies is to discern which possible postures are false and which one is true. Many interpreters have taken up the problem as he poses it, making claims for one or another of these options or, most often, for whatever combination of them

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49 (1930), 320.

<sup>34</sup>FULLERTON (1930), 326. <sup>35</sup>FULLERTON (1930), 326. <sup>36</sup>FULLERTON (1930), 327. <sup>37</sup>YAIR HOFFMAN,

to their minds best accounts for all the evidence.<sup>38</sup>

The problem as Hoffman leaves it, and which many interpreters tacitly approve by proposing solutions, can only be resolved by disambiguating the content of the speech. If one takes Hoffman's as the proper presentation of the problem, the most satisfactory solution will be the one that best accounts for all the speech's ambiguities. This has been done in a number of ways, of course. In each case an interpreter identifies the supposed essence of the speech, and deems whatever contradicts this essence to be secondary, derivative, and non-essential. Yet whereas Fullerton's followers sought clarity and unequivocal essence, Fullerton deemed the appearances of ambiguity as essential to the meaning of Job 4-5. Fullerton's aim of giving a meaningful account of the ambiguity in Job 4-5 has unfortunately been lost on the majority of his followers. In this chapter of the dissertation I engage his contention and make some surprising discoveries.

*Clines v. Balentine.* To give a sense of the interpretive preoccupations since Hoffman's work, I put into conversation the accounts of two recent and well-respected interpreters of JOB. Clines represents the majority of interpreters who characterize Eliphaz as a well-intending friend whose counsel is disabled by the restrictions of his theology and/or imagination. Balentine represents the minority opinion, i.e., that Eliphaz is a callous dogmatist whose feeble and inauthentic sympathies hardly veil his judgmental arrogance. Clines concludes that Eliphaz is "well-disposed and consolatory toward Job."<sup>39</sup> For Clines, the key to assessing Eliphaz's mood lies in his direct address to Job in several "nodal verses."<sup>40</sup> These verses strike Clines as deferential, in contrast with the "somewhat decorative and expansive

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"The Use of Equivocal Words in the First Speech of Eliphaz (Job IV-V)" *Vetus Testamentum*, 30 (1980), 118.

<sup>38</sup>Sixteen years after the publication of his brief essay, Hoffman also weighs in on the question he raised therein in a monograph on the book of Job. See YAIR HOFFMAN, *A Blemished Perfection: The Book of Job in Context* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1996), 117-18.

<sup>39</sup>CLINES (1989), 121.

<sup>40</sup>This is not true of all of Eliphaz's second person speech, only 4:2-7; 5:1, 8, and 27, and especially the "nodal verses" 4:6 and 5:8.

topoi with which the speech is filled out.”<sup>41</sup> On the basis of these he clarifies a succession of several ambiguities (I cite them not for their particular value to my argument but rather to give a sense of the mode of argumentation):

4:5, for instance, is to be read not as a smug and hostile criticism, but at the worst as a mild reproof and at the best as a sympathetic encouragement. 5:1 is not a satirical jibe, but an almost purely rhetorical question, while 5:8 expresses no “holier than thou” superiority but comradely advice. Similarly, larger units like those describing the fate of the wicked (4:8-11; 5:2-5) contain no innuendo against some pretended virtue of Job’s, but rather are designed to serve as further encouragement to Job by presenting the lot of the wicked as a contrast to what Job is entitled to expect.<sup>42</sup>

What I want to draw out of Clines’ conclusion is its logical sequence. He first distinguishes between well-disposed consolations and expansive topoi, a distinction that prioritizes the former over the latter. The consolations transmit the essence of Eliphaz’s mood whereas the topoi decorate and expand this essence. With the essence secured, ambiguities either disappear or lose their functional significance since they become relatively unimportant superficialities.

While Balentine arrives at the antinomic conclusion about Eliphaz’s mood,<sup>43</sup> his logic proceeds congruently. “On first impression,” he admits, “Eliphaz’s words remind one of a pastoral counselor who gently ministers to the distraught with equal measures of comfort and sympathetic advice...” But he then concludes that,

Despite the sophisticated certainty of his counsel, Eliphaz seems trapped within a world of petrified traditions and unaffected slogans for life. He is content to respond to suffering by stringing together bits and pieces of accumulated wisdom, as if this will substitute for

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<sup>41</sup>CLINES (1989), 121. <sup>42</sup>CLINES (1989), 121.

<sup>43</sup>As often noted, Rashi goes the farthest in this regard, interpreting Eliphaz’s statement to mean, “Now your end proves your initial intention, that the fear with which you were God-fearing was in fact foolishness, for it comes from foolishness and not from fulness of knowledge, and similarly your hope and your ways are all foolishness.” For a similar judgment, see EDWIN M. GOOD, *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job*,

thinking through the particulars of Job's situation for himself. In this respect, he is more like a dogmatic theologian than a pastoral counselor. His approach is that of one who is so addicted to formulas for life's problems that he is unable to feel his way into ideas and experiences alien to his own. He espouses a "cocksure fundamentalism" that brooks no questions and harbors no doubts. As the spokesperson for the first and best counsel the friends can offer to Job, Eliphaz models a way of responding to suffering that makes God's final assessment in 42:7 all the more weighty for those who will be instructed by this drama.<sup>44</sup>

Like Clines, Balentine relies on a fundamental distinction between essence and appearance. Unlike Clines, Balentine distinguishes "bits and pieces of accumulated wisdom" from the inauthentic comfort and sympathy that strings them together. What Clines reads as a friendly disposition expanded into various *topoi*, Balentine dismisses as window-dressing for intellectual impotence. Both, however, disambiguate the speech's essential meaning through recourse to Eliphaz's attitude or mood.

*Habel.* N. Habel's excellent 1985 commentary reverses his previous position<sup>45</sup> and argues that Eliphaz assumes the role of a "sapiential counselor who moves from cautious outreach to confident assurance. In this role Eliphaz expresses the positive tone of a friend rather than a disputant."<sup>46</sup> He finds blocks of traditional (i.e., sapiential) materials—sayings, proverbs, teachings, and doxologies in 4:7-11, 17-21; 5:2-7, 9-16, and 18-26—which are "framed by intermittent comments [in 4:2, 3, 7; 5:1, 8, 17, 27] which betray a particular technique of sapiential counseling and a corresponding pastoral mood."<sup>47</sup> Several of these comments are direct imperatives (4:7; 5:1, 17, 27), as one would expect in light of a text such as Prov 3:1-4:1 (cf. Prov 3:1, 5, 11; 4:1), and the rest employ some variants or cite a common heritage that give Eliphaz's counsel a connotation of deference and goodwill. For example, Eliphaz

*with a Translation* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 208-13.

<sup>44</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 104-5.

<sup>45</sup>In NORMAN C. HABEL, *The Book of Job* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 26.

<sup>46</sup>HABEL (1985), 121. <sup>47</sup>HABEL (1985), 118.

speaks deferentially to Job in the indirect third-person singular in 4:2, “If one dares a word with you...” and in the first-person singular in 5:8, “If it were me, I would seek El...” and not simply in the direct, second-person singular. Furthermore, Habel finds in the three utterances of *hinnēh* (4:3; 5:17, 27) an alert to “the sufferer that assurance can be found in the advice being offered or the common ground being explored.”<sup>48</sup>

Habel’s argument, like Clines’, may be well-supported but it is not without its problems. I mention two in particular. First, Habel’s discussion displaces the ambiguity within Eliphaz’s discourse to an ambiguity between the disputants, the way Eliphaz seems to talk about one thing—in 4:6, for example, Job’s fear (*yir<sup>e</sup>āh*) and blamelessness (*tōm*) seem to refer to the prologue (e.g., 1:1, 8; 2:3)—and yet be taken by Job (he cites 6:8; 14:19; 27:5; 31:6) and by the reader to mean something quite different. Habel suggests they “are taken by Job as a sarcastic comment on Job’s religion and heard by the listener as a significant thematic question to be explored.”<sup>49</sup> But this is only to reinstate Fullerton’s division between sender and receiver as the basis for ambiguity in the speech when, as Hoffman’s analysis suggests, the message and its medium are far from clear.<sup>50</sup>

Second, Habel’s argument is particularly interesting in this discussion because it uses all the same evidence as Balentine yet arrives at an opposed conclusion about Eliphaz. Despite Habel’s accusations of gratuitousness and despite the disavowals that pepper his analysis,<sup>51</sup> Balentine’s argument offers an equally plausible account of the evidence and cannot be so easily dismissed. The distance, in other words, from A (traditional sayings surrounded

<sup>48</sup>HABEL (1985), 119.

<sup>49</sup>HABEL (1985), 121.

<sup>50</sup>CLINES (1989, 125) makes the same move in his commentary when he writes, “The ‘double entendre’ elsewhere in Eliphaz’s speech so elegantly analyzed by Fullerton is particularly ironic here [in 4:7]: from Eliphaz’s viewpoint he is being nothing but consolatory; heard with the ears of Job, though, his words only rub salt into Job’s wounds. . . The irony lies not in Eliphaz’s words themselves—they are meant in a kindly spirit—but in their significance within the book as a whole.”

<sup>51</sup>E.g., HABEL (1985), 118: “There is no justification for considering these imperatives belligerent or

by comments) to B (deferential and friendly counsel), is the same as the distance from A (traditional sayings surrounded by comments) to C (bits and pieces of accumulated wisdom strung together by disingenuous sympathies):

$$\overline{AB} \cong \overline{AC}$$

Figure 4.1: The Congruency Between Habel/Clines and Balentine

Yet one cannot reasonably decide between the two since the appeal of both positions to a point of view transcendent to the text—the speaker’s mood—that leaves behind their common ground of the text.

#### 36 A HERMENEUTICAL IMPASSE

So what does Eliphaz’s speech mean? As in the crossword puzzle discussed at the beginning of the chapter, one can either choose one of the available options—or try to come up with a competing proposal. The difficulty of the situation is not lost on interpreters. For example, regarding Job 4-5, Hoffman remarks, “The two interpretations are contradictory, and they determine to a great extent, not only our understanding of Eliphaz’s attitude towards Job, but also his theory of divine retribution.”<sup>52</sup> Yet Hoffman had just said on the previous page that one’s determination about what the speech means ultimately depends upon one’s presupposition about Eliphaz’s mood:

If Eliphaz’s starting point is the conviction that Job is a righteous believer, then the inevitable conclusion will indeed be that [Job] has nothing to fear, and his future is assured. If, on the other hand, Eliphaz’s point of departure is Job’s present condition, then the converse of the above meaning is the import of his statement: your suffering . . . attests to the fact that you are not truly righteous.<sup>53</sup>

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paternalistic.”

<sup>52</sup>HOFFMAN (1980), 117. <sup>53</sup>HOFFMAN (1980), 115-16.

One can ascertain Eliphaz's subjective attitude once a semantic choice is made about the meaning of his words, and one can grasp the meaning of his words once a choice is made about his intentional point of reference. For Hoffman, Eliphaz's point of departure is inherent to the meaning of his speech, but Hoffman provides no way of discerning this subjective position without having already determined the substance of the speech. And yet such a determination seems impossible without the prior decision. Clines confesses his confrontation with the same impasse:

Such assessment [i.e., his assessment] of [Eliphaz's] mood does indeed have a subjective element in it, and it would be possible to read the speech as much more coldly critical of Job; but it is submitted that the reading here presented makes a coherent interpretation of Eliphaz's speech possible and accounts best for the windings of thought.<sup>54</sup>

In other words, Eliphaz's speech cannot constitute its own meaning; knowing the position from which Eliphaz enunciates its content is prerequisite. The reader is therefore left stranded and trapped within a hermeneutical circle.<sup>55</sup> Not that such analyses do not produce knowledge. Of course they do. But the essentially hermeneutic nature of the problem makes the question "who is correct?" impossible to answer: one cannot make a judgment about the *particular* meaning of Eliphaz's words apart from some preconception about the *totality* of Eliphaz's mood or intention, and that preconception is based on a particular meaning.

### 37 THE AXIOLOGY OF RETRIBUTION

Given the hermeneutical nature of the problem, I want to revisit H. G. Gadamer's basic conceptual distinction between the negative sense of a "prejudicial reading" and a more

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<sup>54</sup>CLINES (1989), 121.

<sup>55</sup>Incidentally, Clines himself admits the attractiveness of such circular logic in his discussion of 4:7 and the apparently cruel, improbable, and unmaintainable opinion Eliphaz seems to espouse therein—that the righteous are never cut off—when he writes, "Yet, however cruel such a doctrine may be, its strength lies in the fact that it is unfalsifiable. If one already believes the doctrine, every instance of premature death is



philosophically constructive estimation of necessary “fore-structures.”<sup>56</sup> I propose setting aside as potentially prejudicial the question of whether Eliphaz is cocksure or consolatory, and inquire instead into the fore-structure or conceptual framework of “retribution ideology” found in almost all interpretations of the friends’ speeches. Although some detractors exist, interpreters of JOB more or less agree that the friends console Job by offering him a framework of retributive justice within which he can and should locate himself and his experience so that he can begin to take control of both.

Before questioning the validity of this thesis with regard to Job 4-5, it will be helpful to outline the passage’s main rhetorical movement. Chapter 4 divides neatly after v.11, at which point Eliphaz turns from the more linear argumentation of vv.2-11 to describe in detail his sensory experience of encountering the divine. This major break yields two ten-line sections (vv.2-11 and vv. 12-21), each of which may be further subdivided into subsections of five lines<sup>57</sup>:

- Vv.2-6 are framed by Eliphaz’s perhaps sarcastic rhetorical questions to Job. Much in the manner of the “lectures” in Prov 1-9, these verses position Eliphaz to Job as teacher to student.
- Vv. 7-11 present basic sapiential truisms about the fate of the righteous versus the fate of the wicked. The fate of the wicked, even of the ones who possess such power as the lion, is tenuous and doomed.
- Vv. 12-16 recount Eliphaz’s *phenomenal* encounter with divine truth.

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proof of the wickedness (however secret) of the victim, and serves only to support the validity of the original premise” (CLINES, 1989, 124).

<sup>56</sup>See HANS-GEORG GADAMER, *Truth and Method* trans. by Joel Wiensheimer and Donald G. Marshall 2nd edition. (Continuum, 2004), 268-273. To seek a solution to the present hermeneutical impasse by turning to Gadamer, the patron saint of hermeneutics, is to adhere to the old adage “only the spear that smote you can heal your wound.” This ancient notion receives a properly dialectical analysis in ŽIŽEK (1993), ch. 5.

<sup>57</sup>These divisions are generally uncontroversial. A list of critics and their particular divisions can be found in PIETER VAN DER LUGT, *Rhetorical Criticism and the Poetry of the Book of Job* (Leiden: Brill, 1995),

- And finally, vv.17-21 either explicitly or implicitly elaborate this encounter at a conceptual level, translating the overwhelming sensory experience into a message.<sup>58</sup>

The evidence of Eliphaz here evincing a retribution ideology is not difficult to identify. In vv.2-6 Eliphaz critiques Job's response to his encounter with suffering, which has caused Job to abandon what the sapiential tradition has had to say about the meaning of suffering, despite the fact that Job had hitherto understood and taught about ethical exigencies from within the framework of this tradition. Perceiving Job to be at a subjective brink, Eliphaz urges him to retreat.

But now it comes upon you and you are weary.

It touches you and you are terrified.

Is not your fear your confidence?

your hope the integrity of your ways?

(4:5-6)

If we momentarily set aside the ways in which interpreters deal with Eliphaz's identifications—of fear with confidence, hope with integrity—then on first glance these identifications seem far from intuitive, and yet Eliphaz drives them home as if they were empirical fact. Eliphaz challenges Job to find the exceptional case:

Think now—what innocent person has perished?

Or where have the upright been destroyed?

(4:7)

These things have not (and therefore *do* not) come to pass, a point which Eliphaz reduplicates declaratively, in one of the classic manifestations of wisdom's ethic of retribution.

Just as I have seen, those cultivating trouble and sowing misery reap the same.

(4:8)

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65-66.

<sup>58</sup>It is supposed that v.17 reports the content of the word mentioned in v.12, though it is not necessary to take this as a direct citation. Verses 18-21, at any rate, describe what transpired indirectly, in more

Whether intended to be encouraging or disparaging, the first part of Eliphaz's first speech appears to be governed by the ethical axiom of retribution.

### 38 JOB 4:6: A CRACK IN THE RETRIBUTIVE FRAMEWORK

Interpreters often note that rhetorically Eliphaz's speech recalls the prologue, when all in Job's world was right and subsequently removed.<sup>59</sup> Take for example Eliphaz's mention of Job's "fear"; in our passage Eliphaz pointedly asks, "Is not your fear you confidence?" (4:6). Compare this to the opening lines of JOB, "There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, fearing God and turning from evil" (1:1). Eliphaz reminds Job of the subjective correlate to objective blessing—*fear* goes with *blamelessness* goes with *greatness*—or, more causatively, fear *causes* greatness.

Granted the connection between 4:6 and 1:1. But what of the odd predication in 4:6, identifying *fear* with *confidence*? Lexically considered, "fear" (*yrh*) and "confidence" (*kslh*) can only be seen as strict antonyms. Interpreters almost always resolve this identification of opposites by referring to the way the wisdom tradition endows "fear" (*yr*) with a positive ethical/epistemological value.<sup>60</sup> Proverbs frequently extols the posture of "fearing YHWH" as an exhortation to religious piety and the fear-of YHWH ultimately signifies the very essence of wisdom (cf. Prov 1:7 and 9:10).

There remains substantial disagreement about the *semantic* field of *yr* within the wisdom tradition: does it retain the sense of "being afraid" or has it lost those affective origins?<sup>61</sup> In any case, one can easily understand the point that Eliphaz is making if one reads fear within the framework of retribution as the subjective stance proper to objective summary fashion.

<sup>59</sup>See, for example, CLINES (1989), 124-25; or BALENTINE (2006), 105-6.

<sup>60</sup>See the extended development of this idea in VON RAD (1972), ch. 4, "Knowledge and the Fear of God."

<sup>61</sup>The range of scholarly opinions can be represented by the antithetical positions of BECKER (1965) and CLINES (2003). KNAUBERT (2009, 185-196) reframes the question, demonstrating that the paradigmatic or structuring function of the signifier "fear" is strictly a function of its gradual *loss* of significance.

blessing. The perceived contradiction of “fear” with “confidence” is alleviated since “fear” (understood as “the fear-of YHWH” that frames Job’s outlook in the prologue) supplies the only basis for authentic sapiential confidence.

Yet, one cannot resurrect the particular, historical, sapiential permutations of certain privileged signifiers on only *one* side of the equation. “Fear” is, after all, not the *only* word that should be read within its historic, sapiential context. So I turn also to “confidence”—*kis<sup>e</sup>lah*—and raise the question as to its particular deployment by the sages, which would necessarily color Eliphaz’s statement. This noun and its cognates are included among M. Fox’s discussion of *words for folly*. That is, while the sages endow “fear” with a positive ethical/epistemological value, “confidence” gets a negative one. As Fox puts it, “It is an easy semantic move from confidence to overconfidence, and from there to smug obtuseness.”<sup>62</sup> Delitzsch says the root *ksl*, to be fat, “signifies both the heaviness of stupidity and the boldness of confidence.”<sup>63</sup> Fox speaks of various verses in the wisdom corpus that “assume the connection between (over)confidence and stupidity.”<sup>64</sup> If we presume this connection here, then Eliphaz is suggesting that Job’s stupidity, his thick-headedness, somehow follows from his fear.<sup>65</sup>

The problem is obvious enough; although it is undoubtedly tempting to decide that the particular *sapiential* valence should be assigned to fear rather than stupidity, such a decision cannot be justified. The problem is not simply a failure of our (interpretive) understanding; it runs like a crack through the retributive framework that supposedly binds Eliphaz’s (and the friends’) discourse together. Recall the sapiential motivation for

<sup>62</sup>MICHAEL V. FOX, “Words for Folly” *Zeitschrift für Althebraistik*, 10 (1997b), 8.

<sup>63</sup>FRANZ DELITZSCH, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job* trans. by Francis Bolton 2nd edition. (2 vols. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872), 91.

<sup>64</sup>FOX (1997b), 8.

<sup>65</sup>Cf. GOOD (1990), 210. The masculine form *kesel* means “confidence” in Ps 78:7 and Job 31:24, but “folly” in Qoh 7:25.

fear: the sage must fear because of her own lack with respect to wisdom—she cannot be wise in her own eyes—and also because of YHWH’s excessive presence that can disrupt any order, retributive or otherwise. The fear of YHWH serves to mark wisdom as incomplete and necessarily partialized but, paradoxically, this fear is the “first-part” of wisdom in the sense that it brings wisdom into existence as a thing that can be taught about and sought after. The fool’s confidence assumes a structurally symmetrical function to the sage’s fear, even though the former is less important.<sup>66</sup>

Fear and confidence are functionally symmetrical because they both signify what falls outside of the retribution framework, and thus effect an ideal image of this framework’s (possible, ultimate) completeness. Just as fear designates the ignorance inherent to wisdom, confidence signals the knowledge at the heart of folly. That they do so from two different and opposed angles accounts for the sense of ambiguity and uncertainty generated by their juxtaposition in Job 4:6. If only one of the nouns were there, it would have served to constitute the framework by providing a place within it for that which is outside of it; and if the two were opposed, they would have together formed the boundaries of everything wise or foolish; but since they are identified, the difficulties these notions pose to the task of discerning wisdom and folly are set in stark relief. Setting two notions side-by-side that usually cover over the inability of sapiential thought ultimately to divide wisdom from folly produces a palpable sense of this framework’s incompleteness.

### 39 THE AXIOLOGY OF TOTAL CULPABILITY

This crack rendering the retribution framework incomplete may be signaled by the juxtaposition of fear and confidence in 4:6, but it is blown wide open in the vision that follows

<sup>66</sup>The fool’s confidence may be less important than the sage’s fear but both are central to Proverbs. Dame Folly’s final appellation in Prov 1-9 is “the woman of *k<sup>c</sup>siylût*” (9:13); the book’s final poem that praises the Woman of Substance teaches that, “Charm is deceptive and beauty ephemeral, but a woman who *yir<sup>c</sup>at* YHWH is to be praised” (31:30). See CHRISTINE ROY YODER, *Wisdom As a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), which convincingly

in the second half of ch. 4. In v.17 Eliphaz reports the whisper of a message that stole itself into his ear (cf. v.12).<sup>67</sup> Although the meaning of the experience is debated, Eliphaz reports v.17's question as authoritative and significant: "Can a human be righteous before Eloah? Or a person be pure before his maker?" And with slight variation, similar statements implying the totality of human culpability before God are made by other interlocutors in the dialogue (e.g., 9:2; 15:14; 25:4), including Job, such that Harding can write, "Thus for each of the humans still involved in the drama (Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, Elihu) the authoritative status of Eliphaz's revelation is not in doubt."<sup>68</sup> A problem arises here for many because of the apparent conflict between the axioms of 4:2-11 and 4:12-21.<sup>69</sup> Where Eliphaz implies that the innocent person does not perish (*bd*) in v.7 and that the cultivators of trouble do perish (*bd*) in v.9, in vv. 19-21 he concludes ch. 4 by telling us that those whose foundation is dirt—i.e., all human beings—will perish (*bd*) and will die without wisdom. It seems, then, that the axiom of retribution that divides the world into the wise and the foolish, the innocent and the evil, gives way to a doctrine of total culpability in which all are culpable and foolish.

Unsurprisingly, many have tried to make these two incommensurable axioms compatible within a consistent speech. For example, Clines argues for a modal reading of the verbs in 4:20-21, rendering these verses not "as statements of general actuality, but of particular possibility,"<sup>70</sup> which is to say that only some, and not all, are the subject of vv.19-21's verbs, the some in question being those cultivators of trouble and sowers of misery mentioned in v.8.

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establishes the inherent connections between Woman Wisdom in Prov 1-9 and the Woman of Substance in Prov 31:10-31.

<sup>67</sup>The ambiguity of the vision and its implications receive detailed attention in JAMES E. HARDING, "A Spirit of Deception in Job 4:15? Interpretive Indeterminacy and Eliphaz's vision" *Biblical Interpretation*, 13 (2005), 137-66.

<sup>68</sup>HARDING (2005), 159. <sup>69</sup>As noted and elaborated by HARDING (2005), 152-53.

<sup>70</sup>DAVID J. A. CLINES, "Verb Modality and the Interpretation of Job IV 20-21" *Vetus Testamentum*, 30

For if these verses are taken as general statements about humankind, Eliphaz will have destroyed, by the time he reaches the mid-point of his speech, the premise from which he began, and on the basis of which alone he can offer consolation to Job; namely that humankind is divided into two camps, the innocent and the wicked (vv.7-8), and that each camp receives its proper reward (v.8), and that Job unquestionably belongs to the former camp (vv.3-4,6). It is always possible, of course, that the speech lacks coherence, but such is an unhappy conclusion to which we may finally be driven only when we have allowed for the possibility of modal interpretations.<sup>71</sup>

To clarify a confusion: there is no question that these are general statements about humankind. They are. The question is whether the verbs should be given a modal translation, which would imply that the predicate is only potentially predicated of the general subject. That is, does Eliphaz say, for example, that every human will perish without being noticed (v.20), or that, for every human, the possibility exists of perishing without being noticed. Thus, even if one were to accept Clines' argument that a modal reading of the verbs in vv.19-21 is preferable, there would be no need to jump to the unlikely conclusion that the subject that could actually receive the potential predicate in these verses is the subject of the verb in v.8. Eliphaz characterizes human beings by their inability to be righteous before God (v.17) and their ability to be crushed as easily, and more so, than angels (vv.18-19). No reasonable justification exists for finding in this text, as does Clines, the unrighteous crushed opposed to the righteous uncrushed. On the contrary, Eliphaz's speech opposes the unrighteous crushed to the unrighteous uncrushed.<sup>72</sup>

*Pace* Clines, the idea that Eliphaz's speech lacks coherence need not disappoint. Another scholar might be perfectly happy with such a conclusion without thereby falling out of the critical enterprise: "Eliphaz's first speech does not in any sense consist of a fairly unified sequence of thought, but is a series of entities of very different kinds, each of which

(1980), 354; cf. CLINES (1982), 204; cf. COTTER (1992), 196.

<sup>71</sup>CLINES (1982), 204-5.

<sup>72</sup>Many commentators agree that Eliphaz makes "unrighteous" a universal predicate of humankind; see,

has its own structure of thought and thesis within itself. Eliphaz offers Job at least five different and slightly connected propositions to ponder.”<sup>73</sup> What, however, are the extent and nature of the “slight connections” between these different thoughts? Can they ultimately be isolated from one another as different entities in a series? The discussion of 4:6 as a crack in the retributive framework testifies that neither of these theses or structures of thought is ever constituted as a separate or independent entity.

Earlier I suggested that the impasse about the ambivalences of Eliphaz’s mood and the speech’s meaning might be broken by looking to the theological framework upon which almost all interpretations agree. This theological framework now seems struck by a similar, essentially hermeneutic impasse. There is evidence for both axiologies and yet there is no ultimately satisfactory common ground for adjudicating between them insofar as they organize the ground in the first place.

#### 40 JOB’S FRIENDS AS CONSOLERS

I am finally in a position to identify the promise of a recent article on the friends’ speeches. Newsom argues that the speeches are best understood as the verbal component that likely accompanied the acts of mourning and consolation performed by family and friends for the sake of a mourner. She perceives two stages in the process. First, ritual mourning, which apparently lasted for seven days or to a point at which the mourner marked the termination of mourning through specific actions, e.g. putting on clean garments, and entered into the second stage, a process of consolation, which could last much longer.<sup>74</sup> It was customary for mourners to receive consolers, i.e., family and friends who encouraged mourners to move along in this process *from mourning*, in which they were ritually separated from

for example, DRIVER and GRAY (1921), 48; POPE (1973), 39; HABEL (1985), 120.

<sup>73</sup>VON RAD (1962), 410.

<sup>74</sup>CAROL A. NEWSOM, “‘The Consolations of God’: Assessing Job’s Friends across a Cultural Abyss” in *Reading from Right to Left: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J.A. Clines* Edited by J. CHERYL EXUM and H.G.M. WILLIAMSON. (London: Sheffield, 2003b), 349.



the community and their normal lives, *to consolation*, in which normal activities could be resumed. Newsom suggests that coherence, consistency, and non-contradiction are not what one should expect from consolatory speeches, for these aim at performing a function rather than delivering a single message.<sup>75</sup>

Since there is scarce evidence in the Hebrew Bible of any verbal component to such consolations—outside the book of Job—and there is abundant evidence from Greco-Roman sources, Newsom proposes to shed some light on the speeches of Job's friends by looking at the latter. She outlines five “fundamental assumptions that underlie the Greco-Roman understanding of the nature, purpose, and appropriate modes of consolation.”<sup>76</sup> Her purpose is not to find parallels, but rather “to normalize elements of the friends' words and behavior that we are often not certain whether to treat as examples of good cultural performance of consolation or as an outrageous failure of friendship.”<sup>77</sup> With this, Newsom positions her argument squarely within the antinomy of mood and meaning, of the subject and signification, that is at work throughout this discussion of Eliphaz's first speech. Her conclusion:

They have, as friends, begun with sympathy, but their friendship offering would have been incomplete had they not also engaged in consolation. The rationalism of their arguments is neither inept nor inapt but is precisely the instruction that is needed when grief disorders insight. Appropriate, too, is the eclecticism of their consolatory repertoire, for one does not know what will prove useful. Even the increasing harshness of tone and moral rebukes would have appeared appropriate from the perspective of Greco-Roman traditions.<sup>78</sup>

The promise of Newsom's argument comes from her insistence that the speech need not cohere to be considered a whole. The ambivalences of the speech—of mood and of meaning—do not conceal an essence which, upon discovery, would allow us to separate Eliphaz's true message from those contradictory messages he simultaneously and unwittingly sends, or from Job's misinterpretations, or from the author's clever double entendres. Instead, the speech's potential meanings and the speaker's potential postures achieve a kind of

<sup>75</sup>NEWSOM (2003b), 356. <sup>76</sup>NEWSOM (2003b), 354. <sup>77</sup>NEWSOM (2003b), 356. <sup>78</sup>NEWSOM (2003b), 356.

semi-autonomy from other meanings and postures as so many different attempts to perform the same social function, regardless of their mutual consistency or mutual exclusivity. Consolation, therefore, is not unlike a kind of early talk therapy in which the law of non-contradiction exercises as much rule over the analyst's interventions as it does over the analysand's dreams, i.e., none.

By drawing our attention to the social function of consolation, Newsom disengages a particular interpretation of the speech's meaning from the burden of having to vie for hegemony over the whole, of having to encapsulate the essence of the speech's wisdom. Moreover, Newsom has found evidence suggesting that one might even *expect* a consoler to offer different and inconsistent consolations. Far from something to be embarrassed about or paternalistically dismissive of as evidence of some primitive irrationality, such inconsistency might evidence the consoler's astute flexibility in responding to the (in)effectiveness of his consolation.

The crucial point is to recognize why consolation works where other unifying notions for grasping what the speech means have not. Unlike the others, the notion of consolation does not try to envelop or account for all the ambiguities and ambivalences of the text, weaving them into a coherent whole. Taking a totally different tack, Newsom's consolatory function succeeds because it is void of content. Or rather, its content is nothing other than its function, which is to organize the speech's signifying material with respect to it. Being void of content, it avoids many of the pitfalls encountered by more essentialist proposals that necessitate an evaluation of the speech's meanings on the basis of their (dis)similarity to whatever is posited as the speaker's psychological profile.

There is a concomitant risk alongside the promise of Newsom's argument. If the designation "consolatory speech" frees us from futile attempts to grasp the speech either as a non-contradictory totality or as an authentic reflection or realization of Eliphaz the person or character, this designation nevertheless does not free us from the sense that we just cannot quite figure out what he wants to say and why he is saying it. Job 4 incites in

readers a sense of intensifying uncertainty, suspicion, and desire that must not be lost with the baptism of its meanings as ultimately indeterminate and penultimate to the function of consolation. The dynamism and temporality of the reading process that produces this sense should not be exchanged for a more static and spatial model of the speech's meaning.

#### 41 ELIPHAZ'S ANSWER

Given this irreducible sense of vexation that inheres within the meaning-effect of ch. 4, it is striking that Eliphaz begins ch. 5 by speaking about experiences of vexation and about what not to do when faced with them. In a proverb in 5:2, Eliphaz says,

Surely vexation kills the fool, and passion slays the naïve.

*kî-le<sup>ē</sup>wîl yah<sup>a</sup>rog-kā<sup>a</sup>s ûpōteh tāmît qin<sup>e</sup>āh*

Many interpreters translate *kā<sup>a</sup>s* “anger” and focus their interpretations on the anger of the fool as that which kills him.<sup>79</sup> What is important for the word in this context, and what is important about the word more generally, is its strong tie to an object with respect to which the subject is frustrated, inhibited, vexed, or provoked, as when Hannah is provoked by Peninnah about her inability to bear a child (1 Sam 1:6, 16), or when God is provoked by Israel’s turning away toward other gods and sin (Deut 32:19; Ezek 20:28; Ps 85:5) or by other nations taking due credit away from God (Deut 32:27).<sup>80</sup> The characterization of the fool here has less to do with a particular affective response (his hotheadedness), than with his tendency to let an object frustrate or vex him (vexation also characterizes the fool in Prov 12:16; 27:3; and Ecc 7:9). The parallel word to vexation, *qin<sup>e</sup>āh*, “jealousy, zeal, envy, animosity, enmity,” also signifies an affect that is unmistakably related to an object (again, its loss, perceived loss, lack, perceived presence for another, &c.).<sup>81</sup> Thus the issue is not simply the presence of an affect but the affective relationship of the fool to a (missing)

<sup>79</sup>See, for example, DHORME (1984, 57) and DRIVER and GRAY (1921, 49-50). <sup>80</sup>Cf. HALOT, 491.

<sup>81</sup>Cf. HALOT, 1110-1111.

object. Eliphaz's statement, therefore, sounds more like an admonition warning Job that he is at risk of becoming vexed before the answer he cannot receive.

So, to return to my thesis, Job 5 tells one some things to think and not to think about a sense of vexation such as what subsists after reading Job 4. Below I will discuss how, later in ch. 5, Eliphaz provides an alternative to vexation for dealing with uncertainty. He speaks about a force that causes vexation, and so reorients the reader's perspective on vexation from an indeterminate effect of misunderstanding or opacity, to an indeterminacy that is determined as an effect of God's activity in the world. Whereas vexation about the meaning of Job 4 has been considered an impediment to identifying its subject, Job 5 suggests that one subject in particular characteristically produces gaps and uncertainties that disturb meaning.

Before trying to see how this thesis plays itself out in ch. 5, I need to outline that chapter's main rhetorical movement. Job 5's main divisions are fairly uncontroversial.<sup>82</sup> There are three main sections:

- Vv.1-7, introduced by an imperative, give Job an negative exemplar of what not to do when faced with vexation.
- Vv.8-16 begun by a first person invocation (“As for me, I would...”), the effect of which (i.e., “I think you should...”) may be less direct but ultimately is not very different than the imperative. These verses teach Job about God's involvement in matters that confound the wise.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup>The division at this “strophic” level is basically the same as in, for example, FRIEDRICH HORST, *Hiob* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968), 58-60; SAMUEL L. TERRIEN, *Job* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1963), 74-78; HABEL (1985), 113-115; COTTER (1992), 127-28, cf. 117-28; BALENTINE (2006), 104; and VAN DER LUGT (1995), 70-79, who includes a list of different divisions and the interpreters who proposed them on pp.75-76. “The sections described by Horst (4:1-11, 12-21, 5:1-7, 8-16, 17-27) emerge as the most typical of the results achieved by scholars working on a great variety of theoretical bases” (COTTER, 1992, 122); cf. VAN DER LUGT (1995, 76n.1) for several of Horst's predecessors with similar sections.

<sup>83</sup>Cf. HABEL (1985), 118-19.

- Vv.17-27, begun by an imperative, promise Job what will come to be for him should he accept that which he cannot understand. As noted by Terrien and others, vv.17 and 27, both introduced by the particle *hinnēh*, are somewhat set apart from their surroundings.<sup>84</sup>

## 42 5:1-7

Having just ended his vision report in ch. 4 with the triumphant exclamation that those whose foundation is dirt die without wisdom, Eliphaz begins ch. 5 by warning Job not to think that his vexation conceals some truth which he could come to know. There is no one, Eliphaz implies in 5:1-2, no holy being to whom Job could turn to answer him. Answer what? Perhaps the questions Job surely has about Eliphaz's own speech in ch. 4, but at least those questions Job raises in ch. 3 (e.g., "Why did I not die at birth? [3:11] . . . Why does he give light to the toiler? [3:20]"). Not only has Job just spoken these questions, but Eliphaz's speech also evokes them in vv.6-7, the concluding statement of this section, when it characterizes the human as born to toil (*āmāl*), which seems to respond directly to Job's concern in 3:10 and 20. Regardless of the particular referent, the message is clear: only a fool remains vexed by these questions. They are so unanswerable that vexation by and zeal for their answers, according to the proverb in 5:2, can only lead to death. Eliphaz's message in vv.1-2 is not to become fixated on resolving one's vexation.

I will take Eliphaz's advice as a convenient alibi for avoiding the particulars of the vexing parable he offers in vv.3-5, concentrating instead on its images, which continue the message against fixation. In fact, "fixating" would not be a bad translation of the hiphil participle *mašrīš* in v.3,<sup>85</sup> which Eliphaz claims to have observed a fool doing—he is still talking

<sup>84</sup>Terrien, however, thinks they are set apart as crowns on two strophes of three triads: 8-10, 11-13, 14-16 + 17; 18-20, 21-23, 24-26 +27 (TERRIEN, 1963, 75). As nice as Terrien's symmetry is, I side with the majority who read 5:17 as an introductory rather than a concluding line; cf. COTTER (1992), 122.

<sup>85</sup>The root is usually translated "to root" and has a similar range of meaning in Hebrew as it does in

about the same <sup>š</sup>*wîl* from v.2. First of all, “fixed” captures the most common figurative meaning of the root *šrš* : riveted, immobile, stable. Second, the negative connotation of fixation in English, which is derived mainly from a vague, pop-psychological notion of an obsession, an *idée fixe*, captures the sense *šrš* receives when the sages use it of fools and the wicked to signify a maldeveloped, incompetent, and perhaps even dead root.<sup>86</sup> Finally, fixation includes a libidinal dynamic signifying a firm and satisfying attachment to a privileged object or a characteristic of an object.<sup>87</sup> Where *šrš* is not elsewhere used as the English slang *root* to denote activities such as rummaging, poking, prying, and pulling for one side/team in a competition, *mašrîš* may here receive a similar connotation since it concerns an unanswerable question and a fool’s death from vexation and zeal.

Eliphaz describes the fool’s tendency to root around in an unanswerable question until, fixated with zeal for its resolution, he brings about his death. Given these three connotations, what Eliphaz goes on to describe is hardly surprising as, suddenly (v.3), the fool’s “offspring are far from salvation, they are crushed at the city gate” (v.4), and his harvest goes to the hungry (v.5).<sup>88</sup> Eliphaz worries that Job will search so high for a holy answerer English, having first to do with a plant, but most often used to various figurative ends. It signifies a source (Deut 29:17; Job 19:28; Ezek 17:9), an anchor to the ground (2 Kgs 19:30; Job 8:17; 14:8; Job 28:9; Isa 40:24; Ezek 17:6), and more generally something riveted, stable (Prov 12:3; Jer 12:2), anchored to a social body (Job 29:19), or a history (Judg 5:14; Isa 37:31), and, contrastively, the displacement of some such fixed position, as in “uproot” (Ps 52:7; Job 31:8), as well as the acts of digging (Ps 80:10) and spreading (Jer 17:8).

<sup>86</sup>Bildad twice characterizes the root of the wicked as dry, weak, ephemeral (Job 8:17-18; 18:16), and Proverbs opposes the root of the righteous which will not totter, to wickedness, which will not be established (12:3).

<sup>87</sup>For a fuller treatment of the psychoanalytic use of this term, see J. LAPLANCHE and J.-B. PONTALIS, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), 162-65.

<sup>88</sup>Verse 5 is impossible to make sense of as it stands. As for the part referred to here, the consonantal text, *qsrw* could be read either as a qal perfect 3cp whose subject is the children of v.4 (“what they harvested. . .”), as in LXX, or a noun with the 3ms suffix (“whose harvest. . .”), as in the MT (the mater is the Masorettes’ attempt to clarify this ambiguity). The relative particle beginning the verse works either way. Whether it is

(v.1), or bore himself down so low into his questions (v.3), that he will find himself forsaking the world and the world forsaking him (vv.4-5).

Verses 6-7 reveal even more about the axioms subtending Eliphaz's concern.<sup>89</sup> Continuing the imagery against rooting, Eliphaz cites a proverb in v.6 proclaiming that suffering does not sprout from the ground. And in v.7 he says that all humanity (*ʿādām*) is born to suffering.<sup>90</sup> The fool is not the sufferer *per se*; suffering does not simply mean that the sufferer is a fool. The fool is, on the contrary, the one who entertains a particular relationship to suffering, a relationship which, I am presently articulating, approaches suffering as if it were a crop whose seed could be discovered by rooting it out. The fool thinks that all the evidence simply adds up and reveals its cause, the fool is the one who reads 4:8—"those who cultivate misery (*ʿāmāl*) reap it"—without 4:9, where it is "from the breath of Eloah [that] they perish." In other words, there is a gap between the evidence for the cause of suffering and the suffering itself that cannot be accounted for by the evidence. Balentine too observes this from his comparison of vv.6-7 to Gen 3:17-19; in the latter the ground (*ʿādāmāh*) is cursed by God because of human sin to "bring forth (*šāmah*) thorns and thistles that signify the hard labor it will impose on human existence... When compared to Gen 3:17-19, [Job 5:6-7] is an elliptical statement that leaves open the question whether the fool or his children whose harvest is eaten by another, the fool is obviously not in a position to do anything about it with his head in the ground. This part of this verse is just a glimpse of the difficulties of 5:1-7. "This passage is the most difficult part of Eliphaz's speech to understand. First, the text is garbled in v.5; second, it is not clear how the verses fit together; third, vv.6-7 can be interpreted in contradictory ways. Any interpretation must therefore be tentative" (NEWSOM, 1996, 379). For these reasons I have tried to stick to the consonantal text and focus more on the images structuring the passage than the precise meaning it produces.

<sup>89</sup>See CLINES (1989), 141-42.

<sup>90</sup>Many repoint the MT to read a hiphil imperfect instead of a pual imperfect so that Eliphaz actually says "a human begets suffering." This reading is further supported by the presence of many manuscripts that have *yld*. While this is possible, it requires the *l*- preposition to mark the accusative, which it often does, only not with the verb *yld*. *yld* often occurs with *l*- and these cases include both defective and full spellings of the verb, but nowhere does the *l*- preposition mark the direct object of the verb *yld*. See, for

sin is at the root of human misfortune.”<sup>91</sup> Eliphaz does more, however, than leave the question unanswered. *This opening or gap in understanding is precisely what his speech consistently represents to its hearers.* In what follows Eliphaz informs Job that this gap is nothing other than the activity of God and he advises Job to seek no one other than God.

I can briefly summarize my interpretation up to now with two paradoxes. First, Eliphaz's speech in ch. 4 presents an irreducible ambiguity that incites hearers' *desire to disambiguate* as well as their *suspicion about certitude*. Second, in 5:1-7 he tells Job neither to expect an answer from a holy beyond nor to think that he can uproot the here and now of his suffering and perceive its seed. This would seem to leave Job nowhere to turn. In 5:8-27, to which I now turn, Eliphaz clarifies the option he thinks Job is left with and what effect this choice will have on him.

43 5:8-16

After seven difficult verses teaching where and whom not to seek, v.8 finally tells Job whom to seek: God. The God of whom Eliphaz speaks, however, is no easily seekable divine being. In fact, this God can hardly be identified by anything more or less than the trail of evidence God leaves behind. In v.9 Eliphaz characterizes God as one whose great deeds are unfathomable, incapable of being numbered (cf. 9:10), which is to say that they are incapable of being ordered or known (cf. 37:5). Eliphaz counsels against looking for an answer to suffering because the key lies instead in what remains unknown, and more specifically in failures to understand and/or misunderstandings, in that unknown X that must be posited for a failure of understanding to be perceived as such. God is, he says, the doer of what is unfathomable and innumerable. This goes against the grain of many conceptions of the theologies of Eliphaz and the friends, which tend to imagine God as the

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example, Gen 24:15; 35:26; 36:5; Deut 23:9; 2 Sam 3:2, 5; 5:13; Prov 17:7, 21; Job 1:2.

<sup>91</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 115.



ultimate guarantor of the system, or even the exceptional support of the rule. Instead, God is the causal agent behind the failures of the rule, the breakdowns in the system and in any totality.<sup>92</sup>

Eliphaz, a sage, surprisingly describes God as “frustrating the crafty” (v.12), “capturing the wise in their craftiness” (v.13), so that “daily they encounter darkness and at noon they grope as at night” (v.14).<sup>93</sup> Consider what fails in each case: *maḥ<sup>e</sup>š<sup>e</sup>bôṭ*, the designs, plans, purposes, machinations of the crafty (*ārûmîm*); the craftiness of the wise; the *ē-šāh*, the counsel, schemes, advice, plans of the crooked; and finally, sight. In other words, what fails are the attempts to plan, to anticipate, the tortuous attempts to calculate when what remains unknown is not a corner of darkness awaiting enlightenment but a force that makes enlighteners see darkness even in light. Job, Eliphaz’s doxology implies, should not be trying to know more but to understand where the failure in his understanding lies and what that can teach him, because he can be certain that, where his wisdom fails, there God has been. God cannot be anticipated, but where the unanticipatable happens, there God has been.

With this reversal whereby Eliphaz proclaims that the limits and failures of wisdom bespeak its essence, Eliphaz dares to draw some astonishing conclusions. He proclaims in

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<sup>92</sup>E.g., HABEL (1985, 120): “This El is the creator God of wisdom tradition, the master mind whose strategies are superior to those of the wisest schemers on earth and who intervenes to thwart their ingenious plans. Thus Job, like the poor, can be assured that his *tiq<sup>e</sup>wāh*, “hope” (v.16), resides in the integrity of his ways (v.6) and that his God will therefore restore him.”

<sup>93</sup>Cf. COTTER (1992, 217, 219-20): “One of the puzzling things about the sorts of people to whom Eliphaz takes exception here is the fact that, by and large, the qualities he objects to are held in esteem in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. . . . A tightly crafted unity, this section of Eliphaz’s first speech leaves the reader more confused than ever about him. . . [H]e seems to condemn the wise. At least he speaks of them, in vv.12-14, in such ambiguous terms that a reader who did not know that Eliphaz fancied himself to be one of the wise himself could hardly guess.” Incidentally, numerous interpreters miss what Cotter has noticed because they, for some reason, project a negative moral value on to these qualities. For example, Balentine thinks Eliphaz describes God “thwarting ill-begotten schemes for success and ensnaring those who devise them in

v.16 that the poor have hope and in v.17 that Job has been blessed and instructed. Eliphaz does not tell Job to seek God because wisdom emanates from God's deeds, which are all perfectly harmonious and coherent, and that Job will gain understanding if he gains a perspective more like God's<sup>94</sup>; instead he tells Job to seek God because God sets the lowly on high and raises the dejected (5:11). This is not the God of calculus, of a calculating retribution theology, but the one who frustrates the calculating and wise (5:12-13).<sup>95</sup> God is a great eclipse forcing the wise to see noontime as night (5:14), and this is the God on account of whom hope exists for the poor (5:16)—here meaning Job.

#### 44 5:17-27

In vv.17-27 Eliphaz turns his attention directly to Job, deploying a litany of second person subject and object pronouns and outlining what could be for Job should he accept the instruction (*mûsar*)<sup>96</sup> of Shadday (v.17). Accepting the instruction of Shadday is an act whose nature has gone remarkably unspecified by scholars. At the very least, it is that which Eliphaz thinks Job must do to be counted again among the set of sages, among society. With that, a question that has trailed this analysis for many pages finds its answer, i.e., for Eliphaz, what serves as the boundary between mourning and consolation. One risks misunderstanding what Eliphaz promises Job by starting out with the idea that the essence of his wisdom lies in a retribution theology. Just as the interpretive key to 5:1-7 came from resisting the identification of the fool and the sufferer that Eliphaz is so often taken to assume and insisting instead that the fool is the one who maintains a certain relationship to suffering, so too does the blessing of God's instruction come here, not from an absence of their own machinations" (BALENTINE, 2006, 117).

<sup>94</sup>I.e., Habel's "master mind."

<sup>95</sup>For the opposing opinion, see HABEL (1985, 135), who refers to God here as "the grand controller of all cosmic events that affect human lives"; or, according to BALENTINE (2006, 119), the one who "has revealed the blueprint for creation" to Eliphaz.

<sup>96</sup>On this important term, see HABEL (1985), 134-35.

of suffering, but rather from a certain relationship to suffering.

Eliphaz does not offer Job a life free of adversity,<sup>97</sup> as a focus on retribution may cause us to anticipate.<sup>98</sup> Quite the contrary: the nine prepositional phrases in vv.18-22 imagine a number of possible calamities that Job may endure e.g., injury (5:18), adversity (v.19), famine and war (v.20), devastation, starvation, and wild animals (vv.21-22). While vv.19-20 make promises of a limiting sort, “amidst seven adversities no harm will touch you” (v.19), “amidst famine, he will ransom you from death” (v.20), what these promises promise is an ultimate limit to suffering. Eliphaz is not saying that Job will suffer no more, or that he will suffer six or seven—but not seven or eight—adversities (*ṣārôt*) when he promises him that he will be spared from harm (*rāʿ*). The harm (*rāʿ*) Job will be spared is altogether different than the adversities (*ṣārôt*) he will suffer. Admittedly, Eliphaz’s statement in v.18 creates some ambiguity insofar as the two *waws* joining the two dispensations of God’s activity could be read temporally—i.e., God injures *then* binds, smites *then* heals. But vv.21-22 dissipate this possible confusion as Eliphaz promises not one unfortunate experience over another or a period of misfortune followed by a time of fortune, but an altogether different experience of misfortune, one which is not accompanied by an upsurge of negative affect:

Amidst the scourge of the tongue you will be hidden;  
 you will not fear devastation when it comes;  
 You will laugh at devastation and starvation;  
 and you will not fear the creatures of the earth.

(5:21-22)

Here it is clear that Eliphaz thinks devastation is a sure possibility for Job’s future—and

<sup>97</sup>Cf. “What Eliphaz envisions as Job’s restitution is tantamount to a return to the paradisiacal harmony of Eden (vv.23-26) . . . he describes the primordial bliss that God has prepared for Job on the other side of his misfortune” (BALENTINE, 2006, 118); or HABEL (1985), 136.

<sup>98</sup>So, for example, “The didacticism of the imperatives [in vv.17b and 27b] sounds a note of uncertainty; that is, there *is* a blessed future for Job, but *only if* he will meet certain conditions” (CLINES, 1989, 147).

how could he not—but the good news he offers is that Job will not fear it when it comes.<sup>99</sup> The possessive second person pronouns clustered in vv.23-25—*your* covenant, *your* tent, *your* habitation, *your* progeny, *your* issues—function to emphasize a subjective condition despite objective calamity such that, for example, Eliphaz promises Job that he will know peace in *his* tent, despite whatever storms may rage on in it; he may reckon *his* progeny many, despite the starvation he may endure. No matter what, Job “will enter the grave in full vigor” (v.26).

What Eliphaz promises, then, is a transformation at a second level, not an immediate transformation, i.e., a transformation of his experience of his experience and not simply a different experience. This reading is strengthened when we recall how Job ends his first speech:

Surely the fear I feared has come upon me,  
and that which I dread encounters (*bw*) me;  
I am not at ease, and I am not at peace, and I am not restful,  
for anguish has come (*bw*).

(3:25-26)

Eliphaz acknowledges Job's complaint right away in his first speech, “But now it comes (*bw*) upon you and you are weary; it touches you and you are terrified” (4:5). And then Eliphaz promises at the end of his speech that, even amidst terror, Job will know no fear.

As for the content of Job's experience, Eliphaz promises Job nothing different than that which he is already suffering. As for the role of God, Eliphaz promises neither that God's good and redeeming hand will overturn the forces of death and destruction, nor that God's just hand will continue to bring death and destruction until Job accepts God's instruction. Instead, Eliphaz says, “Blessed be the person whom Eloah reproves, so do not

<sup>99</sup>Cf. NEWSOM (1996), 381, “Read more sympathetically, and with more appreciation of the nature of poetic language, Eliphaz's imagery evokes something of the life-giving power of God, which sustains a person even in calamity, the inextinguishable source of strength that prevents a person who is gravely suffering

reject the instruction of Shadday. For he injures and he binds; he smites but his hands heal” (5:17-18).<sup>100</sup> In the end Eliphaz offers Job a new perspective on his experience insofar as meaningfulness no longer supplies its ultimate horizon. Job is counseled against any desire to disambiguate or cohere what is ambiguous or incoherent and instead is urged to see in it the work of God. Eliphaz quarantines truth to the realm of the divine and resists identifying God with a particular meaning—injury or healing—insisting instead that God is experienced in the limitation of meaning, in the kernel of truth that distorts all meaning. Eliphaz does not offer Job a God who makes sense of it all, a God opposed to a traumatic remainder that escapes sense, but makes of God the supreme agent of senselessness, nothing other than sense’s traumatic limit. Job need not be terrified by his ignorance and vexation but can instead enjoy and learn from them as privileged symptoms of a divine encounter.

On what basis does Eliphaz imagine that Job’s terrifying experiences could lose their fearfulness? At the end he appeals to no other authority than Job’s conscience and the force of his own argument, “hear and know for yourself” (v.27). Just as I found Eliphaz much more concerned with Job’s orientation and approach to his own suffering than with any particular opinion Job may harbor about his suffering, so here does Eliphaz admonish Job to gain understanding through an orientation and not through any particular content.

But does Eliphaz not stabilize, domesticate, and thereby negate the unknowable by locating it in a structure that can instruct? Perhaps, but it seems to me that, for Eliphaz, the instruction of God is not about the unknowable per se as much as it is about the impossibility of knowing it. The inscrutable God continues to evade understanding, drifting behind and away even from the moment of instruction.

What on earth could this wisdom fail to encompass? How could Job possibly throw this infinitely flexible wisdom into crisis? In the remaining chapters of part 2, I aim to show how Job does precisely this.

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from shattering entirely and even enables that person to flourish again.”

<sup>100</sup>Cf. Deut 32:39; Hos 6:1.

Before getting to that, however, I propose to look more precisely at where we have already been. To this point I have been able to present the argument solely as a function of the text. Yet it is also deeply rooted in certain notions of the individual, the subject, signification, and so on. I do not think that I have been disingenuous by neglecting direct treatment of this dimension insofar as such notions subtend every interpretation—not just my own—and I have remained silent about this dimension with respect to them all. In any case, what follows undertakes a transcoding of the above analysis into a set of terms which may at first appear foreign but which will in the end, if I am successful, seamlessly converge upon the now familiar terms with which I read the speech. The fortunate consequence of this exercise will be a surplus of understanding.

#### 45 THE SELF AND THE SUBJECT; A THEORETICAL TRANSCODING

Crucial to my interpretation is a conviction about the categorical difference between a subject and an individual. The problems I have drawn out of the confusions that plague the present scholarly discussion of the subjects of Job 4-5—the subject matter of the speech as well as the subjective position from which it is spoken—are deeply tied to confusions about the nature of these two subjects and of the relationship between them. Some scholars operate under the premise that the speech's meaning is grounded in a pre-existent subject whose intention is transparent to itself and realized in the speech. Eliphaz's (and/or the author's) identity, intention, or mood is invested with the function of anchoring the meaning of his speech.<sup>101</sup> I call the supposed position of mastery from which the speech's meaning

<sup>101</sup>Recourse to the so-called "intentional fallacy" has often been made by biblical critics across the theoretical spectrum and so, for this reason, should not be taken for granted. Unfortunately, more often than not, citing it has served a prejorative end, allowing either *a facile dismissal of a critique*—"so-and-so may accuse me of succumbing to the fallacy of intention here, but I say it matters and, moreover, all I am ultimately interested in is what an author meant to say. . ." as if it is at all legitimate to respond to a critique by making the critiqued position a matter of choice or preference—or *a facile critique of an opposing viewpoint*—"so-and-so here falls prey to the intentional fallacy. . ." as if saying so invalidates all the opposition's

is supposed to emanate  $S_1$ . I call the content or meaning of the message  $S_2$ , which is constituted only on the basis of its relationship to  $S_1$ , a relationship which can be depicted like this:

$$(S_1 \rightarrow S_2)$$

Figure 4.2: Mastery and Meaning

The problem is that neither  $S_1$  nor  $S_2$  is able to ground the other, and so the barred-S ( $\S$ ) represents a lack of a signifying or meaningful basis that subtends every constituted relationship between  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ :

$$\frac{(S_1 \rightarrow S_2)}{\S}$$

Figure 4.3: No Ground to Stand Upon

The result leaves the critic before a seemingly interminable series of interpretations, each one of which is complete and excludes the others without providing any means for evaluating among them:

$$\frac{(S_1 \rightarrow S_2)}{\S} \longrightarrow (S_1 \rightarrow S_2) \vee (S_1 \rightarrow S_2) \vee (S_1 \rightarrow S_2) \vee \dots$$

Figure 4.4: The Interminable Effect

The lack of any ground for each determination of meaning compels the reader to circle back, imagine another sense for the passage, a sense that could only be related to the previous sense through the logical operator “or” ( $\vee$ ) because of their independence from one another. findings. Here I intend (!) to do neither.

But more needs to be said about the nature of  $S_1$ , for the idealistic notion of a pre-symbolic, self-transparent subject whose thoughts and intentions are somehow realized in his speech has been attacked and rejected from many angles.<sup>102</sup> The point of departure for the standard critique is the priority of language and socio-symbolic structures over subjectivity and intention. The socio-symbolic field to which anyone must turn in order to attain the material and structures necessary for understanding and describing oneself is not the self but is instead something other than the self and so that which it provides cannot be understood as the self but rather as object-representations with which one identifies. Beginning with its name, the subject does not produce itself but receives from its socio-symbolic milieu the material necessary for its emergence. Following Lacan I refer to this symbolic milieu—the predominant structure of socio-symbolic space out of which any subject is produced—as the symbolic order or the big Other. The subject is an effect of an embodied self's position with respect to its trans-individual context.

The effect of this critique on the conception of the position of mastery, intention, and desire (i.e.,  $S_1$ ) is profound and is missed in the usual notion of a gap between intention and the alien medium of language, which conceives of a pre-symbolic intention that is more or less distorted in its forced conformity to the signifier—what one wants to say is different than what one says because no one can fully possess the medium. On the contrary, the true point of the subordination of the subject to the signifier is that the intention to say is always already mediated by the structures and operations of signification. Intention is not an “internal” immediate force; it is always mediated through the “external” symbolic order; when we intend to say something we follow our judgment about what needs to be said because it is good, right, wise, funny, relevant, and so forth.

With respect to Eliphaz and Job 4-5 this appears to be good news, for it means that no

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<sup>102</sup>What follows is a gross over-simplification of the basic problem of self-consciousness confronted repeatedly over the history of Western philosophy. This problem is lucidly discussed in JOHNSTON (2005); and JOHNSTON (2008b); and in the various resources cited therein.



one has access to the material on the basis of which Eliphaz's intention could be identified. On one hand, this is the insight that lies behind Clines' attempt to solve the interpretive problems of Job 4-5 by proposing a reading that, as he writes, "makes a coherent interpretation of Eliphaz's speech possible and accounts best for the windings of thought."<sup>103</sup> The problem, however, does not go away. The subject continues to disappear behind, within, and from the windings of thought. Or, said differently, the windings of thought create the sense that the subject lies elsewhere.<sup>104</sup>

It is only with Newsom that the subject and  $S_1$  are treated as two different entities; in her argument the consoler does not immediately identify with his intention(s) but instead relates to them from some other place, a place about which she does not speculate.  $S_1$ , then, is not the subject, but is instead the phenomenal, symbolically constituted identity-construct which psychoanalysis refers to as the ego. The subject, then, is that unrepresentable lack of being to which every determined, ego-level identity relates. Lacan in fact called the subject a "lack of being" (*manque-à-être*), a lack of substance and a lack of signification, and he designated the subject with a barred-S:  $\$$ .<sup>105</sup> But how is it that a signifier comes to occupy the place of  $S_1$ ?

#### 46 RACINE AND LACAN; FEAR AS A MASTER-SIGNIFIER

To answer this question and conclude this part of the chapter, I turn to the example on which Lacan worked out this logic of transformation in 1956, namely, Racine's 1691 play *Athalie*,

<sup>103</sup>CLINES (1989), 121.

<sup>104</sup>So, S. Žižek writes, "In short, the intimate link between the *subject* and *failure* lies not in the fact that 'external' material social rituals and/or practices forever fail to reach the subject's innermost kernel, to represent it adequately... but, on the contrary, in the fact that the 'subject' itself is nothing but the failure of signification, of its own symbolic representation – the subject is nothing 'beyond' this failure, it emerges through this failure." JUDITH BUTLER, ERNESTO LACLAU and SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *Contingency, Hegemony, and Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), 119-20.

<sup>105</sup>See, for example, LACAN (1977), 203-15.

which supplements the story of Queen Athaliah from 2 Kings. Although the account in 2 Kings is not altogether clear,<sup>106</sup> the story behind the play can be summarized as follows. Queen Athaliah was an Omride of Israel who married J(eh)oram, king of Judah but puppet of Israel (8:27). Her son, Ahaziah, became the next king of Judah (2 Kgs 8:26). In his coup, Jehu assassinated King Ahaziah of Judah as well as King J(eh)oram of Israel, who appears to have shared a name with his brother-in-law, Ahaziah of Judah's davidic father. Following Jehu's assassination of King Ahaziah, the Queen mother Athaliah "set out to destroy all the royal family" (2 Kgs 11:1). However, Ahaziah's daughter Jehosheba took her brother Joash and hid him in the Temple, away from their grandmother's attempted genocide of the davidic line. Jehosheba left Joash under the tutelage of the high priest Jehoiada who, faithful to the davidic line, considered Joash the rightful king of Judah. According to the chronicler, Jehoiada was married to Jehosheba (2 Chr 22:11).

Racine's play opens with high dramatic tension as Abner, the Queen's soldier enters the Temple, house of the Judean Resistance. Lacan understandably imagines Jehoiada anxiously listening to Abner, wondering if the soldier's first line, "I come into His temple..." will end, "... to arrest the High Priest."<sup>107</sup> But instead Abner says, "... to worship the Eternal Lord," and thence begins reminiscing with Jehoiada about the good old days when "masses of holy people streamed in through the gates," which has now, with the Baal-worshipping Omride on the throne, become "scarcely a handful of zealous worshippers." Having thus revealed his zeal for YHWH and, perhaps, for the Resistance, Abner goes on to express his concern to Jehoiada: "I tremble with fear... that Athaliah should have you ripped from the altar and wreak upon you her dreadful revenge." Lacan observes that, at the moment Jehoiada is alerted to the danger by Abner, he too uses the signifier fear, though, in a way that only partly coincides:

<sup>106</sup>Cf. the discussion and proposed interpretation in J. MAXWELL MILLER and JOHN H. HAYES, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* 2nd edition. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 320-25.

<sup>107</sup>LACAN (1993), 262.

He who can still the raging seas  
 can also thwart the wicked in their plots.  
 In respectful submission to his holy will,  
 I fear God, dear Abner, and have no other fear.

From this moment on, Lacan says, Jehoiada has transformed Abner's fervor, zeal, uncertainty, doubt, fear, &c., into faithfulness for the cause.

This famous fear of God completes the sleight of hand that transforms from one minute to the next, all fears into perfect courage. All fears – "I have no other fear" – are exchanged for what is called the fear of God, which, however constraining it may be, is the opposite of a fear.<sup>108</sup>

Jehoiada responds to Abner's multiple, conflicting, and paralyzing feelings with one signifier, "fear," the effect of which Lacan describes as follows:

Everything radiates out from and is organized around this signifier, similar to these little lines of force that an upholstery button forms on the surface of material. It's the point of convergence that allows everything that happens in this discourse to be situated retroactively and prospectively.<sup>109</sup>

Thus Lacan depicts the work of the Master-Signifier as a quilting point (*point de capiton*), the sketch of which I include on page 353. S. Žižek writes the following about this passage in Lacan,

Jehoiada does not simply try to convince Abner that divine forces are, despite everything, powerful enough to gain the upper hand over earthly disarray; he appeases his fears in a quite different way: by presenting their very opposite – God – as a thing more frightening than all earthly fears. And – that is the "miracle" of the *point de capiton* – this supplemental fear, fear of God, retroactively changes the character of all other fears.<sup>110</sup>

Back to JOB. In his first speech Eliphaz's aim for Job is no less than what Jehoida accomplishes with Abner, the sleight of hand that exchanges all his worldly fears, his ignorance and his zeal, for the opposite, the fear of God and the beginning of wisdom. Eliphaz takes

<sup>108</sup>LACAN (1993), 267. <sup>109</sup>LACAN (1993), 268. <sup>110</sup>ŽIŽEK (2002), 17.

Job's ignorant questioning in ch. 3 and gives him God (not as an answer but) as the ultimate force of ignorance. Thus he "magically" turns all Job's other ignorances into their opposite, instructions (*mûsar*) of God, i.e., wisdom.<sup>111</sup> The failure of wisdom, in other words, is represented by the *mûsar* of God as both the proof and positive condition of wisdom's existence. And with that, Eliphaz teaches Job what von Rad and few others have (re)learned, that the essence of wisdom is quintessentially bespoken at its limits.

#### 47 CONCLUSION

Job 4 impresses upon its hearers the sense of being one step away from grasping the true significance of the human condition or at least Eliphaz's conception of it. Eliphaz then takes this effect of his speech—the sense that the True meaning is just out of reach—and identifies this Truth in ch. 5, not as an absence from this dialogue, but as an excess internal to his speech and the world. This excess is nothing beyond the here and now, it is the effect of God's activity to keep the here and now from ever being all here or all now. Eliphaz thereby captures Job's zeal, his terror, his perplexity, his fixations, by refusing them the illusion of a possible resolution through the projection of their causes beyond themselves, on the one hand, and by transforming them into the meaningfully-related effects of some meta-level object, on the other. With God and Job thus correlated around Job's failure to know, Eliphaz can promise Job all kinds of satisfaction from a God who can henceforth function as the cause but not the object of his desire.

Whereas one could hardly say that the preceding argument has been wide enough to do justice to the content of Eliphaz's first speech, not to mention the next two, I hope that it will prove preliminary for future study of the friends' speeches with respect to one matter in particular: I hope it has sketched the *essential* function of Eliphaz's confrontation with the limits of wisdom in the speech, thus cautioning future studies from relying on purely

<sup>111</sup>See, for example, Woman-Wisdom's statement in Prov 8:33: "Hear instruction and be wise; and do not let it go."

external or derivative conceptions of these limits and encouraging future work to attend to them on a plane that is co-substantial with the essence of his wisdom. The final section of this chapter gives an indication of the presence of this structure of wisdom elsewhere in the friends' speeches and the wisdom tradition.

#### 48 WISDOM BEYOND JOB 4-5

It is one thing to undercut the history of interpretation about Eliphaz, i.e., to refuse the *either/or* that has framed a scholarly tradition I traced from Fullerton to the most recent commentaries. It is another thing altogether to suggest that the gap in understanding caused and carefully preserved by Eliphaz's speech is constitutive of the position of Job's friends as a whole, let alone of the wisdom tradition as a whole. Against this generalizing move weighs a more or less implicit set of assumptions:

- Eliphaz cannot be identified with Bildad and Zophar, at least not without remainder<sup>112</sup>;
- the first cycle of speeches occupy, in some sense, a transitional moment between the friends' silence at the end of Job 2 and the narrow focus on retribution and, more specifically, the "fate of the wicked" topos in the second and third cycles of speeches<sup>113</sup>;
- as regards the wisdom tradition as a whole, the multiple hesitations of Eliphaz do not fairly characterize the "optimistic" epistemology of Proverbs—the orthodox norm against which the wisdom tradition is measured.

#### 48.1 Bildad

The supposition that Bildad is bound to a retribution ideology is grounded on such passages as are found in Job 8.

<sup>112</sup>For differences within and among the friends' speeches, see NEWSOM (2003a), 96-129; and CLINES (1982), 199-214.

<sup>113</sup>See the bullet points listed in BALENTINE (2006), 229.

See, God will not reject a blameless person,  
 nor take the hand of evildoers.  
 He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,  
 and your lips with a joyous cry.  
 Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,  
 and the tent of the wicked will be no more.

(8:20-22)

As with Eliphaz, Bildad consoles Job with the promise of an orderly universe, wherein God's favor falls upon those of integrity (*tām*), God's disfavor on the wicked (*m<sup>e</sup>rēq̄-m*).<sup>114</sup> Given Job's strong identification with the virtue of *tām* (cf. Job 1:1, 8; 2:3), we can assume that Bildad means to assure Job of a positive outcome, that his immediate experience of suffering will be redeemed, and that this redemption will come into view on the basis of a broader (a "heavenly") perspective. From this perspective, experience and ethics are *immediately* linked: contrasting with the robust joy of the blameless (their irrepressible laughter—*s<sup>e</sup>hōq*; their triumphant shouts—*t<sup>e</sup>rûāh*) is the puny ephemerality of the wicked, whose substance is obscured in a veil of shame (*yilb<sup>e</sup>šû-bōšet*) and whose security is vanished (*w<sup>e</sup>ōhel r<sup>e</sup>šāim ʾēnennû*).<sup>115</sup> From these verses one must affirm that Bildad does indeed advocate a retribution ideology, a system in which God functions as the guarantor of a fixed order.

But, like Eliphaz, Bildad's speech cannot be reduced simply to an articulation of retribution. In the third cycle of the friends' speeches (in which the friends seem to have

<sup>114</sup>In her work on Jeremiah, K. O'Connor regularly refers to the consoling capacities of harsh retributive frameworks. Simply stated, she observes how the idea that one's suffering is one's fault gives the sufferer a sense of power and control over a chaotic disarray that may otherwise threaten to paralyze the sufferer's faculties.

<sup>115</sup>Cf. 4:7-9, wherein Eliphaz contrasts the righteous and the wicked on this same scale of durability. "What innocent person has perished . . . [but] by the breath of God [the wicked] perish; by the spirit of his anger they cease."

reverted to an increasingly narrow and rigid focus on the wicked and not the righteous), Bildad says these words to Job:

Dominion and fear are with God;  
                   he makes peace in his high heaven.  
 Is there any number to his armies?  
                   Upon whom does his light not arise?  
 How then can a mortal be righteous before God?  
                   How can one born of woman be pure?  
 If even the moon is not bright and the stars are not pure in his sight,  
 how much less a mortal, who is a maggot,  
                   and a human being, who is a worm.

(25:2-6)

Here Bildad virtually cites, and to the same effect, Eliphaz's line of questioning from ch. 4—"Can a human be righteous before Eloah? Or a person be pure before his maker?" (cf. 15:14-16). Bildad's mounting frustration is aimed at Job's *hubris* in maintaining his innocence before God. Such stubbornness is patently ridiculous, according to Bildad, when one considers the sublime distance of God from human knowledge, which is roughly as valuable as that of a maggot or of a worm when it comes to comprehending the deity.<sup>116</sup>

Thus the Bildad corpus may not be read as a smooth edifice to retribution; it is inhabited by the same contradiction I dwelled upon at length in Job 4-5. There is, on one hand, the *certainty* that God dispenses blessing to the righteous and woe to the wicked. On the other hand, any human knowledge about what God does (and why, and how) is put under the sign of *doubt*. The vacillation between these mutually exclusive theses marks Bildad's speech as much as it does Eliphaz's.

<sup>116</sup>Newsom has put the category of the sublime to use in comprehending God in the divine speeches of chs.38-41 under the category of "the tragic sublime" (NEWSOM, 2003a, ch. 9), and in comprehending the friends' theology as the "masochistic sublime" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 138-50). Cf. NEWSOM (2004, 220) for her

48.2 *Zophar*

With respect to Zophar one sees the same split, though sharpened by Zophar's rhetorical flourish in condemning the "wicked" and the "godless." In the first cycle of speeches, Zophar frontally criticizes Job's failure to preserve a minimal degree of *uncertainty* in his vigorous self-justification. "Is there nothing that would shame you," Zophar complains (11:3b),

For you [Job] have said, "My conduct is pure, and I am clean in God's sight."

But oh, that God would speak, and open his lips to you,

and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom;

for two sides belong to insight.

Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.

Can you find out the deep things of God?

Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?

It is higher than heaven—what can you do?

Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?

(11:4-8)

Wisdom is in its essential characteristics ungraspable by human insight:

- founded on the secret things of God,
- doubled in its character,
- split by the incalculability of divine mercy.

As to its place, Wisdom belongs to extremities inaccessible to human discovery:

- amidst the deep things of God yet at the limit of God's reach;
- higher than the heavens yet deep as the pit of hell.

From this perspective, Job's shrill cry, "I am pure! I am clean in God's sight!" represents the utmost in folly. It is a perspective, at the same time, that undercuts human certainty and thus stands in contradictory tension to Zophar's subsequent ethical insistences.

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discussion of this theology in the Hodayot. I will deal with the sublime in more detail in CHAPTER 9.



These insistences are manifest in mostly familiar terms (the wicked possess no durability, no solidity from the perspective of eternity) but Zophar's penchant for spatial imagery brings the friends' contradictory logic to a head. In the following excerpt from his second and final speech Zophar offers what provides an ideologically palatable "solution" but is not for that any less paradoxical.

Do you not know this from of old,  
 ever since people were placed on earth,  
 that the exulting of the wicked is short,  
 and the joy of the godless is but for a moment?  
 Even though their height mounts up to the heavens,  
 and their head reaches to the clouds,  
 they will perish forever like their own dung;  
 those who have seen them will say, "Where are they?"

(20:4-7)

The question that concerns this dissertation relates to the split between, on one hand, Zophar's own ethical certitude (such and such is the fate of the wicked, as has been obvious "from of old") and, on the other hand, his demand that Job relinquish all ethical certitude (Wisdom is beyond mortal understanding, higher than heaven, deeper than hell). The solution, which is here so crisply effected by Zophar's rhetoric, is to preserve only *one* absolute tenet of wisdom, which is the prohibition against absolute Wisdom.

Recall that in Zophar's first response to Job he roundly condemns Job's radical assertion of self-knowledge. Job's claims to innocence, righteousness, and purity (asserted repeatedly in chs. 9-10) are, from Zophar's perspective, epistemologically *impossible*. Job has mistaken appearances—what he has gleaned from his perceptions and memories—for the "secret things of wisdom."<sup>117</sup> How strange, then, that in ch. 20 Zophar recasts this *impossibility*

<sup>117</sup>Zophar's account of a "doubled insight"—*kiplayim l' tūšiyyāh*—lends itself readily to the Kantian categories of noumena and phenomena discussed at length in part one, so that Job's unbearable suffering

according to the altogether different logic of *prohibition*. On one hand, the secret things of wisdom are as “high as the heavens” and therefore inaccessible (impossible); on the other, the wicked mount up “high as the heavens,” and therefore they are punished (prohibited). On one hand, wisdom is removed from the sphere of what is *findable*; on the other the wicked recede from terrestrial rootage, and their old neighbors wonder, *Where are they?* In other words, Zophar quite tellingly locates Wisdom and the Wicked in the same impossible-to-find no-place, which transcends (human) limits. In other words, in a very literal sense, Zophar’s teaching aims at an essence that is co-substantial with (and not beyond!) its limit.

In short, the limit that lies at the essence of the friends’ wisdom and is present across all three cycles of speeches runs not along the ethical binary righteous—wicked but between

1. an insistence that God will dispose of blessing and punishment along the lines of righteous versus wicked; and
2. an insistence that human beings are, by their constitution, ignorant of the ways of God.

### 48.3 *The Wisdom Tradition*

Briefly glancing beyond the discourse of the friends, this immanent identification of wisdom’s limit-essence is clearly not peculiar to their discourse, nor does it represent what some scholars have identified as a distinct, skeptical sub-tradition within the wisdom corpus.<sup>118</sup> On the contrary, the folly at the heart of wisdom is hidden in plain sight in the texts that are considered the most orthodox of the tradition.

- I have already considered at length the Joban prologue, but I can here underscore the structure I have now explicated of the friends’ wisdom. Job’s exemplary status—his uprightness and crucially his “wholeness” (*tām*) —is vouchsafed by his zealous

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can be read as a category error. Job foolishly mistakes the phenomenal *Objekt* for the noumenal *Ding*.

<sup>118</sup>See, for example, CLINES (1989), 146, who is more sympathetic than many to this so-called clash with

cultivation/preservation of doubt. This is the meaning of the freighted “perhaps” that animates his piety. Job can only be “whole” as long as there remains something hidden, an unfathomable depth “in the heart” (1:5).

- In the proverbial sentences, too, the sages dwell on *multiple* forms of human limitation.

Do not boast about tomorrow,  
for you do not know what a day may bring forth.

(Prov 27:1)

With an almost mathematical sensibility, this proverb expresses the sages’ awareness of the incalculability constituted by the passage of time. Or, on the other hand, the proverb that von Rad so heavily emphasized in his discussion of wisdom’s limits:

The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to YHWH.

(Prov 21:31)

Even if time’s passage were fully disclosed and each of its trajectories traced to the next day, *yet* there is an unfathomable agency that freely interrupts the ontic field of cause and effect. Here too, the disclosure of *lack* is at the heart of the sages’ teaching.

- Finally, Prov 1-9 frames its instruction with the sages’ most famous motto: “The fear of YHWH is the beginning, the essence of wisdom” (Prov 1:7, 9:10). This signifier “fear,” whose Joban vicissitudes I am not yet finished exploring, bestows upon wisdom’s limit the dignity of a proper name.

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orthodox wisdom but still refers to it as “the dark side of wisdom.”

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 “What I Fear Has Come upon Me”; On Fear and Anxiety
 

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This is a special way of being afraid  
 No trick dispels. Religion used to try,  
 That vast moth-eaten musical brocade  
 Created to pretend we never die,  
 And specious stuff that says No rational being  
 Can fear a thing it will not feel, not seeing  
 That this is what we fear – no sight, no sound,  
 No touch or taste or smell,  
 Nothing to think with,  
 Nothing to love or link with,  
 The anaesthetic from which none come round.

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 PHILIP LARKIN, “Aubade”

## 49 INTRODUCTION

In CHAPTER 3 I argued that Job’s affliction in the prologue made it possible for him to display WISDOM. I divided the prologue into two orientations—one which prevented Job from displaying that free fear for which he was tested (offered to Job by *haśśātān*, Job’s wife, and others) and another that made such a display possible. I argued that the prologue stages a refutation of the former by presenting WISDOM as a human response that conforms to and affirms that which the event of an encounter with God affords. The prologue places Job on the groundless void which the divine act creates and from which WISDOM emerges and offers Job as a model of one who fears God *ḥinnām* by giving WISDOM his voice at the moment of its terrible silence. But the WISDOM Job displays in the prologue is clearly a

performative, more a declaration than an articulation, there being simply too little material there for it to be developed. The dialogue, however, provides considerably more material—not only in Job’s responses, but also in their opposition to the friends’—to those who wish to understand Job’s effort to grasp that which has overturned him and the implications of this overturning.

The history of interpretation of JOB strongly cautions against the presumption that Job’s response in the dialogue comes from the same position as Job’s response in the prologue.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, in this chapter I ask again how the book presents Job’s affliction and its implications, and introduce the range of responses imagined by the book to this affliction—which is a more direct concern of CHAPTER 7—seeking throughout to discern those immanent limits from which a transcendent WISDOM is produced. The rest of part 2 analyzes Job’s wisdom and continues CHAPTER 4’s reading of the friends’ wisdom, supplementing it with greater attention to the relationship between their position and Job’s.

Two questions more or less respectively organize the investigations remaining in part 2: (1) What is the subjective structure of the suffering Job experiences at God’s hand? and, (2) What are the objective solutions provided by Job to his situation? And how do they differ from those provided by his friends? In CHAPTER 4 I indicated the impossibility of independently investigating these questions that have so profoundly captured interpretations of JOB. The subjective and objective poles of Job’s desire inevitably reverse fields so that, for example, one can only determine Job’s subjective experience in terms of the object that he desires and vice versa. It is thus a somewhat arbitrary decision (though hopefully one that is helpful in terms of a descriptive strategy) to approach the question of Job’s subjective experience via some initial observations about the object of Job’s desire. The necessarily indirect line of argumentation will thus proceed in three steps:

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<sup>1</sup>For a recent and well-documented discussion of this issue and the ways in which it has continued to inform contemporary scholarship, see CAROL A. NEWSOM, “Re-considering Job” *Currents in Biblical Research*, 5 (2007), 155–82.

1. I critically take up the prevailing hypothesis as to *what* Job desires in order to
2. better determine the *subjective structure* of Job's suffering,
3. a structural knot for which Job and Job's friends provide fundamentally different *objective solutions*.

This chapter works through (1) and (2), which involves a thorough recasting of Job's subjective dilemma. The work of the next two chapters will then be to document a gap between (1) and (3), i.e., to demonstrate that what Job's friends and readers posit as the proper object of Job's desire does not address and in fact fundamentally misinterprets Job's subjective dilemma. Furthermore, the object of desire offered Job by friends and scholars alike is not simply mistaken with respect to Job's testimony, but is an object that his testimony ultimately and explicitly rejects.

#### 50 THEORIES OF JOB'S DESIRE

So what does Job want from God in the dialogue? This seemingly simple question turns out to have a surprisingly complex answer with implications reaching even to some of the most important disputed issues in Joban scholarship. Among other things, most responses suggest that Job wants: "a meeting, a response, God's presence, an explanation, a trial, a judgment, justice, &c." Such responses emphasize that Job suffers from an acute experience of God's *absence*, or at least that the acuteness of his experience is exacerbated by God's absence.

The remedy for this crippling experience of God's absence is then supposed to be a convincing or authentic experience of God's presence. Although this divine "return" or "response" is couched in various discursive registers, two have especial importance for JOB. On the one hand, the idea that Job imagines his confrontation with God in a legal context informs many recent interpretations. These emphasize Job clamoring to argue his case before or against God, whom presently Job can find nowhere. On the other hand, Job's speeches are often understood in light of the lament tradition, which has recently received

abundant critical attention and which encourages the idea that, when faced with suffering, the sufferer often considered the presence of suffering as strictly correlative to the absence of God from the protective duties owed by a lord to his vassal. So the purpose of the petition is to call God back to God's duties to protect the subject whose plight is taken to reflect the lord's competence.<sup>2</sup> In both cases, robust and popular contemporary conversations among scholars encourage the idea that Job complains about God's absence and seeks God's presence.

While the lament and legal traditions offer compelling biblical modes for thinking about the movement from absence to presence—compelling to the reader of JOB because divine absence is as robustly linked to subjective suffering as divine presence is to objective redemption—yet it must be acknowledged that the sum total of Job's own testimony offers, at best, an ambiguous witness to the "benefits" of God's presence. Indeed, Job speaks of his suffering in terms of God's *oppressive presence* as often or more often than of God's *enigmatic absence*. The frequent and enthusiastic references to the lament and law-suit genres are comprehensible, therefore, insofar as they provide needed contextual cues apart from which Job's speech seems to lack sense. They set Job's speech in specific interpretative frameworks which, each for different reasons, privilege those moments in the dialogue when Job ties his suffering to his inability to perceive God's presence (or, the obverse, pins his redemption to an audience with God). Once it is established that in JOB the objective situation of divine absence-presence corresponds to the subjective one of suffering-redemption, the fallout that remains in need of explanation is the meaning of Job's contradictory speech, specifically, why Job's expressed desire that God "leave him alone" should be subordinated to its opposite, that God "show up in court."

For the sake of momentary clarity let me put it somewhat abstractly:

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<sup>2</sup>For an informative recent discussion of the intersubjective dynamics involved in lament psalms, see AMY C. COTTRILL, *Language, Power, and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008).

- there are A texts in which Job wishes to be liberated from God's overwhelming presence;
- there are B texts in which Job wishes to be justified via a hearing with an erstwhile absent God.

There are nearly as many ways of negotiating the abrupt juxtaposition of A/B (which, after all, is hardly the only such difficulty in JOB) as there are commentaries, and I have no interest in attempting a comprehensive or even representative catalogue. Instead, I take up the work of two scholars, whose arguments are especially illustrative in that they take different paths to arrive at what is essentially the same conclusion. Westermann establishes a *narrative sequence* in which B represents the moment of completion, which corrects the starting point of A. Habel, on the other hand, sets them in a *logical dyad*: B being the primary, actual moment in relation to which A is derivative and virtual.

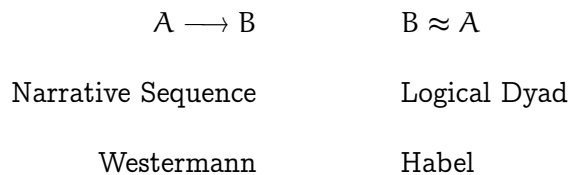


Figure 5.1: Two Negotiations of Job's Desires

*C. Westerman.* Westermann analyzes the book's structure according to form-critical categories, a starting point which leads him to understand the Joban dialogues as an extended lament and the book as a dramatization of a lament. One of the intrinsic features to Westermann's (i.e., the standard) conception of lament is the petition or wish. The idea is simple, although perhaps not unproblematic, that anyone who laments, whether explicitly or not,



simultaneously expresses a desire for something to be different.<sup>3</sup> Westermann arranges Job's petitions and wishes into four groups (the third and fourth are much alike) which, he thinks, coincide

almost totally with the sections of the Book of Job; they are as follows:

1. The wish to die (3:11-13, 21-22; 6:8-10; 7:15; an echo of this wish occurs in 10:18b-19)
2. The wish that God would leave Job alone
  - a) so that Job might be able to breathe freely (7:16b; 10:20b) or so that mankind might be able to breathe freely (14:6, 13-15)
  - b) so that Job might be able to address God (9:34-35; 13:21-22 [and hear God's answer])
3. The wish that Job's cause might be heard and that he might find an advocate despite his death (16:18-22; 17:3; 19:23-24)
4. The wish to encounter God (23:3-12; 31:35-37 [the summoning of God])<sup>4</sup>

Westermann tells us that the second of these wishes—that God might leave Job alone, also appears in the first cycle of discourse in a different context. Job also expresses the wish that God might leave off striking him with his blows so that he might have a chance to speak to God (9:34-35) and be able to hear God's answer (13:21-22; cf. also 13:3). Both these optative lines of thought terminate in the wish for a direct encounter with God (13:21-22 and 14:15). But this latter wish gets developed only in the third cycle of discourse.<sup>5</sup>

The third wish, which is found in the second cycle, in Job's fourth and fifth speeches, is "logically incompatible with the first, [in it] Job implores that his cause be heard and carried through to a resolution despite his death."<sup>6</sup>

Finally, Westermann writes,

Only in the third cycle of discourse, in the seventh and final speech of Job in the dialogue section, does the main wish finally stand forth in clear and unhindered fashion—the wish for

<sup>3</sup>"The mere presence of a lament can already imply a petition" CLAUS WESTERMANN, *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 67.

<sup>4</sup>WESTERMANN (1981), 67-68. <sup>5</sup>WESTERMANN (1981), 69. <sup>6</sup>WESTERMANN (1981), 69.

a direct encounter with God. *This is the real wish toward which Job has been struggling all along.* This is shown by the fact that, directly after the introductory v.2, this final speech of Job starts out by saying, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him" (23:3). Furthermore, this is the most elaborate wish in the whole of the Book of Job.<sup>7</sup> The centrality of this particular wish is emphasized even more by the way that both the optative lines of thought in the first cycle of discourse point in the direction of this wish (13:21-22 and 14:15) and by the fact that the wish for a direct encounter with God is once again taken up at the end, in the closing words of the concluding lament (31:35-37).<sup>8</sup>

Westermann concludes, "in 23:3-12 Job brings together all his petitions and wishes. . . In the last analysis, all Job really wants is for God to grant him a hearing" (cf. 23:6b).<sup>9</sup> Overall one can see how Westermann's reading arranges what appears as a logical impossibility into a dynamic development. What Job desires at the outset differs from what Job *comes to desire*, and this difference can be traced along an arc of *clarification* or *resolution*: Job's incoherent and immature wishes are, at the end, resolved in his deepest, most authentic desire to gain a hearing before God.

This progression results in a neat resolution to the otherwise difficult to understand movement, A  $\rightarrow$  B, i.e., the culmination of Job's desire as the desire *for* God. But the two pieces of evidence Westermann cites are quite fragile, taking their support from each other in a sort of self-sustaining circle. He claims that the optative lines of thought in the first cycle of Job's discourse have their telos in this wish, which he finds fully articulated in 23 and 31:35-37. However, as is almost always true of such teleological arguments, "the telos" is only evident after the fact whereas, in the moment of development, one must admit that numerous possible endings exist. Westermann would seem to recognize this possibility when he remarks on the prevalence of Job's different and even opposed desire that God would leave him alone even beyond the second cycle of discourse, which is where Westermann

<sup>7</sup>This is a highly dubious claim, which would have to explain, for starters, how the whole of ch. 29 is not to be understood as the articulation of a wish.

<sup>8</sup>WESTERMANN (1981), 69, emphasis added. <sup>9</sup>WESTERMANN (1981), 69, 70.

places its proper provenance. In other words, the optative lines of thought could (and, I will argue, do) end in more than one desire, which renders unsubstantiated Westermann's claim that these optative lines find their true end in one desire.

*N. Habel.* Significantly, like Westermann, Habel gives pride of place to ch. 23 in determining the proper object of Job's desire. Also like Westermann, Habel supports his reading of ch. 23 with reference to Job's final speech in ch. 31. Furthermore, both begin their interpretations from the presupposition that Job's desire for God is split, as Habel puts it, "poised between two poles of compulsion and fear."<sup>10</sup> Finally, like Westermann, Habel thinks Job's *true* wish is to encounter God.

Unlike Westermann who renders the wish that God would leave Job alone prolegomena for the wish to encounter God, Habel differentiates Job's conflicting desires in their relation to existence. Job's desire to encounter God is determined to be actual, existent, and primary, whereas Job's desire to escape God arises from his fear of a potential condition, the possibility of realizing his true wish. In the end, the threatening possibility does not succeed in deterring Job from his actual, true desire.

He is compelled by his overwhelming desire to confront God in person and present his case in court ([23:]4-7). Yet he fears that God will continue to terrify him (see on 7:14; 21:6) and that his "face" will overwhelm Job with its terror (see on 9:34; 13:20-21), thereby preventing a fair trial. Job closes this speech with a typical cry of lament (cf. 10:20-21). This ending does not, however, negate Job's hope of finding God. For Job is now committed to meeting God face to face (cf. 31:35-37).<sup>11</sup>

In other words, while Job's *antipathy towards* God is logically consequent to Job's *hope in* God, the former does not finally measure up to the latter.

Habel describes a few "significant dimensions" of Job's desire as follows:

First, it means coming into God's holy presence. Thus Job is driven by an urge to press his suit "to his face" (23:4a) while being terrified of that "face" (23:15a)... His search for God

<sup>10</sup>HABEL (1985), 351. <sup>11</sup>HABEL (1985), 351.

reflects themes from the traditional quests of sages for wisdom. Job, however, is searching for God himself... [Job] transforms the traditional "wish" element of the lament tradition into a defiant quest to confront God in person... Job wants to reach God and meet him face to face.<sup>12</sup>

Although Westermann associates Job's wish with the lament tradition and Habel thinks Job's wish transforms this tradition, they both come to the same conclusion: Job's culminating and ultimate wish is to meet God, to encounter God's presence.

In calling into question the supposition that God's presence is the proper object of Job's desire, I have found it necessary at the outset to point out the dubious nature of arguments that:

1. posit a correct literary context by which one gains the proper reading perspective from which
2. a selection of Job's statements are elevated as sure reference points from which the remainder can be "properly" understood.

In short, the supposed influence of juridical or lament genres do not bear the weight of the arguments that they found. The posited lament and/or legal contexts are not comprehensive enough to govern the interpretation of the whole of the book or even the speeches. Thus they should not be used to smooth out those large swaths of text that escape them. On the contrary, just as valuable as learning what one can from those places where the text fits the lament or litigious contexts are those places where the text escapes them.<sup>13</sup>

I can at this point formulate my critique of form-critical approaches to Job *in general*. These interpretations (i) take their cues more or less from form-critical categories and

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<sup>12</sup>HABEL (1985), 348.

<sup>13</sup>Westermann even disallows the possibility of a text escaping its "proper" context when he claims that "Each individual sentence of the book stands in a twofold context" (WESTERMANN, 1981, 12), in its own context, say, a speech of Job, and in the context of the book as a whole, which is understood as a collection of the formal elements of a lament. His basic premise about a twofold context may be true, but the second-order

(ii) conceive of Job's desire as a desire for God's presence. The conclusions that they are bound to draw out of these particular generic hats cannot help but involve the absence of God and the theological problem of transcendence. Job's speeches testify to an experience of God's presence that should stop interpreters short of such conclusions. Reexamining this experience will make a fresh approach to Job's desire possible. A final comment: I do not wish to downgrade the importance of the legal and/or lament genres so as to make room for some more fitting generic category. I find the former genres important points of reference for interpretations, and I do not think that some other generic category is better. Instead, in a book whose most conspicuous feature is its generic manipulation and transformation, any triumphant assertion that "*Here Job speaks in his mother-tongue!*" is sure to reflect little more than the ideological preferences of the interpreter.<sup>14</sup>

Granting that Job does lament and does speak in legal idiom, yet one cannot conclude that Job's desire is fixated on a certain object called God's presence. God's presence plays a much more ambivalent function than the object of desire, a function which I will designate the object *cause* of desire and which Lacan formalizes as the *objet petit a*.

#### 51 THERE IS FEAR AND THEN THERE IS . . . FEAR

Job's initial lament in ch. 3 sets the stage for the friends' speeches by concluding with the following summary judgment of the terrifying and disturbing dimensions of his experience:

Surely the fear (*phd*) I feared (*phd*) has come upon me,  
and that which I dread (*ygr*) encounters (*bw*) me;

context has been consistently revealed by interpreters as undecideable, each first-order context attempting and perhaps gaining temporary hegemony but unable finally to hold on to it.

<sup>14</sup>I rely here on Newsom's generic analysis of JOB, which characterizes the fictional author to whom she attributes all but the Elihu speeches, as follows: "he wrote [JOB] by juxtaposing and intercutting certain genres and distinctly stylized voices, providing sufficient interconnection among the different parts to establish the sense of the 'same' story but leaving the different parts sharply marked and sometimes overly disjunctive" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 16). A couple sentences later she describes the author's work as a "manipulation of genre."

I am not at ease, and I am not at peace, and I am not restful,  
for anguish (*rgz*) has come (*bw*).

(3:25-26)

In CHAPTER 4's interpretation of Eliphaz's first speech I mentioned this statement (on page 182) because Eliphaz appears to respond to it directly. Eliphaz reminds Job what he has previously done for others experiencing dismay, helplessness, and inhibition:

Look, you have instructed many,  
and you strengthened the hands of the weary;  
Your speech supported the stumbling;  
and you made feeble knees firm.

(4:3-4)

Then Eliphaz speaks directly to Job's complaint:

But now it comes (*bw*) upon you and you are wearied (*lh*);  
it touches you and you are terrified (*bhl*).

(4:5)

The "it" Eliphaz mentions is somewhat unclear but, in light of 3:25-26 and the way the speakers in the dialogue characteristically begin their speeches by referring to something said previously by another speaker,<sup>15</sup> "it" would seem to refer either to the terror (*phd*) and anguish (*rōgez*), or the God whose encounter with him has left him in this state (cf. 3:23). In 4:5 Eliphaz shows Job that he has understood Job's description of his experience, he acknowledges that Job's experience has brought him *bhl*, "terror" or "dismay," as well as *lh*, "helplessness" or "weariness." In Eliphaz's next statement, however, he predicates a fear of Job that functions altogether differently,

<sup>15</sup>The dialogue shares this characteristic with the Babylonian Theodicy, thus suggesting it may be a generic convention. See NEWSOM (1996), 330-31.

Is not your fear (*yrh*) your confidence (*kslh*),<sup>16</sup>  
 your hope, the blamelessness of your ways?

(4:6)

Eliphaz's message of hope is that, in the same way that Job's words stabilized the stumbling (4:3-4), there is a fear (*yrh*) which is supposed to be his confidence in the face of that which is terrifying (*bhl*) him. Nearly every scholar reads "fear" here as shorthand for the "fear of God" seen elsewhere, e.g., Prov 1:29; Gen 20:11; Job 28:28, and thus as meaning something like "piety."<sup>17</sup> The text gives us no reason to think that Eliphaz knows anything about what I described in CHAPTER 3 as the revolution *hasšātān* performs on the traditional, sapiential notion of the fear of God in the prologue. It will soon become clear that Eliphaz continues to deploy the signifier fear in ways congruent with the traditional notion.

Eliphaz refers to this other, reverential or pious fear in each of his speeches in the dialogue. In his second speech, he says,

But you annul (*prrr*) fear (*yrh*), and belittle meditation before El.

(15:4)

And he poses the following question, which smacks of sarcasm, in his speech in the third cycle,

Is it because of your fear (*yrh*) that he reproves you,  
 and enters into judgment with you?

(22:4)

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<sup>16</sup>As discussed in CHAPTER 4 (on page 165), the ambiguity in this statement cannot be eliminated. This word means confidence in its other two occurrences (Ps 85:9; 143:9) but the masculine form of the substantive means both confidence (e.g., Job 8:14; 31:24; Ps 78:7) and folly or stupidity (e.g., Qoh 7:25), which is how some ancient versions took it (LXX and Jerome). In both places in JOB where it occurs meaning confidence, it parallels *mbth* (cf. Prov 1:33). The second line, and especially the parallel here with hope (*tquh*), certainly attenuate the possible double entendre. Cf., for example, CLINES (1989), 109.

<sup>17</sup>The NRSV takes the uncharacteristically expansionist step to insert "of God" into its translation.

In each of these three uses of the word *yrh* (4:6; 15:4; 22:4), Eliphaz evokes the semantic domain of a positive power that contrasts sharply with the negative force that words for fear (including *yrh*; cf. 11:15) otherwise signify. In the positive instances, fear is an attribute of the pious and its affective avatar is attractive, a sense of stability, security, confidence, whereas elsewhere fear characterizes the wicked or foolish (e.g., 15:20-21, 24; 20:25) or what Job could avoid if he turned to God (e.g., 5:21; 11:15-16; 22:10). In these negative cases fear is experienced as surprising (e.g., 22:10), terrifying (15:24), inhibiting (e.g., 11:15-16), and alienating (18:14).

I refer to *semantic domains* of words for fear because the distinction between the types of fear lies not at the lexical level. The words for fear are not exclusively technical terms in the speeches or elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. To take the most prominent example, *yrh* is both that which is supposed to be Job's confidence against the terrifying events that have happened to him (4:6) as well as that which Job will not suffer when violence strikes him (5:21)—as long as he does not reject the instruction of Shadday (5:17). Alternatively, the positive, pious fear of God is elsewhere signified with *phd* (cf. Ps 36:2; 2 Chr 20:29) whereas Eliphaz names it as that which afflicts the wicked in, for example, Job 15:21 and 22:10.<sup>18</sup>

Stated succinctly, at the end of his first speech Eliphaz promises Job that, if he does not reject the instruction (*mûsar*)<sup>19</sup> of Shadday (5:17b), terrifying things will come upon him but he will not fear them—"You will not fear (*yr*) devastation when it comes (*bw*)"

<sup>18</sup>CLINES (2003, 69, 70) recently made the same point, although to another end, with which I would elsewhere want to register my disagreement. His conclusion follows the elipsis: "Most occurrences of the 'fear of God' use the *yr* word group, but *phd* is also used in exactly the same senses, and no distinction can be found between the two terms. The fact that the other terms are not much evidenced in a religious sense of 'fear of God' is merely accidental. . . the terms for fear studied above mean no more and no less than the emotion of fear."

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Prov 15:33, "The fear of YHWH is the instruction (*mûsar*) of wisdom, just as humility precedes honor."



(5:21b)—and, in contrast to his present state, he will know that his tent is at peace (5:24a). Even amidst terror, Job will know no fear.

Eliphaz's first speech operates on the basis of two distinctions. The first distinguishes between *a knowledge* about one's experience—according to which one knows oneself to be suffering a terrifying experience—and *a belief* about which one can be certain regardless of one's experientially-based knowledge. The second distinguishes between *a terror* with which Job is presently afflicted, and *a fear* that can save him from it by giving him a place from which his terrifying experience could be safely viewed.

## 52 THE FRIENDS' FEARS; ETHICS AND AGENCY

The wicked are distinguishable from the righteous not by the presence or absence of the terrifying experience, but rather by the ultimacy or penultimacy of their experience of terror, the negative fear. Terror does not afflict the wicked alone. In 4:13-14 Eliphaz describes an experience of facing anxieties (*špym*) when dread and trembling (*phd wrdh*) encountered him such that all of his bones were in dread (*phd*). From the friends' perspective, terror lacks a properly ethical status. The question of righteousness or wickedness arises only in relation to the presence or absence of the other positive sense of fear.

While the friends may consider terror to be in a certain sense beyond, or better, below ethics proper, descriptions of terror do regularly occur in their accounts of the fate of the wicked (e.g., 18:11, 14) and of what Job would avoid were he to adopt a righteous stance. That the wicked are more strongly associated with terror than the righteous has less to do with (the presence of) terror and more if not everything to do with (the absence of) the other, positive fear. Fear is the antidote to terror and this antidote is exclusively available to the sage. The sage is the one who fears when afflicted with a terrifying experience.

This is to distinguish an active fear from a passive or, better yet, middle terror. Terror

happens; it befalls the individual but one can escape it by fear.<sup>20</sup> Fear is something one can sustain, forsake, relate to, have confidence in, and it is always the proper reaction to the conditions of the sage's life. Terror stands for the pre-discursive reality, so to speak, what the sapiential framework calls what came before and ended in fear. The sage always speaks of terror from within the safe confines of fear, as Eliphaz does in describing the terror he (previously) suffered.

Terror therefore does not really precede fear. Terror emerges simultaneously with fear as the name for the experience prior to the present fear. Insofar as terror is constituted within the framework of fear, it is something altogether different and cut off from the actual prior experience. Fear transubstantiates a certain kind of amorphous experience into terror *qua* the seed from which fear grew. So what about those who suffer an experience that the sages understand from the perspective of fear as terror, but who do not do so from within the discursive framework of wisdom? For anyone unwilling or unable to relate to their experience with fear, the experience is not of terror such as Eliphaz describes in ch. 4, but rather of what I will call *anxiety*. Anxiety may become fear (then it would be counted retroactively as terror), but as such it stands for an alternative way of relating to a terrifying experience, one which does not occur from within the discursive framework of fear/wisdom.

For the friends who stand within this sapiential framework of fear before a sufferer, such a distinction between terror and anxiety matters little. For them, what is important is

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<sup>20</sup>This sense of the difference between fear and terror was implicit in my description of the former as a positive *power* and the latter as a negative *force*. The difference between a force and a power can be described as a function of the presence or absence of an agent wielding it; power is wielded by an agent, a force lacks any apparent agent behind it. In the present context, then, one can say that the positive sense of fear is available only to the conscious intention of the sapiential agent whereas the negative fear characteristically afflicts, comes upon, or overcomes its victim. The friends do not say that *no* agent wields the negative force of fear; they rather say that *no human* agent wields it. They attribute the negative force to the unique agency of God (e.g., 25:2). The distinction between a power and a force, therefore, is only meant to apply from the

that Job should respond to his terrible experience with fear. This goes against the common conception that the friends are trying to get Job to suppress *his experience* in favor of *their knowledge*. On the contrary, they encourage him to fear so as to find security from the anxious terror he suffers and to understand something about what his experience has made available to him. When the friends exhort Job to fear in the face of terror, they clearly assume the agency required for the exercise of fear is available to Job, who is suffering anxiety because he is either failing to assume this agency or failing to do something that would enable him to assume it. From the perspective of the fearer, anxiety, unlike terror, risks bringing guilt upon the one who suffers it. If the sufferer of a terrifying experience is not relating to it fearfully, then she is doomed (and dooming herself) to the prison-house of anxiety. It is Job's resistance to fear that, at least in part, funds their tendency to think there is some folly Job is denying or ignoring.

Having set up some of the major lines of my interpretation, I want to look more closely at the relationships between righteousness and wickedness as regards fear and anxiety. For the friends, wickedness affords an *ontological* insecurity despite any hope, confidence, or thought that says otherwise.

... The hope of the godless shall perish.

For his confidence is broken,<sup>21</sup>

and his security (*mbth*) is a spider's house.

If his house is leaned against, it will not stand;

if one seizes it, it will not hold up.

(8:13b-15)

The anxiety of the wicked is but a signal of this insecurity.

Terrors (*blhwt*) terrify (*bt*) him on every side;

and cause his feet to scatter,  
 perspective of the human, who has the one at-hand but experiences the other as a heavy-handed imposition.

<sup>21</sup> *yqwt* is a hapax that has occasioned various emendations. See the discussion in CLINES (1989), 199-200.

This translation follows a meaning of *qwt* that accords with the readings of the Tg. and the Syr.

[The wicked one] is torn from his tent, from his security (*mbth*),  
and terrors (*blhwt*)<sup>22</sup> march him off to the king.

(18:11, 14)

For now, the wicked may lie comfortably in their tents, but soon terrors will tear them away and leave them totally insecure. The righteous, however, can be certain and secure, as CHAPTER 4's reading of Job 5 suggested at length.

If the wicked are insecure as a rule, hounded by their anxieties and dread, whereas the righteous are certain, secure in their hope, this is more an ontological truth than an empirical condition. The states of terror or peace do not correspond empirically to righteousness or wickedness. This non-correspondance is negotiated in various ways, but fundamentally the terror of the wicked is thought to impinge upon them even if they are (temporarily) at peace.<sup>23</sup> So, Eliphaz says,

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<sup>22</sup>The verb is pointed in the MT as a singular, as is *tškun* in v.15. That both verbs are feminine has led some (e.g., JPSV) to take the feminine noun "terrors" as an intensive plural and the subject of the verb. In v.11, the same word is clearly the subject of the two verbs in each line of the verse, both of which are defectively pointed as plurals. Being in the hiphil and feminine, as opposed to the niphal and masculine as is the verb in the verse's first line, this appears to be the best option (despite Clines' warning regarding the phrase *The King of Terrors*, "it would be a crime to tamper with that magnificent phrase" CLINES, 1989, 419). Of course, this leaves the problem of what it means for terrors to "march one off to the king." Most take the king, constructed with the terrors, as a reference to the god of the underworld (see the discussion in CLINES, 1989, 406), which it still could be apart from the construct. Most important for my purposes is that the terrors control the steps of the wicked and rip him from his secure dwelling, much as Bildad says in v.11.

<sup>23</sup>Newsom shows how this is a product of the friends' adherence to "one of the most widespread and fundamental beliefs in the ancient Near East... [the] belief that good and evil have a different relation to reality. The resilient, enduring quality of good derives from its participation in the structures of creation itself, whereas evil, no matter how powerful and vital it appears, is actually fragile and subject to disintegration because it has no root in that order of creation (e.g., Psalm 1)... What this view claims is significant is simply the qualitative difference between good and evil consequent upon the ontological status of each" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 121).

The wicked one writhes all his days;  
 and the number of years are stored up for the ruthless one.  
 The sound of terrors (*ph̄dym*) is in his ears;  
 and *when he is at peace* (*šlw̄m*), devastation comes.  
 He cannot be sure (*mn̄*) about returning from darkness. . .  
 Distress terrifies (*bt̄*) him, and anxiety (*mšwq̄h*) overpowers him.

(15:20-22a, 24a)

Eliphaz can say that writhing occupies *all* the days of the wicked, even those days in which the wicked one is at peace, because the wicked one's peace is not a peace he can be sure of. Zophar says,

In the fullness of his [i.e., the impious or wicked; v.5] sufficiency,  
 distress will be his; all kinds of misery<sup>24</sup> will come to him. . .  
 Heaven will expose his iniquity,  
 and earth will rise up against him. . .  
 This is the wicked one's portion from Elohim,  
 and the inheritance of El's appointment for him.

(20:22, 27, 29)

Even when *full* of all they want, room always exists for the misery that is to come; their distress is sure. Responsibility for this misery that will come to the wicked, whether in heaven or on earth, is given to God (cf. 20:15: "He will vomit the wealth that he swallowed; God will empty out his stomach"). But so are the states that stand in need of such restoration. Bildad admits, "Dominion and terror [*ph̄d*] are with him, he makes peace in his heights" (25:2). Dominion, terror, and peace are all with God, which bestows upon God a high degree of plasticity. Recall that the God in whom Zophar commands Job to have

<sup>24</sup>Although *ml* is pointed here as a personal noun ("laborer, sufferer"), I follow most who read it as an abstract noun with the LXX and the Vulg.. Cf. CLINES (1989), 477.

such confidence resides in the virtual heights, beyond knowledge and calculation: "higher than heaven. . . deeper than Sheol; what do you know?" (11:8).

The non-empirical, ontological nature of the insecurity, suffering, and anxiety that befalls the wicked means that the anxiety and suffering Job endures need not register Job's wickedness but can function as a terror on account of which Job could fear God. If he fears, they exclaim, "You will be without anguish, and you will not fear" (11:15b; cf. 5:21b). Fear promises certainty (11:15a; cf. 5:24a), security (11:18a); pleasure (5:22a), and virility (5:24b; cf. 11:19a) in the face of the evils suffered in anxiety.

How should one understand the friends' exhortations to Job to fear God alongside their implications and accusations that he is wicked, that he harbors some iniquity that he is denying or ignoring? How is it that the security, stability, confidence, and hope that are the fundamental attributes available to the righteous are simultaneously those that are available to Job if he turns to God and admits his iniquity? Why is it that admitting to the presence of wickedness in him would save him from (and not destine him to) the fate of the wicked?

Those who fear God do not exclude themselves from their belief about a real, ontological condition of the righteous and the wicked that is separate from but more true than what can be perceived and understood from phenomenal, empirical reality. Counting themselves among the righteous gives them, on the one hand, a certain confidence or hope despite their experience but, on the other, requires a certain humility before the possibility that this unknown dimension tells not of their righteousness and wisdom but of their wickedness and folly. Job is promised a certain confidence and hope for his future—but only on the basis of his prior humility, his readiness to reject any aspect of his condition that may be iniquitous, *his remaining uncertain about his present*. He must forsake a part of himself in order to view his condition from the safe confines of fear.

Consider Zophar's conclusion to his first speech with its promise predicated upon two conditional statements,

If you establish (*hkynwt*) your attention (*libbekā*),  
 and spread out your hands to him,<sup>25</sup>  
 If iniquity is in your hand, distance yourself from it,  
 and do not let wickedness reside in your tents,  
 Surely then will you lift your face without blemish,  
 you will be without anguish,<sup>26</sup> and you will not fear (*yr*).  
 Surely will you forget misery. . .  
 And you will be secure, for there is hope (*tqwh*).  
 You will search<sup>27</sup> and you will rest securely (*bṭh*).  
 And you will lie down, without trembling (*wryn mḥryd*).

(11:13-16a, 18-19a)

Zophar's promise includes a spatial image that fits with a certain commonsensical way of understanding (self)consciousness. From within the flux of lived experience, consciousness

<sup>25</sup>The image of hands spread out to God is commonly used to represent prayer or supplication. See, for example, Exod 9:29; 1 Kgs 8:22, 38; Isa 1:15; Jer 4:31; Ps 44:20; 143:6; Lam 1:17; Ezra 9:5.

<sup>26</sup>The pointing in the MT (*mūṣāq*) renders the defective spelling of the hophal participle of either *ysq* or *ṣwq*, meaning "to be poured out" or "to be oppressed," respectively. Many go with the former, "You will be cast, strong, a man of steel, and you will not fear" (see CLINES, 1989, 269). The NEB has "a man of iron," the NRSV "secure" (cf. 41:16, 25). One could also repoint it as the defective spelling of the noun meaning hardship or anguish found in Jer 19:9 (*māṣōq*), for example, and in its feminine form in Job 15:24 (*m<sup>e</sup>ṣūqāh*). It is certainly possible, especially in light of the above discussion of the end of Eliphaz's first speech, that Zophar intends to tell Job that he will be oppressed, in anguish, or poured out, and not fear. But it is perhaps better to read with other Hebrew manuscripts that have a doubled middle consonant, which could be taken as an indication of the *min* preposition prefixed to the nominal form of the root *ṣwq*, found in both masculine (Dan 9:25), as here, and feminine forms (Isa 8:22; 30:6; and Prov 1:27). I find this reading most attractive because it renders two successive, parallel uses of the preposition—"you will lift your face *without* blemish, you will be *without* anguish;" see other uses in, e.g., Isa 2:10, 19, 21; Ps 91:5—and because it creates a nice semantic parallel between the final phrases of the verse—"you will be without anguish, and you will not fear."

<sup>27</sup>This verb (*hpr*) usually means "to be ashamed," which would be awkward here. It also means to dig (e.g., Gen 21:30; Deut 23:14) or search (e.g., Job 3:21; 39:29; Deut 1:2), which is more likely.

is not yet present. It is only on the basis of some distance from myself that the reflexive awareness that I am a being submitted to the flux of lived experience can arise. This reflexivity is often thought of as consciousness. For self-consciousness to exist, there must appear to be some place "above" or external to oneself from which one can relate to oneself. Zophar promises Job relief from his present terror in the elevation of his perceptive capacities (*libbekā*) above himself. Being thus externalized from himself will give him the distance to reject any part of himself that may harbor iniquity or wickedness.<sup>28</sup> With this Job can secure himself even against those dimensions of himself that he is uncertain about. Zophar tries to break Job out of the immanent flux of his experience so that he can view himself as one about whom he does not know everything. Job must relate to himself as one about whom some truth remains unknown.

The ironic aspects of Zophar's rebuke should not be missed, insofar as his teaching would return Job precisely to his pristine, pre-afflicted state. Recall from above (on page 98) my specification of Job's "wholeness" (*tām*) as it is represented in the prologue. Such ethical perfection is not attested by Job's substance, i.e., his considerable progeny or wealth. Instead, the story cites Job's punctilious ritual of sacrifice, which he carried out saying, "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts" (1:5). The unfathomability of the human heart is, from Zophar's orthodox point of view, the basis of Job's guilt before God. And Job's blameworthy action is not some particular sin that Zophar feels Job is hiding. On the contrary, Job's sin is the blatant, overt one of suspending his properly human doubt ("*It may be . . .*") before God.

How can excluding the dimension of truth to the divine realm become the basis for Job's understanding about his experience and for his trust and hope in something beyond his miserable experience? On the face of it, the friends' counsel sounds paradoxical: the exclusion of truth yields the production of (limited) knowledge; Job's uncertainty about

<sup>28</sup>One might take the reference to "tents" in this vein as a recognition of a transsubjective dimension to identity that is supposedly absent from certain western accounts of the autonomous individual.



his situation is the key to gaining a safe perspective on it; his eagerness to admit the possibility that he has overlooked some iniquity will engender his trust; his willingness to see himself as alienated from himself will make him more comfortable with himself. Their promises are not rooted in any additional, positive knowledge that fear will give Job about his experience, but in the clarity that comes from (i) setting up a locus of truth, being, God, and certainty as unattainable, and (ii) defining the ideal subject as the one who pursues this unattainable truth nonetheless. The system of sapiential belief/fear negates this dimension of truth and the Real from what is accessible and simultaneously installs it in a beyond. Saying it is not here or now gives it a positive existence elsewhere.<sup>29</sup>

It is therefore wrong to say that this locus of truth is simply excluded from the discursive framework of wisdom since wisdom's framework constitutes itself by means of reference to this dimension. Though negated, a crucial role remains inside the system for what is said to be outside. Though the system excludes it, this very act of exclusion gives it a way of being included in the system. Furthermore, this inclusion of what is excluded is what makes possible intelligibility within the system. If Job agrees (or submits) to this prohibition against knowledgeably accessing the truth and the Real, then he can judge his perceptions against this missing dimension. That is, Job can glean some knowledge from the consistency or inconsistency with which his perceptions correspond to this missing dimension.<sup>30</sup> Fear will allow Job to escape his anxiety not because it tells him something

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<sup>29</sup>Above, in CHAPTER 3, I discussed this structure as that of an All constituted on the basis of an exception. Here one should note the important role prohibition plays in the establishment of such a structure. While the prohibition may appear merely superfluous, its superfluosity is precisely what allows the establishment of the appearance of a beyond and, thus, the constitution of the order.

<sup>30</sup>I should not miss the opportunity to state explicitly the difference between this interpretation and another, much more common one, according to which a quite knowable and known retribution theology functions as the support for the friends' recognitions of an epistemological limit. Clines, for example, says that ch. 11 shows that Zophar "believes he can fathom the unfathomable God" (CLINES, 1989, 262). He goes on, "Where there is punishment without any visible reason, we can be sure that God in his wisdom knows

he does not know but because it locates the unknown dimension of his experience at a safe distance from himself. Thus (dis)located, the unspeakable can be held in place by a structure and so no longer threaten to overtake Job. Job's energies can then be transformed from his concern with fleeing its cause to understanding what it may mean. The difference is between distancing himself from something and closing the gap between it and himself. This is why God must be located in a beyond that is out of reach to Job; Zophar says in this speech, "higher than heaven. . . deeper than Sheol; what do you know?" (11:8), and he speaks of the mystery and limit of God (11:7). In contrast to this virtuality in which Job can have the utmost confidence and highest hopes for his material reality, Zophar concludes by telling Job that the wicked have no such escape, their hope being restricted to the material world of breathing bodies.

The eyes of the wicked will fail, and refuge will be lost to them;  
since their hope is a breathing body.

(11:20)

In the next two chapters I argue that Job locates his hope in his corporeal experience alone.

### 53 THE FRIENDS' SUBLIME HOPE, STRONG SUPEREGO

I briefly mentioned above (on page 193) that the category of the sublime has been of some help to biblical scholars of the book of Job.<sup>31</sup> Here I want to continue what these

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the reason. . . So, while we cannot always know exactly why God is punishing someone, we can be sure that he is punishing that person *for some reason or other*. . . Which all goes to show that God is knowable and indeed quite adequately known, that his dealings with humankind follow a strict but simple pattern. . . And that leaves Zophar where he has always been—in the academy of the wise—but, as against Eliphaz and Bildad, with his own personal chair in Divine Epistemology" (CLINES, 1989, 272). On the contrary, I am arguing that the friends' epistemology exists only insofar as it includes a negation of itself within itself.

<sup>31</sup>In addition to those texts by Newsom in which she defines the friends' theology as a "masochistic sublime" (2003a, 138-50; cf. 2004, 220), or understands the whirlwind speeches under the category of "the tragic sublime" (2003a, ch.9), the sublime has also been drawn on by T. Linafelt—first, briefly, in LINAFELT (1996), 170-71, and then more extensively in TOD LINAFELT, "The Wizard of Uz: Job, Dorothy, and the Limits of the

recent studies have begun and even broaden their scope by drawing the necessary connection with psychoanalysis. In German Idealism and Freudian Psychoanalysis, there exists a structure similar to what I have ascribed to the positive dimension of the friends' fear. The friends proffer an experience of *fear* that affords confidence, security, and hope from an elevated position above the fray of the *anxiety* that threatens to overwhelm and overtake the individual's subjectivity in an experience of terror. In Kant's famous description of the experience of the sublime, it is crucial that the subject see herself subjected to or confronted with a power that is greater than herself. For Kant the sublime is far from what is often designated as such in popular discourse. The sublime is not the beautiful. Instead, it is what we feel when we witness our own powerlessness and mortality as if elevated above ourselves. Zupančič has noted and analyzed at length the link between the Kantian sublime and the Freudian superego.<sup>32</sup> The elevation inherent to the words sublime (*das Erhabene*, "the raised") and superego (*das Überich*, "the over-I") makes an initial connection. But the conceptual link becomes apparent when we recall Freud's discussion of the superego as that psychic apparatus that, when invested with the subject's accent, looks down upon the ego as something tiny and trivial.<sup>33</sup> The superego, in other words, can be thought of as Freud's account of that psychic apparatus on which the feeling of the sublime is based.

I cannot do better than Zupančič when she draws from Monty Python to illustrate this connection between the superego and the feeling of the sublime and so I will simply paraphrase her account.<sup>34</sup> In the *Meaning of Life* there is a scene in which two men enter "Sublime" *Biblical Interpretation*, 14 (2006), 94–109—and KATHLEEN M. O'CONNOR, "Wild, Raging Creativity: The Scene in the Whirlwind (Job 38-41)" in *A God so Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller* Edited by BRENT A. STRAWN and NANCY R. BOWEN. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 171–179. For BEAL (2002, 47-55), R. Otto's notion of the holy is central, but its roots in the sublime are acknowledged and clearly in the background. As is evident in these citations, the category of the sublime has been mostly used in readings of the divine speeches. I will again treat it in my discussion of these speeches below.

<sup>32</sup>See ZUPANČIČ (2000), whose influence is obvious throughout the following analysis.

<sup>33</sup>See SIGMUND FREUD, "Humour" in *SE XXI* (1961 [1927]), 164. <sup>34</sup>Cf. ZUPANČIČ (2000), 150-52.

the apartment of a married couple in order to harvest the liver he agreed to donate in his will. When he protests that he is still alive, they respond by informing him that he will not likely survive the operation, and so one of them goes to work butchering the man's body. The other accompanies the wife to the kitchen and asks if she too is willing to donate her liver. She says no and shrinks in fear. But then,

A tuxedo-clad man emerges from the refrigerator and proceeds to escort her out of the kitchen of her everyday life, on a promenade across the universe. While they are strolling across the starry heavens, he sings about the "millions of billions" of stars and planets, about their "intelligent" arrangement, etc., etc. Thanks to the cosmic (and for her undoubtedly sublime) experience, the woman comes, of course, to the desired conclusion: how small and insignificant I am in this amazing and unthinkable space! As a result, when she is asked once again to donate her liver, she no longer hesitates.<sup>35</sup>

This caricature illustrates the way we can get caught up in something that is bigger than ourselves, even to the point that we are ready to sacrifice our well-being for it, and it illustrates also the way this sacrifice can seem ridiculous to the observer who is not caught up in the same, sublime experience. So, the friends' thesis is that Job's experience metonymically represents an excess that may have something to do with a hidden sin or injustice that could be intelligible but that, in any case, cannot be explained except by reference to a God that is beyond intelligibility, above and below the field of representation, and correspondent to every place representation fails. The friends approach the senseless eruption of an inexplicable excess in the world by affirming a prohibition that installs the truth of this excess elsewhere. By managing the other wise inexplicable, they achieve a feeling of the sublime.

#### 54 WHY JOB CANNOT ASSUME THE FRIENDS' FEAR

Why is Job unable to do as the friends counsel and look upon his condition from the heights of sublimity? Perhaps his anxiety keeps him riveted to his body and does not allow him

<sup>35</sup>ZUPANČIĆ (2000), 151.

to attain the safe place that Kant recognized makes it possible for one to experience the sublime.<sup>36</sup> The terror Job experiences before God's presence and the anxiety he suffers are clearly not reported from a place of safety. Job does not relate to his affliction as something he has gotten beyond or could rise above. Rather, his speech suggests that the horrifying events continue to overtake him. The moment an experience is reported may stand at an irreducible temporal distance from the experience itself, but that does not mean that the future always puts the past behind it.

In his speech in ch. 16 Job reports that neither his speech nor his silence provides him any relief:

If I speak, my pain (*k<sup>e</sup>ēb*; cf. 2:13) is not alleviated;

and if I do not, what of it goes away?

Surely now [God] has wearied me (*lh*).

(16:6-7a)

Along with most translations (e.g., NRSV and JPSV), I render the hiphil perfect verb with a perfect sense: "he has wearied." But this should not suggest that the text reports a state resulting from an action completed in the past. Job is not only speaking of a past time when God wore him out. He uses the adverb "now" (*lh*) with the hiphil stem and perfect conjugation to accuse God of actions that previously brought him into a state of weariness and that even now keep him in that state (which Eliphaz recognizes in 4:5), no matter what he does, no matter whether he speaks or stops speaking.

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<sup>36</sup>"Someone who is afraid can no more judge about the sublime in nature than someone who is in the grip of inclination and appetite can judge about the beautiful. . . Bold, overhanging, as it were threatening cliffs, thunder clouds towering up into heaven, bringing with them flashes of lightening and crashes of thunder, volcanoes with their all-destroying violence, hurricanes with the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean set into a rage, a lofty waterfall on a mighty river, etc., make our capacity to resist into an insignificant trifle in comparison with their power. But the sight of them only becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is, as long as we find ourselves in safety" IMMANUEL KANT, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* trans. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 144.

The contrary terms Job uses—speech and silence (*hdll*)—indicate a totality of ineffective actions. Nothing he has done has been able to erect a wall or set a boundary between himself and that which he is undergoing. Job is unable to invest himself in a position from which he could look upon his affliction because the line that would delimit the ground on which he must stand in order to assume such a viewpoint keeps moving. The terrain of his experience is shifting and unsettled and leaves him no place to stand.<sup>37</sup> In the next section I look closely at one experience of loss, repeatedly cited by Job, that appears to approach inevitability.

#### 55 JOB'S EXPERIENCE OF ANXIETY

In this experience of loss Job either expresses or imagines expressing a desire which immediately is not only inhibited, so that he is unable to attain his goal, but reversed, so that the aim he achieves is precisely opposed to his intended goal. Speaking his desire brings upon him a situation where this desire could not possibly be realized because whatever he identifies as the condition for the possibility of realizing his desire—sleep, a divine response, righteous speech, a cleansing bath, &c.—turns into the condition that makes his desire impossible. It is as if his speech were inherently antagonistic to him, each utterance necessarily leaving his lips and turning on him, betraying and opposing his desire. Job identifies the necessitating condition, the condition that necessitates the reversal of his desire and even of his being, with God.

Job says in 7:13-16,

When I say my bed will comfort me,

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<sup>37</sup>P. Nemo offers a similar description of Job's experience when he explains why he says, apropos the "dialogue" between Job and the friends (the reason for the scare quotes is obvious from the quote), "We cannot really say that the two parties 'disagree'... All combat presupposes a site where adversaries can confront each other face to face. Therefore all combat is communication; and all solitude that results from rejection is a communication in the same way. However, the solitude of Job is even less than this minimal communication. For there is no common ground. It is the ground itself that has collapsed under him" PHILIPPE NEMO, *Job and the Excess of Evil* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 37.

my couch will ease my complaint,  
 You terrify (*bhl*) me with dreams,  
 and frighten (*bt*) me with visions,  
 So that my throat (spirit) (*nap<sup>e</sup>šî*) chooses strangulation,  
 Death, to my bones.  
 I reject.<sup>38</sup> I will not live forever.  
 Let me be for my days are a breath (*hebel*).

(7:13-16)

If Job wants comfort through sleep, God is there with nightmares. This ends in an autoimmune experience in which Job's very being attacks him; his *nepeš* turns on him and chooses death by strangulation. Job links his asphyxiating experience to a suffocatingly overproximate God who invades his body and mind.

In 9:16-18 he says,

If I summoned and [Eloah] answered me,  
 I do not believe that he would hear my voice.  
 Because he crushes me with a storm;  
 and he multiplies my wounds without cause.  
 He will not let me catch my breath (*rûhî*),  
 because he fills me with bitterness.

(9:16-18)

Here Job considers summoning God and receiving a response and concludes that God will be unable to hear his voice. Why? Because the effect of getting a response from God is

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<sup>38</sup>Seow is one of many scholars who read this with the preceding verse ("death to my bones [that] I reject"). While he makes a good argument and while leaving it on its own makes the statement somewhat indeterminate, I choose to do so, as it is in the MT, because this verb is elsewhere in Job on its own and without an object (cf. 34:33; 36:5; 42:6), and because reading it on its own does not limit its object to Job's bones, which is more appropriate in light of the larger function the verb assumes in the dialogue (cf., for

not the ability to speak with God, to ask God "What are you doing?"—a possibility he dismisses in 9:12<sup>39</sup>—but rather the loss of this ability. So busy stuffing him with bitterness, God's response would withhold from Job his breath, and no one can speak without breath. The image is simultaneously one of *shattering*—Job is crushed and multiplied—and *saturation*—filled with bitterness. As before, Job describes his experience of God's presence as suffocating, a hindrance to his desire and a dis-integration of his being.

In 9:20-21 Job's mouth turns on him,

If I am righteous, my mouth condemns me;

I am blameless, but it/he [mouth/God] perverts me.

I am blameless. I do not know myself (*nap<sup>e</sup>šî*).<sup>40</sup> I reject my life.

(9:20-21)

Scholars debate the referent of the 3ms subject of the verb *qš*, "to pervert." Those who identify it with "God"<sup>41</sup> are supported by the context in which God is the one distorting Job throughout ch. 9 and elsewhere (e.g., 19:6),<sup>42</sup> but others prefer "mouth,"<sup>43</sup> the closest nominal antecedent. In the ambiguity, one might say, lies this verse's precise truth. If Job

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example, 5:17; 8:20; 9:21; 10:3).

<sup>39</sup>"Look; he snatches away; who can turn him? Who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'"

<sup>40</sup>Translators often render this clause fairly loosely, but some rightly insist upon its literal rendering. Cf. HABEL (1985, 183); NEWSOM (1996, 412); and BALENTINE (2006, 170).

<sup>41</sup>For example, HABEL (1985, 179). Often this is, in the interest of parallelism, accompanied by an emendation to the verse's first line. Some argue for a *w/y* confusion apropos the 1cs suffixed pronoun on "mouth" so that it is God's mouth (3ms possessive pronoun) that condemns Job. This is not only unattested, it is also unnecessary and perhaps belies a fundamental confusion about the meaning of the speech in which Job tells us he does not know himself, a self that presumably includes his mouth. For different discussions of the issue that lead to the same conclusion, see CLINES (1989, 235-36); HOFFMAN (1996, 149-50); and POPE (1973, 72-3).

<sup>42</sup>Furthermore, MAGDALENE (2007, 162) notes the anagram this word forms with *šq*, "to oppress," which suggests that Job experiences his perversion as oppressive.

<sup>43</sup>See, for example, GORDIS (1978, 96) or CLINES (1989, 218) who claims "parallelism favors 'it' (the mouth) as the subject."



were to testify to his righteousness, his mouth would condemn him. In the same kind of reversal that he associates with God's presence elsewhere, Job confronts himself as implicated in his destruction and thus leaves the subject ambiguous, concluding that he is both blameless AND YET perverted, innocent AND YET guilty. His mouth is his own AND YET is set against him, on the side of God. Job is not himself; his identity has exploded into difference, not because he is now different than he was, but because he is not what he is. Job repeatedly confronts his world, his bed, his breath, his mouth, his *nepeš*—himself—of other than he expects.

The interpretation to avoid here is the one that would conclude that these texts display the deconstruction of the subject (Job) in the experience of self-obliteration or self-difference.<sup>44</sup> The antagonism Job suffers is not a tension between himself and purely external elements but an inner tension that defines his sense of self. Job is not simply obliterated or deconstructed; he experiences himself as obliterated/deconstructed. That is, Job is constituted in this experience as the subject of obliteration/deconstruction. In his own words, "I do not know myself. I reject my life."

Given such experiences one can understand why Job begins to relate to his desire as something foreign, as something which is not simply his but can itself be desired or not. Job's experience seems to confirm what some have suggested about desire, namely, that it is accessible to the will only as a second-order and not as a first-order phenomenon.<sup>45</sup> I can desire to desire X, say, a drug, or I can desire not to desire that drug, but it is questionable how much control, if any, I have over whether or not I do in fact desire that drug. This kernel of ourselves that we do not have control over is not, Job's experience suggests, uncontrolled, it is rather controlled by another, Job tells us, by God. One finds this second-order relationship to desire in 9:27-29,

<sup>44</sup>That is, these texts do not testify to the "death of the subject" such as is described in certain post-structuralist or new historicist discourses.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. HARRY G. FRANKFURT, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" *The Journal of Philos-*

If I say, I will forget my complaint,  
 I will abandon my face and I will smile,  
 I fear all my pain; I know that you will not acquit me;  
 I will be guilty. Why then should I strive in vain?

(9:27-29)

Job's attempts to abandon and forget reward him with fear and worry; even his *passive* wish not to think of his concerns is transformed into *active* labor done gratuitously. God remains an obstacle for Job. God is the disrupter of Job's desire and the impediment to justice.

In these texts, Job (i) expresses a wish, (ii) suffers an inexplicable experience directly opposed to this wish, (iii) attributes this reversal to God's presence, and (iv) describes an attendant experience of confronting himself as other than himself. Freud named such an event an experience of the uncanny.<sup>46</sup> In the first section of his essay on the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*), Freud focuses on its linguistic usage which, literally, means the opposite of *heimlich*, un-homely, what is not "familiar, agreeable, not strange, intimate, belonging to the house, what is kept concealed." Freud argues that the uncanny is not simply the opposite of the familiar but rather the familiar or intimate when its familiarity has been stripped from it such that it is experienced as unfamiliar and frightening, *das Heimliche* as *unheimlich*.<sup>47</sup> In 9:30-31 Job offers a striking illustration of his uncanny experience,

If I wash with soap, and cleanse my hands with lye,  
 then you dip me in the pit so that my clothes abhor me.

(9:30-31)

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*ophy*, 68 (1971), 5–20.

<sup>46</sup>Others have also drawn on Freud's notion of the uncanny in their readings of JOB. Cf., for example, TIMOTHY K. BEAL, *Religion and Its Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 4-5, 55.

<sup>47</sup>FREUD (1955 [1919]b), 220. He draws especially on the direction indicated by Schelling who, Freud summarizes, says, "everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" (FREUD, 1955 [1919]b, 225).

As Habel writes, "The repulsive feeling an individual experiences when putrid wet clothes cling to the body is brilliantly reversed here (v.31b) and portrayed as a feeling of the clothes themselves."<sup>48</sup> And Newsom adds, "Personifying the clothes makes Job himself into the object of disgust (cf. 30:19)."<sup>49</sup> In other words, Job encounters himself not only as different from himself but also as disgusting and abhorrent, as an *unheimliches Heim*.

It is time to take stock. Job's conscious experiences of himself as a desiring subject, as seeking out that which he lacks, stumbles repeatedly when this desire goes lacking, when God excessively disorients him or thwarts him with various obstructions.<sup>50</sup> Job experiences his being as *essentially* displaced, as estranged from himself to such an extent that he identifies his encounter with his displaced self as an encounter with the presence of God. Job's experience of himself, in other words, is an experience of being fundamentally out-of-joint with the corporeal being with which he identifies. This is important because it keeps us from locating Job's sense of self in a purely Imaginary register. Job's experience of God and self cannot be accounted for in the phenomenological terms of reflection or identification. Job confronts God's presence as a force *within* his world that keeps him from feeling integrated, that keeps him anxious in his own skin. Thus, I need to modify an earlier suggestion (on page 224); Job feels anxiety not so much because the ground on which he stood was shaken out from under him, but rather because the normal drift of his life and desire are halted by his collision with a ground that will neither budge nor

<sup>48</sup>HABEL (1985), 196. <sup>49</sup>NEWSOM (1996), 413; cf. NEWSOM (2003a), 144.

<sup>50</sup>This is to describe the anxiety that is the affective avatar of Job's experience of God in the sense Lacan gives it in his tenth seminar where, for example, he says, "anxiety is not the signal of a lack but of something that you must manage to conceive of at this redoubled level as being the absence of this support of the lack" (LACAN, 12.5.1962). Anxiety begins at the moment the lack (desire) that supports the subject goes lacking. The importance of this observation will become more apparent as the chapter proceeds. See also LACAN, 11.28.62, where Lacan exhorts his students to (re)read Freud's article on the *Unheimlich*, which he calls "the absolutely indispensable hinge for approaching the question of anxiety. Just as I approached the unconscious by the witticism, I will approach the anxiety this year by the *Unheimlichkeit*."

allow him to peel himself away.<sup>51</sup> Psychoanalysis teaches "that the subject's inability to coincide with herself stems from the fact that (her) libido or jouissance appears more like something that attaches itself to her than something she is."<sup>52</sup> Job tells us that he is unable to coincide with himself because God lives (in) him as an other.<sup>53</sup> Where Job expects to find himself but instead finds himself unfamiliar and frightening, where Job expects justice and instead finds only unanticipated obstacles to justice (e.g., 9:14-24), in such displacements or gaps, Job tells us, is God's presence. God is the wall Job runs up against when he tries to articulate his desire and express himself.<sup>54</sup>

This discussion's focus on the disintegrating character of Job's experiences risks under-emphasizing a crucial aspect of his experience of God's presence. I want to avoid giving the impression that in describing these experiences in which he is somehow cut off from himself Job is echoing what his friends said. The analysis in section 52 claimed that, on account of their fear the friends relate to the experience of terror from a position that is in a sense outside, cut off, or separate from themselves. Although Job experiences his being

<sup>51</sup>This argument distances my reading from Nemo's, which describes the ground beneath Job's feet as unsettled or absent. I can (somewhat ironically) mobilize Levinas to support my critique of Nemo. In his early evocation of the whistle that Charlie Chaplin swallows in *City Lights*, LEVINAS (2003, 64-65) describes anxiety as the experience of being riveted to one's being as to something one cannot assume.

<sup>52</sup>JOAN COPJEC, "The Censorship of Interiority" *Umbr(a)*, (2009), 178. Cf. ŽIŽEK (1993), ch. 6, esp. 208-11, for a lengthy discussion and numerous social, cultural, and historical examples supporting the Lacanian thesis that the subject's enjoyment always appears as something foreign to her.

<sup>53</sup>I encountered the notion of an other who lives the subject in Deleuze's description of the double, which is "not a doubling of the One, but a redoubling of the Other. It is not a reproduction of the Same, but a repetition of the Different. It is not the emanation of an 'I,' but something that places in immanence an always other or a Non-self. It is never the other who is a double in the doubling process, it is a self that lives me as a double of the other: I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me" GILLES DELEUZE, Chap. Foldings, or the Inside of Thought (Subjectivation) In "Foucault" trans. by Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1988), 98.

<sup>54</sup>The prevalence of Job's use of seige imagery for God is well-documented. Some of the best examples come in ch. 19; see especially vv.6, 8, 10, 12.

as something from which he is alienated, it is also something to which he is riveted.<sup>55</sup> Job's experience of God has led him to conclude that he does not coincide with himself, that he is not a container for all that he is, yet his experience of God has not made him think he can or has stepped outside of his self. He might not feel fully himself, but he is also not something or someone else.<sup>56</sup>

Consider Job's statement to God in 16:8, which repeats a sentiment expressed in several quotes above:

You have seized (shriveled) me (up) to be a witness,  
my leanness rises up against me; it testifies to my face.

(16:8)

The first verb (*qmt*) can either mean "to seize/snatch" or "to shrivel" and, again, Job could not have chosen a more apt ambiguity. God has *seized* Job by the neck (16:12) AND

<sup>55</sup>COPJEC (2009, 174) refers to this anxious sense of "the unbearable opaqueness we are to ourselves" as an experience of "being stuck to an inalienable alienness."

<sup>56</sup>Here I am trying to account for a dimension that is obfuscated in Nemo's analysis of Job. I draw attention to this particular obfuscation only because Nemo relies on much of the same intellectual tradition as this study and often comes to similar conclusions, which makes understanding the differences between the two all the more important. Nemo describes anxiety, which also functions as a defining category for his analysis, as a transformation of the person. In reference to Job's descriptions of himself as "drunk with pain" (10:15), "inebriated" with "delirium" (7:4), and of his words as "thoughtless" (6:3), he says we should not take these to be superlatives or metaphors painting "the portrait of a man suffering in the extreme while still basically remaining who he is. We must take these passages quite literally and see in them an explicit affirmation, perhaps not of what the psychiatrist understood as 'psychosis' or 'insanity,' but of a 'psychopathological' crisis in any case. Job is not altogether 'there.' He is 'elsewhere,' in some 'other' place not related to the normal place. Anxiety has caused him to take leave of himself, has fractured his being, has derailed him" (NEMO, 1998, 35). While I agree with Nemo that we must not let the "other" place be collapsed into reality, or the "normal" place, I think it is equally crucial that we do not separate the two, although the reasons why might not become apparent until later, in my analysis of shame. Job is dis-placed into an elsewhere whose only quality is that it *is* not-the-normal-place. In other words and in direct contradiction to Nemo's penultimate statement, its only characteristic is that *it is related to the normal place*.

*shriveled* him up so that even the little that remains of him testifies against him. Job does not speak outside of his shriveled body; his testimony for himself simultaneously testifies against himself.<sup>57</sup> So, if I first (in section 54) suggested that Job is unable to adopt the friends' position of fear because his anxiety keeps him riveted to his body and prevents him from attaining a safe place, I can now nuance this position. Job's anxiety prevents him from assuming the friends' fear because his anxiety indicates to him the immanent presence of the dimension that fear treats as transcendent (i.e., the locus of God, truth, &c.). The sage's fear is made possible because he locates this dimension on an infinitely receding horizon excluded from himself. However, Job's anxiety registers the presence of this transcendent otherness within himself. Not that the truth of his experience is any clearer to Job, but rather that he assumes a different relationship to it than do his friends.

#### 56 JOB'S REFUTATION OF THE FRIENDS

In this section I interrogate the nature of the relationship between how the friends understand the subjective structure of Job's experience (sections 51–53) and Job's testimony about his experience (sections 54–55). The friends, I argued, think Job is suffering an experience of anxiety because his experience is one out of which he seems unable or unwilling

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<sup>57</sup>To Job 16:8 I could add other texts in which Job suffers God's disintegrating presence, is impeded in his attempt to establish a mediating distance through a symbolic order, and suffers an experience of shame when he finds himself implicated in his violent experience, that is, when he finds no space to differentiate God from himself. In ch. 9 Job confronts the impossibility of relating to God from within a symbolic order and then vows in 10:1ac, "My spirit (*nephesh*) is loathed by my life. . . I will speak in the bitterness of my soul" (cf. 7:11). Recall that this "bitterness" is precisely what he accuses God of stuffing him with in 9:18. The shame associated with such confusions between self and other as regards agency carries important resonances with the testimony of some victims of sexual abuse. Freud's article entitled "A Child is Being Beaten" would be a helpful resource to pursue in this regard (FREUD, 1955 [1919]a). Incidentally, it was published in 1919, the same year as "The Uncanny." In biblical studies, one could consult some of K. O'Connor's recent and forthcoming work that is located at the intersection of the book of Jeremiah and trauma and disaster studies. I hope that she will soon bring some of this work to bear directly on JOB. Cf.,

to climb, despite the fact that he knows that it is inexplicable on its own terms. Unlike the wicked, the righteous have a notion of fear more akin to piety, and they can use this to gain some distance from the horrifying confrontation with anxiety so as to be instructed in wisdom. This funds the friends' tendency to think that there is some hidden folly that Job is denying or ignoring. In any case, they do not think his situation lacks hope. So how does their take on the situation relate to Job's own description of his experience as one of an anxiety from which he cannot break free?

In my argument that the friends' statements about the fate of the righteous and wicked are made on an ontological and not an empirical basis, I cited numerous texts in which they spoke of empirical conditions of the righteous and the wicked that directly contradicted their claims about the conditions of each at an ontological level. The friends' speech about the *future destruction* of the wicked is unconcerned with the *present peace* of the wicked (cf. 15:21b). Job answers their lack of concern with a great deal of his own. In ch. 21 Job is particularly consumed with refuting the friends. Newsom offers the following assessment of the first part of the chapter,

Job describes the wicked with images and metaphors that are the opposite of those in the friends' descriptions. Where the friends described the enfeeblement of the wicked (15:29-34; 18:5-7; 20:6-11), Job speaks of their strength (21:7). In contrast to their extinguished line and devastated household (18:14-15, 19; 20:10, 28), Job notes their secure households and well established offspring (21:8-9, 11). Their wealth does not dissipate (15:29; 20:10, 15) but multiplies (21:10). Instead of being subject to terrors, violence, and premature death (15:21, 30; 18:13-14; 20:23-25), they enjoy a happy and secure life, culminating in a peaceful death (21:9, 11-13). Each image reverses one claimed by the friends to characterize the wicked.<sup>58</sup>

Throughout ch. 21, he cites and questions several of their admissions, e.g.,  
for example, O'CONNOR (2007); O'CONNOR (2011, forthcoming).

<sup>58</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 162.

Why do the wicked live, grow old and gain wealth?...

Their homes are at peace (*šlwm*), without terror (*phd*),

and the rod of Eloah falls not upon them...

But their thriving is not in their hands.

(21:7, 9, 16a)

"Not in their hands" implies that God not only spares the rod but is also responsible for creating situations that contradict those on account of which the friends have hope. In v.17, Job mocks the actual occurrence of that in which the friends trust,

How often is the light of the wicked extinguished,

Or does calamity come upon them,

Or are destructions apportioned by [God's] anger?

(21:17)

Whereas the friends may object,<sup>59</sup>

God stores up a human's iniquity for his [i.e., the human's] sons;<sup>60</sup>

(21:19a)

Job replies,

Let [God] repay [the human] so that he will know;

let his eyes see according to his hands...

For what delight does he have in his house that comes after him?

(21:19b-20a, 21a)

<sup>59</sup>Although the device is not made explicit until verse 27 (the reference to 'your thoughts'), the second half of the speech is a series of four objections and replies (v.16/vv.17-18; v.19/vv.20-21; v.22/vv.23-26; vv.27-28/vv.29-33)" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 163).

<sup>60</sup>Some translations preface this quote with a remark e.g., "You say..." so as to clarify that Job's statement seems to be a quote or sentiment to which he is responding. It is not clear, however, whether Job disapproves of what the sentiment avers or disagrees with it, as the clarification suggests. Thus it is better not to insert it into the text.



Job's response to the following sentiment espoused by the friends is somewhat less straightforward than the previous two, though it is not completely unclear.

Can one teach knowledge to God;  
 he who judges [from<sup>61</sup>] heights?

(21:22)

Here he seems to question whether the category of judgment can be applied to God, insofar as it relies on distinctions presumably applicable only to humans. The evidence for the category error seems to be that:

One person dies with total integrity,  
 completely tranquil (*šlʾnn*) and at ease (*šlw*) . . .  
 Yet another person dies with an embittered spirit,  
 without tasting any goodness.

Together they lie upon the dust, and worms cover them.

(21:23, 25-26)

So, while the friends admit the (empirical) existence but subordinate the (ontological) significance of circumstances that oppose their hopes for judgment against the wicked and the constitution of a righteous community, Job grants such circumstances ontological significance.

Chapter 21 is often connected with two similar sentiments expressed earlier in the dialogue:

It is one; therefore I say: blameless and wicked he annihilates.  
 If a scourge brings sudden death,  
 he mocks the trial of the innocent.

<sup>61</sup>Many translations take the participle as a reference to high or exalted ones such as the friends. However, I think it is better to take the heights as a reference to what the friends consider to be the locus of the divine presence for two reasons in particular. The first is that it occurs in the context of their references to God as one who judges and dwells from on high, which are cited above and present elsewhere in JOB (e.g.,

If land falls into the hand of a wicked person,

he covers the face of its judges.

If not [he], then who is it?

(9:22-24)

Just as he depicts God as the antagonist of the just in ch. 9, so too does he place the security of the provocateurs of God in God's hand in ch. 12,

The tents of marauders are at ease (*šlh*),

and those who provoke (*rgz*) El are secure (*bṭh*),

those whom Eloah brings into his hand.<sup>62</sup>

(12:6)

To summarize, at times Job refutes the friends by claiming that God actually does the opposite of what provides the basis for their hope, security, and trust. If this constituted the extent of the difference between their accounts of God's activity in the world, then we would be forced to characterize Job as a skeptic who offers no new constellation of wisdom or perhaps a reformer—but not a revolutionary—one who sheds light on the limits of the system, bringing into view aspects of itself that it did not recognize.<sup>63</sup> I have seen such a conclusion figured as follows:

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22:12) and beyond (e.g., Ps 113:5). The second, related reason is that in this speech Job is citing sentiments of the friends in order to object to them.

<sup>62</sup>For a discussion of the third line of this verse, see CLINES (1989), 291-92. Some are reticent to believe that Job calls God the protector of God's own provocateurs but, in light of what has thus far been said, this is hardly surprising.

<sup>63</sup>With the evocation of skepticism, I intend to allude to the work of K. Dell, who writes the following, "The sentiments of Job in the dialogue are 'sceptical' in that they doubt and question tradition. He attacks the reasoning of the traditionalists who hold certain dogmas about God and his action in the world and puts experience before beliefs which do not begin to answer his questions" (DELL, 1991, 171). According to Dell, Job does not offer anything truly new. By exposing the limits of traditional wisdom with respect to his experience, one might even say that he entrenches the idea that this wisdom forms the ultimate, albeit now more clearly limited, horizon of thought and action.

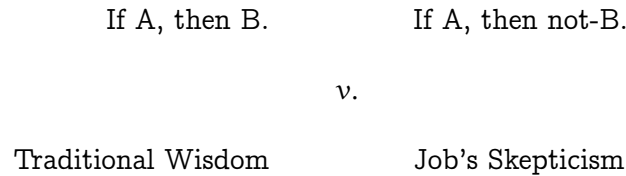


Figure 5.2: Job as Skeptical Wisdom

In light of ch. 21 there is certainly ample evidence that the book proposes an either/or. Either, with the friends, God brings terror to the repose of the wicked and security to the terror of the righteous; or, with Job, God makes the wicked secure and terrorizes the righteous.<sup>64</sup> Yet some of Job's other statements move in a direction that compels one to reject that Job is a mere reformer or skeptic operating within the tradition, and to regard him instead as a revolutionary offering a truly new framework for sapiential understanding.

<sup>64</sup>The argument found in a key cohort of scholars that corresponds to this either/or interpretation is, of course, the one that claims that Job's position differs from the friends only with respect to their shared conviction about a doctrine of retribution. Cooper adopts and summarizes this position, which goes back at least as far as Maimonides, as follows, "Maimonides states, 'If you now consider the discourse of the five [Job, his three friends, and Elihu] in the course of their conversation, you may almost think that whatever one of them says is said also by all the others, so that the same notions are repeated and overlap.' After saying that, of course, Maimonides goes on to find subtle differences among the characters, and to suggest that each one represents a particular philosophical school.

I see little basis for such differentiation. Job and his friends share a common theology of retributive justice: God rewards people for their virtue and punishes them for their sins. The only question at issue is how that principle applies to the particular case of Job" (COOPER, 1997, 234). Several problems with this position should be evident on the basis of the above arguments. Not only have I tried to demonstrate that the universal adopted by the friends is not an all-encompassing retribution theology that can be applied to particular cases—it is rather a universal constituted by an exception which makes room within the theology for cases that contradict it—I have also set up a robust account of the difference between Job's and the friends' theologies that, I hope, would give one pause before agreeing that Cooper's is the "only question."

## 57 GOD: THE SURPRISING LIMIT OF WISDOM

Job 12 illustrates this new framework for wisdom. Job tells the friends that "wisdom will die with you" (*w<sup>e</sup>immākem tāmūt ḥok<sup>e</sup>māh* v.2b), but in the very next line claims to have a mind like theirs (*gam-lî lēbāb k<sup>e</sup>mōkem* v.3a). To what extent does his understanding really resemble theirs?

At the outset Job makes statements that sound like those of ch. 21. He claims that those who provoke God are secure (v.6) whereas God's actions characteristically render that which they touch insecure, contradicting Zophar's promise that security will come to him by turning to God in prayer and repentance (11:13, 18). The rest of the chapter characterizes God as the one who upsets what appears to be settled. This perspective he shares with the friends; they are of a mind about God being one who acts outside of knowledge, from beyond what appears possible to a given situation. Job then cites a knowledge they share with the animals and the earth, namely, that all life and breath (12:10), wisdom and courage (v.13), and strength and prudence (v.16) are in God's hand, and that that which it is impossible to undo, God has done (vv.14-15). The examples he goes on to list tie the two points of agreement together in a way that can be approached via the culminating characterization of God's proprietary relationship to creation, the last of the "things" that belong to God<sup>65</sup>:

In whose hand is the soul of every creature, and the breath of all humans. . .

With him is wisdom and strength, he has counsel and understanding. . .

With him is strength and cunning, he has the deceived and the deceiver alike.

(12:10, 13, 16)

"Deceived and deceiver" (*šōgēg ūmašgeh*) is a particularly instructive pair, for before its inclusion one might have assumed that what is "proper" to God is somewhat intuitive—wisdom, strength, and understanding deriving their character from an *a priori* proximity

<sup>65</sup>The prepositions indicating this relationship (*b<sup>e</sup>yādō, immō, lō*) all denote a relationship of ownership.

to God's own character. Yet our text frustrates such expectations. First, before God "good universals" such as wisdom and strength enjoy no privileged status over what is deceiving or deceived. Second, *all these states of being* are bound up in and subordinated to *the singular experience of reversal*, which is held up as the one sure sign of God's activity in the world:

He leads counselors away, stripped, and of judges he makes fools.

The bonds of kings he opens, and ties a waistcloth on their loins.

He leads priests away, stripped, and the mighty he overthrows.

He steals the speech of the trusted, and the judgment of elders he takes.

He pours out contempt on the nobles, and loosens the belt of the mighty.

He discloses the depths of the darkness, and brings to light the deep darkness.

(12:17-22)

In short, God is the non-deceiving root of deception and honesty, a rootage whose absolute ground is not honesty but the deceptive essence of everything that appears to be.

This apparently abstruse way of putting things allows an important distinction, for, as others have recognized,<sup>66</sup> Eliphaz similarly supports his promise of hope to Job in ch. 5 by affirming God as the agent of surprising reversals: "But as for me, I would seek El. . . [who] sets the lowly on high. . . so hope exists for the poor" (5:8a, 11a, 16a). The difference, however, is that Job refuses to postulate any sort of ideal to which such reversals refer. He attacks transcendence, making "reversals as such" the defining attribute of God's work in the world. As Clines says, "at no point in these verses is any moral purpose served by the upheavals. Job's concentration is wholly upon the upsetting of expectations."<sup>67</sup> So, those who are supposed to be cornerstones of the social order and impervious to vulnerability, i.e., judges, counselors, kings, priests, those who are trusted, elders, the great and the mighty, these are the ones whom God defeats, makes fools of, humiliates, disgraces, and perverts (12:17-21). Just as nations are exalted *and* exterminated, expanded *and* exiled (v.23) by

<sup>66</sup>E.g., CLINES (1989), 296; and NEWSOM (1996), 429. <sup>67</sup>CLINES (1989), 296.

God, so too are mysteries brought to light and leaders made to walk in darkness (vv.22 and 24-25).

I fully admit the difficulties of understanding any reference to God as an attack on transcendence. But, following von Rad's quip in response to Reventlow's claim that YHWH is the focal point of the Old Testament, one must ask "What kind of a Jahweh?"<sup>68</sup> for they are not all the same. When Job speaks about God he is, I believe, first of all critical of every claim to speak of God in the name of something transcendent. The work Job attributes to God is purely immanent to the world. Let me reformulate ch. 12 as Job's rejection of the friends' position. The friends think God acts from a position of remote transcendence in ways that oppose the world and upset reality as it is known. Job's position on God's activity, however, is better captured by saying that the upsetting of the world is the manifestation of divine presence. In other words, the difference between Job and the friends appears as something like a reversal of subject and predicate. *Where the friends claim* that God's hand causes all kinds of surprising events, *Job counters* that all kinds of surprising events are God's handiwork.

The two positions share some important affirmations. *In both*, God exceeds knowledge as the agent responsible for something that could not be anticipated within the situation in which it occurs, but each locates this excess differently. *Both* begin with the affirmation of God as that which opens up and operates in a gap that separates some situation from itself. *For the friends*, God transcends phenomena and can be identified as the agent "behind" various phenomena that cannot be explained, understood, or known through recourse to other phenomena. That is, God is a dense presence that can disturb causal connections within reality, a Real virtuality behind/above/below the constructed reality that is the product of human knowledge. *For Job*, God is not the external reference for phenomena

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<sup>68</sup>GERHARD VON RAD, *Old Testament Theology, Vol.2: The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 415, in response to HENNING GRAF REVENTLOW, "Grundfragen der alttestamentlichen Theologie im Lichte der neueren deutschen Forschung" *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 17 (1961), 96.

that do not fit, not their synthesis or their background, not a third term transcending the difference between the reality in which some event could not have been anticipated and the event itself. Instead, *for Job* God is something much more immanent to reality, something that is perceptible in those moments when reality does not coincide with itself, and appears to open up into something else. *For the friends*, God exists at some distance from reality, in the virtuality that is higher than heaven, deeper than sheol (11:8). *For Job*, God is not distanced from reality but is that which distances reality from itself. God is something much more like an edge that separates and holds different realities together. *The friends* think of God as that which can limit reality; *Job* thinks of God as that which decomplicates reality, that which keeps reality's inherent limitation from closing.

*Neither* thinks reality is complete. *Both* agree that the incompleteness is not always perceptible. Their difference emerges in their opposing accounts of how God is related to those moments when reality appears limited, when the appearance that reality is unlimited stumbles. *For the friends*, the excess that is perceptible at such moments registers humans' inability to construct a reality that is adequate to the Real of God. *For Job*, such moments directly register God's presence. *The friends* counsel fear, and thus keep God at a distance from the world whose limitation is taken to be evidence of God's distance from it. *Job* insists on God's proximity to himself and the world as that which splits them from themselves. In the instrumentalization of reality's non-coincidence with itself, *the friends* exclude the truth of events that disrupt reality from the reality that they disrupt, and thereby (inconsistently) sustain the (false) appearance of reality's wholeness. *For Job*, God is the force that limits reality and prevents any whole from being formed of it.

Job reckons his anxiety an affective avatar of God's presence.<sup>69</sup> At the beginning of ch.

<sup>69</sup>At the risk of stating the obvious, Job's sense that his increased anxiety corresponds to God's proximity is neither unique to him nor the wisdom literature. One thinks especially of the priestly tradition's holiness theologies in which God's presence is particularly antagonistic to human life. NEWSOM (2003a, 142) has also recognized this connection, "In narrative texts the outbreak of the holy against the profane may take the form of annihilating violence (e.g., Lev 10:1-4; Num 11:31-34; 2 Sam 6:6-8)."

13 Job scolds the friends for arguing for God, for being partial to God's side, a partiality that even God opposes (v.10). Job asks them if it will go well with them when God examines them (v.9), and then says, "Is it not that his arousal would terrify you; and terror of him would fall upon you?" (v.11). *The friends think* anxiety must be fled in favor of a fear that assures them that they may be deceived about God, that God is too big and too wonderful for their knowledge. *Job, however, says* that anxiety is a sign that God is close by. Job recognizes the dimension of certainty that must be present for one to understand that a deception has occurred; that is, one can only be surprised if one knows that the surprise is something that was not previously anticipated. That Job's experience comes as a surprise indicates that God has been at work in it. The events that have afflicted Job are events whose cause, although unknown, is not uncertain; the events could only have been caused by God, which is the proof that they were caused by no one or nothing else than God. Job's anxiety is certainly aroused by an experience of God's presence. What this may imply theologically or otherwise is irrelevant to the one in anxiety.

#### 58 FEAR AND ANXIETY IN OTHER FIELDS

So far I have differentiated Job's position from the friends' on God's activity in the world by locating this difference in the affects each attributes to the manifestation of God's presence. God's presence elevates the friends' fear but arouses Job's anxiety. Anyone familiar with the long and robust philosophical and psychological, structural and phenomenological discussion of the difference between fear and anxiety knows that it has hovered, like a spectral accompaniment, over this discussion of what I have, up to now, distinguished only on the basis of the use of words for fear in the dialogue. The psychological or phenomenological argument locates the difference between fear and anxiety in the presence or absence of an object. In his article on fear, anxiety, and reverence, Gruber quotes and relies upon a cou-



ple of psychologists who can serve as representative of this conventional position.<sup>70</sup> Gaylin explains the difference as follows:

Fear... is the anticipation of a painful... experience... [Moreover], fear tends to be direct, object or event oriented, specific, and conscious... When we feel anxious, it is usually vague and indirect, with no particular source, and more unconsciously oriented.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, Kielholz writes,

... fear is always distinguished from anxiety by the fact that it is invariably objective and reflects the magnitude of the threatening danger. Those affected can therefore meet the threat by rational and appropriate action. Let us take fear of examinations as an example. It is a spur to work, and the better the student is prepared the more readily he can master his fear, and even acquire a feeling of security through the acquisition of a sufficient stock of knowledge. The position is quite different with examination anxiety. In spite of the most assiduous study, the anxiety grows more acute as the examination approaches and, on the examination day, turns into an examination stupor with total failure as the outcome.<sup>72</sup>

Fear, he claims, is objective; it is fear of something when that something is an object constituted within the symbolic world as something explainable, identifiable, specifiable, orientable and, finally, dispellable through rational thought. Anxiety, on the other hand, lacks any specific object, it is unjustifiable, unreasonable, and impervious to the conscious attempts by the subject to combat it.

We can use Kielholz's example to reveal the pitfalls of his own account and to better identify the source of the difference between fear and anxiety. In the example, the first student is supposed to feel fear before an object—the examination—because the feeling is dissipated with the accumulation of knowledge about this object. The second student's

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<sup>70</sup>The quotes and discussion can be found in MAYER I. GRUBER, "Fear, Anxiety and Reverence in Akkadian, Biblical Hebrew and Other North-West Semitic Languages" *Vetus Testamentum*, XL (1990), 418-19.

<sup>71</sup>WILLARD GAYLIN, *Feelings: Our Vital Signs* (New York: Ballantine, 1979), 21, 22.

<sup>72</sup>PAUL KIELHOLZ, "Psychopharmacology Measurement of Emotions in Medical Practice" in *Emotions: Their Parameters and Measurement* Edited by LENNART LEVI and ULF S. VON EULER. (New York: Raven, 1975),

feeling is supposed to be anxiety because, although triggered by the test and amplified by its proximity, no amount of knowledge about it reduces the feeling. In other words, the second student feels anxiety because no object corresponds to his feeling; the object—the examination—is not the source of the feeling if the feeling does not change when he gains knowledge about it.

Yet the opposite argument makes as much or even better sense of the two students. The first student is not first afraid of the exam and then unafraid of the exam. The two objects are not at all the same. He is first afraid of an unknown dimension, some indeterminate X that the exam represents, and he then accumulates knowledge about the exam so as to build up his defenses against this unspecified nothing of which he is afraid. By accumulating knowledge he hopes to ensure that this nothing—of which he desires not to know anything and which he, in this case, successfully defended himself against through the exercise of his desire to know about the exam—remains “out there,” “beyond his defenses.” Of course, it is likely to manifest itself on another front in the future and, in any case, it is not as absent as he may imagine, for it is precisely what conditions his desire for knowledge about the test and it must remain “absent” for the knowledge that he desires to sustain its value/desirability. What, then, of the second student? What is the examination for him if not that which arouses his anxiety? Contrary to the psychologists, I do not think the examination is without a sense of objectivity, even if this objectivity is not to be equated with whether it can be known and distinguished from other objects. The *examination* that is the object of his anxiety is not the same as the *test* he actually takes, not because it is another object but rather because there is some added value in the test that simply results from the student having elected it and invested it with his libido.<sup>73</sup> His anxiety is triggered

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748-49.

<sup>73</sup>I do not mean to suggest that the student's ego has consciously elected the test; the election is rather something that takes place at the level of the drive. The same distinction is at work in the difference between the milk and the breast according to the psychoanalytic account of the oral drive (cf. the discussion on page 39). A human baby seeks milk to fill its stomach. However, the oral drive is posited to account for

by the test and nothing else, and the “examination” designates the way in which the test does not correspond to itself, the way in which his anxiety sticks to the test regardless even of its content. Any interpretation of the test’s content or significance is irrelevant to anxiety. Unlike the test, the examination is not an isolatable object; but it is objective in the sense that it must be posited as the object that gives rise to the student’s anxiety. This object does not exist apart from the test, but no knowledge of the test can integrate it.

It is for this reason that Lacan warns, “It is wrongly said that anxiety is without an object. Anxiety has a completely different sort of object to any apprehension that has been prepared, structured.”<sup>74</sup> Based on his analytic experience, Lacan felt compelled to develop a concept of this unique object of anxiety, which he called the *objet petit a*.<sup>75</sup> He corrects what is commonly transmitted about anxiety (i.e., “it is without an object”) by saying, “‘it is not without an object’ . . . This relationship of ‘not being without having’ does not mean that one knows what object is involved.”<sup>76</sup> So, anxiety’s object is one that is not known objectively, cannot be expected, but whose presence is unmistakably signaled by anxiety. Seven years later Lacan reiterates that this is a non-objective object by calling it unnameable and yet translatable, which he does, by way of Marx’s “surplus value,” as “surplus jouissance [*plus-de-jouir*].”<sup>77</sup> The “surplus” designates the unique ontological status of this object, the sense in which it is produced as that which the subject has lost by its forced alienation

the fact that the baby is, on the one hand, not satisfied by the milk alone and, on the other, satisfied by something more than the milk, which psychoanalysis names “the breast.” The milk is split from itself by the drive’s investment, so that the breast is not an object opposed to it but is rather that object in it that makes it something more, that makes it the locus of the subject’s enjoyment. There is a brief discussion of this in LACAN, 12.12.1962; cf. LACAN (1977), 180.

<sup>74</sup>LACAN, 12.19.1962.

<sup>75</sup>“The most striking manifestation, the signal of the intervention of this *objet a*, is anxiety. . . and this object, of which we have to speak under the term *a*, is precisely an object which is outside any possible definition of objectivity” (LACAN, 1.9.1963). In other words, Lacan deduces the object (*a*) from his elaboration of anxiety, not vice versa.

<sup>76</sup>LACAN, 1.9.1963.

<sup>77</sup>LACAN (2007).

into the symbolic order and yet which, when approached, disintegrates rather than unifies its sense of self. Anxiety serves the subject as a signal of the potential dangers from this impending disintegration. Lacan tries to capture this unique ontological status with the litotes "not without."<sup>78</sup> "*Jouissance*" designates this object as an embodiment of libido, which appears to the subject as a foreignness that sticks to it rather than as the objective embodiment of its being. To be sure, Lacan did not depart from the psychological tradition on his own; he was anticipated in important ways in the philosophical and psychoanalytic tradition by Kierkegaard,<sup>79</sup> Freud,<sup>80</sup> and especially Heidegger.<sup>81</sup> But Lacan surely did the most to specify the nature of this object and referred to that as his unique contribution to psychoanalysis.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Cf. LACAN (2007), 58.

<sup>79</sup>SOREN KIERKEGAARD, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980 [1844]), 111, says, of the object of anxiety about sin: "its nothing is an actual something," and he goes on to say, "No matter how deep an individual has sunk, he can sink still deeper, and this 'can' is the object of anxiety" (1980 [1844], 113).

<sup>80</sup>Freud wrote numerous, not altogether consistent theses on anxiety. It is clear that for him anxiety is experienced by the ego as a signal of danger, and that the signal is a (privileged) affect, not a signal constituted by a signifying order. See the later chapters of SIGMUND FREUD, "*Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*" in *SE XX* (1959 [1926]), 77–172.

<sup>81</sup>"That in the face of which one has anxiety is not an entity within-the-world... That in the face of which one is anxious is completely indefinite. Not only does this indefiniteness leave factually undecided which entity within-the-world is threatening us, but it also tells us that entities within-the-world are not 'relevant' at all. Nothing which is ready-to-hand or present-at-hand within the world functions as that in the face of which anxiety is anxious. Accordingly when something threatening brings itself close, anxiety does not 'see' any definite 'here' or 'yonder' from which it comes. That in the face of which one has anxiety is characterized by the fact that what threatens is *nowhere*. Anxiety 'does not know' what that in the face of which it is anxious is. 'Nowhere', however, does not signify nothing... [*T*]he world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety... *Being-in-the-world itself is that in the face of which anxiety is anxious.*" MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time* trans. by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 1962), 232-33, emphasis in original.

<sup>82</sup>As he admits, it is a difficult notion, "This object without which anxiety is not can still be addressed

To summarize: the object of fear can be present or absent, but it has a Symbolic place; whereas the object of anxiety is a unique object, existing somehow outside the Symbolic order, in a privileged relationship to the Real. Job's paradoxical experience of God is his experience of being in relation to something from which he is excluded but to which he is attached and with which he is even identified. In anxiety, Job suffers a heightened sense of himself as an inalienable alienness to which he is stuck.<sup>83</sup> Job's experience of God consists of an experience of uncanny confrontation with himself as other than himself, as a self with which he is not integrated, a self that even opposes him, that testifies against him and yet gives him no message about himself. God makes Job who he is and prevents him from knowing himself.<sup>84</sup> Job describes God as a surplus within the world whose presence splits the world from itself so that objects or experiences are surprising and unanticipatable. God is thus transcendent to the world, not in the sense that God is the formal condition for the world's existence nor in the sense that God is located in some beyond of the world, but rather in the sense that God is somehow a surplus within the world over itself. Thus God is also immanent to the world, a presence on account of which the world stumbles, the one who, even the animals know, has encountered Job. In other words, God is immanent to the world and manifested in connection with a sensible form. What, then, accounts for the transcendent dimension of this immanent transcendence? The sensible manifestation of God's presence neither has any determinate referent nor does it deliver any meaning or message to Job. So Job locates God precisely in the position that Lacan will call the *objet petit a*, that unique object that is a product of and surplus beyond the Symbolic order, a reference to the Real whose proximity gives rise to anxiety.

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in some other way. It's precisely this that over the course of the years I have given more and more form to. I have in particular given many chatterboxes the opportunity to rush hastily into print on the subject of what I may have had to say with the term 'object *a*'" LACAN (2007), 147.

<sup>83</sup>My phrasing here intentionally evokes the accounts of anxiety cited above in Copjec (on page 231) and Levinas (on page 230).

<sup>84</sup>As Sartre says about "the look," God reveals Job to himself as unrevealed; cf. SARTRE (1992), 359.

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 Job 23: Job's Anxiety in a World of Indefinite Inclusion
 

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## 59 WHY JOB 23?

This chapter offers a close reading of Job's speech in ch. 23. Despite this text's numerous interpretive and translational difficulties, it has proven central to some of the interpretations considered thus far as the most influential for framing the critical approach to JOB in terms of the theological problem of transcendence.<sup>1</sup> In light of these difficulties, the following, commentary-like analysis does not try to establish a foundation for my argument. Instead, it illustrates some of the many ways in which the preceding argument generates new and often more satisfying interpretations of some of the most difficult problems presented by

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<sup>1</sup>Recall Westermann's argument that only in Job 23 "does the main wish finally stand forth in clear and unhindered fashion—the wish for a direct encounter with God. This is the real wish toward which Job has been struggling all along. This is shown by the fact that... Job starts out by saying 'Oh, that I knew where I might find him' (23:3)... in 23:3-12 Job brings together all his petitions and wishes" (WESTERMANN, 1981, 69). Verse 3a is also crucial to Habel's interpretation of the speech, and of the development of Job's desire in the dialogues more generally, because it begins with one of the instances of *mî-yittên* by which Habel marks the stages Job reaches "in the progression of his exploratory hopes" (HABEL, 1985, 347). Job utters this formula—which Habel also translates "Oh, that"—five times over the course of the dialogues. Habel takes them as a sequence from (i) the hope that God would crush Job (6:8-9) to (ii) the hope that God would hide Job in Sheol and grant him postmortem vindication (14:13) to (iii) the hope for a redeemer (19:22-25) to (iv) the hope that Job could find God's abode and argue his case (23:7-9) to (v) the hope that God would appear in court to hear Job (31:35-37). According to Habel, in ch. 23 Job expresses his twinned desires to (i) find God's fixed place and (ii) present his case. Job does follow his expression of hope in v.3a with this statement in v.4b: "... that I might fill my mouth with arguments." The rest of ch. 23, however, poses numerous problems for Habel's reading.

Job's speeches. Job 23 also takes the notoriously difficult ontology of Lacan's *objet petit a* and plants it squarely back in the complications of Job's testimony itself.

## 60 JOB 23: TEXT AND TRANSLATION

<i>wayya'an iȳyōb wayyōmar</i>	1	Then Job answered and said,
<i>gam-hayyōm m<sup>e</sup>rī śihî</i>	2a	Surely <sup>2</sup> today my complaint is bitter <sup>3</sup> ;
<i>yādî kābdāh al-anḥātî</i>	2b	my own hand weighs heavily upon my groaning. <sup>4</sup>
	...	
<i>mî-yittēn yādastî w<sup>e</sup>ēmṣā-ēhû</i>	3a	Who could let me know where I might find him, <sup>5</sup>
<i>ābō ad-t<sup>e</sup>kūnātō</i>	3b	that I might enter as far as his fixed-place, <sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup>As argued by DAVID J. A. CLINES, *Job 21-37* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 574, *gm* is probably best read as emphatic of the whole sentence, not merely of "today."

<sup>3</sup>*mry* is read by many as "rebellion" or "defiance," from the root *mrh*, as in Num 17:10; Isa 30:9; Ezek 2:5 (e.g., CLINES, 2006, 574-75; HABEL, 1985, 344; GORDIS, 1965, 272). Others read it, with many ancient versions (Syr., Tg., Vulg.), as formed from the root *mrr*, meaning "bitter" (e.g., DRIVER and GRAY, 1921, 160; GOOD, 1990, 113), the noun form of which is otherwise attested as *mar*. This reading is also supported by Job's earlier characterizations of his soul as embittered (7:11; 10:1). As NEWSOM (1996, 508) suggests, it is probably best to read it as a play between the similar sounding words.

<sup>4</sup>With *yd* and in the Qal, *kbd* usually means "to weigh heavily upon" or "press down upon," with the sense of "oppress" (see HALOT, p.455), as in Judg 1:35; 1 Sam 5:6, and 11. The translation of this line is discussed further on page 255.

<sup>5</sup>On the translation and syntax of this line and those that follow in 3b-5, see the discussion below on page 255.

<sup>6</sup>Following HALOT, 1731 and many others (e.g., BALENTINE, 2006, 362), I take *t<sup>e</sup>kūnātō* to be a near synonym for the more common *mākôn* (which signifies YHWH's dwelling place in 1 Kings 8:39). With respect to its other two occurrences in the Bible, this one seems closer to Nah 2:10, where it signifies a place for the storage of silver and gold that is said to have no end, than Ezek 43:11, where it signifies the layout or arrangement of the temple's space. The latter seems more like the masculine noun *tkwn*, which is found in a number of texts at Qumran (e.g., 1QS 10:5) and likely derives from the root *tkn* rather than *kwn*; cf. DAVID J.A. CLINES, editor, *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix,

<i>·ē·ēr·kāh l<sup>e</sup>pānāy<sup>w</sup> mišpāt</i>	4a	that I might display before him a case,
<i>ūpī ·<sup>a</sup>mallē tōkāhōt</i>	4b	that I might fill my mouth with arguments,
<i>·ēd·āh millīm ya<sup>a</sup>nēnī</i>	5a	that I might know the words he would answer me,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>·ābīnāh mah-yō·mar lī</i>	5b	that I might discern what he would say to me.
	...	
<i>habb<sup>e</sup>·rob-kō<sup>a</sup>h yārīb immādī</i>	6a	Is it by greatness of strength he would contend with me?
<i>lō·ak-hū yāsīm bī</i>	6b	No, but he would set himself within/against me. <sup>7</sup>
<i>šām yāšār nōkāh immō</i>	7a	There, the one who argues with him might be upright, <sup>8</sup>
<i>wa<sup>a</sup>·pall<sup>e</sup>·tāh lānešah miššōptī</i>	7b	and I might deliver the eminent one <sup>9</sup> from my judging. <sup>10</sup>

2009), 487.

<sup>7</sup>I discuss the meaning of this ambiguous line at length in section 63. I include both prepositions because, as I argue below, “against” alone risks conjuring the image of an external opposition, as in “overagainst,” whereas I think Job is speaking here as elsewhere about an opposition internal to himself that opposes himself to himself. I take the adverb *·ak* to be functioning in the exceptive or restrictive sense (cf. Gen 9:4; Num 18:15; 1 Sam 18:17; Jer 16:19). In other words, Job says that God would not oppose him with great strength, *except* from within/against himself. Elsewhere the exceptive use occurs alongside the negation *lō* (e.g., Gen 20:12; 1 Kings 11:39), though only here in this order. For a discussion of this use of the adverb, see WALTKE and O’CONNOR (1990), §39.3.5.

<sup>8</sup>This follows the translation of CLINES (2006, 576), though there is nothing in the syntax that demands *nōkāh* be the subject and *yāšār* the predicate.

<sup>9</sup>I discuss this translation in more detail in section 63, including the common reading of *lānešah* as “forever,” and the many solutions for dealing with the verb *plṭ*—e.g., repointing it as an (otherwise) unattested niphāl or qāl (Driver-Gray), or reading “myself” its an implicit object (Dhorme, Hartley).

<sup>10</sup>The MT reads *miššōptī*, yielding three elements: the preposition *min*, the qāl active participle of *špt*, and the 1cs pronoun suffix—“from the one who judges me.” This does not fit well with the rest of the sentence, in particular the inarguably active meaning of *plṭ* (on which see CLINES, 2006, 576, and the commentary that follows), and so the LXX and Vulg. read *mišpātī*—“my judgment.” This suggestion (followed by NAB and JB, along with several commentaries) has its own problems, insofar as *plṭ* does not in other instances mean “deliver” in the juridical or rhetorical sense (i.e., to deliver a verdict or speech) but rather *to rescue, to save from*. I prefer to read *miššōptī*, preserving the preposition *min* but reading *špt* as an infinitive construct. The presence of the *o* in the infinitive construct is surprising but not unattested—cf. *l<sup>e</sup>šoptēnū* in 1 Sam



<i>hēn qedem ʾeh<sup>ē</sup>lōk w<sup>e</sup>ēnennū</i>	8a	Were <sup>11</sup> I to go east, <sup>12</sup> then he would not be there;
<i>w<sup>e</sup>āḥōr w<sup>e</sup>lō<sup>→</sup>ābîn lô</i>	8b	and west, then I would not perceive him;
<i>ś<sup>e</sup>mōwl ba<sup>←</sup>śōtō w<sup>e</sup>lō<sup>→</sup>āḥaz</i>	9a	north, by his doing I would have no vision;
<i>yaṭōp yāmîn w<sup>e</sup>lō<sup>→</sup> ʾereh</i>	9b	he would conceal himself south so that I would not see. <sup>13</sup>
	...	
<i>kî-yāda<sup>←</sup> derek ʾimmādî</i>	10a	Instead he has known <sup>14</sup> my way;
<i>b<sup>e</sup>ḥānanî kazzāhāb ʾēšē<sup>→</sup></i>	10b	he has examined me, like gold I emerge.

8:5 and 6, or *b<sup>e</sup>šoptekā* in Psa 51:6. This reading does not depart from the consonantal text and merely shortens one vowel. Semantically, the *nomen agentis* “the one who judges me” is replaced by the verbal noun “my judging,” a rendering that allows the other elements of the sentence to keep their usual meaning.

<sup>11</sup>Taking the *hēn* as the conditional particle “if,” rather than the interjection “behold.”

<sup>12</sup>In 23:8-9, Job names the four directions of bodily orientation (NRSV), which are the same in Hebrew as the four compass directions (NIV)” (NEWSOM, 1996, 508). “The four points of the compass are determined on the basis of the Israelite facing east. Thus east is also ‘before’; west is ‘behind’ (Isa 9:11 [12E]; cf. Deut 11:24); north is ‘to the left’ (Gen 14:15); and south is ‘to the right’ (1 Sam 23:19)” (HABEL, 1985, 345). Cf. ROBERT GORDIS, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 261.

<sup>13</sup>Verses 8-9 have birthed many emendations and several omissions. The changes that most significantly alter the meaning of the couplet are those made to v.9, in particular to *b<sup>e</sup>stw*, “by his doing,” and *yṭp*, “he conceals himself.” Many commentators change both to the first person and the former to *bqqštyw*, “I seek him,” following the Syr. The latter verb can supposedly either mean “to turn” or “to cover,” in the sense of “to clothe.” A noun from the root that means “garment” or “mantle” can be found in Isa 3:22 and, for example, Ps 65:14 tells of valleys “clothing themselves” in grain. A homonymn of this root means “to be faint, weak, languish” (e.g., Lam 2:11; Ps 61:2; Isa 57:16), but nowhere in the Hebrew Bible does the this root or its homonymn carry the dubious meaning “to turn.” Claiming that this meaning is attested here is clearly an attempt to couple it, “I turn [south],” with the verb “I go [east]” and the doubly emended “I seek him [north].” While this creates a nice parallelism, it strikes me as excessive, borderline rewriting. See the discussion in CLINES (2006, 577-78), who makes the emendations.

<sup>14</sup>With the particle *kî*, read here in the adversative or restrictive sense (cf. WALTKE and O’CONNOR, 1990, §39.3.5d), plus the shift to the suffixed conjugations, the poem transitions from the modality of possibility to that of actuality, from what might happen to what has happened and, concurrently, from God’s remoteness to God’s proximity. This shift is discussed in more detail in section 64.

- ba<sup>a</sup>šurô aḥ<sup>a</sup>zāh raglî* 11a To his path my foot has clung;  
*darkô šāmartî w<sup>lō</sup>-āṭ* 11b His way I have kept and I will not deviate.  
*mišwat ś<sup>e</sup>pātāyw w<sup>lō</sup> amîš* 12a And from the command of his lips I will not depart.<sup>15</sup>  
*mēḥuqqî šāpantî imrê-pîw* 12b Beyond my duty<sup>16</sup> I have treasured the words of his  
mouth.

<sup>15</sup>Following many, I take “the command of his lips” as a *causus pendens* with the *waw* as the *waw apodosi*. The preposition “from” is unnecessary in the *causus pendens* according to DHORME (1984, 349), who is followed by CLINES (2006, 579). Also possible, though seldomly accepted, is Blommerde’s proposal that “the command of his lips” is another object of “I have kept” in v.11b.

<sup>16</sup>Reading the comparative *min* with a minority of others. Most follow the LXX (ἐν δὲ κόλπῳ μου) and emend the MT to *b<sup>e</sup>ḥēqî*, “in my bosom” (e.g., [N]RSV, POPE, 1973, 156; cf. Ps 119:11; Job 19:27). Although both have support and seem plausible in context, I agree with Habel that the emendation “ignores the interplay with the same noun in v.14a” and I render a similar translation to his: “I have treasured his words beyond that required of me” (HABEL, 1985, 345-46). *ḥq* is not normally translated “duty” but, other than Prov 30:8, only here and in v.14a is it spoken with the first person possessive suffix by anyone other than God. When spoken by the lawgiver, of course, it does not mean “duty” but rather “law,” “rule,” “statute,” “decree,” etc. (e.g., 1 Kings 9:4). The same is true when it is spoken with the second or third person pronouns about the lawgiver’s “statutes” (e.g., Ps 147:19). When spoken by or about the law insofar as the speaker is bound to it as in this case, however, “duty” would seem to capture best the sense of the speaker’s responsibility to the law (e.g., Exod 5:14; Lev 10:13). Job speaks not of his law but of his duty.

- w<sup>e</sup>hû b<sup>e</sup>eḥād ûmî y<sup>e</sup>šîbennû* 13a But he is one,<sup>17</sup> and who could turn him back?<sup>18</sup>
- w<sup>e</sup>napšô ḵww<sup>e</sup>tāh wayyā<sup>a</sup>ś* 13b What his desire has wanted, he has done.
- kî yašlîm ḥuqqî* 14a Surely he will make an end of my duty
- w<sup>e</sup>kāhēnnāh rabbôt ḵimmô* 14b and such things become a multitude with him.<sup>19</sup>
- ...

<sup>17</sup>CLINES (2006, 579) lists as many as six different ways in which this phrase has been read. His case, however, seems overstated. Most readings vary only slightly, emphasizing one aspect or another of the association of one-ness with sovereignty, clearly indicated by the following lines of the poem. For a similar statement, cf. Isa 43:13 (so, NEWSOM, 1996, 509). Most of this line's awkwardness revolves around the *b<sup>e</sup>*-preposition, most often read as the *beth essentiae* or the *beth* of identity or equivalence. In this usage the "object of the preposition *b<sup>e</sup>* can act as a predicate nominative, meaning that the subject is equated with it" (WILLIAMS, 2007, §249). Cf. WALTKE and O'CONNOR (1990), §11.2.5e. Other examples are found in Exod 6:3; 18:4; Isa 40:10. Clines rejects this reading saying that the preposition functions differently here than in Exod 6:3, but he fails to say why. Clines' excessive classification creates the sense that the text is corrupt and in need of the common emendation of *bḥd* to the verb *bḥr*, for which another argument can be found in DHORME (1984, 350). Clines' emended rendition ("If he has chosen, who can dissuade him?") finally seems too speculative and, in the end, to be little more than an importation of the sense of v.13b into 13a that loses the specificity and poetic function of 13a.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. similar statements in 9:12 and 11:10.

<sup>19</sup>Verse 14 is lacking from the LXX. This line literally reads, "and like/as them [fem. pl.] a multitude with him [masc. sg.]" The referent of the feminine plural pronoun is unclear and it cannot be resolved by accepting the clever proposal to reposit *rabbôt* as *ribôt*, "so are lawsuits with him." The independent third person plural pronouns are prefixed by the *k<sup>e</sup>*-preposition elsewhere (e.g., Gen 41:19; 2 Sam 12:8; 2 Chr 9:11) to mean "like these" or "such as them." Most translations are close to what is here, which leaves ambiguous exactly what is being compared. Below I argue that the comparison is being made to that singular disposition of God to Job on account of which Job's duty is brought to an end.

- al-kēn mippānāyw ʿebbāhēl* 15a Therefore, before his face<sup>20</sup> I am terrified.
- ʿētbônēn w<sup>e</sup>ʿēpḥad mimmēnnû* 15b I consider well and I fear before him.
- w<sup>e</sup>ʿēl hērak libbî* 16a El has enfeebled my heart,
- w<sup>e</sup>šadday hibhîlānî* 16b and Shadday has terrified me.
- kî-lōʾ nišmattî mipp<sup>e</sup>nê-ḥōšēk* 17a Yet I am not<sup>21</sup> silenced<sup>22</sup> in the face of darkness,<sup>23</sup>
- ûmippānay kissāh-ʾōpel* 17b though blackness covers my face.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup>*mipp<sup>e</sup>nēy* is a “complex” or “compound preposition,” similar to *lip<sup>e</sup>nēy*, which “means ‘from before’ in a locative or causal sense” (WALTKE and O’CONNOR, 1990, §11.3.1a). An example of the causal sense can be found in Job 35:12. The locative sense functions in two different ways. Sometimes one entity is simply located by the preposition in relation to another. When fear or trembling is involved, as it is here, it usually functions in this simple, locative sense. Another example can be found in Deut 20:3 when Israel is commanded “Do not fear. . . or be terrified before them (*mipp<sup>e</sup>nēyhem*)” (cf. 2 Kings 1:15; Isa 19:1; Jer 1:8; Ezek 3:9; Neh 4:14). At other times, however, the preposition functions in a separative sense to locate one entity *away from* the face or presence of another, as in Ps 139:7, “Where can I flee from your presence?” (cf. Exod 34:24; Num 10:35; 2 Sam 7:9; Hos 2:2).

<sup>21</sup>For a discussion of different problems generated by this negation and the way different translations deal with them, see CLINES (2006, 581). Verse 17 is crucial to the meaning of the whole speech and highly disputed. In addition to Clines’ lengthy discussion, see DHORME (1984, 352).

<sup>22</sup>This verb is rare but has multiple attestations to two different meanings, each of which can be argued to fit this verse. The first is “to be silenced” (see HALOT, 1036), which is adopted by, for example, the NIV AND REB. The other meaning is “to be destroyed, annihilated, disappeared,” which seems to be the best translation of the verb’s other occurrence in the Niphal stem in Job 6:17. It is adopted here by, for example, the NRSV and JPSV.

<sup>23</sup>HABEL (1985, 347) writes apropos this verse, which he considers a cry of lament framing the speech with v.2, it “follows the poet’s favorite practice of closing a speech with the theme of death or darkness (7:21; 10:21-22; 12:24-25; 14:18-20; 17:11-16).”

<sup>24</sup>The translation of this verse is difficult. Since Job is in the midst of describing what God has done to him, it is certainly plausible that God, and not *ʾōpēl*, is the subject of the verb just as God was of the verbs in the previous verse. Grammatically speaking, either is possible.

## 61 INTRODUCTIONS: VV.1-2

After v.1's formulaic transition from Eliphaz's speech to Job's, v.2 summarizes and indicates the underlying cause of Job's anguish:

Surely today my complaint is bitter;  
my own hand weighs heavily upon my groaning.

Scholarly discomfort with the sense of *yādî*, "my hand," is evident in the commonplace emendation to "his [God's] hand."<sup>25</sup> However, Job often describes his anguish as an experience of being divided against himself (cf. section 55): in 7:15, "my throat chooses strangulation"; in 9:20, "my mouth condemns me"; in 16:8, "my leanness rises up against me."<sup>26</sup> The impetus to emend should thus be rejected since it seems to stem from an ignorance of Job's conception of his experience as an inherent antagonism. Job introduces his speech in ch. 23 as another meditation on suffering that arises from *within*. Yet again the experience he suffers is one that defamiliarizes the familiar so that what was previously on Job's side—i.e., his hand—now turns on him to oppress him as if in the service of someone else—and not just anyone—as if it were God's own hand.

## 62 THE CONDITIONS OF DESIRE: VV.3-5

The *mî-yittēn* of v.3 sometimes functions as a generic expression of desire, as the popular English rendering "Oh that..." suggests.<sup>27</sup> I would rather preserve the specificity of the

<sup>25</sup>See, for example, the NIV and (N)RSV, but also the Syr. or LXX, which has ἡ χεὶρ αὐτοῦ, but also a different version of v.2a.

<sup>26</sup>Though it is a difficult text, because of its similarity to 23:2, I should not fail to mention 10:1 where, in light of the other verses under consideration here, it seems that Job complains of his life's abhorrence of his embittered soul: "My spirit is loathed by my life; I will abandon my complaint (*šyhy*), I will speak in the bitterness (*mr*) of my soul."

<sup>27</sup>As rendered by Habel, cited above, but also CLINES (2006, 575), KJV, (N)RSV; the NIV conveys the same meaning/degree of generality by the expression, "If only..." Cf. 2 Sam 19:1.

Hebrew: “Who will give?” or “Who will grant?”<sup>28</sup> In the particular idiom he employs, Job does not approach his desire for God directly but considers first its condition of possibility. He asks what must be granted so that his desire could find some meaningful support in knowledge. The various scenarios Job imagines, i.e.,

- that I might find him,
- that I might enter as far as his fixed-place,
- that I might display before him a case,
- that I might fill my mouth with arguments,
- that I might know the words he would answer me,
- that I might discern what he would say to me,

rest on the condition that someone, some One, grants the transcendental perspective of *my-knowing*. Who or what could grant Job the knowledge he needs to pursue his desire?<sup>29</sup>

On this reading, the interrogative (*mî-yittēn*) rhetorically functions in its usual manner; it establishes “the mood of that which is still unfulfilled but possible, and hence also of that which is desired.”<sup>30</sup> While it is unusual for the interrogative to be followed by the perfect,<sup>31</sup> the perfect of *yd* is often equivalent to the imperfect and the following verbs are in every case in the imperfect or cohortative aspect. Thus one should understand the imperfect *mî-yittēn* to establish the optative mood, and the perfect *yādaṣṣî* to supplement the condition created by *mî-yittēn*—i.e., the one who would grant—with the condition of knowledge. The series of wishes expressed by the prefixed conjugation are thus grounded in the unfulfilled condition that some One could grant knowledge. The conjunction on the

<sup>28</sup>Although the literal sense is often unnecessary since the meaning of the desiderative is equivalent to the sense “O that...” there are occurrences where the literal sense is clearly operative, e.g., Judg 9:29. Cf. WILHELM GESENIUS, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Mineola, New York, 2006 [1909, 1813]), §151 a-d.

<sup>29</sup>Elsewhere I discuss the common notion that such a One should be conceived along the lines of Justice.

<sup>30</sup>GESENIUS (2006 [1909, 1813]), §151a1.

<sup>31</sup>The only other time this happens in the Hebrew Bible is in Deut 5:26, where the perfect is prefixed with the *waw*- conjunction.

prefixed conjugation of *mš* that follows *yādatî* marks it as logically subordinate to its predecessors.<sup>32</sup> Although not parallel in every aspect, consider Deut 32:29:

If they were wise they would understand this; they would know their end.

*lû ḥāk<sup>e</sup>mû yas<sup>e</sup>kîlû zōt yābînû l<sup>e</sup>aḥ<sup>a</sup>rîtam*

The particle establishes the optative mood and then the perfect verb is followed by imperfect verbs that describe actions whose actuality depends upon the unfulfilled but desired condition established by the perfect verb.

The reason for belaboring the relationships among the clauses in vv.3-5 is to emphasize that they each rest on the necessary but unfulfilled condition of the existence of one who could grant Job such knowledge. That is, the various images of a direct confrontation with God rest on a contingency that has not been met. How could this contingency become an actuality? The answer to this question reveals that Job's desire is stuck in a logical impasse. On one hand, Job's *knowledge about* where he might find this God with whom he is entangled must derive from someone or something that is removed from his situation of entanglement. God's being must be meaningfully represented to Job by something that stands at some distance from God, just as Job's case would meaningfully represent him to God. The representatives of each party could then be justly weighed against one another. On the other hand, this representative cannot but be God who, according to the wisdom tradition, is the *a priori* condition of any knowledge whatsoever. Such is the testimony of the axiomatic statements recorded in Prov 3:19-20,

YHWH by wisdom founded the earth;

he established the heavens by understanding.

By his knowledge the depths were divided,

and the clouds let fall the dew.

The friends repeat such notions about God being knowledge's condition, especially to admonish Job's presumption of some kind of privileged access to truth and knowledge:

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Judg 9:7; and WALTKE and O'CONNOR (1990), §33.4.b.

Were you the first person born? Were you created before the hills?

Have you heard the council of Eloah? Do you limit wisdom to yourself?

(15:7-8)

Finally, this sentiment is resoundingly affirmed in God's own speech:

Where were you when I founded the earth? Speak, if you have understanding.

(38:4)

In short, Job needs someone who can know something about God and represent God to Job. This one would have to relate to God externally and be able to know something about God. To know something about God implies knowledge that *represents* God and thus in some sense transcends God's presence.<sup>33</sup> God, however, is the one who created the conditions for all knowledge, which means that God is always present in and never *represented* by knowledge. Although it may seem counter-intuitive, God's complete inclusion in knowledge prevents God from ever being subjected to, represented, or encompassed by any knowledge. Since God's subjective presence is unlimitedly included in all knowledge, the triadic structure necessary for objective knowledge, and thus the possibility of any knowledge that would mediate between Job and God, remains an impossibility. In v.13 Job returns to God's subjective presence to make a similar point about its unmediated character: "What [God]'s desire has wanted, he does."

### 63 THE CONDITIONS OF CONTENTION: VV.6-9

Beginning with v.6 Job reframes his proposal about (the impossibility of) knowledge and objectivity, turning now to the issue of God's power. The second rhetorical question of the

<sup>33</sup>One should not read too much into the notion of transcendence here, a notion that has long lived in and suffered the putrefying effects of quasi-philosophical discourse. I mean the distance required from a situation in order to make a judgment *about* it. I refer the reader to the article of Daniel Smith, which helpfully clarifies what is at stake in speaking of the objective field as transcendent to subjective experience: "The tradition of subjectivity provides us with a first and obvious model of transcendence. For any philosophy that begins with the subject—that is, much of post-Cartesian philosophy—the concept of immanence refers to the sphere of



speech, which Job immediately answers in the negative, concerns the way and the place from which God exerts power over Job.

Is it by greatness of strength he contends with me?

No, but he would set himself within/against me.

(v.6)

Still concerned with God's place, Job focuses here on God's mode of engagement. Behind Job's initial expression of desire for one who could grant him knowledge to find God's place, one may have presumed that the impediment was God's transcendence or externality. When Job considers this hypothetical lawsuit, he wonders whether he will experience God as an overwhelming abundance of power, launching sorties from the stratosphere. Job's question in v.6a evokes God's speech from the storm (chs. 38-41) where, as most interpreters read it, Job's driving question about justice is diminished in the light of God's entirely inaccessible potency. Job rejects this possibility in v.6b and concludes instead that God's mode of engagement is limited to himself. He reckons God a force acting not with great strength but only against and/or within him. A key issue here is how to read the notoriously wide-ranging semantic field of the  $b^e$ - preposition. The basic sense of the preposition is spatial ("in," "through," "within," "amid"),<sup>34</sup> a sense which seems appropriate in the context of Job's concern with God's place, and the restrictive use of the particle *ʔak*.<sup>35</sup> But the adversative sense also seems appropriate in light of all that Job previously concluded about such a scene (cf. ch. 9), and all that Job goes on to say in this chapter. The meaning would then be the subject, while transcendence refers to what lies outside the subject, such as the 'external world' or the 'other'. In this tradition, the term 'transcendence' refers to that which transcends the field of consciousness immanent to the subject" DANIEL SMITH, "Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought" in *Between Deleuze and Derrida* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 47.

<sup>34</sup>WALTKE and O'CONNOR (1990), §11.2.5b.

<sup>35</sup>The  $b^e$ - preposition occurs elsewhere with this verb in the spatial sense. One example is 2 Sam 14:19 which, interestingly, has the same sequence as this verse, the independent subject pronoun *hw* followed by a finite conjugation of the verb *sym* followed by the  $b^e$ - preposition, "He set all these words in the mouth

something like, "No; but nonetheless he would set (himself) *against* me."<sup>36</sup> Thus it seems best to include both so as to include the spatial sense of "within" along with the adversative sense of "against."<sup>37</sup>

Despite the difficulties of understanding this verse, not everything about it is unclear. With the negation in v.6b Job rejects the traditional mode of thinking—represented by the above quotations from Proverbs, the friends, and God's speeches—that takes for granted the constellation of transcendence, power, and truth. Job posits this constellation, but only to nullify it. If one preserves the spatial sense of the preposition, then Job takes aim at all three points of this constellation, including transcendence. Far from the stratosphere, the locus of God's agency is restricted to a much narrower field, where "he is set within/against me."<sup>38</sup>

Verse 7a's initial particle "there" (*šām*) must be understood in reference to its proper antecedent, which could be one of the two fields of discourse Job has proffered: on one

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of your servant."

<sup>36</sup>Although one would usually expect an object of the verb, the qal is used with such an implied reflexive sense elsewhere (cf. 1 Kings 20:12). The adversative use of the preposition with this verb can be found in Ezek 15:7, "And you will know that I am YHWH when I set my face against them."

<sup>37</sup>Some abandon the adversative sense altogether, thinking that the negation in v.6b negates not the mode of engagement but the engagement as such. Cf. for example, the NRSV's "No; but he would give heed to me." While possible, the specification "with great strength" seems to me to place the concern decidedly on the mode of engagement and not on the engagement as such.

<sup>38</sup>This, I believe, poses a serious problem to the thesis of S. Scholnick, according to which the narrative of Job's education can be traced on the faultline of the use of the word *mišpat*. Job supposedly moves from a preoccupation with the forensic meaning of *mišpat*, present in his demands for justice, to an acceptance of its governance meaning, and thus of God's sovereignty, "with the resultant retraction of his lawsuit (42:6)" SYLVIA HUBERMAN SCHOLNICK, "The Meaning of Mishpat in the Book of Job" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 101 (1982), 521. The problem stems from the location of the power; for Scholnick the power that makes the law impossible is located in the position of the sovereign who guarantees the law; for Job, this power somehow involves God set against/within him.

hand the transcendent locus of God's power (v.6a),<sup>39</sup> on the other hand, the immanent field where God sets himself *in* Job (v.6b). The question is crucial since "there" refers to the discursive space in which it is possible for those who reason with God to be reckoned "upright" (*yāšār*). Verses 7b-9, however, do not leave the question of *šām* open but arrive at a very assured formulation about the conditions under which Job could (re)gain the status of *yāšār*. These conditions are not different than the ones already raised as overlapping aspects of God's presence in the world:

- the efficacy of God's power;
- God's transcendence to the realm of Job's subjective experience.

Hence their consequences are followed and described by Job *in extremis*.

Verse 7b is difficult, but I am unwilling to follow the common solution of repointing *wā<sup>a</sup>pall<sup>e</sup>tāh* as a qal (*ʿep<sup>e</sup>l<sup>e</sup>tāh*),<sup>40</sup> for *plṭ* almost always occurs in the piel<sup>41</sup> and, as often as it does, it carries a transitive sense.<sup>42</sup> In my opinion the verbal idea at the core of v.7b is "that I might deliver," with the cohortative form indicating the continuance of the modal sense.

If the verb is read transitively, what then is the object of the sentence? *plṭ* generally takes an unmarked accusative,<sup>43</sup> but there are cases where the direct object is marked by the preposition *l-*.<sup>44</sup> The object of the preposition, *neṣaḥ* ("eminence"), often occurs with

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<sup>39</sup>CLINES (2006, 576) is not wrong in positing *tkwnh* (from v.3) as the antecedent of *šām*, though the intervening verses make me reticent before any tight, direct linkage. The trope of God's divine place, I think, is not only named by the Hebrew *tkwnh* but is equally evoked in what follows, up to and including the attestation to God's great strength.

<sup>40</sup>So, DRIVER and GRAY (1921), 161.

<sup>41</sup>Isa 5:39 attests the hiphil *w<sup>e</sup>yaplṭ*, conveying the same transitive sense; Ezek 7:16 contains the sole qal usage, with the meaning "to escape."

<sup>42</sup>Thus I can neither accept that *plṭh* is intransitive, e.g., GORDIS (1965, 273); and ROWLEY (1970, 200); nor that it is the intensive of the qal, e.g., DELITZSCH (1872, II: 7).

<sup>43</sup>E.g., Psa 17:13.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. 2 Sam 22:2 and Pss 56:8; 144:2.

the same basic meanings whether prefixed by the preposition or not. The preposition, in other words, could be left untranslated either as a function of the verb or of the noun, but only in the former case would the noun function as the direct object of the verb. If the preposition is left untranslated as a function of the common nominal expression, then the transitive verb has no object. *neṣaḥ* usually has a spatio-temporal sense of “endurance, everlastingness, endlessness,” but it can also mean “glory, splendor” (cf. Lam 3:18; 1 Chr 29:11), and it can even function as a substitutionary nomination for God, “the eminent one” (cf. 1 Sam 15:29).<sup>45</sup> “Eminence,” I believe, captures both senses of transcendence evoked by the word’s meanings, that is, the quantitative spatio-temporal sense of separation effected by great height or duration as well as the qualitative sense of separation in status that comes with glory or splendor. This leaves two more or less equally plausible interpretations:

1. The object of *plṭ* is an implied “him,” and the *l-* serves to specify the nature of the deliverance: “I would deliver (him) to eminence [or, more commonly, forever], away from my justice.”
2. The *l-* marks the direct object of *plṭ*, and *neṣaḥ* is best read as a divine epithet: “I would deliver eminence (the-eminent-one) from my justice.”

Whether Job delivers an eminent God from his justice, or delivers God to an eminent place or time, far away from his justice, in either case the possibility of reasoning with God (v.7a) comes with God’s transcendence from the realm of human justice.

If “eminence” (*neṣaḥ*) encapsulates both dimensions of transcendence, vv.8-9 one-sidedly emphasize the spatio-temporal sense of separation effected by great height or duration. If the condition of possibility for a “contention” with God is God’s removal from the sphere of human knowledge and experience, then vv.8-9 specify the “there” and no disjuncture separates them from v.7. In other words, the logical-discursive “place” where the upright can reason with God is where God’s presence and actions are

– not there (*w<sup>e</sup>ēnennû*),

<sup>45</sup>CLINES (2001, 740) suggests this may also be the meaning in Pss 44:24 and 74:10.

- not understandable (*lō·-ābîn lō*), and
- not visible (*lō·-āḥaz* and *lō·-ereh*).

This is not non-sense but a clear answer to Job's driving question, "Who will grant my knowing." This agent who grants knowledge cannot be simultaneously someone/something that is *in* the field of investigation. The defendant cannot be the judge. Knowledge can come only from a point that is minimally separated from the thing known.

#### 64 FROM POSSIBILITY TO ACTUALITY: VV.10-14

A new moment of Job's argument is introduced in v.10, a transition marked both by the particle *kî* and the verbal shift to the perfect aspect. Through these devices the poem replaces the modality of *possibility* with that of *actuality*. Job stops speaking about things that might happen if some condition were met; he speaks instead about what *has* happened (the actions expressed by perfect verbs) and the consequences that arose from them (those actions expressed by imperfect verbs—here I am taking the imperfect aspect to indicate a temporal relation of futurity in relation to the surrounding perfect verbs even though it is not necessary to do so in poetry). In lock step with this modal shift is a shift from transcendence to immanence, from God's remoteness to God's proximity. Such proximity is established in two directions so that God's constant attention to Job (*God has known... has examined... and like gold I emerge*) is mirrored by Job's constant attention to God (*My foot has clung... I have guarded and I will not deviate... I will not depart*).

These two attentive gazes of God and Job are not *immediate*. They sustain the structure of *mediation* that is fundamental to the entire wisdom tradition. God's regard for Job and Job's regard for God must *pass through* a third, Symbolic term. For instance, God has known Job's "way" (*yādaḥ derek immādî*) just as Job's feet have held fast to God's "steps" (*ba<sup>a</sup>šurō āḥ<sup>a</sup>zāh raglî*). This layer that mediates Job's relationship to God and vice versa is nothing other than the function of the law under which Job and God as positive

entities are replaced by their respective *relationship* to a normative “way” (*derek*) or “path” (*āšūr*) or “command” (*mišwāh*) or “mandate” (*hōq*) or “word” (*ēmer*). That is, for the relationship to be constituted, each member must be divided between their *being* and their *meaning*, between their *substance* and the *signifier* that holds their place in a lawful Symbolic order. God’s law represents God to Job, who in turn means something to God *only* in relation to this law. This structure of mediation and division is entirely assumed, albeit implicitly, in every interpretation that understands Job’s desire to be a day in court with God. And yet because the function of the law has not been *explicitly* pursued as the transcendental condition of desire as such, Job’s particular desire is mistakenly identified as the desire *for* God’s presence.

This common (mis)reading is useful since it states the exact opposite of vv.13-14. Verse 13a says that God will not submit to the splitting function of the law, that God is by contrast *undivided*, “. . . is one” (v.13a). The precise sense of this admittedly abstract proposition (*w<sup>e</sup>hū b<sup>e</sup>ēhād*) has been found difficult,<sup>46</sup> but the text does not long remain at the level of abstraction. God’s monadic essence has concrete consequences that are immediately listed in the rest of vv.13-14.

- God cannot be turned—“And who could turn him back?” (*ūmī y<sup>e</sup>šībēnnū*)—for the idea of turning implies a relation to something fixed, i.e., something from which one can deviate or to which one can re-turn. (The poem has just given, in vv.10-12, a list of such exemplary reference points: “path,” “way,” “command,” “duty,” “words.”)
- God does not desire, for even the fleeting instant of desire is foreclosed by the pure consubstantiality of God’s desire and its fulfillment:<sup>47</sup>

What his desire has wanted, he has done.

*napšō iw<sup>e</sup>tāh wayyā<sup>a</sup>s*

(v.13b)

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<sup>46</sup>Cf. footnote 17 on page 253.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. GOOD (1990, 278): “There is no space between the god’s desire and his deed, no thoughtful reflection,

Thus there can be no lack ascribed to God, no place for Job to stand in what gets called “God’s plan.” Job can only stand in relation to God as an object of God’s enjoyment, which should be understood here as elsewhere in this dissertation as that libidinal satisfaction procured beyond the scope and calculus of the subject’s desire or pleasure—*jouissance*.<sup>48</sup>

– Consequently, Job’s own point of orientation by a Symbolic mandate is obliterated:

Surely he will make an end of my duty.

*kî yašlîm huqqî*

(v.14a)

God’s lack of desire, which is to say God’s lack of lack, does away with the Symbolic framework within which Job’s lack has achieved its meaning (i.e., the way his experiences of the world as inconsistent or incomplete have been framed as registers of his finitude, his failure to be absolutely wise). The wisdom tradition characteristically transmutes lack into duty by giving it certain Symbolic coordinates. Apart from such a referential network, Job experiences the abjection of absolute lack, lack *as such*, lack stripped of all meaning.

Job’s thoroughgoing (thoroughly rigorous even as it is thoroughly disconsolate) thinking through of the discovery, “God is one,” leads him to the following dialectical reversal:

... such things become a multitude with him.

*kāhēnnāh rabbôt immô*

(v.14b)

The truth of God’s *monism*, impervious as it is to the requirements of the law, is indistinguishable from God’s indefinite *multiplicity*—not the infinite magnitude of transcendence, but the innumerability of God’s endless and unbounded drive to enjoy Job every which  
no canvassing of implications.”

<sup>48</sup>Cf. footnote 73 on page 40.

way but Sunday.<sup>49</sup>

65 THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND THE FAILURE TO FEAR: VV.15-17

It is telling that in the final verses of ch. 23, verses which are preoccupied with the semantic domain of fear, Job fails to make use of the one, obvious formulation considered definitional for JOB and the wisdom tradition as a whole: the way “fearing God” (cf. Job 1:1—*yārē·lōhîm*) is considered to encapsulate the whole of the sages’ teaching (cf. Prov 1:7; 9:10).<sup>50</sup>

In contrast to the traditional usages of fear that mark an unbridgeable gap between divine and human spheres, what the immanent presence of God evokes in Job is fear’s uncanny double, which CHAPTER 5 defined as *anxiety*.<sup>51</sup> For the tradition, “darkness” (*hōšek*) or “blackness” (*ōpel*) would evoke *fear* by standing as placeholders for God’s opacity to human perception<sup>52</sup> or, in more affect-laden moments, for the weight of the

<sup>49</sup>The identity of monism and multiplicity has been a constant theme of all philosophies of immanence, most recently in the work of G. Deleuze. “There is only one form of thought, it’s the same thing: one can only think in a monistic or pluralistic manner” GILLES DELEUZE, “Dualism, Monism and Multiplicities (Desire-Pleasure-*Jouissance*)” *Contretemps*, May (2001a), 95. When Deleuze says it is the *only* form of thought, the statement must be qualified: it is the only form of *immanent* thought. For Deleuze, the emergence of transcendence is the *end* of thought, and, conversely, the structure of transcendence is neither one nor multiple; it is dual. “The only enemy is two... There are multiplicities, which obviously implies a theory and practice of multiplicities. Wherever we leave the domain of multiplicities, we once again fall into dualisms, i.e., into the domain of non-thought, we leave the domain of thought as process” (DELEUZE, 2001a, 95).

<sup>50</sup>So, for example, von Rad has famously said of the fear of God, “It contains in a nutshell the whole Israelite theory of knowledge” VON RAD (1972), 67. The constitution of meaning on the basis of fear is formulated most programmatically in Prov 1:7, “the fear-of YHWH is the beginning of knowledge.” And certainly the value ascribed by the sages to this ideal is underscored in various barbs the friends fling at Job. In two of many critiques along these lines, Eliphaz appeals to Job, “Is not your fear your confidence?...” (4:6a) and later asks, with less restraint, “Is it because of your fear that he reproves you?...” (22:4a).

<sup>51</sup>See the phenomenological description of anxiety on page 231.

<sup>52</sup>This is to say that for the tradition these signifiers cease to correspond to the straightforward experience of, one might say, the diminished capacities of scotopic vision. Instead they register some-thing else whose



Symbolic debt imposed by God's law.<sup>53</sup> Job, however, speaks not of an experience of any unbridgeable gap or ineradicable uncertainty but rather of his *certain* and, moreover, *intimate* experience of God's presence.

Therefore, before his face I am terrified,  
I consider well and I fear before him.

(23:15)

These verses correspond perfectly to the ethical prescriptions of the friends. Do the friends not counsel precisely this kind of harrowing and sustained immersion in God's fearsome presence?<sup>54</sup> Consequently, it is anxiety or, in Larkin's poetic idiom cited in the epigraph to CHAPTER 5, "a special way of being afraid" that we must explore.

Commonly what we *fear* is what lies hidden in obscurity, in the shadow of difference, between a signifier and what it signifies. The child fears unseen ghosts that haunt night-time forests and bogey-men that live behind barely cracked closet doors. The sages also fear what they *cannot* see or know; they fear "what is hidden from the eyes of the living" (Job 28:21), what they surmise only from "rumors" passed on by death (28:22). And in fact the sages vigorously cultivate this fear as the most reliable evidence of God's infinite distance from creatureliness and its finite capacity for perception.<sup>55</sup> Therefore the sapiential existence has been retracted from the realm of human experience, whose being does not correspond to anything in the world. Lacan designates this transcendental function of signification with the phallus.

<sup>53</sup>Job here and especially in the prologue has happily endured the severity of the law's demands, even when these demands are *stricto sensu* impossible (cf. 1:5). The devotion to the law Job expresses in vv.11-12 rivals such panegyric monuments as Psa 119: "To his path my foot has clung. . . More than my duty I have treasured the words of his mouth."

<sup>54</sup>Consider, for example, Eliphaz's accusation, "But you annul fear, and belittle meditation before El" (15:4). I discuss the friends' counsel extensively elsewhere, beginning in section 51.

<sup>55</sup>Remarkable in this regard is Prov 2:1-5, which reverses the normally expected pedagogical sequence, i.e., first comes the fear-of YHWH, then comes knowledge. These verses state the opposite: first comes the acquisition of wisdom, "you call out for insight and to understanding you raise your voice. . . you seek it like silver and like treasure you search for it" (vv.3-4), and *then* "you will understand the fear-of YHWH (*āz tā-*

aim of inculcating the fear-of YHWH (especially in the next generation<sup>56</sup>) involves first and foremost preserving God's *absence*. It is this strictly negative magnitude, which is produced for ideological consumption by the caveat, attached to all human experience, "this is not all. . .," that keeps open the (crucial) space for an empty, objective gaze, which is the sage's sole guarantor of knowledge.

How does Job understand his situation in relation to these foundational (yet no less paradoxical) relationships of dependency on which the sages built their entire discursive edifice? What is Job's take on a certain knowledge vouchsafed by fear of the unknown, of the ambivalent and polyvalent field of representations? If it is a truism to say that Job disagrees with sapiential orthodoxy, it is useful nonetheless to point to these final, punctuating verses of ch. 23, in which Job turns upside down any assumed correlation between darkness and ignorance or silence:

Yet I am not silenced in the face of darkness,  
though blackness covers my face.

(23:17)

The stain of darkness or black smudge that the traditional sages attach as a caveat to all experience becomes for Job a cover that falls over his face but nevertheless fails to silence him. The lack that functions in a transcendental sense to constitute all presences and absences for the traditional sages falls immanently over Job, bearing down beneath issues of representation, to the realm of ontology, to efface his face.

An approach to Job's experience and desire must account for this transcendental function of lack, this immanent encounter with what is otherwise perceived to exist at some distance from the realm of phenomenal encounters, and this speech that somehow persists in the face of darkness.

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*bîn yir'at yhw'h*."

<sup>56</sup>On the pedagogical efficacy of fear see CHRISTINE ROY YODER, "Forming 'Fearers of Yahweh': Repetition and Contradiction as Pedagogy in Proverbs" in *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients* (Winona Lake, Ind:

## 66 CONCLUSION: JOB'S ANXIETY, SIGNAL OF THE REAL

In ch. 22 Eliphaz tells Job that God has not done these things to him because of his fear (i.e., piety), and that his fear (i.e., terror) is a consequence of his limitless iniquity:

Is it because of your fear (*yrh*) that he reproves you,  
 and enters into judgment with you?  
 Is your evil not great; and your iniquity, limitless? . . .  
 Therefore, snares surround you,  
 and sudden terror (*phd*) frightens (*bhl*) you.

(22:4-5, 10)

As a result, Eliphaz counsels Job, much as he did in ch. 5,

Habituate to [God] and be at peace (*šlm*),  
 good (*tubh*) will thereby come to you.  
 Accept instruction from his mouth, put his words in your heart.  
 If you turn to Shadday, you will be restored (*bnh*).

(22:21-23a)

In ch. 23 Job counters, insisting once again on his certainty that he has never been far from God and God's words, and that his terror is the precise consequence of his proximity to God:

To his path my foot has clung;  
 his way I have kept and I will not deviate.  
 And from the command of his lips I will not depart.  
 Beyond my duty I have treasured the words of his mouth.  
 But he is one, and who could turn him back?  
 What his desire has wanted, he has done.

Surely he will make an end of my duty,  
and such things become a multitude with him.

Therefore, before his face I am terrified (*bhl*).

I consider well and I fear (*phd*) before him;

El has enfeebled my heart,

and Shadday has terrified (*bhl*) me.

Yet I am not silenced in the face of darkness,

though blackness covers my face.

(23:11-17)

As far as Job is concerned Eliphaz's promise that Job will find peace and be restored if he habituates or turns to God is false. For Job has habitually followed God's words and even now is in God's face, and the result is not peace but anxiety. Consequently, the peace he would get by turning is neither a peace that would come from God nor a peace that could be at peace with God, but a sham and shaky peace that comes from an ultimately futile effort to turn away from God.

Job testifies to an experience of blackness covering his face. The blackness can be thought of as the limit of Eliphaz's world beyond which lodges that which it does not include; i.e., Job's iniquity as much as the Shadday to whom Job is supposed to turn and to habituate. Job, however, does not have the sense that his world fails to include something, but that what is supposed to represent an exclusion (i.e., the darkness) falls over his face, and what is supposed to be excluded (i.e., God) is in his face. Far from failing to include something, there would seem to be nothing which is excluded from Job's experience. This does not mean that Job experiences the world as a whole, because no whole can be formed when there is no limit to inclusion. The void that keeps his experience open is brought on by God's proximity; the blackness which circumscribes an unlimited realm for the friends covers Job, who does not have an experience of something missing but of an encounter with something where it is not supposed to be, in and over his face, and this is what gives

rise to his anxiety.<sup>57</sup>

The turn to fear is a defense against anxiety, an escape into uncertainty so as to avoid the terrorizing certainty that comes from an encounter with God. The subjective structure of Job's suffering makes it impossible to convert his anxiety into fear by locating its cause in a signifying chain whose truth lies elsewhere, in something or some place that is "without limit" (*ʿyn-qš*), as Eliphaz says in 22:5b, because Job's anxiety is nothing but a signal to him of the non-existence of any such unlimited place; his anxiety arises when the lack that would limit his experience goes lacking.

Although Job cannot turn away from God for a sham peace, he is certainly not content with his experience of God. The next chapter investigates the "solution(s)" by which Job imagines he could escape what his anxiety signals him to flee, and how these solutions question or support the prevailing interpretations as well as the friends' counsel.

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<sup>57</sup>In his myth of the lamella, Lacan describes the experience of libido—*jouissance*, unconscious enjoyment—whose over-proximity to consciousness gives rise to anxiety, in terms similar to Job's description of a blackness that covers his face: "Now imagine that every time [a baby is birthed]... a phantom—an infinitely more primal form of life, in no wise willing to settle for a duplicate role in some microcosmic world within a world—takes flight through the same passage... Let us assume the latter to be a large crêpe that moves like an amoeba, so utterly flat that it can slip under doors, omniscient as it is guided by the pure life instinct, and immortal as it is fissiparous. It is certainly something that would not be good to feel dripping down your face, noiselessly while you sleep, in order to seal it" LACAN (2006d), 717. Cf. LACAN (1977), 197-98. Žižek has taken advantage of the similarity between the experience Lacan describes and the encounters with various terrorizing figures in horror movies, especially the facehugger's attack on Kane in Ridley Scott's 1979 film *Alien*; see, for example, SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, "A Hair of the Dog that Bit You" in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society* Edited by MARK BRACHER ET AL. (Albany, NY: New York University Press, 1994), 67.

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“And This Shall Be My Salvation”; On Guilt and Shame

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## 67 INTRODUCTION

I have described Job’s subjective structure in terms of the affect *anxiety*, and I have strictly opposed his situation to the one of *fear*. From all parties implicated in these dialogues—Job and the friends, of course, but also a host of subsequent interpreters—it is clear that anxiety is not a sustainable subjective position. On all accounts anxiety is something that must be escaped. In connection with the rough scheme introduced at the outset of CHAPTER 5—the successive determinations of (i) the object of desire, (ii) Job’s subjective dilemma, and (iii) various solutions proposed in the name of liberation—it now seems clear that any solution to Job’s subjective dilemma must somehow manage or take some distance from anxiety. And in fact, in the course of analyzing Job’s speeches, especially ch. 23 in CHAPTER 6, I have already been describing various strategies for such an escape.

There are two basic tasks to this chapter. First, I specify a limit to the conventional idea that Job’s expressions of desire are finally or paradigmatically structured by the legal metaphor. This limit hamstring all advancements of this idea, which is not to say that all advancements are equally valuable. I therefore distinguish between those limits that render certain articulations of this idea less successful than others, and that Limit that afflicts the legal metaphor as such as an approach to Job’s desire. This Limit derives from the structure of transcendence through which the legal metaphor reads the text and because of which such readings remain blind to the full extent of the text. The second task of the chapter is to articulate that aspect of Job’s position that the dominant approach fails to

see. Where the dominant approach can only account for Job's desire within a structure of transcendence I call guilt, I uncover a very different structure—shame—in which Job locates his ultimate desire and salvation.<sup>1</sup>

#### 68 JOB'S INITIAL, SUBTRACTIVE DESIRE

In ch. 3, at the outset of the poetry, Job initially responds to his anxiety with a “subtractive desire.” Job wishes to be subtracted from God's presence and God's world, and the various responses to this desire (of the friends, of interpreters, and of Job himself in his subsequent speeches) are motivated at least in part by a dissatisfaction with it. As I take this “subtractive desire” to be a point of departure, it will help to list some of the most important texts at the outset.

Recall Job's initial speech in ch. 3, where his volitives and interrogatives repeatedly express his desire to be subtracted from God and God's world:

Let the day on which I was born perish. . .

May Eloah above not seek (*drš*) it. . .

Why did I not die at birth? . . .

Why does he give light to the laborer? And life to the bitter in spirit?

Those who wait for death, but there is none,

Who seek (*hpr*) it more than<sup>2</sup> treasures,

Who are gladly rejoicing, they exult when they find a grave;

To the one whose way is hidden, whom God has overshadowed?

(3:3a, 4b, 11a, 20-23)

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<sup>1</sup>It should be evident that the pair “shame/guilt” should be folded onto those other, massive oppositions by which this dissertation traces new faultlines for interpretations of the contours of JOB (e.g., “desire/drive,” “sacrifice/satisfaction,” “All/not-All,” “exclusion/subtraction,” “fear/anxiety”).

<sup>2</sup>LXX and Syr. both have “like” and some scholars have proposed reading the *k<sup>e</sup>* preposition instead of *min*, finding it unimaginable that those who long for death search for treasure. But reading the *min* in the

In contrast to this desire for his bare life to be subtracted, in other speeches Job wishes for *God* to be subtracted from him and from his world so that he could live a decent life. In ch. 7 Job says,

My days are faster than a loom. . .  
 Remember that my life is a breath. . .  
 Your eye will be with me but there will be no me. . .  
 I reject. I will not live forever.  
 Let me be (*hdl*) for my days are a breath. . .  
 Leave me alone (*rph*) until I could swallow my spittle. . .  
 You would seek (*šhr*) me, but there would be no me.

(7:6a, 7a, 8b, 16, 19b, 21d)

In his speech in chs. 9-10 Job says,

I do not know myself. I reject my life. . .  
 My days are swifter than a runner; they flee and see no good.  
 They pass by like reed boats, like an eagle swooping down upon food. . .  
 Are my days not few? So cease (*hdl*);  
 Turn away from me (*w<sup>e</sup>šît mimmennî*) so that I may smile a little.

(9:21bc, 25-26; 10:20)

Finally, in the beginning of ch. 14 Job says,

A human is born of woman, short in days and filled with turmoil. . .  
 He flees like a shadow and does not endure. . .  
 If his days are determined, the number of his months are with you,  
 you make a limit (*hq*) he cannot transgress.

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comparative sense need not imply that they dig for treasures, just that they seek death more than they or one would seek treasures. Cf. CLINES (1989), 74.



Look away from him and stop (*š<sup>e</sup>ēh mēālāyū w<sup>e</sup>yeh<sup>e</sup>dāl*),  
 until he could enjoy his day like a hireling.

(14:1, 2b, 5-6)

In these and other texts (e.g., 9:34-35; 13:20-21), Job experiences his anxiety as a signal to flee God's overproximity, which prevents him from enjoying himself and from feeling integrated with himself. His anxiety issues in various imperatives that express his desire for God's subtraction from himself—*leave me alone, let me be, cease, stop, turn away, look away*.

As noted in CHAPTER 5, the interpretative community has *tended* to respond to these insistent and despairing, even allegedly suicidal or theocidal sentiments by subordinating them to other texts in which Job supposedly expresses his desire for God's presence. Job's desire for *presence* is thought to represent a more mature position (so Westermann), or one having priority as regards Job's real situation (so Habel). In the interest of disassociating these positions from these particular scholars, let me mention other examples. The following concludes one discussion of the second cycle of speeches:

Whilst being sceptical of God's ways and the possibility of a relationship with him, Job clings to the hope that, after all, God is just and listens to man. Occasionally his hope resurfaces and his scepticism disappears – but these sentiments are only momentary. His desire to find God becomes for Job the only way out of his predicament.<sup>3</sup>

According to this scholar, Job's disposition toward his desire for God's presence vacillates between optimism and pessimism but this desire finally "becomes for Job the only way out." Or consider Balentine, who otherwise pays close attention to Job's desire for space from God's overproximity. About 13:24a he writes, "For [Job], God's *absence* is more than inexplicable; it is a sinister and perverted form of *hostile presence*."<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, however, Balentine erects a sort of wall by which the God whose presence causes Job's suffering is divided from a God who remains hidden and whose absence simply permits his suffering

<sup>3</sup>DELL (1991), 181. <sup>4</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 214.

to continue.

On first sight, the closing words of chapter 10 seem to signify that Job has only returned to where he was at the beginning. He questions the meaning of life, longs for death, and petitions an absent God to let him be. Although his despair is similar to what he expressed in chapter 3, Job has in fact moved a step closer to God. To lament is not the same as to curse. To curse is to negate. To lament is to hope, in the midst of negation, that there remains some possibility of new beginnings. The telltale sign of Job's move toward God is in the changed trajectory of his question. He no longer asks "Why did *I* come forth from the womb?" (3:11) but instead "Why did *you* bring me forth from the womb?" (10:18). The shift from *I* to *you* is more than simply a grammatical change. It is an indication of Job's fierce resolve to hold on to God against God. If God is absent, then Job will clamor for God to be present. If God is silent, then Job will cry out until God responds. More remarkable still, even if Job indicates God as guilty, he will continue to believe that the future remains open for new acts of divine justice and compassion.<sup>5</sup>

Not only is it difficult to grasp what it might mean to "petition an absent God to let him be," that seems impossible to reconcile with Job's speech in ch. 10 where God may be a number of things—but not *absent*. This quotation also curiously characterizes Job's wish to be free as a step *closer* to God. While it is easy to get lulled into the nice cadences of the circuit through lament or the grammatical shift, by the end this interpretation has twisted Job's desire into an utterly contrary position. Such interpretive gymnastics can be found throughout the secondary literature. Take Seow's comment on 7:16: "Some interpreters think that the call to desist is an outright rejection of God, a cry for divine absence (Clines). More likely, however, it is a cry for God to stop paying him undue attention, perhaps meaning the potentially destructive attention."<sup>6</sup> Job's desire for divine absence is sublimated into hope for a different sort of presence.

I have chosen some of the best interpreters so as to exemplify a general tendency. Despite the universal acknowledgement of Job's expressions of subtractive desire and the pervasive

<sup>5</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 182. <sup>6</sup>SEOW (forthcoming).

comments on the radicalness of such language, the fact is that interpreters overwhelmingly subordinate these expressions to others.

#### 69 THE ANTINOMY OF JOB'S DESIRE

Job's subtractive desire is enframed almost as often by the *general* notion that Job desires God's presence as it is by the supposition of Job's *specific* desire for a legal encounter. I have already shown the privileged role given to the trial motif in arranging the apparent disorder in JOB.<sup>7</sup> One of the most extreme examples refers to Job's demands for space from God as demands for a pre-trial settlement!<sup>8</sup> The confusion that pervades scholarship on Job's desire stems from the difficulty of coordinating texts in which Job complains about God's over-proximity and expresses his desire for God's absence, with texts in which Job expresses a desire for God's presence.<sup>9</sup> Yet after CHAPTER 5's extensive analysis of the unique presence Job associates with God, it should be clear that this question poses a false problem.

One does not need CHAPTER 5's analysis to identify problems with the many unsuccessful attempts to subordinate Job's subtractive desire to another framework. Yet CHAPTER 5 allows me to take a step further to see that the issue is not an either/or, that it does not pose a contradiction, and that its presentation as such inevitably will end in interpretive confusion. Job's expressions of desire for God's presence and God's absence are two sides

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<sup>7</sup>This is true of many more scholars than HABEL (1985, 308), who names as "one of the conditions" of Job's desire for a trial "that God remove his intimidating 'terror' from the court so that Job would not need to hide from his 'face' (13:20-21)" (cf. HABEL, 1985, 230). HOFFMAN (1996, 167-68) provides a refreshingly self-aware account of his prioritization of the trial motif.

<sup>8</sup>F. RACHEL MAGDALENE, *On the Scales of Righteousness: Neo-Babylonian Trial Law and the Book of Job* (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2007), 191-92.

<sup>9</sup>Recall the quote, cited above (on page 203), in which Westermann goes so far as to say that Job's third wish—that his cause might be heard and that he might find an advocate despite his death (16:18-22; 17:3; 19:23-24)—is "logically incompatible with the first" (WESTERMANN, 1981, 69), i.e., with Job's wish to die

of the same coin; absence and presence are perceptible only from a fixed position *within* a coherent Symbolic order. Whether Job complains that God is all over him or laments that he cannot find God, the problem is that Job lacks a stable, mediating distance from God by which he could differentiate himself from God and relate to God as other. Job's anxiety arises not from the presence or the lack of an object, but from the disappearance of the lack on the basis of which presences and absences can be significantly located.<sup>10</sup> Such differentiations, I noted, are always founded on the efficacy of Symbolic mediation<sup>11</sup>; or in negative terms, apart from an established Symbolic network, the experiences of the subject are undifferentiable, "without zones, subdivisions, localized highs and lows, or gaps in plentitudes . . . unrent, undifferentiated fabric."<sup>12</sup>

These seemingly exclusive desires—for God's absence and for God's presence—are not contradictory. In Kant's "Transcendental Dialectic," the largest section of his first *Critique*,<sup>13</sup> Kant deals with the antinomies that plague reason when it approaches concepts—e.g., God, the world, the soul—that transcend the bounds of any possible, concrete, sensible experience. These antinomies present problems because valid arguments can be constructed in favor of two opposite conclusions, each side demonstrating the falsity of the other. For example, one can conclusively demonstrate that the world is both finite and infinite, and there is no way for reason to adjudicate between the two. Although both cannot be correct, Kant resists the temptation to think that one or the other is correct. He refuses the choice and wants instead to propose an alternative to both. Kant's strategy for dissolving and resolving such debates has come to be called Ramsey's maxim:

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(in 3:11-13, 21-22; 6:8-10; 7:15; 10:18b-19).

<sup>10</sup>Cf. the discussion of 23:10-14 in section 64.

<sup>11</sup>For a more intuitive example, imagine the similar effect of looking through binoculars into an abyss of darkness (pure absence) or the over-proximity of lens covers (pure presence).

<sup>12</sup>BRUCE FINK, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 25.

<sup>13</sup>IMMANUEL KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

it is a heuristic maxim that the truth lies not in one of the two disputed views but in some third possibility which has not yet been thought of, which we can only discover by rejecting something assumed as obvious by the disputants.<sup>14</sup>

By negating the premise Kant can move beyond both and assert a third view.<sup>15</sup>

The problem plaguing interpretations of Job's desire is similarly antinomic. Like Kant, one should resist the compulsion to decide in favor of one or the other option: either Job suffers God's absence and desires God's presence, or Job suffers God's presence and desires God's absence. Instead, one should ask whether there is a false assumption that both share.

The false assumption shared by the thesis—Job suffers God's absence and desires God's presence—and antithesis—Job suffers God's presence and desires God's absence—is that God is for Job an object of experience, something or someone that could be considered present or absent. This assumption is false because Job experiences God neither as a presence nor an absence but in the elimination of his ability to delimit presences from absences, subject from object, himself from an other, &c. Perhaps, then, Job's desire should be read at a second order. When Job hopes for God's presence, this is not simply God's presence Job wants but the presence of the presence of God, a God who could be present, in contrast to his experience of God in the disruption of presence. Conversely, Job's desire for God's absence expresses his hope for the presence of the absence of God, for a God who could be absent, in contrast to his experience of God as one from whom no absence can be found. In short, the two desires are not contradictory when they are understood as two sides of the same desire for the presence of both presence and absence.

So we approach Job's desire in structural terms as a desire for Symbolic mediation. Job's desire is not simply about the dyadic relationship between himself and God but

<sup>14</sup>F. P. RAMSEY, "Universals" *Mind*, 34 (1925), 404.

<sup>15</sup>In the above example, the premise is the assumption that the world exists. The first *Critique* as a whole could be read as the articulation of a third option that gets its start by negating the shared, false premise of rationalism and empiricism. Cf. LACAN (1998, 43), who connects the illicit belief in the world with the illicit belief in the sexual relationship. Both beliefs, he insists, "must be abandoned."

rather about the possibility of a triadic relationship in which he and God would be related on the basis of a third. The trial scene is one stage on which Job *imagines* this desire's fulfillment but it is not the only or the necessary one. It is in fact a defining characteristic of those interpretive confusions mentioned above that they (mis)take the imaginary resolution (the courtroom scene) as the truth of Job's desire. All kinds of problems stem from this conflation: (i) Job's expressions of desire are overdetermined by the kind of reasoning that the courtroom scene inevitably conjures; (ii) Job's expressions of desire are transmuted into expressions of grievances about particular offenses; (iii) Job's statements to the contrary of this resolution are misread as articulations of a different desire; (iv) finally, conflating Job's desire with this resolution renders the interpreter blind to the possibility, explored in the second half of this chapter, that Job's desire might be read otherwise than in relation to the desire for the constitution of a Law.

In the following section I take up the prevailing conception of Job's desire for a Symbolic order largely with reference to its presentation in Newsom's monograph because she exemplifies a proper restraint before the temptation to take the Imaginary resolution of his desire as the direct referent of its articulation, and thereby avoids many of the problems just mentioned.<sup>16</sup> She correctly sees that Job's complaint against God has less to do with particular offenses than with the offensive nature of God's relationship to human beings.<sup>17</sup> I present

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<sup>16</sup>Here, as in those other places where the word "Symbolic" is set apart by capitalization and font, I mean the Lacanian Symbolic, understood in the sense of the differential order of signification, that treasure trove of signifying elements from which speaking beings draw the material by which meaning is created.

<sup>17</sup>Before moving forward a comment is in order in the interest of allaying any confusion that might arise from the persistence of the terms Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real in what follows. *On the one hand*, in the preceding paragraphs I have referred to certain shortcomings in scholarship on Job that arise from the tendency to "imagarize" the Symbolic, to take Job's desire for the triadic structure of Symbolic mediation and conflate it with a dyadic image of Job in God's presence. The fact that the image by which the Symbolic is reduced to a dyadic, Imaginary structure is an image of the Law, a legal image, may cause confusion insofar as the Law is regularly used as a model for the triadic, Symbolic order. Despite this

Newsom's argument according to Lacan's three registers of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real. Succinctly put, the friends offer Job an Imaginary solution to his experience. While he accepts some of their presuppositions, Job rejects their solution as ineffective against God who encounters him outside the Imaginary, in the Real. In contrast to their Imaginary solution, Job desires a Symbolic solution to his encounter with the Real. After presenting her argument I turn to some instances of its degradation into a more homiletical tone, which the Levinasian framework radically challenges. Finally, I turn on the Symbolic account of Job's desire itself, finding unsatisfactory its characterization of Job's desire as a desire for the exclusion of the Real because, as I argue in the second half of this chapter devoted to Job's shame, Job finally articulates a subjective position from which the imperative to flee the Real has disappeared. The Real's proximity to Job no longer threatens him with annihilation and, instead, affords him an experience of himself.

## 70 JOB'S DESIRE FOR SYMBOLIC MEDIATION

### 70.1 *The Imaginary*

It is conventional to approach the Imaginary through what Lacan defined as the mirror stage. Between the ages of six and eighteen months, a human child experiences a moment of (mis)recognition in which she alienates her being into in an image of herself usually found on some reflective surface such as a mirror. Given the extended period of prematurational helplessness endured by human beings, the image of a whole body, functioning together common usage, descriptions of Job's desire in the terms of the legal metaphor are not necessarily triadic, Symbolic descriptions. In fact, I have suggested that these descriptions are regularly made in dyadic terms. This is not universally the case, however, and in what follows I rely on Newsom because she best exemplifies a properly Symbolic account of Job's desire. *On the other hand*, in what follows my object of study shifts from the interpretive community's approach to Job's account of his suffering to the accounts offered within the book by Job and the friends. Thus I deploy the notions of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real registers of Job's experience below in somewhat different ways than above. I need not explain this difference at the

and apparently in control of itself, gives rise to a sense of jubilation. At the same time, however, the child's ongoing confrontations with the difficult task of managing their actual body gives rise to their aggression before and against this false image that they fail to live up to. This, then, involves humans in a struggle that will stick with them for life, instigating their attempts to emulate those images that they are not but desire to be, and their aggression against both the less-than-ideal selves they actually are, as well as those others whose difference from them reveals to them their inadequacies.<sup>18</sup>

The strictly dyadic opposition characteristic of Imaginary thought informs Job's as well as the friends' characterizations of Job's situation. Both see Job's situation as a particularly strong register of God's alterity. On one hand, the friends articulate a theology in which God occupies the position of the ideal, Imaginary other, the perfect image of which reveals to humans their imperfection. Newsom explains "the logic of the argument" as follows,

What supports [the friends'] claim about the inferiority of human moral nature (4:17) is simply the human propensity to perish. . . . [The breakable human body's] mortality is associated with moral corruptness and impurity and contrasted with that which is other—immortal, incorruptible, and holy.<sup>19</sup>

Here Newsom describes the friends' conception of the relationship between God and humans insofar as it is based on the Imaginary identification of God's similarity and difference from themselves. The friends console Job with what Newsom calls a masochistic theodicy that outset; it will suffice to prevent the possibility of confusion to keep the fact of it in mind.

<sup>18</sup>For a justly classic treatment of the the Imaginary and Symbolic registers see FREDRIC JAMESON, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan" in *The Ideologies of Theory* (London: Verso, 2008c), 77–124. Especially relevant to my interpretation of Job's "mood swings" are those places wherein Jameson draws out the coeval emergence of aggressivity and narcissism: "The mirror state, which is the precondition for primary narcissism, [i.e., the jubilation the infant feels upon grasping their independence from their situation] is also, owing to the equally irreducible gap it opens between the infant and its fellows, the very source of human aggressivity; and indeed, one of the original features of Lacan's early teaching is its insistence on the inextricable association of these two drives." (2008c, 87).

<sup>19</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 140.



does not acknowledge the similarity or continuity uniting God to humans and emphasizes the difference so as to “locate being and meaning in God, that is, safely beyond the reach of all powers of destruction and meaninglessness.”<sup>20</sup> (For illustrative purposes, one could imagine an infant for whom the apparent wholeness of its *imago* was such an experience of triumph that the ongoing discombobulation of infantile life is paid no heed.) The upshot of this theodicy, then, is the masochistic pleasure it affords. Job could gain the pleasure that comes from pursuing an existence as the object of God's desire.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, Job also puts the theological function of the Imaginary to work, though in a different way than the friends; he seems “determined to bring to light what their formulation tacitly assumes but represses, namely, the continuity between God and himself.”<sup>22</sup> He agrees that God and humans are incomparable (9:2) and he identifies his suffering with God's aggressive attempts to destroy that which is different, but he shows how this aggression (and the perception of difference from which it arises) are grounded

<sup>20</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 143.

<sup>21</sup>I phrase this masochistic position as a *pursuit* so as to avoid the common confusion of masochism with passivity. There is a dialectic at work in masochism on account of which activity and passivity, subject and object are displaced or transposed. The masochist appears to give his partner, the torturer, every right over him, and so appears to assume the role of object vis-à-vis a subject. However, the scene is determined by the position of the masochist. “The woman torturer of masochism. . . is *in* the masochistic situation, she is an integral part of it, a realization of the masochistic fantasy” (DELEUZE, 1991, 41). Although the fantasy appears to begin in mutuality—a consenting victim and an willing torturer—and subsequently to be determined by the activity of the latter, it is clear that the masochist is the one who determines the scene, persuading and training his torturer in how to act, determining the other's enjoyment by supplying himself as its object. I recently heard Melissa Febos testify to her realization of this dynamic in an interview with Terry Gross. Febos, who worked for four years as a dominatrix in a dungeon under midtown Manhattan, admits, “In the beginning, it did feel pretty powerful, you know, to act out those roles. . . After a little while, you know, it wasn't my fantasy in most cases, you know? And in a lot of ways, it felt more humiliating to me than it did to them. I mean, I think it was satisfying for them. And for me, to enact a sexual fantasy that wasn't my own fantasy was uncomfortable in a lot of ways” MELISSA FEBOS, ‘Whip Smart’: *Memoirs of a Dominatrix* (Fresh Air Interview with Terry Gross on National Public Radio, 8 March 2010, cited 6 May 2010).

<sup>22</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 150.

in God's connection to human beings. Job locates this connection in the relationship of creator to creation.<sup>23</sup> In ch. 10 "Job investigates the paradoxes and perversities to which this relationship is subject."<sup>24</sup> Newsom elaborates these "paradoxes and perversities" as follows,

The psychology of creation is inherently ambivalent. That which I make is an object over against me but also in some sense part of me. I may take pride in it, love it, be pleased with it. But insofar as it is, or as I perceive it to be, defective or inadequate, I may despise it, loathe it. In some way it is my defect or my inability to exercise power that is displayed therein.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the beginning of ch. 10 Job refers to God's hand as a metonym for God's creative activity. Job accuses God in v.3: "You reject the work of your hands (*kp*)," and in v.8: "Your hands (*yd*) shaped me and made me, and afterward you swallowed me up on every side."<sup>26</sup> Newsom comments, "the thing that has been made is destroyed by its creator, the pot crushed back into dust (10:8-9). What generates the destructive impulse is the presence of a flaw. Since the human is a moral agent, the flaw sought out is not a physical one but a disfiguring 'iniquity' or 'sin' (10:6)."<sup>27</sup> Just as the friends disavow their *similarity* with God despite their theology's dependence on it, so too does God want to destroy Job's *otherness* despite the dependence of the notion of creation on it (i.e., when one creates something, it is necessarily something other than oneself).

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<sup>23</sup>God's act of creation, as recounted in the Priestly tradition, famously turns on the question of the shared image (the Hebrew *selem* of Gen 1:27 supremely conveying the qualities of Imaginary identification) and on the particular axis this common image is understood to reside.

<sup>24</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 147.

<sup>25</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 146.

<sup>26</sup>The verb Job uses here to describe what God has done to him (*bl*: "to swallow") is the same verb God uses to characterize the affliction to *hasšātān* in 2:3. Here, however, Job does not account for that dimension of God's act which God characterized as *hinnām*.

<sup>27</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 147.

70.2 *The Real*

Although Job directly responds to the friends through recourse to the Imaginary dimension that largely informs their position, Newsom thinks he finally locates the cause of God's drive towards his destruction in a dimension beyond the dialectic of the Imaginary, beyond God's recognition of some *particular* difference Job represents, in the Real difference that separates humans from God. She draws extensively on Levinas for the categories by which this dimension can be identified and explained in Job's speeches. For Levinas, the ego comes to be through its constitution in and construction of a world in which it can dwell and on which it can rely. At some moment I encounter an Other that eludes me and my world.<sup>28</sup> Being addressed by this Other destroys the egotism by which I previously lived as if the world were my own. The Other's address summons me to renounce my egotism and my world and to assume an infinite responsibility to and for this Other.<sup>29</sup> My relationship with this Other is radically asymmetrical and nonreciprocal because I am always-already responsible to its unconditional command but have no right to claim this Other's responsibility to or for me.<sup>30</sup> "Subjectivity as such is primordially a hostage, responsible to the extent that it becomes the sacrifice for others."<sup>31</sup> So the ethical is, for

<sup>28</sup> Although he perhaps fails to maintain his insistence, Levinas insists that this "narrative" is misleading to the extent that it is formulated ontogenetically. But, Newsom and I are justified in recounting it narratively by Levinas himself: "It is necessary to begin with the concrete relationship between an I and the world" LEVINAS (1969), 37. After proceeding from this necessary point of origin, however, Levinas argues that it is not that one gets along as an ego that is then interrupted by the encounter, but rather that one's getting along is always already a response to such an encounter. This "primacy of the Other" is intended by a number of Levinasian/Derridean conclusions e.g., "ontology presupposes metaphysics" or "truth presupposes justice."

<sup>29</sup> "To recognize the Other is to give. . . The presence of the Other is equivalent to this calling into question of my joyous possession of the world" (LEVINAS, 1969, 75-76).

<sup>30</sup> "The relationship with the Other does not move (as does cognition) into enjoyment and possession, into freedom; the Other imposes himself as an exigency that dominates this freedom" (LEVINAS, 1969, 87).

<sup>31</sup> EMMANUEL LEVINAS, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* trans. by Sean Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 98.

Levinas, the domain of an *a priori*, asymmetrical disturbance that "happens" prior to the constitution of the political world of universality and symmetrical relations, prior to the constitution of the subject. The subject does not exist prior to the ethical moment (when there was only the ego) but comes to be in it. Thus his famous position on "ethics as first philosophy." Prior to the establishment of the political, prior to the existence of the subject, is nothing less than "the ethical moment in all its terrible freedom."<sup>32</sup>

According to Newsom, this sense of absolute or Real Otherness in/of Job, that which makes Job as human/creature other than God as divine/creator, is the best way to account for God's complete insatiability in this search for something in Job that escapes him and escapes God, "the quality of frustrated obsession Job attributes to God... the incessant surveillance, a sort of stalking (7:12, 14, 17-19, 21b; 10:4-7, 14-17; 14:13)."<sup>33</sup> Job "can account for [God's behavior] neither with respect to the nature of his own being ('Am I the Sea, or the sea monster, that you set a guard over me?' 7:12) nor the nature of God's being ('Do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as humans see?... ' 10:4-7)."<sup>34</sup> Explanation comes up short, something escapes.

Through no intentional act of his own, Job remains to some degree opaque to God. Similarly, despite what Job describes as God's rage to annihilate, Job, like some hideously resilient monster from a horror movie, cannot be disposed of. Although one may kill concrete others, one cannot kill otherness, *the Other*. And this is what Job intuitively understands himself to represent—God's Other, in a Levinasian sense.<sup>35</sup>

In order to make her point more clear, I want to resist Newsom's language at the end of this quotation—"what Job intuitively understands himself to represent." Job does not understand himself to *represent* the absolute or Real Other, if only because such an Other is precisely what cannot be represented. I draw on the notion of the Real precisely so as to name the sense in which Job is something for God that falls outside the field of

<sup>32</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 149. <sup>33</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 147. <sup>34</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 147-48. <sup>35</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 149.

representation. For this reason one could say that Job's speech traces two different modes of his existence, one which can be represented and another which is unrepresentable and about which all one can say is that it exists.<sup>36</sup> There is another Job which Job understands himself to be for God but there is nothing one can say about it/him because it/he is outside (his or our or anyone's) knowledge or representation. It is not outside in the sense that it is another being, external to the represented one, but in the sense that it is found at the limit of his representation. It is structurally unknowable but makes its presence "intuitable" at the limit of representation.<sup>37</sup>

Before turning to the destructive dimension of God's behavior, I need to return to the first movement of ch. 10, especially v.6, about which I quoted Newsom as saying that Job explicitly identifies the object of God's tormenting pursuit of himself with some stain of his guilt (on page 284). If this is true, then this account—according to which God is obsessed with a dimension of himself that escapes knowledge—has outrun the exegesis. To anticipate the conclusion, while Job does think God's gaze searches for his transgression, he concludes that God knows that the object of God's search is nonexistent, thereby further supporting the idea that God does not relate to Job within some Imaginary or Symbolic circuit. Here is the text,

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<sup>36</sup>Copjec supplies a distinction of some help here by saying that "the first is subject to a predicative judgment as well as to a judgment of existence; that is, it is an existence whose character or quality can be described. The existence implied by the second is subject *only* to a judgment of existence; we can say only that it does or does not exist, without being able to say what it is, to describe it in any way" (COPJEC, 1994, 3). Copjec draws the distinction in order to account for similar statements made by Lacan about "the" woman and Foucault about "the" pleb.

<sup>37</sup>Although I have, for consistency's sake, defined this unique "object" that is the Levinasian Other according to Lacan's *objet petit a*, I do not want to suggest that they are two names for the same object. Žižek, among others, has attempted to articulate the difference in some recent works e.g., SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, "Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence" in *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* Edited by SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, ERIC L. SANTNER and KENNETH REINHARD. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 134–90; SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions in*

I say to Eloah: Do not condemn me. Inform me of what you charge me.

Is it good to you that you oppress,  
 that you reject the work of your hands,  
 and favor<sup>38</sup> the counsel of the wicked?

Do you have eyes of flesh? Or do you see like a human sees?

Are your days like a human's days?

Or are your years like the years of a person?

For you search for my sin and you seek out my iniquity

As you know, however, I am not guilty,

though there is no deliverance from your hand.

(10:2-7)

Although Job demands God make known (*ydc*) to him God's case or cause for investigation, he concludes that God knows (*ydc*) Job is not guilty, i.e., that God knows that there is no case against him, that there is nothing to be made known. What we learn from this is that no correlation exists between the presence of God's gaze on Job, the pressure of God's hand on Job, and Job's status before the Law. Even though God's gaze is interested in Job's status before the Law and, specifically, his transgression, this gaze persists regardless of the Law. Job does not fear God's presence because it represents the Law or exposes his guilt. These instruments of God's presence, God's eye and God's hand, affect Job from beyond or despite his status before the Law, which is another reason why the affect they arouse—i.e., anxiety and *not* fear—signals the Real.

*the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London; New York: Verso, 2001a), ch. 4.

<sup>38</sup>*yp* literally means "to shine forth" and is predicated of God in several texts, e.g., Deut 33:2; Ps 50:2; and Job 37:15. Enjoyment is often present when God's "shining" is at stake. Here its opposition to *mṭ* and parallel enveloping function with "Is it good for you" led me to agree with the NRSV's decision to translate it "favor."

### 70.3 *The Symbolic*

Newsom uses Levinas not only to identify the “object” that would account for God’s obsession but also for the violent response Job attributes to God. The encounter with the Other shatters the solipsistic world created by the ego, which is then held hostage to the Other, a situation that can be responded to in one of two ways: “One possible response to the Other is the attempt to reduce its alterity, to absorb it into the Same, either by means of knowledge or power. This is in fact a futile gesture. . . [the] point is not so much that this is bad as that it is impossible. It fails. . . the Other resists appropriation. . . simply because it is Other.”<sup>39</sup> The futile pursuit of destruction is not the only possible response. For Levinas, the ethical response is the surrender of oneself in a posture of vulnerable receptivity, an endangering openness toward the Other. The receptivity is total in that one might be called on to sacrifice oneself for the Other, to take the place of the Other.<sup>40</sup> However, out of this response one can also appeal to a Third that would mediate the disjunctive encounter. Levinas thinks inherently mediatory discourses such as politics, universality, and symmetrical relations are born out of the asymmetrical encounter between the Self and the Other.

For Newsom (who here supplies some conceptual clarification to a widely held interpretation), Job’s use of the legal metaphor seeks to establish such a Third on the basis of which he and God could relate nonviolently, a Third that would limit the absoluteness of their face-to-face encounter, a Third on whose ground God and Job could start to cohabit an objective space of reasoned argument without the inequality inherent to the asymmetrical and non-reciprocal encounter between the Self and the Other.<sup>41</sup> Job’s call for justice aims

<sup>39</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 148.

<sup>40</sup>Recall the quote cited on page 285: “Subjectivity as such is primordially a hostage, responsible to the extent that it becomes the sacrifice for others” (LEVINAS, 1990, 98).

<sup>41</sup>She writes of “mutual disclosure” (NEWSOM, 2003a, 159) and claims, “Job negotiates the dangerous terrain of alterity by establishing the common ground upon which the divine and the human can meet—the ground of justice. Job’s strategy is indeed to reduce the alterity of the divine and the human by stressing

to provoke God's response/ibility and to interrupt God's murderous refusal of the Third in God's encounter with God's Other, i.e., Job.<sup>42</sup> To make the progression according to the Lacanian registers explicit, having established the basis for the friends' theology in the Imaginary and the basis for Job's disagreement with them in the Real nature of God's encounter with human beings, Newsom identifies Job's desire as a desire for the Symbolic.

One of the benefits of Newsom's work to this chapter's investigation of Job's desire is that it allows different expressions of Job's desire for a Third to be identified by their shared structure. In particular, Newsom invites us to draw a structural homology between the symbolic Third evoked by Job's use of legal discourse and the personified figure of justice—the arbiter, umpire, witness, mediator—Job wishes for in several often-analyzed passages (9:32-35; 13:18-23; 16:18-22; 19:23-27). In the case of both the symbolic Third and the personified Third, Job articulates his desire for a universal.<sup>43</sup>

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the common moral nature of God and human beings" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 150). Other quotes could be cited as well, e.g., "Legal appeal shifts the ground to an objective set of values both sides take as normative, privileging reasoned argument" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 156); or: "Legal disputes . . . require the provisional setting aside of inequality" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 157).

<sup>42</sup>Biblical scholars often note a similar dynamic when they recognize that enunciating innocence to God communicates more than its enunciated content, it also communicates a call for justice. See, for example, MAGDALENE (2007), 163-164; WALTER BRUEGGEMANN, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 55; PATRICK D. MILLER, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 109-10; FREDRIK LINDSTRÖM, *Suffering and Sin: Interpretations of Illness in the Individual Complaint Psalms* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994), 422. JANZEN (1985), 94-97 makes a very similar point without arriving at the same conclusion and without the same theoretical background.

<sup>43</sup>It has been understood at least since Saussure that the production of meaning depends upon a symbolic order that is a total, self-contained system by which all its constituent parts are related; e.g. FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE, *Course in General Linguistics* trans. by Wade Baskin (London: Peter Owen Limited, 1959), 9. Of course, the diachronic nature of meaning must simultaneously be affirmed even though it poses a strict contradiction to language's synchronic nature. Diachrony requires that the symbolic order be incomplete, open to a new production of meaning that could restabilize the symbol system into a different order. This contradiction is fundamental to the production of meaning.



The basis for Job's articulation of the Third, surprisingly enough, lies in that position, identified by Newsom, that Job shares with the friends despite their disavowal of it, namely, the dimension of continuity humans share with God. I noted this dimension above so as to isolate an Imaginary basis that Job sometimes ascribes to God's aggression, that is, a basis in some recognizable predicate of Job's such as an iniquity or sin that differentiates creature from creator (10:6). What this continuity is, however, I did not make explicit. Newsom says that at the heart of the friends' statements on divine alterity is an insistence on the radical difference separating God from humans, because it is only through such an insistence that God's Otherness can be protected from any continuity or contamination with themselves, the domain of Sameness. Their comparison of divine to human justice, even though it is made to manifest the qualitative incomparability of God to human beings as regards justice, "points to a fundamental continuity between the divine and the human. . . [H]umans share with the deity the capacity to make moral decisions."<sup>44</sup>

Newsom zeroes in on the ways and means by which Job uses the legal metaphor to understand his situation. The metaphor functions for Job as a map on which he can chart his experience differently than the map available to the friends' discourse of prayer (which Newsom names "traditional piety" and identifies in many other contexts in the Hebrew Bible). She writes,

[T]he immense alterity between God and humans, which is lifted up by Eliphaz and which is a reassuring feature in the divine warrior hymns, appears as disturbing and morally troubling when reframed in a forensic context. . . For legal procedure to have any meaning, the outcome must be genuinely open, not preempted by violent power. . . Yet if what is affirmed of God in Eliphaz's teaching and in these traditions of hymnic praise is true, the possibility of justice between God and a human is put in question.<sup>45</sup>

Job's explorations of his experience within the framework of the legal metaphor and his responses to the friends that evoke legal discourse all seem to find their basis in and gain their polemical edge from the continuity between God and humans that undergirds the

<sup>44</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 145. <sup>45</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 152-53.

friends' discourse. Newsom describes the interpretive power generated by Job's use of legal discourse as follows, "What Job eventually does. . . is to make use of this extensive conceptualization of divine justice to organize an aspect of experience where it did not traditionally function—the right of a person before God."<sup>46</sup>

The legal model is so appealing to Job because it promises a space in which the radical alterity separating God from humans can be "set aside as not appropriate to the context (13:20-21), since legal framing of the situation requires the stipulation of provisional equality in the presence of transcendent norms of justice."<sup>47</sup> So, the courtroom promises to accomplish the initial subtractive gesture Job longs for by giving his experience meaning in relation to, and a verdict on the basis of, transcendent norms of justice. The legal metaphor enables Job to imagine a framework grounded by a truth whose value derives from its universal recognition by all its subjects. Since this truth would be found "out there," Job could measure himself and others against it, pay a penalty or dole out debts on its terms, be found guilty or not<sup>48</sup>; in any case, it would relieve Job of his burden. The guilt gained through such symbolic mediation would be a welcome relief to his anxiety.

Job desires a Third so that guilt can be determined, calculations made, and judgment rendered. Job wants his day in court, *commanding the deity*:

Do not condemn me. Inform me of what you charge me.

(10:2)

*and demanding of his friends*:

Listen to my arguments

and pay attention to the contentions of my lips. . .

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<sup>46</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 153. <sup>47</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 157.

<sup>48</sup>NEWSOM (2003a, 158-60) fittingly identifies and elaborates the "hermeneutical" character of Job's desire for a Third.

Listen attentively to my words

and let my declarations come into your ears.

Look, I have arranged a case. I know that I am righteous. . .

How many are my iniquities and sins?

Inform me of my transgression and my sin.

(13:6, 17-18, 23)

Guilt can be argued about, calculated, it is something one has or has done, something one can talk about, judge, acknowledge, confess; it is a part of oneself. The Symbolic order is the promised land for the partitioning of the self, the space of determination and calculation.

#### 71 ETHICAL CELEBRATIONS OF JOB'S DESIRE FOR A THIRD

Although the line between description and prescription is especially muddied by the commentary form, a kind of celebratory stance can be found in some critical approaches to Job's resolve to wish for transcendent norms of justice despite the acts of God that prevent his desire's realization. Newsom's careful tracing of the Symbolic function—its efficacy *as well as its limits* in relation to Job's subjection—can relax into a more homiletic tone: Job becomes an exemplar for the virtues of persistence or uncowed authenticity. A couple of prominent examples should suffice. Clines depicts a Job whose “conviction of his own integrity has hardened.”<sup>49</sup> As Job becomes increasingly sure of his case and his desire, he begins to anticipate the legal encounter with God without fear.<sup>50</sup> “Once Job has realized that what he most wants is God's personal acknowledgement of his innocence, the fear that he cannot possibly be justly treated by God recedes, and he convinces himself that anyone, even God, must respond favorably to so obvious a case of injured innocence.”<sup>51</sup> So too, of course, do Clines' readers feel compelled to “respond favorably” to Job's case.

Balentine offers a more exuberant celebration. What is initially striking about his analysis is its strong parallel to Newsom's. Where she draws primarily on the traditional piety

<sup>49</sup>CLINES (2006), 596. <sup>50</sup>CLINES (2006), 593-96. <sup>51</sup>CLINES (2006), 595.

of Israel's hymnic tradition to account for and interpret Job's discourse, he draws primarily on Israel's lament tradition as that which allows Job to vent his anger and question God, and suggests that this in turn leads to the more direct legal speech.<sup>52</sup> Balentine, with many others, thinks Job's initial, subtractive gesture is articulated with despair and expresses a wish "simply to give up and die."<sup>53</sup> His discussion of 23:1-7, entitled "Job's Compelling Hope: 'Oh, That I Knew Where I Might Find Him,'" asserts that Job's

despair is the source of new-found energy. . . now he determines to find the "fixed place" where God is hiding and present his case for justice in a one-on-one confrontation. If Job is to encounter God, then he will have to be the pursuer, for it seems clear that no amount of suffering moves God to take the initiative to come to him.

Job's resolve to confront God is framed with the legal imagery that has shaped his previous speeches (vv.4-7). He begins by saying that he intends to present his "case" (v.4) before God and concludes by saying that his hope is to bring "justice" (v.7) to a successful birth. . .<sup>54</sup> Job's hope for justice depends on being able to find God. . . There is a painful disconnect between Job's yearning and God's absence (vv.10-12). . .<sup>55</sup>

[F]or a long time Job can do little more than pray that death will come quickly (e.g., 3:20-22; 10:18-21; 16:22-17:1). It is only through an act of courageous defiance that he determines to live for justice rather than death (13:15; 16:18). . . What is Job to do now that he seems to have exhausted all reasonable options? Should he retreat to his first inclination and wait passively for death's final verdict? Or should he accept terror as the only reward for those too stubborn to "agree with God and be at peace" (22:21)?

In v.17, Job announces that he will accept neither option. . . he will be a *presence* that God cannot ignore. . . Moreover, Job will not agree to be a *silent presence*.<sup>56</sup>

Balentine's discussion of Job's desire clearly expects readers to agree that Job's desire for transcendent norms of justice exemplifies Job's

<sup>52</sup>"Lament becomes for Job more than simply a way of addressing God. It becomes a means of imagining new ways of encountering God. . . He imagines putting God on trial" (BALENTINE, 2006, 179).

<sup>53</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 362. As indicated above, I remain unconvinced of this interpretation.

<sup>54</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 362. <sup>55</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 363. <sup>56</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 364, 366.

- *courageous resolve* to live for justice rather than death,
- *painful defiance* of God's terrorizing absence, and
- *heroic resistance* to the temptations to give in to the friends or retreat into cowardly passivity.

I am sympathetic to the impulse behind this evaluation of Job's position but believe that its rather worn-out heroism finally falls short of both a politically liberatory ethic as well as Job's own testimony. The role Job attributes to God (see section 55) is significantly watered down in this account. Lacking is any explanation of how and why Job now, supposedly, no longer thinks God disturbs and discredits his calls for justice but is instead one with whom justice would be possible were it not for certain, contingent conditions.

According to CHAPTER 6, ch. 23 is far from a simple expression of Job's desire "to encounter God, come what may." Quite the contrary, Job does not turn his face toward an empty seat of justice, enlightened by the pure foundation of his conviction, and God does not stop unsettling the ground under his feet or shrouding his position in darkness. Part of the problem is undoubtedly tied to the model that supports the legal framework and compels a theological framework of transcendence, imagining Job a citizen, indivisible and claiming his rights before/from God, who resides above/beyond the plane of Job's experiences. Job's testimony, however, depicts an altogether different situation—one need think only of the emphasis in his speeches on his division from himself (see section 55). In the next section I find many of Job's statements that discredit this interpretation of his demands for a Third and saps them of any ethical value.

## 72 THE ETHICS OF JOB'S DESIRE, RECONSIDERED

There is a more radical conclusion one can reach that begins from the same founding assumption that Job's relief from anxiety must be sought via Symbolic (re)mediation. This position, again belonging to the ethical thought of Levinas, is as far as possible from the ethical celebration of Job as a hero of theological doggedness. According to it, Job's assertion

of his right to exist apart from the immediate presence of God's terrorizing Otherness can only be construed as *unethical*. Levinas's ethic is grounded in human finitude, the primordial lack of autonomy suffered by the subject who is thrown into a situation that exceeds him and is unassumable by him.<sup>57</sup> It thus becomes a kind of anti-Nietzschean treatise on the impossibility of willing the unwilled, the impossibility of the eternal return of the Same before an ever-transcendent horizon of Otherness. Measuring any ethical action against a norm is therefore impossible insofar as no one is capable of mastering their situatedness so as to formulate a norm that could attain universality. But, and here is the key twist, this impossibility and fundamental heteronomy of human being is not to be lamented and is not the end of ethics; it conditions a new kind of ethics, an ethics of solidarity based on mutual vulnerability. Levinas's ethical stance can be summed up as a radical openness to the Other as to a Good beyond being, even to the point of sacrifice.

The insinuation here may seem absurd—Job is a perpetrator of ethical violence and not a victim seeking symmetrical relations!?!—but this absurdity is the heart and soul of Levinasian ethics. Politics and ethics remain fundamentally separate; to desire symmetrical relations is to desire a Third that could be impervious to the Otherness of the Other, a Third that would annihilate the Other as Other by giving it an identity, a place within its order.<sup>58</sup> Any assertion of one's right to exist threatens the social order.

<sup>57</sup>Levinas himself compared his approach to existence with Heidegger's notion of *Dasein's* "Thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*) in EMMANUEL LEVINAS, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays* trans. by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 45. For a reflection on Levinas's relation to Heidegger, especially in Levinas's early writings, see Jacques Rolland's introduction to EMMANUEL LEVINAS, *On Escape: de l'évasion* trans. by Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). And for a slight complication of this simplified account, see, for example, LEVINAS (2003), 69-70.

<sup>58</sup>Although it has apparently been lost on her readers, Newsom also recognizes this violence inherent to Job's desire. First, in her phenomenology of the courtroom: "Every rhetoric exerts constraints on the types of stories that can be constructed and the way they relate to one another, and legal rhetoric is no exception. Legal stories are quintessentially stories of blame and exculpation. The forensic context pares down the rich variety of ways in which social beings may be described as relating to one another. . . . Though some of these

The essence of Derrida's critique/specification of Levinas's ethic is that the openness to the Other is always possibly unethical, insofar as it inherently involves turning toward one other and away from an other other.<sup>59</sup> The Third is always "present" in its "absence" from the face-to-face encounter, in a presence that challenges the claim that the encounter could ground ethics.<sup>60</sup> Any ethical decision is therefore finally indeterminate, it being always possible that the decision to open oneself to the face of an Other turns away from a Third to/for whom one is also responsible. There is thus an "initial perjury" of the immediacy involved in the encounter with the other.<sup>61</sup> In my own critique of Levinas—i.e., in what I perceive as the challenge Job's testimony issues to Levinas's ethic—something else will be at stake, even if I do not think that Job abandons the most radical insights of Levinas and Derrida. Job's testimony witnesses to a conception of the subject that does not square

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overlap with stories of blame and exculpation, they cannot be reduced simply to those categories.

The legal imagination is also reductive with respect to stories in one other way. Though the confrontational structure of legal disputation invites the telling of rival stories, the structure of judgment implicit in the legal model assumes that alternative stories cannot both be true to the same degree" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 160). She also alerts us to the ethically problematic (for Levinas's position) character of Job's demands in a brief footnote, "Levinas argues against the resolution of same and other in such a fashion, which he sees as the traditional response of philosophies of being" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 278n.49). As ever, Levinas's position was anticipated already by Hegel, who saw in self-consciousness's pleasure the movement of desire that "does not aim so much at the destruction of objective being in its entirety, but only at the form of its otherness or its independence" HEGEL (1977), 218.

<sup>59</sup>Cf. HÄGGLUND (2008), ch. 3. I discovered this important book too late to take into account in the dissertation. Hagglund advances a similar though much more polemical argument against the common tendency to assimilate Derrida's work into a Levinasian ethical framework.

<sup>60</sup>DERRIDA (1999, 32) writes, "The third does not wait; its illeity calls from as early as the epiphany of the face in the face to face."

<sup>61</sup>JACQUES DERRIDA, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 33. In his characteristic style, DERRIDA (1999, 34) goes on to say, "the proceedings that open both ethics and justice are in the process of committing quasi-transcendental or originary, indeed, pre-originary perjury. One might even call it *ontological*, once ethics is joined to everything that exceeds and betrays it (ontology, precisely, synchrony, totality, the State, the political, etc.)."

with theirs. For them, the subject threatens the social order by asserting himself as a positive presence within it, either by submitting to the demand of the Second in the face-to-face encounter, which makes one always possibly at fault for neglecting the faceless Third (Derrida), or by usurping some other in the assertion of the rights of the Self/Same (Levinas).<sup>62</sup>

Even if there is a point at which these philosophers become unhelpful to the reader of JOB, an important point that they agree upon is one that the celebrants of Job's desire for a Third fail to endorse. The latter esteem a stance by which Job would maintain his right to exist in harmonious and symmetrical relations with God and others against a God who impedes these relations through either omission (refusing to submit to a Third) or commission (acting to prevent the constitution of a Third through some contingent, obstructive interventions). Job's testimony, however, testifies to a God whose presence necessarily prevents the constitution of any Third, not to a God whose presence remains transcendent to a Third. Job's testimony is closer to Levinas and Derrida than those Joban scholars who, in this case at least, stand instead with Job's friends. The conception of Job's experience I have attributed to the friends also adheres to a structure according to which God acts from a place beyond what God's activity makes impossible (cf. 11:8). For Job, on the other hand, God is immanent to the impossibility as much as the impossibility is to Job.

For this reason I want to nuance Newsom's argument that Job brings to light what remains tacit and repressed in the friends' discourse. She convincingly shows how Job's use of legal language assumes more continuity between God and human beings than the friends admit and thereby exposes the continuity that the friends' position tacitly presupposes. Does this mean that there is no difference between the actual sense or degree of continuity

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<sup>62</sup>For Derrida's designation of the other as "faceless," see JACQUES DERRIDA, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone" trans. by Samuel Weber in *Acts of Religion* Edited by GIL ANIDJAR. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002a), 59.



at work in Job's and in the friends' positions, and that any differences between them stem solely from the friends' silence or misunderstanding about this continuity? I think not. The friends banish being and meaning to the divine realm, as Newsom writes,<sup>63</sup> and encourage Job to acknowledge and explore the limits of his understanding as limits vis-à-vis this transcendent realm. Job, however, does not banish God from the represented world but instead includes God in it as the cause of its limits, the force behind its failures. Because Job "includes" God in the world as that which exceeds it, it seems best to conclude that Job's position articulates both a greater continuity and a greater alterity with God than the friends'—greater continuity in the sense that God is immanent to Job and to his world, but greater alterity in the sense that God is what prevents Job's and the world's constitution as entities in and of themselves. God is a force that prevents the establishment of any Third with respect to which Job could be located vis-à-vis an other. God is an inherent cause of otherness, of incompleteness.

Newsom agrees that Job deems the establishment of a Third impossible, and this is one reason why her work exceeds so many analyses of the legal metaphor that treat Job's statements on impossibility as claims about a mere contingency or epistemological limit. That is, many interpreters err by sapping these statements of the ontological weight I think they compel. About 9:32-35, i.e.,

Truly [God is] not a man like me that I could answer him;  
that we could enter a case together.

There is no arbiter between us  
who would set his hand on the two of us;  
he would divert his rod from upon me;  
and let not his terror frighten me;

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<sup>63</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 143, cited on page 283.

I would speak and I would not fear him;

Truly I am not with myself.<sup>64</sup>

Newsom writes,

[I]t is at the end of the chapter, as Job considers the conditions that render an actual trial with God an impossibility. . . that he simultaneously envisions the conditions of possibility. . . Following this cluster of legal terminology, one can readily hear the opening of chapter 10 as what Job would like to say if such a trial were possible.<sup>65</sup>

In other words, Job accomplishes something like a Utopian imagining of a present unlike his own, in which the impossible could be possible. In the end, although Newsom acknowledges the fundamentally impossible character of the Third,<sup>66</sup> her conclusion does not fully account for the challenges this impossibility poses to her position that Job identifies his right to a just relationship with God by bringing to light the friends' disavowed presupposition of universal justice.

Despite Newsom's consistent warnings and evident reticence to treat the legal metaphor as if it accounted for too much of Job's speeches,<sup>67</sup> when it comes to accounting for his

<sup>64</sup>This verse is quite difficult and various different proposals have been made. Its symmetry with v.32 and Job's other statements about not being at one with himself (e.g., 9:21 and 10:1) favor the more literal reading: "Truly [it is] not so [that] I am with myself."

<sup>65</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 154.

<sup>66</sup>In section 73 I discuss a number of other texts in which Job follows his expressions of this desire with explicit statements concerning its impossibility; e.g., 13:17-23 followed by vv.24-27; 14:13, 16 followed by vv.19-20; and, definitively, 19:6-10.

<sup>67</sup>For example, she says one scholar's "decision to maximize the presence and shaping of legal language obscures a more complex and subtle situation. Though Job on occasion uses unmistakably technical legal expressions, much of the language in question is at home both in legal and more general discourse" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 150). Her point, she assures us, is not to disavow the significance of legal language, only to insist on its "subtle and exploratory" nature. Later on she acknowledges that "explicitly legal speech actually occurs rather infrequently" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 154). For her, legal speech is significant for the way in which Job seems to use the metaphor of the trial to reinterpret his situation differently than the friends, who rely on the discourse of traditional piety (NEWSOM, 2003a, 155-60).

desire and disposition toward his experience, she hardly makes room for anything else.<sup>68</sup> The first problem that is obfuscated by her complementary formula in which the condition of impossibility becomes the condition of possibility is that the two conditions are not complementary; the impossibility of any Third undercuts every imagining of a possible Third. Consequently, every imagined Third is marked from the outset as a deceptive escape, and any hope in a Third comes across as false since it is invested in a possibility that is destined to fail. Job may procure some satisfaction from such false hopes, but it seems a sham satisfaction since it depends upon the disavowal of the impossibility of escaping God's presence. Newsom never turns back to her formulation to ask what the impossibility does to the possibility. She leaves the impossibility behind as a formal *a priori* for the imagined possibility of a Third, which she spends most of her work analyzing.<sup>69</sup> She never wonders whether there may be another way in which Job relates to his anxiety-provoking encounter with God's presence.

If Job finally reckons the constitution of any Third impossible, then what function do his expressions of desire for a Third play (other than the sham satisfaction I just suggested he may procure from them)? At the very least one can say that they register what is unavailable to him. Accordingly, I am less interested in characterizing Job's desire for a Third as an unethical (in the Levinasian sense) wish to annihilate an Other, and am more inclined to see it as an indication of Job's recognition of that upon which Levinas's ethic is grounded, namely, the impossibility that any Third could ever be constituted such that the asymmetrical force of the encounter with an Other could be escaped.

By simultaneously articulating his desire for a Third and its impossibility, Job's speeches should prevent readers from believing that

(1) he thinks of his situation as a limit situation that could or would return to normalcy,

<sup>68</sup>She does, however, account for another way in which Job positions himself vis-à-vis his friends in his final speeches, to which I will return at the end of this chapter.

<sup>69</sup>I have already indicated the distance Newsom's monograph covers by exposing the many roles this

- (2) God would ever fail to act as a force of asymmetry, and
- (3) he would function as a part in a harmonious order.

According to certain theorists of sovereignty, when the appearance of a Third that normally functions to structure social relations is suspended, one enters into what is called a "state of exception."<sup>70</sup> According to Job, there is no other state; the normal situation is the state of exception. Job testifies to an experience of the exceptional as normal, eternal, infinite.

Job's simultaneous articulations of a desire and its impossibility should (in theory) make it difficult if not impossible to be satisfied with the conclusions that Job either expresses

- (1) *defiant hope* in the possibility of a Third that could actually send him a satisfactory message about his identity, about his guilt or innocence; or,
- (2) *tragic resignation* before the unattainability of a satisfaction that could come from a Third that will never be.

Instead, in what follows I claim that Job ultimately finds a sense of himself in the surprising experience of God that his articulation of his desire affords. The sentiment of this experience, I argue, is shame.<sup>71</sup>

### 73 DESIRE AND IMPOSSIBILITY

Before giving a proper account of Job's shame, I want to discuss a number of texts that show why the concept of shame is necessary for understanding Job's stance toward his desire plays in Job's refutation of the friends' discourse.

<sup>70</sup>See, for example, GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *State of Exception* trans. by Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>71</sup>The following discussion of shame relies heavily on several recent treatments, including GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002); and, most importantly, the recent work of Joan Copjec. Both take their departures from the early and excellent analyses of shame by Levinas and Sartre, and both end with similar results even though their theoretical approaches are finally oriented around two different thinkers: Foucault for Agamben, Lacan for Copjec. It is Agamben who refers to shame as "nothing less than the fundamental sentiment of being *a subject*" (AGAMBEN, 2002, 107).

experience. In particular, I want to look at Job's experience of the Third's impossibility. There are moments when Job's desire for a Third falters and he gets hung up, not on an obstruction issuing from an other, or an impeding foreign object, but on a foreignness within himself. In ch. 13, Job first articulates his desire and the conditions needed to meet God in court:

Listen carefully to my words; and let my declaration come into your ears.  
 Look, I have arranged a case. I know that I am righteous.  
 Who would argue with me? For then I would be silent and die.  
 But two things do not do to me, then I will not be hidden from your face.  
 Distance your hand from me, and do not let your terror frighten me.  
 Then summon<sup>72</sup> and I will respond; or I will speak and you reply to me.  
 How many are my transgressions and sins?  
 Inform me of my transgression and my sin.

(13:17-23)

To the one before whom Job has suggested that no one can be in the right (9:2), Job stands ready to testify. He subsequently concludes, however, that God prevents such conditions by rendering the very premise of such an encounter—i.e., the bridgeable *difference* between God and Job—impossible:

Why do you hide your face and reckon me your enemy?  
 Will you frighten a windblown leaf, and pursue dry chaff?  
 For you inscribe bitter things against me,  
 and bequeath to me the iniquities of my youth.  
 You set my feet in stocks and watch all my paths; you carve out my footprints.

(13:24-27)

God does not simply prevent the trial as an external force; God inscribes bitter things against Job, including the iniquity of his youth. So, after Job boasts, "Who would argue

<sup>72</sup>On the root *qrn* as a summons, see Deut 25:8; 1 Sam 22:11; 1 Kgs 20:7. Cf. MAGDALENE (2007), 141.

with me?... Summon and I will respond... How many are my transgressions and sins?" (13:19a, 22a, 23a), he then falters, "Surely you inscribe bitter things against/upon me; and bequeth to me the iniquities of my youth" (13:26). Job may ascribe to God the agency both to inscribe and to bequeth, but what he receives from God are his own iniquities.

In ch. 14 Job expresses his desire for some hiding place away from God's presence, a place where he would be concealed from exposure:

If only you would treasure me up in Sheol,

you would hide me until your anger turns...

For then you would count my steps; you would not watch over my sin.

(14:13ab, 16)

And he subsequently concludes,

Water wears down stones, its torrents wash away the earth's soil,

so you destroy a human's hope.

You overpower him forever; he goes where you send him with a changed face.

(14:19-20)

Job's initial hope, for a place where he would be veiled from God who watches over his sin falters, and he concludes that he goes where God sends him.

In ch. 19 Job issues his definitive pronouncement on the impossibility of justice:

Know then, that Eloah has wronged me, and caused his net to surround me.

Look, I cry out "Violence" but I am not answered, I shout but there is no justice.

He has immured my path so that I cannot pass,

and upon my ways he has laid darkness.

He has stripped my honor from me, and removed the crown from my head.

He disintegrates me all-around so that I am gone;<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup>Cf. 10:8: "Your hands shaped me and made me, and afterward you swallowed me up all-around."

he uproots my hope like a tree.<sup>74</sup>

(19:6-10)

Job is depersonalized, disintegrated, and his hope is uprooted. In his dissolution, he finds no space he can call his own. Being disintegrated means he can locate no private space for himself not exposed by his experience. Job's is an odd predicament; he is fully exposed and yet receives no recognition. He calls out but receives no answer from the Other, no recognition of himself or his desire. He stands not on his dignity, but confesses, "He has stripped my honor from me, and removed the crown from my head" (19:9). Just after this passage, in 19:13-19, he will describe the totality of public and private relations from which he is alienated through his exposure.

Paradigmatically, there is the passage, discussed in section 55, in which Job says, "Though I am righteous, my mouth condemns me... If I wash myself with soap... then you dip me in the pit so that my clothes abhor me" (9:20a, 30a, 31). Reducing such statements to grievances ignores the extent to which the line between the aggressor and the aggrieved disappears in them.

Finally, recall ch. 23, discussed at length in CHAPTER 6, in which Job famously imagines a place where a just contention with God would be possible:

Is it by greatness of strength he would contend with me? No...

There the one who argues with him might be upright,

and I might deliver the eminent one from my judging.

(23:6a, 7)

But alas, he tells us, such a place for contention cannot be found:

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<sup>74</sup>Cf. 14:19: "Water wears down stones, its torrents wash away the earth's soil, so you destroy a human's hope."

Were I to go east, then he would not be there;  
 and west, then I would not perceive him;  
 north, by his doing I would have no vision;  
 he would conceal himself south so that I would not see.

(23:8-9)

He then relates the result: anxiety (v.15) and enfeeblement (v.16).

As such texts pile up in which Job's resolute march to contend with God is halted, I become unconvinced that Job's subsequent resolve to speak "in the face of darkness" (23:17), or "in the bitterness of my soul" (10:1), or "in the adversity of my spirit" (7:11), can be read as new expressions of that same old desire. Since Job speaks about his sin (13:23; 14:16), iniquity (13:26), and dishonor (19:9), it seems difficult to think that his newfound resolve issues from the same conviction about his innocence, his honor, his decency, his dignity, or that it aims for the same determinations of innocence and guilt. So does this mean that Job simply admits guilt or assumes responsibility? Quite the contrary: each of these texts sits uneasily beside insistences of his innocence. This uneasy juxtaposition signals Job's encounter with something he has not mastered, something beyond guilt and innocence, beyond good and evil, something that interrupts Job's demands for a Third and saps them of their libidinal investment. Job stumbles upon something that turns his attention away from the (absent, impossible) object of his desire so that he is no longer captivated by its promised determinations of guilt and innocence. Job is instead turned toward something else, i.e., darkness, bitterness, adversity. The Third is no longer "out there"; the very notion of an ethical limit has lost its meaning. His dignity, it seems, has become useless. At such moments, innocence and guilt, dignity and conviction, certainty and decency, are all stripped from Job. Absent is the neat division of himself from God; there is no guilty Other and innocent subject, much less a guilty subject and innocent Other.



To understand better this experience of interruption and subsequent resolve, I want to look again at ch. 10. Job says,

My spirit loathes my life;

I will abandon my complaint against myself;

ׁeׁezׁbāh ׁālay śîḥî

I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.

ׁ<sup>a</sup>dabׁrāh bׁmar napׁšî

(10:1)

This verse clearly returns to the wish Job expressed a few lines before,

If I say, I will forget my complaint, I will abandon my face and I will smile,

I fear all my pain; I know that you will not acquit me;

I will be guilty. Why then should I strive in vain?

(9:27-29)

Job 10:1, however, adds a twist registering an important difference. The sense of 10:1's second line is somewhat uncertain at first. It literally reads, "I will abandon my complaint against/concerning myself" which may at first seem counter to the sentiment Job expressed roughly a half-dozen verses earlier in 9:28, i.e., that the hope of abandon is impossible amidst anxiety. But the third line, "I will speak in/against the bitterness of my spirit," suggests that the verb *zb* ("to abandon") in the second line should be read in its other sense, not "forsake" but "let loose" or "give free reign to."<sup>75</sup> In other words, the lesson one can draw from 10:1 is that the resolve Job expresses after his desire stumbles does not come from the same sense of pressure to flee his condition. What changes from 9:27-29 to 10:1 is that *the imperative to flee* (to somewhere he could smile) *has disappeared*, being replaced by his resolution to speak in the bitterness of his soul.

In sum, at times Job's pursuit of his desire (to flee) stumbles, a surprising arrest that he attributes to God's efforts to dissolve the position from which he uttered his desire. In

<sup>75</sup>See HALOT, 807.

this experience God opens up the bitterness of his soul, the adversity of his spirit, which is a dimension beyond dignity, guilt, and innocence, a darkness or non-place where such categories do not apply. God gives Job an experience of himself that survives himself, an excess of life beyond dignity, persisting beyond himself.

In order to bestow some more precision upon this excess of darkness or bitterness that his experience affords him, I want to consider in more detail that section of ch. 19 mentioned on page 305.

[God] has alienated my kin from me;

and my acquaintances are estranged from me.

My relatives are gone; my friends have forgotten me.

My houseguests<sup>76</sup> and my maidservants reckon me a stranger;

I am an alien in their eyes.

I summon my servant but he does not respond;

I must entreat (*hnn*) him with my mouth.

My breath<sup>77</sup> (*rû<sup>a</sup>h*) estranges<sup>78</sup> my wife;

my body is loathesome (*hnn*) to my children.

Even youths reject me; when<sup>79</sup> I arise they speak against me.

All my intimate friends abhor me; and those I love turn against me.

(19:13-19)

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<sup>76</sup>The unbalanced versification is discussed in what follows.

<sup>77</sup>Or, "life/spirit."

<sup>78</sup>Many read a second sense of *zur* here, attested nowhere else in Hebrew but from *diyār* in Arabic, which means "to stink," thus "is repulsive to." It is hard not to relate the use here with the uses in vv.14 and 27. Cf. DRIVER and GRAY (1921); HABEL (1985).

<sup>79</sup>The cohortative is elsewhere used to introduce a conditional clause, as in 16:6, where it accompanies *im*. Cf. CLINES (1989), 429.

There is an unbalanced metric pattern to vv.14-15 that translations often correct by moving “houseguests” up from v.15a to be the subject of v.14b, thus making both “relatives” and “friends” the subject of 14a (e.g., NRSV but *pace*, e.g., KJV, NIV, JPS).<sup>80</sup> What is interesting about this is that the dispute involves a question about whether the *gry byty*, which literally means “guests in my house” (its precise meaning is uncertain), belongs to the group of terms clustered in vv.13-14 and 18-19 that are concerned with broader social relations, or with those of vv.15-17, which belong within the more intimate sphere of the household. The term’s isolation in the chapter’s stichometry corresponds to its unique semantic position in vv.13-19 of Job’s speech, for it brings the two spheres together, marking their permeability and openness toward one another even as it solidifies the sense that the two spheres are (normally) separable. This term’s isolation is even more interesting because of the way it constitutes a topologically precise correlate to Job’s position. Job describes his position as, contrary to the houseguest, a place to which both private and public worlds have closed themselves off in the very act of his exposure to them. Job inhabits a space that belongs neither to the public nor the private, but which simultaneously unites the two worlds around this exclusion that they share in common. Topologically, this space is congruent to that bitterness or darkness God opens up in his experience, that excessive dimension beyond/between guilt and innocence. This dimension can be depicted with overlapping circles, a Venn diagram, so long as the space of “overlap” is understood *not* as a space of conjunction but of disjunction (to capture this visually I have erased the points of intersection so that the circles appear turned in on themselves, limited from within). Job is what the public and private have in common, but Job is part neither of the public nor of the private.<sup>81</sup> Belonging neither to the public nor to the private, Job is nonetheless that

<sup>80</sup>So, for example, do POPE (1973, 131); HABEL (1985, 291); GORDIS (1978, 201); and Clines, who notes, “The transfer seems supported by 11QtgJob which has no ‘and’ preceeding ‘my servant-girl(s)’” (CLINES, 1989, 429), i.e., “maidservants” in v.15a. Clines follows KUTSCH (1982, 466-67).

<sup>81</sup>Such a notion of two things intersecting at a point that belongs to neither was famously put forward

(lack) which they both share.<sup>82</sup>

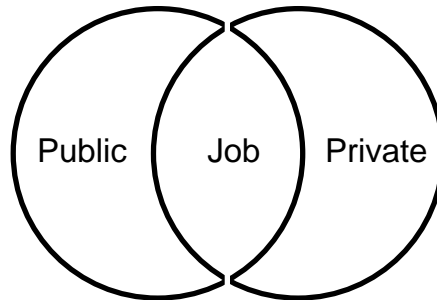


Figure 7.1: Job at the *Disjunction* of Public and Private Social Life

Not unlike the dunghill on which Job sits in the prologue (discussed on page 116), Job experiences himself in a place from which the world has shifted away by opening up. In this case, it has shifted away from him on two sides; together they are supposed to constitute the totality of social life but in this case they fail to contain the same object that exceeds them both.

#### 74 SHAME VERSUS GUILT

Having discussed a number of texts in which (i) Job's resolve for a Third is arrested and (ii) he subsequently assumes a different resolve toward his experience, I now hope to differentiate more clearly between these two resolute postures. I first need to distinguish my by LACAN (1977, 203-15) in his eleventh seminar as a way to understand the structure of the subject's alienation from himself upon entry into the Symbolic order, an entry which also alienates the Symbolic order from itself. This obverse side of alienation is why Lacan could put forward slogans such as, "There is no Other of the Other," "There is no such thing as metalanguage," or, finally, "The Other does not exist." See also the discussion in FINK (1995), 33-68; and the post-Lacanian use to which this paradoxical topology is put in the excellent work of MLADEN DOLAR, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), discussed further in CHAPTER 8.

<sup>82</sup>Lacan refers to this topology as the overlapping or superimposition of two lacks in LACAN (1977), 204,

use of shame here from its use in other contexts. First, my use of the notion of shame differs from those that would use the notion, along with honor, to describe cultures in which one's reputation or status is drawn primarily from social recognition.<sup>83</sup> To quote Julian Pitt-Rivers, honor is one's "*claim* to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his *right* to pride," whereas shame "is what makes a person sensitive to the pressure exerted by public opinion."<sup>84</sup> "Shame cultures" can then be opposed to "guilt cultures," such as my own, Western culture, whose members have developed an internal morality that no longer relies on the recognition of others. That such typologizing deployments of guilt and shame have an unfortunate and problematic history—up to and including the United States' attacks on "the Arab mind" in its recent wars, shamelessly documented by the Abu Ghraib photographs<sup>85</sup>—is well known. Again, this notion of shame is not operative here.

When I designate some of Job's experiences as experiences of shame, I follow Copjec's "curt and contrary thesis":

*The affects of guilt and shame are improperly used to define kinds of cultures; what they define, rather, are different relations to one's culture. I use culture here to refer to the form of life we inherit at birth (not our biological birth, but our birth into language), all those things – family, race, ethnicity, sex – we do not choose, but which choose us, the entire past that precedes us and marks our belatedness. The manner in which we assume this inheritance, and the way we understand what it means to keep faith with it, are... what distinguish shame from guilt.*<sup>86</sup>

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214.

<sup>83</sup>The discussions of this sense of shame are many and complex in biblical, anthropological, and historical studies. An excellent discussion and list of resources can be found in GALE A. YEE, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Women as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 40-48.

<sup>84</sup>JULIAN PITT-RIVERS, "Honour and Social Status" in *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* Edited by J. G. PERISTIANY. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 21, 42.

<sup>85</sup>See the discussion and resources cited in COPJEC (2009), 166-67.

<sup>86</sup>COPJEC (2009), 167.

Shame and guilt do not refer to kinds of cultures, especially not primitive versus advanced cultures, but to different modes of relating to culture. Guilt and shame are affects that one and the same member of a society can experience.

In what follows I use guilt and shame to designate two modes of relating to Job's experience. Much of the first half of this chapter has been occupied with guilt. At a surface level, the relationship should be obvious between guilt and Job's desire for a Third, the Law, the legal metaphor, and so on. So the notion of shame designates those aspects of Job's relationship to his experience that guilt fails to account for. Just after recounting his creation at God's hand, Job mentions both guilt and shame in the following passage,

And these things you treasured up in your heart,

I know that this was with you:

If I sinned, then you would watch me,

and from my iniquity you would not acquit me.

If I am guilty, woe to me; but I am righteous.

I cannot lift my head, sated with shame (*qālōn*) and look,<sup>87</sup> my misery.

(10:13-15)

According to Job, God created him so as to watch him sin and then judge him guilty (vv.13-14). But, he protests, he is righteous; he presents no guilt visible to the scrutinizing gaze of God (v.15a). At this point, mid-verse even, something happens that is similar to

<sup>87</sup> Admittedly, this verse is quite difficult. The final word is pointed as an imperative *r<sup>e</sup>ēh* (cf. Lam 1:9) whereas one expects an adjective, like the identically pointed *s<sup>e</sup>ba<sup>s</sup>*, "sated." But *r<sup>e</sup>ēh* is not only an imperative; it functions elsewhere as a stereotyped interjection like *hinnēh* (e.g., Deut 1:8; Qoh 7:27). See GESENIUS (2006 [1909, 1813]), §105b. Thus, while I translate it such that it can be read either as an imperative or an interjection, the context favors the latter insofar as it does not seem to issue a return to direct discourse ("look at my misery!") but instead functions more like an adjective describing his condition as one who is sated with shame and showing his misery ("behold, my misery"). Others argue that this is not the root *r<sup>h</sup>* but, as occurs in some words e.g., *g<sup>h</sup>*, a case of medial *ṽ/w* switch. *r<sup>w</sup>h* is a synonym of *s<sup>b</sup>*, which would read, "and saturated with my misery." While this produces a nice parallelism, emendations

that which occurred in those many texts surveyed in section 73. Job's resolute movement toward God halts, his fearless desire to make God see that there is no sinful part of him to be seen, gets choked up on shame. He bends his head low as he senses his exposure. What is exposed of him is not some part of him that is guilty, but a malaise that fills all of him.

Shame, Job testifies, is an experience of saturation. Shame draws Job's being entirely onto a single exposed plane, unlike guilt, which thrives on divisions between planes, such as hidden/seen, private/public, surface/depth. Those engaged in a trial are forever piercing the superficialities, penetrating into depths in search of the facts that would ground the true story.<sup>88</sup> I have cited several texts in which Job desires to symbolize his experience, to divide it up and undertake to determine of what, if anything, he may be guilty (see especially 10:2; 13:6, 17-18, and 23 discussed at the end of section 70.3). Shame, however, leaves nowhere to go. Shame cannot be symbolized like guilt; it cannot be calculated, objectified. Shame does not partition the self because it consumes and satiates the whole self. I am guilty of something, one says, but I am ashamed of myself.<sup>89</sup> But even this is somewhat misleading. As Copjec writes,

Strictly speaking, the syntagm "shame for" is a solecism; one feels shame neither for oneself nor for others. Shame is intransitive; it has no object in the ordinary sense. To experience it is to experience oneself as subject, not as a degraded or despised object. *I am not ashamed of myself, I am the shame I feel*. . . It is a sentiment that sharpens the sense of who one is but also, and this is crucial, consists of a feeling of not being integrated with who we are.<sup>90</sup>

that produce such harmony between parallel lines usually raise suspicions.

<sup>88</sup>Thus, Newsom's designation of the courtroom as a locus of "hermeneutics" is spot on (2003a, 158-60).

<sup>89</sup>Of course, one could define these terms differently and come to different understandings of them, ones that may support saying "I am ashamed of what I have done" or "I am as such guilty." In his analysis of shame on which this description draws, Steven Connor writes, "guilt relates to actions, shame to being. . . . The sinner can abhor her sin and the malefactor loathe the guilt in him. But the one in shame is always on the side of his shame, there being no other side for him to take" STEVEN CONNOR, "The Shame of Being a Man" <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/eh/skc/shame/>, (2000).

<sup>90</sup>COPJEC (2009), 167-68, emphasis added.

In 10:15 Job gives the impression of being caught unawares, stopped mid-verse by an on-rushing of shame as he suddenly switches from a certainty of his righteousness, a resolve to face any accuser, to the inability to face anything, the impossibility of lifting his head.<sup>91</sup> Job lowers his head, loses face, and, moreover, any partitions or stratifications of his being under the saturating flood of shame.<sup>92</sup> Being unable to lift his head is akin to being unable to keep the warm blood from blushing your cheeks and ears when embarrassed. Shame cannot be stopped. If Job's lowered head hides a rush of red into his cheeks, he becomes nothing but what is exposed of him, his lowered head. The same goes for Jerusalem and Nineveh in Jer 13:26 and Nah 3:5, where YHWH lifts their skirts to cover their faces. Such covering conceals nothing because there is no deeper plane of their being; their being is fully exposed by their denuded genitalia, which is why in both cases their experience is deemed shameful (*qalδn*).

Specifying shame as a saturating experience over and against the differentiating quest of guilt brings other texts to mind. Job's complaint in 10:15 that *he is so filled (šb) with shame that he is unable to lift his head* recalls his earlier accusation in 9:18 that *God so fills (šb) him with bitterness that he is unable to catch his breath*. This in turn brings us back to those many texts discussed above (in sections 55 and 73) in which Job describes his body as an inalienable alienness and relates his experiences of the halted movement of his desire. For example, in ch. 7 Job associates his inability to arise and his sense of the yawning abyss of night with an experience of saturated restlessness:

When (*im*) I lie down I say, "When will I arise?"

But the night stretches out;

I am sated (*šb*) with restlessness (*nddym*) until dawn.

(7:4)

<sup>91</sup>See Judg 8:28; Ps 110:7; and Zech 1:21 for other uses of the idiom "to lift one's head."

<sup>92</sup>Cf. Ps 83:17, which implies that there remains one place for the one in shame to turn: "Fill their faces with shame, so that they may seek your name, O YHWH."



Time stretches out and engulfs the sufferer just as trauma snatches its victim out of the flow of history. In 14:1 Job concludes that his experience is indicative of a human condition of being sated (*šb*) with *rōgez* (“anguish”), a term that serves a crucial role in Job’s description of his condition.<sup>93</sup>

The shift of Job’s subjective position, which I am referring to as a shift from guilt to shame, does not involve a change in the certainty or uncertainty of his disposition, but rather has to do with his posture with respect to the limit of his experience. This point is crucial for understanding the difference between shame and guilt. Guilt names that posture that seeks to push beyond this limit and I have cited several places where Job desires to penetrate below surfaces and enlighten dark corners. This is the posture of Nietzsche’s contemporaries before whom Nietzsche felt such repugnance when he wrote, “Nothing is so nauseating in [...] the believers in ‘modern ideas’ as their lack of shame, their complaisant impudence of eye and hand with which they touch, lick, and finger everything.”<sup>94</sup> Every limit beckons the one in guilt to transgress it.

But in Job’s experience of shame, the darkness does not conceal a separate essence for it is itself a presence; the opacity of that which he encounters does not invite him to transgress into it with his torch of reason for it bears an ontological weight. Job is constituted in his experience of shame not by the urge to go somewhere beyond his experience but by the absence of anywhere else to go and his consequent inhabitation of the surface level of his experience, a world of pure immanence.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>93</sup>Cf. 3:26 and the emphasis given this term throughout NEWSOM (2003a).

<sup>94</sup>FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 213.

<sup>95</sup>Apropos the epithet “pure immanence,” I intend to evoke its deep associations with G. Deleuze’s work, whom I pause to mention here amidst my descriptions of Job’s torment. In such a context it seems especially important to restrain ourselves from reaching any settled evaluation of shame, which by no means strips Job of his life. In fact, Deleuze allows one to re-think what is normally meant by a life (i.e., something imbued with consistency, meaning, a “project”) under the new sign of immanence. “We will say of pure immanence

Shame therefore differs from guilt in that it requires a limit to be recognized, honored. Guilt leads to the pointing of fingers, and has everyone looking at Job. They search for truth, justice, or reason, and want to calculate a possible cause. Such searching is sure to persist indefinitely and beyond any apparent limit because it operates on the basis of a reference to God as ultimately incalculable. When Job suffers the inalienable alienness at the root of his anxiety, guilt treats it as though it signaled something located somewhere else, as though it were alien, which is why those pursuant of guilt are willing to "touch, lick, and finger" any aspect of his experience.<sup>96</sup> If the posture of guilt has everyone looking at him from entrenched positions, shame names that which must be looked away from and infects everyone's posture. In 19:13-19 (quoted on page 308) Job is estranged from and loathesomely inapproachable to his kin, acquaintances, friends, guests, servants, wife, children, youths, intimate friends, and those he loves. It is Job's shame that has everyone looking away from him, looking awry at him in disgust. Again Job credits (or rather, *charges*) God as the cause of his condition, the one on account of which he and others encounter his being as an inalienable alienness, an abhorrent display of excessive *jouissance*. Job 19 opposes the shame-full responses in vv.13-19 to his three interlocutors who, he says in v.3, shamelessly (*l-bwš*) humiliate (*klm*) and wrong (*hkr*) him.

## 75 VISIBLE DARKNESS

There is probably no better image for what Job thinks his experience exposes than darkness or invisibility. Job's complains in several places of being unable to see God, the source of that it is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life. A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is complete power, complete bliss. It is to the degree that he goes beyond the aporias of the subject and the object that Johann Fichte, in his last philosophy, presents the transcendental field as a *life*, no longer dependent on a Being or submitted to an Act—it is an absolute immediate consciousness whose very activity no longer refers to a being but is ceaselessly posed in a life" GILLES DELEUZE, "Immanence: A Life" in *Pure Immanence: Essays on Life* (New York: Zone Books, 2001b), 27.

<sup>96</sup>Paradigmatically, I think of chs. 29-31 and 22:6-11 as texts in which Job and the friends—in this case,

his disjunctive experience. In ch. 9 he says,

He passes by me but I do not *see* (*rḥ*);

he goes by but I do not *perceive* (*byn*) him.

(9:11)

In 13:24 he asks God, “Why do you hide (*str*) your face?” (cf. 13:20), and speaks in 23:8-9 of being unable to find God despite traveling in every direction. It is worth noting that JOB, whose anthropomorphic tendencies are well known (think especially of the prologue), never lifts this veil. God resists the imaginary; Job in no way images God. Instead, Job fundamentally relates to God through his body, and specifically, through his non-rapport with his body.

On the one hand, this is not surprising. God has been depicted as the one who sees without being seen often and by many different voices, including God’s own in Deut 31:18. So why is Job’s blindness more than some mere mystical reverie about God’s ineffable presence? Because God is not beyond the visible but its inner limit.<sup>97</sup> God causes Job’s blindness. Job complains in ch. 17 that, because of God,

My *eyes* (*yny*) fail from vexation;

my limbs<sup>98</sup> are all<sup>99</sup> like a shadow.

(17:7)

In ch. 16 he complains of a deep darkness on his eyes:

My face is red from weeping,

and deep darkness (*slmwṭ*) is on my *eyelids* (*ṣṣpy*).

(16:16)

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Eliphaz—assume such a posture.

<sup>97</sup>This is, in other words, yet another instance in which JOB renders God immanent to the limits of phenomena, not their transcendent or unlimited noumena.

<sup>98</sup>Cf. discussion in CLINES (1989), 373. Literally, “my formed parts.”

<sup>99</sup>Contra CLINES (1989), 373 who reprints this to read the participle of the verb *klh*, which has many

And in ch. 23, although many find Job's claim unacceptable and emend the verse,<sup>100</sup> Job says that he cannot see God by God's own doing:

Were I to go east, then he would not be there;  
and west, then I would not *perceive* (*byn*) him;  
north, by his doing I would have no *vision* (*ʕz*);  
he would conceal himself (*tp*) south so that I would not *see* (*rh*).

(23:8-9)

In ch. 19 he says,

[God] has immured my path so that I cannot pass,  
and upon my ways has laid darkness (*hšk*).

(19:8)

In ch. 12 Job characterizes God's work in the world as follows,

He uncovers the depths of darkness (*hšk*),  
and brings to light deep darkness (*slmw*).

(12:22)

The cause—i.e., God—of Job's anxiety-provoking alienation from himself is a blind spot in his field of view. This is not just any blind spot, but a kind of visible smudge brought to light by God. God is not located outside the sensible realm of vision but within it, in the non-phenomenal manifestation of invisibility.<sup>101</sup> The affect of this manifestation is, as supporting verses but little effect on meaning.

<sup>100</sup>See the discussion and rejection of such emendations on page 251. Clines' disbelief that leads him to pose the following rhetorical question is simply unwarranted against the evidence listed here: "it can hardly be that the reason why God cannot be found in the other quarters is that he is hiding himself. . . for why would he do that?" (CLINES, 2006, 578).

<sup>101</sup>I write "non-phenomenal" to capture the darkness in its invisibility, the sense in which it surfaces within the phenomenal field without thereby taking on a phenomenal or visible form. This notion is developed to a greater extent in JOAN COPJEC, "The Phenomenal Nonphenomenal: Private Space in *Film Noir*" in *Shades of Noir: A Reader* Edited by JOAN COPJEC. (London: Verso, 1993), esp. 188-90.

argued in CHAPTER 5, oftentimes anxiety,<sup>102</sup> as in ch. 23 where Job says, after telling us moments before that God is invisible,

Therefore, before his face I am terrified; I consider well and I fear before him;  
El has enfeebled my heart, and Shadday has terrified me.

(23:15-16)

Like the Gorgon, to be before God's face means to perceive the invisible, to see what cannot be seen.<sup>103</sup> I do not mean that God's face is something that exists or that happens, something Job sees that cannot be seen by the friends, but rather that God's face represents to Job what cannot be seen, what cannot be represented. Job does not see or know anything about God's face, the proximity of which is only indicated by the arousal of his anxiety. Just as I found in several places above (e.g., in section 55), God's presence arouses Job's anxiety, which he describes as an impossibility of being at one with himself. God's presence makes Job other than himself and exposes to him the impossibility of being at one with himself. God's face and Job's blindness are one and the same impossibility of seeing, of representation.

In addition to these texts in which Job associates God with the exposure and visibility of the invisible, there are others in which he speaks about his experience of the exposure of phenomena upon which no one can look. Consider the following examples of what his experience makes visible:

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<sup>102</sup>Newsom has alerted me to a wonderful filmic illustration. Oftentimes when the invisibility cloak is donned in *Harry Potter*, those who are in its presence manifest their awareness of it in an anxious look or pause. The videography even sometimes indicates this non-phenomenal manifestation of presence by smudging the image. The viewer is thus encouraged to imagine that nothing is added to or subtracted from phenomenal reality by virtue of its presence, and yet others can "sense" its non-sensible presence. Freud called this sense of the non-sensible "the uncanny," which I discuss on page 228).

<sup>103</sup>Cf. AGAMBEN (2002), 53.

Let the day on which I was born perish. . .

For it did not shut the doors of my womb,

and hide (*str*) trouble (*ml*) from my eyes (*myny*).

(3:3a, 10)

The next time he speaks he says to his friends,

You see (*rh*) terror (*htt*) and you fear (*yr*).

(6:21b)

And to God,

Remember that my life is a breath,

my eye (*yny*) will never again see (*rh*) good (*tub*).<sup>104</sup>

You terrify me (*htt*) with dreams,

and frighten me (*bt*) with visions (*mhzynwt*).

(7:7, 14)

Still later, he complains,

I cannot lift my head,

sated with shame and look (*rh*), my misery (*ny*).

(10:15b)

Job's experience makes visible to him trouble, terror, nothing good, frightening visions, and misery. The primary characteristic of these phenomena is the impossibility of sustaining one's gaze upon them.<sup>105</sup> In 6:20-21 Job suggests that his friends are shamed, disgraced,

<sup>104</sup>Cf. 9:25: "My days are swifter than a runner; they flee and see (*rh*) no good (*l-tôbâh*)."

<sup>105</sup>I am thinking here of Shoah survivors' testimony to the impossibility of gazing upon the *Muselmänner*. Levi refers to them as a "faceless presence" in whose image "all the evil of our time," if it were possible, could be enclosed (AGAMBEN, 2002, 44). They are those for whom sympathy was impossible, as another survivor wrote: "The other inmates, who continually feared for their lives, did not even judge him worthy of being looked at. For the prisoners who collaborated, [they] were a source of anger and worry; for the SS, they were merely useless garbage" (AGAMBEN, 2002, 43). Agamben relates the story of Aldo Carpi, a

and fearful of the terror they see. And in ch. 3 Job curses the day of his birth because it did not keep hidden the trouble that should have remained out of his sight, and he longs there and elsewhere (e.g., ch. 7) for some distance from the terrible sights he sees.

In sum, God is responsible for two different modes whereby the limit of the visual field appears as something internal to this field itself. First, God's presence makes visible a non-phenomenal darkness, an invisibility uncaptured by the specular field. Second, God's presence makes visible phenomena of inhuman misery upon which it is impossible to gaze, phenomena that extend beyond the boundaries of the specular field. In neither case does the appearance of the limit suggest the presence of something that lies outside of the specular field, some substance that has a simple external relationship to this field. It is instead the appearance of an immanent limit, of something that cannot be captured by speaking simply of visibility or invisibility, and that requires me to speak of a visible invisibility and an invisible visibility. In both cases, its appearance is accompanied by the onset of shame.<sup>106</sup>

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painting professor who was deported to Gusen, where he remained for over a year: "He managed to survive because the SS began to commission paintings and drawings from him once they discovered his profession. They mostly commissioned family portraits... Italian landscapes and 'Venetian nudes'... Carpi was not a realistic painter, and yet one can understand why he wanted to paint the actual scenes and figures from the camp. But his commissioners had absolutely no interest in such things; indeed, they did not even tolerate the sight of them. 'No one wants camp scenes and figures,' Carpi notes in his diary, 'no one wants to see the *Muselmann*'" (2002, 50). Agamben concludes by writing, "As Elias Canetti has noted, a heap of dead bodies is an ancient spectacle, one which has often satisfied the powerful. But the sight of *Musselmänner* is an absolutely new phenomenon, unbearable to human eyes" (2002, 51). Although I do not wish to suggest that the *Muselmann* provides some sort of paradigm for understanding Job's experience, I do think he similarly presents a "new phenomenon" upon which it is impossible to gaze.

<sup>106</sup>The unique ontological status of the "object" that appears to Job is the same as that of Lacan's *objet petit a*, discussed in section 58. About the *objet petit a*, LACAN (2006e, 693) writes, "A common characteristic of these objects as I formulate them is that they have no specular image... It is to this object that cannot be grasped in the mirror that the specular image lends its clothes."

The non-phenomenal character of the darkness afforded Job by his experience is why I suggested that it could be figured by an unconventional Venn diagram of the sort that figure 7.1 on page 310 used to depict ch. 19's positioning of Job with respect to social relations. The specular field, consisting of visible and invisible phenomena, is limited by the manifestation in the phenomenal field of a non-phenomenal darkness:

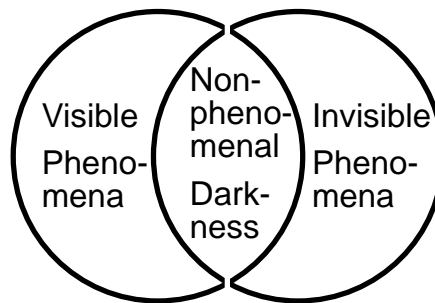


Figure 7.2: Darkness, Limiting the Specular Field from Within

Job experiences the boundary between the visible and the invisible not as a limit that separates the specular field from something that escapes or lies outside it, but as what divides it from within, its immanent limit.

We can easily grasp the importance of this insistence on immanence by noting how one can characterize the failures of scholarly celebrations of the legal metaphor (see section 71) as failures to come to terms with it. Such celebrations often accompany more or less explicit critiques of God's absence from the courtroom. Job is presented as some sort of early exemplar of *Ideologiekritik* who harangues God for failing to show up. The invisible silence of God being placed in the courtroom as a register of God's absence, that is, a register of God's presence on another stage, in another place, forces the interpreter to conclude that God could be there were it not for some contingency/ies and that any possible encounter with God's presence could only happen in some future moment. What is presented as an ideology-critique of theology, however, turns out to perform the most ideological of theo-



logical moves, safely installing God in a realm transcendent to the Bible and to experience, and thus safely protecting the Bible and experience from God's presence. What is avoided is thus the traumatic presence of God to which Job's testimony testifies, a presence that is not transcendent to the courtroom but the courtroom's immanent limit, that which keeps it from ever constituting itself. In short, the celebrants of the legal metaphor often fail to apprehend the text because they transpose Job's testimony about the non-phenomenal character of God into testimony about a God that resides beyond phenomena, inevitably in something like a Kantian noumena or a Platonic ideal.

#### 76 EXPOSURE AND CONCEALMENT

At this point I need to consider the nature of the relationship between shame and exposure and how, if at all, social censure is involved in it. It is not uncommon to think of shame as a product of social censure, something close to embarrassment or conscience. This, however, is another common conception from which Job's experience departs. Job's shame does not arise from social censure or guilt, but rather from his encounter with a dimension beyond the reach of categories such as dignity, guilt, or innocence. A number of psychoanalytic and philosophical investigations have come to a similar conclusion—that shame is experienced beyond the superego pressure to calculate, beyond good and evil. Since I have already begun to demonstrate the close affinity of this conclusion to Job's experience, a more in-depth exploration of these other conversations will likely bear fruit for my own analysis. Furthermore, they may also help clarify a lingering question. For, to say that in guilt all eyes fixate on Job whereas shame leads to the aversion of gazes is in some sense to tie shame to exposure. The question is, then, in what sense?

In Levinas's brief but brilliant early essay "On Escape," he writes,

On first analysis, shame appears to be reserved for phenomena of a moral order: one feels ashamed for having acted badly, for having deviated from the norm. . . Yet shame's whole

intensity... consists precisely in our inability not to identify with this being who is already foreign to us and whose motives for acting we can no longer comprehend.<sup>107</sup>

Shame is not an affect that arises when one senses oneself under the censorious scrutiny of an other, but is what arises when one is confronted with the impossibility of escape from one's being.<sup>108</sup> This being may be our own but, as Levinas says, it is "foreign to us," a being "we can no longer comprehend." In other words, it is that inalienable alienness I tied to the onset of anxiety in CHAPTER 5.

But, again, I worry that this linkage of shame to a confrontation with the impossibility of escape may still suggest a tie between shame and social censure insofar as it sounds so similar to a feeling of being caught. Therefore I want to consider J.-P. Sartre's deservedly famous commentary on *le regard*<sup>109</sup> ("the look"; following Lacan's translators I refer to it as "the gaze"), in which a voyeur who peers through a keyhole or hunts for something outdoors vanishes in his intense investment into the scene upon which he looks. His absorption into his act is interrupted when he encounters some sensible manifestation, such as a foot in the corridor or the rustling of leaves, that signals the presence of (some) others for whom he exists. It is only at this moment that the voyeur exists as a subject, at the moment "a gaze surprises him... disturbs him, overwhelms him and reduces him to a feeling of shame."<sup>110</sup> Just as was the case for Levinas, Sartre does not think that shame arises because the voyeur has been caught doing something wrong; the rustled leaves do not represent the Law and make him feel guilty or embarrassed; the shame has not to do with the perversity of the look. Instead, shame is "the feeling that attends the insertion of the subject into

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<sup>107</sup>LEVINAS (2003), 63.

<sup>108</sup>Similarly, Agamben writes, "[Shame] is nothing less than the fundamental sentiment of being *a subject*, in the two apparently opposed senses of this phrase: to be subjected and to be sovereign. Shame is what is produced in the absolute concomitance of subjectification and desubjectification, self-loss and self-possession, servitude and sovereignty" (AGAMBEN, 2002, 107).

<sup>109</sup>In SARTRE (1992).

<sup>110</sup>LACAN (1977), 84.

society, his sudden immersion in a world of others. This insertion into the social precedes all measure and every rule by which a subject might find himself judged.”<sup>111</sup> The subject experiences not only the presence of others who impinge upon his freedom, but also his bodily limitation. He whose body and being were absorbed into his act moments before is now reminded of his vulnerably embodied and finite existence.

Contrary to how this experience may sound, Sartre does not think of it as one of enlightenment. Following what are basically the twinned philosophical axioms that (i) the self cannot be experienced as a coincidence of the self with itself and that (ii) others are not immediately experienced as such, Sartre repeatedly states that the self that is experienced in shame as well as the other from whom the gaze is supposed to emanate are “unrevealed” and must remain indeterminate. Sartre says that if I determine which eye sees me, the gaze disappears, and that under the gaze, I do not see the eye that looks at me, by which he protects his account of the birth of the social from relying upon any determination of self and others. In other words, for Sartre, exposure and concealment (being and nothingness) occur simultaneously in the experience of shame. And this accords well with Job’s experience.

As I saw in those texts discussed in section 73, Job testifies to an experience of shameful exposure that similarly occurs beyond or between or outside of judgment and what is exposed is, in a sense, “unrevealed.” Job is fully exposed to the totality of public and private relations but, by this, finds himself in a place from which they have turned away (cf. 19:13-19). And he himself turns away from the object of his desire, toward darkness, bitterness, adversity (cf. 23:17; 10:1; 7:11), i.e., toward that excess of life beyond his dignity that his experience has exposed. As Sartre said, what is made apparent is unrevealed. There is a concealment simultaneous to the exposure and consequent dissolution of Job’s being. The unrevealed darkness that is made apparent becomes the aim of Job’s subsequent resolve.

Following Levinas and Sartre, it might seem that what is exposed of Job is his limitation,

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<sup>111</sup>COPJEC (2009), 176.

his inability to displace into a structure of guilt the alienness that sticks to him and causes his anxiety.<sup>112</sup> The absence of the imperative of flight, of Job's subtractive desire, would therefore be a function of the passivity of the experience of shame, i.e., the exposure of Job's complete subjection to his finite, bodily existence. It is already clear, however, that this does not account for Job's experience of shame. Job's shame arises when his investment in his desire to flee what causes him anxiety falters, whereupon not only is his active submission to an impossible desire put on display, but he also appears slightly detached from himself and from visibility.<sup>113</sup> Job's appearance as one who is perishing simultaneously betrays a place where he is hiding from every eye. Furthermore, Job's experience of shame does not destroy or weaken his desire but redirects it onto that which his experience makes available to him (darkness, misery, bitterness, adversity).

The next section takes up in greater detail this dark, bitter, adverse dimension to which Job's attention turns in those moments he expresses his resolve to speak, not of something of which his experience deprives him, but of something his experience affords him.

#### 77 UNCONTAINED EXPOSURE

Job makes it clear from several angles that the darkness his experience presents to him, the deep darkness that falls on his eyes (16:16) and is laid upon his path (19:8), is no mere

<sup>112</sup>Levinas writes, for example, "What appears in shame is thus precisely the fact of being riveted to oneself, the radical impossibility of fleeing oneself to hide from oneself, the unalterably binding presence of the I to itself [*du moi à soi-même*]" (LEVINAS, 2003, 64). Cf. JOAN COPJEC, "May '68, the Emotional Month" in *Lacan: The Silent Partners* Edited by SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK. (London: Verso, 2006), 103.

<sup>113</sup>This is to say that Job testifies to an experience of shame that departs from Levinas and Sartre and is captured only once we account for Lacan's contribution to the analysis of shame. For a discussion of Lacan's contribution, see COPJEC (2009), 165–86; COPJEC (2006), 90–114. For a more general discussion of shame and affect in psychoanalysis and their relationship to recent findings in the neurosciences, see ADRIAN JOHNSTON, "Misfelt Feelings: Psychoanalysis, Neuroscience, Philosophy, and Unconscious Affect" in CATHERINE MALABOU AND ADRIAN JOHNSTON, *Auto-affection and Emotional Life: Psychoanalysis and Neurology* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

light deprivation. Neither is it merely something he is currently suffering or has recently suffered. At the end of ch. 10 Job speaks of a void of darkness, a deep darkness that extends beyond himself, his world, and beyond God, as a land he expects to enter.

Are my days not few? So cease;

turn away from me so that I may smile a little.

Before I go and never return,

to a land of darkness (*ḥšk*) and deep darkness (*šlmwt*),

a land of gloom (*ʿypth*), like thick, deep darkness (*ʿpl šlmwt*),

and without order, where it shines like blackness (*ʿpl*).

(10:20-22)

Job again speaks of darkness as something other than light deprivation at the end of ch. 17, when he admonishes his friends for thinking that darkness and light, night and day, are continuous:

Come back and I shall not find a wise one among you.

My days have passed; my plans, my heart's desire<sup>114</sup> is broken off.

They assign night to day (*lylh lywm yšymw*),<sup>115</sup>

light, near the presence of darkness (*ʿwr qrw b mḥny-ḥšk*).

<sup>114</sup>This verse and the next are quite difficult and have given rise to various emendations. Here I read with most others who think this word (*mwršy*) is not from *yrš* (i.e., “property, inheritance”) but *ʿrš*, meaning desire. However, I do not want to rule out the rather obvious play that may be at work here on the many possible connections between property and desire and that, incidentally, may also be present in Mic 1:14.

<sup>115</sup>Many translations struggle with this verse, which is not in the Old Greek. Some (e.g., NRSV) take the *l*-preposition as a marker of a datival goal, as it sometimes functions with things made (cf. Mic 1:6; WALTKE and O’CONNOR, 1990, §11.2.10e), i.e., “They make night into day.” Given the context, I find other readings preferable, each of which corresponds to a different lexical sense of “day.” First, there is a temporal sense like the terminative (cf. WALTKE and O’CONNOR, 1990, §11.2.10c), such that Job would be rebuking the friends for thinking that the night is that which endures *until* day, that is, for thinking of day and night as equal and alternating parts that couple together to constitute a twenty-four hour period. Alternatively, the preposition could be read possessively (WALTKE and O’CONNOR, 1990, §11.2.10d), such that the night would

If I must await (*qwh*) Sheol as my home,  
 Spread my couch in darkness (*hšk*),  
 Proclaim to the pit, "You are my father,"  
 To the worm, "My mother, my sister,"  
 Where, then,<sup>116</sup> is my hope (*tqwt*)?  
 Who, then, can see my hope (*tqwt*)?  
 Will it descend with me<sup>117</sup> to Sheol?  
 Shall we go down together into the dust?

(17:10b-16)

Job initially complains about an historical rupture created by his experience, the way it has disabled any projection of himself into the future ("my plans are broken off").<sup>118</sup> He *belongs to day*, which would imply that they reckon day the genus in which night is a species. The parallel line does not help us decide between the two insofar as the position it ascribes to the opponents—that light is proximate to darkness—supports both readings. But, perhaps the assumption shared by both of these readings is precisely what Job is attacking as false, namely, the assumption of day as genus. In the possessive sense, day obviously functions as genus. In the temporal sense, however, this use is implicit. In order for day to be perceived as a complement of night, some neutral, universal background must be posited as the frame within which the equal alternation occurs. This background is also signified by day elsewhere. In other words, if the preposition is read in the temporal sense, then day must perform double duty, not only signifying the period that alternates with nighttime, but also the twenty-four hour period in which day and night alternate (as in Gen 1:5, when God calls the light "day" and the darkness "night" and yet the day and the night together constitute one "day"). Job rejects this assumption because he identifies night with what runs like a crack through day that prevents it from constituting a complete and delimited frame for subjective existence, and that enables day to become alien to itself.

<sup>116</sup>The conditional ("if" in vv.13-14, "then" in vv.15-16) does not suggest that the pit and the worm will not produce something new of Job, this he takes as axiomatic; it serves rather to admonish his opponents for their baseless assumption that Job could hope in the nature of what is to be. Because Job knows nothing of this nature, he is unable to hope in it.

<sup>117</sup>Parallelism favors reading with the LXX (*ἢ μετ' ἐμοῦ*), as does CLINES (1989, 375), and not with the MT: "to the bars of Sheol."

<sup>118</sup>For a discussion and a more precise description of the phenomenological connection between the onset

complains that his opponents, whom he finds unwise, think night belongs to day and light is near darkness. Job does not think that his experience of the night is dark because it is located at the other end of a continuum with the light of day. Job thinks that the darkness is the origin of something new<sup>119</sup>; Job proclaims the pit his father and the worm his mother and sister.<sup>120</sup> His rejection of hope continues his rejection of his unwise opponents (his friends and scholars alike) who exhort him with the false hope that escape is possible, that there is some enlightened place where he could go to escape his condition. It is absurd to think that hope goes down to Sheol with him, for there what shines is like blackness (10:22). The dark place where he is going may have been made visible by his experience, but it is not transparent to him or anyone else; its opaqueness remains. Since nothing about this place can be known (thus again confirming its non-phenomenal character), Job finds it absurd to speak of hoping in it.

In ch. 7 Job says that his experience is carrying him to a place no eye can follow. The eye watching him will not be able to see him because he will no longer be, and the one whom he will become will be unrecognizable. This place is a place about which nothing can be foreseen except that it is the site of the creation of something new, something of Job's anxiety and the disappearance of all his plans/projections and desires/hopes, see the Heideggarian description in NEMO (1998), 24-27.

<sup>119</sup>Incidentally, Job is not the only figure in the Hebrew Bible to think that newness comes out of a gap that (dis)joins light and darkness, day and night. The fact that it is a negative space of disjunction, and not a positively established framework, means that what constitutes any particular determination of the difference between them can be overturned. Any guarantee of its stability or operator of such overturning is paradigmatically ascribed to YHWH. So, for example, Jeremiah can say, "Thus says YHWH, 'If you could break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night so that they would not come at their time, only then could my covenant with my servant David be broken'" (Jer 33:20-21a); but Zechariah can imagine the day of YHWH as a day on which "there shall not be light. . . and it will be a day, known only to YHWH, without day and without night; and there will be light at evening time" (Zech 14:6, 7).

<sup>120</sup>One cannot but think here of Job's similar statement in the prologue (1:21: "Naked I came out of the womb of my mother, and naked I shall return there"), about which I made a similar point in CHAPTER 3 (see section 27).

that will not even be recognizable by its own home. Instead of hope, Job characteristically expresses resolve and persistence about the possibilities he anticipates from the direction his experience carries him.

Remember that my life is a breath,  
my eye will never again see good.  
The eye that watches me will not observe me;  
your eye will be with me but there will be no me.  
As a cloud ends and vanishes,  
so do those who go down to Sheol not come up.  
He will never return to his home;  
his place will no longer recognize him.  
As for me, I will not restrain my mouth;  
I will speak in the adversity of my spirit,  
I will meditate on the bitterness of my soul.

(7:7-11)

Job is sure nothing and no one, not even God, will be able to follow him where his experience is carrying him, but he resolves in v.11 to persist nonetheless in this direction.

In ch. 13 Job famously locates the source of his salvation in his resoluteness to contend with God:

Be silent before me that I may speak,  
whatever may come over me.  
Why do I place my flesh in my teeth, and take my life in my hand?  
If he kills me, I will not wait; but I will argue my path to his face.  
And this shall be my salvation.  
Surely no godless person will approach him.

(13:13-16)



All that I have said to this point suggests that here salvation cannot mean justification. Job is well aware that he cannot expect justification. Indeed, he has no expectations (“Whatever may come. . .”). His salvation comes not because he can articulate a case he feels certain the Other will recognize, but because he takes his life in his hand, regardless of what God may desire to do to him. Job does not succumb to the temptation to seek some eye of the storm, some inner chamber into which he could withdraw, above or below the fray of his thought or his body. Job knows his speech places him in the face of God, as well as the problems and violence inherent to this encounter which has defaced him by alienating him from himself and dislocating him into a space that is unbreachable by any gaze (cf. 10:18). He refuses any mystical silence and insists instead on speaking. Job views what is at stake in his speech as the very material and ontological dimension of his being when he likens the speech from his mouth to his flesh in his teeth, and when he identifies his death with one possible consequence of his speech. Job finally locates his salvation in the corporeal experience of himself in God’s presence that speaking his case affords him.<sup>121</sup>

Let me return, once more, to the conclusion to ch. 23, Job’s statement on the terrifying darkness God’s presence makes present to him<sup>122</sup>:

<sup>121</sup>In ways that anticipate recent neuroscientific research, one of Lacan’s fundamental insights was into the way in which psychoanalysis problematizes any hard and fast distinction between the material, libidinal, and affective forces related to the body, and the more-than-material ideational and representational signifiers used by speaking beings. Lacan insists “language is not immaterial” in part because of his realization of the material effects produced by signifiers on speaking beings (LACAN, 2006a, 248). On the connections between Lacanian metapsychology and the neurosciences, cf. JOHNSTON (forthcoming).

<sup>122</sup>HABEL (1985, 347) writes apropos 23:17, which he considers a cry of lament framing the speech with v.2, it “follows the poet’s favorite practice of closing a speech with the theme of death or darkness (7:21; 10:21-22; 12:24-25; 14:18-20; 17:11-16).”

Therefore I am terrified before his face;  
 I consider and I fear before him;  
 El has enfeebled my heart; Shadday has terrified me;  
 Yet I am not silenced in the face of darkness (*hšk*);  
 though blackness (*ʔl*) covers my face.

(23:15-17)

This is yet another text in which Job speaks of the darkness as a progenitor of something new and not simply as something "out there" awaiting him. It is a place in which his speech rises in his present and traces the contours of the black void that God has hollowed out of himself and his world, and it is a place from which every eye, even God's, is distanced. In these moments Job becomes bat-like; guided by his speech he flies not from but into the surface of his being,<sup>123</sup> into the thick darkness that falls over him in folds behind which his face is effaced.<sup>124</sup> He no longer tries in vain to distance himself from his traumatic experience of God's presence and instead finds himself in a different relationship toward it. In this dark void Job finds himself in a place so distanced from any eye, from himself, his world, and from God, that he could transform all three.

#### 78 ADDENDUM: JOB'S FINAL SPEECHES

Although I claimed to be going beyond Newsom, it seems I have done so only to catch up to her at the point at which she too ventures beyond the point at which I left her. In the final section of her chapter, Newsom turns from the analysis of the ways in which Job uses the legal metaphor to oppose the friends' discourse of traditional piety, to the final cycle of speeches, in which the friends oddly fall silent and Job oddly articulates their

<sup>123</sup>COPJEC (2006, 111) discusses the distinction between a flight from and a flight into being vis-à-vis shame.

<sup>124</sup>I hope the final words of this sentence signal my conviction that Job's final stance should be understood ultimately as anti-Levinasian.

arguments about the fate of the wicked and, even more oddly, he does so as refutations of their perspective. The conventional approach she relates as follows:

The presence of these words in Job's mouth seems to many commentators so out of place that they propose that the third cycle of speeches has been disturbed. . . According to many versions of this theory, the material in 24:18-25 and 27:12-23 originally formed part of the speeches of Bildad and Zophar. The difficulty, however, is that no textual evidence exists to support such a theory. It is simply a desperate gesture in response to an interpretive embarrassment.<sup>125</sup>

Of those who appear to depart from convention by interpreting the words as Job's, some have recourse to a notion of the sarcastic tonality with which Job is supposed to speak them. But, Newsom says, such interpretations offer no real alternative insofar as they still understand the speech as Bildad's and Zophar's, albeit with a sarcastic tone, whereas Job presents it as his own (24:25). The straightforward reading of the words as evidence that Job has changed his mind and accepted the friends' arguments also fails because it ignores the way in which Job presents the arguments as refutations of theirs (see 24:25 and 27:12).

As is characteristic of her work as a whole, Newsom is more interested in the discursive effect of Job's speech than in hammering down a stable meaning. She understands both passages in question as Job's attempts to speak about his experience of what Buber calls "the rent in the heart of the world," but she considers each independently because they "do not present identical interpretive problems."<sup>126</sup> Chapter 24 opposes what are present injustices (vv.1-17) to a justice that should be (vv.18-24). Newsom suggests that Job's use of the fate of the wicked topos can be read analogously to his use of the legal metaphor:

Job's exploration of the legal metaphor enabled him to envision as a real possibility both God's recognition of the claims of justice and God's violent repudiation of them. Analogously, Job can imagine the working out of justice against evildoers, even as he knows the realities of injustice.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>125</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 161. <sup>126</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 165. <sup>127</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 166.

But she is not finally happy with this reading, complaining that its logical coordination of the two claims of the chapter into "what is versus what could be" improperly reduces the dissonance which she sees as a reflection of Job's experience. Speaking dissonantly, she says, effects on its hearers "a painful cognitive dissonance, a loss of mastery, that is an echo, however faint, of what Job has experienced of the world."<sup>128</sup> Job's speech, in other words, makes sensible (however faintly) the void that he has experienced.

In ch. 27, Job expresses his desire that his enemies be as the wicked to whom, he says, God apportions a fate that cannot but sound like his own. Most notably for my purposes, he says that the wicked are those whom "terrors (*blhwt*) overtake like the waters [and] a whirlwind carries off at night" (v.20). Newsom once again entertains the temptation to see the dissonance between Job's position and his speech according to the logical relation between *what is* and *what could be but is not*, but she rejects this reading insofar as it risks reducing the effect of the inverted coherency of Job's speech, i.e., the way in which it manifests incoherency. She concludes with a comment on the discursive effect,

No wonder the friends have nothing to say. They speak a language of sanity in a presumably sane world. Job speaks a language bordering on madness in a world turned upside down. Job's language, however, has the quality of a dare or provocation. He has mastered one of the possible languages of subversive resistance in a totalitarian world. When the one whose existence contradicts the dominant ideology that he nevertheless speaks, while his body silently witnesses to the truth, he lays out the scandal for all to see.<sup>129</sup>

The connection with the above interpretation should be clear. In Job's earlier speeches too, I argued, Job's body silently witnesses to the truth despite, and yet only by means of, his speech. Job's corporeal experience of himself in God's presence is not something he could fully relate through his speech, which always says too much or too little. But it is his speech that affords him this experience, into which we are also drawn by his testimony. And it is in his speech that, Job tells us, salvation lies, in the void in which it traces and offers

<sup>128</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 167. <sup>129</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 168.

a glimpse of a space of newness, the space from which the limits of dominant ideologies burgeon. From these limits, Job gives voice to WISDOM.

## Part III

# The Ethics of a Vanishing Mediator

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**Job 28: From Metaphor to Metonymy**


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A man plucked a nightingale and, finding  
but little to eat, said: *You are just  
a voice and nothing more.*

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Plutarch

## 79 INTRODUCTION TO JOB 28

The third and final part of this dissertation contains three chapters. While this chapter and the next interrogate two very different texts—the so-called “speculative wisdom poem” in ch. 28 and the divine speeches recorded in 38-41—they share some similarities<sup>1</sup> and differ in kind from those texts part 2 treats as participants in a dialogue.

This chapter has two main sections. The first, longer section contends that the poem in Job 28 should be read as a movement from metonymy in vv.1-19 to metaphor in vv.20-

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<sup>1</sup>More particular similarities between the two, especially chs. 28 and 38, are often noted. Some even claim that to read ch. 28 where it lies “would weaken tremendously the impact of the God speeches and, in fact, make them anticlimactic. For it expresses the same fundamental theme, though set forth more briefly — the world is a mystery to man, who will never be able to penetrate the great supernal Wisdom by which God has created and governs the universe” GORDIS (1978), 298. For a similar sentiment, see LEO G. PERDUE, *Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991), 84. Ultimately, Gordis believes that the author of JOB wrote the poem in ch. 28 but did not intend it to be a part of the book, which it probably became because it was “preserved with the other writings of the poet by his early readers and admirers and included by a copyist” (GORDIS, 1978, 298). In any case, one can look to ELWOLDE (2003) for a lengthy discussion of the particular parallels between chs. 28 and 38; or,

27. The second considers two sets of consequences that stem from my reassessment of the poem: (i) what this reading means for the debates about the relationship of v.28 to both the preceding verses (vv.1-27) and the preceding dialogue (chs. 3-27), and (ii) what this reading means for the poem's awkward placement within the book. First, therefore, I offer the translation to which the ensuing exegetical analysis will refer.

## 80 JOB 28: TEXT AND TRANSLATION

<i>kî yēš lakeseṗ mōṣā</i>	1a	Surely silver has a vein, <sup>2</sup>
<i>ûmāqôm lazzāhāb yāzōqqû</i>	1b	and a place where gold is refined.
<i>barzel mēāpār yuqqāḥ</i>	2a	Iron from dross is taken,
<i>weben yāṣûq n<sup>e</sup>ḥûšāh</i>	2b	and rock pours forth <sup>3</sup> copper.

cf. the shorter list in GELLER (1987, 177n.1).

<sup>2</sup>Lit.: "a place of exit."

<sup>3</sup>*yāṣûq* could either be read as the Qal passive participle of *yṣq* or the Qal imperfect 3ms of *ṣwq*. The two roots are likely byforms both meaning "to pour out." The parallel with the passive verb in v.2a makes the passive reading appealing (as, for example, in HABEL, 1985, 389), but then the need arises to gap the corresponding preposition. While possible, the finite reading requires no importation of words. But since "rock" is usually feminine one would not expect the masculine conjugation even though this too is possible, since a minority of cases treat "rock" as masculine (Ecc 10:9; 1 Sam 17:40). *yāṣûq* also functions adjectivally to mean "hard" in Job 41:15, 16a, 16b (see HALOT, 428), which would mean here that it modifies rock, and that the verb from v.2a is gapped: "Iron from dross is taken, and copper [from] hard rock." However, this translation is afflicted by the problems of both previous translations: gender disagreement and the need to gap not only the preposition but also the verb from v.2a. While these solutions hardly render opposed or exclusive meanings, I chose the verbal reading—in light of the continuity of "pour forth" with the sense of outward movement also present in the "place of exit" (*mws*) in v.1—and the finite conjugation—since it seems less speculative to take "rock" as the subject of the masculine verb than to posit a gapped preposition.



<i>qēš sām laḥōšēk<sup>e</sup></i>	3a	He <sup>4</sup> puts <sup>5</sup> an end to darkness,
<i>ûl<sup>e</sup>kāl-tak<sup>e</sup>lît hû ḥôqēr</i>	3b	and to every limit he searches,
<i>ʿeben ʿōpel w<sup>e</sup>šal<sup>e</sup>māwet</i>	3c	for the stone in thick, <sup>6</sup> deep darkness.
<i>pāraš naḥal mēʿim-gār</i>	4a	A torrent breaks through far from an inhabitant, <sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup>That no subject is specified for the verb *sām* and that the independent pronoun in v.3b thereby also lacks a determined subject raises some difficulties. Without resorting to various conjectural emendations, one can understand the uncertainty in terms of its dramatic effect. The reader must wait until v.13a before the subject is clearly specified, the effect of which is to highlight the difference between the human who searches for wisdom at every limit, and Elohim who looks to the ends of all the earth and knows its place (vv.23-24). Interestingly, the oddness of the singular subject here in contrast to the plural verb in v.1b, *yāzōqqû*, is potentially mirrored in the only other occurrence of the root *z-q-q* in JOB. In Job 36:27 Elihu says, “For [El] draws up drops of water, they filter (*yāzōqqû*) rain for his mist.” If the subject is the plural “drops of water,” then the sense in which drops can be said to refine or filter becomes a problem (the pual is attested for the passive in Isa 25:6; Ps 12:7; 1 Chr 28:18 [also with gold] and 29:4). This has led some to reposit the verb as a passive (e.g., BUDDÉ, 1896, 220) and others to reposit it as a singular (e.g., HALOT, 279; CLINES, 2006, 807) so that El is the subject, as in v.27a.

<sup>5</sup>This verse is difficult. Duhm is usually credited with the decision to read two cola, a tempting option that most interpreters and I do not follow. I opt instead to follow the masoretic punctuation and read it and v.4 as tricola. Read as a bicolon, v.3 would break after “limit,” yielding, “He sets an end to darkness and to every limit, searching out the stone (‘in’ or ‘of’ or ‘,’) thick, deep-darkness.” This reading is tempting, because it avoids the truncated sense of the third line, which is why others have read it with v.4, as three bicola across the two verses. GORDIS (1978, 300) provides an especially nice version of this option by taking “stone” as lava, a fitting subject for *prš*: “Lava, dark and pitch black, cleaves a channel from the crater, never trodden by human foot, bereft even of wandering men.” In the end I find that the poetic context makes the awkwardness of the third line more palatable than two lines *extra metrum*.

<sup>6</sup>Elsewhere *pl* precedes *šlmwt* as if they signify together a single, deep, gloomy, thick darkness. Cf. 10:22 where the poet uses them in a cola adjacent to two different uses of the same words—*pl* in v.22b and *šlmwt* in v.21b. Thus I read the two together in an adverbial sense, specifying the context of the object sought.

<sup>7</sup>This verse is also quite difficult and numerous emendations have been proposed. I agree with Habel, “the forceful threefold repetition of *min*, ‘from,’ in the sense of ‘away/far from’ argues for retaining the text and rendering ‘*gār*’ as ‘sojourner,’ parallel with the ‘human feet’ of travelers in 4b” (HABEL, 1985, 390).

<i>hanniš<sup>e</sup>kāḥîm minnî-rāgel</i>	4b	the forgotten ones, far from travel, <sup>8</sup>
<i>dallû mē<sup>ē</sup>nôš nā'û</i>	4c	suspended, <sup>9</sup> far from humanity, they wander. <sup>10</sup>
<i>ereš mimmennāh yēšē-lāhem</i>	5a	A land out of which sprouts food, <sup>11</sup>
<i>w<sup>e</sup>taḥ<sup>e</sup>tēhā neh<sup>e</sup>pak<sup>e</sup> k<sup>e</sup>mô-ēš</i>	5b	but under which is roiling, <sup>12</sup> like fire.
<i>m<sup>e</sup>qôm-sappîr 'ābānēhā</i>	6a	Its stones are the place of lapis, <sup>13</sup>
<i>w<sup>e</sup>ap<sup>e</sup>rōt zāhāb lô</i>	6b	and dirt, its gold.
<i>nātîb lô y<sup>e</sup>dā'ô 'āyit</i>	7a	A path unknown by any bird-of-prey,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>lô š<sup>e</sup>zāpatû 'ēyn 'ayyāh</i>	7b	and unseen <sup>14</sup> by any falcon's eye.
<i>lô-hid<sup>e</sup>rîkuhû b<sup>e</sup>nēy-šāhaš</i>	8a	The proud animals have not trodden it,
<i>lô-'ādāh 'ālāyw šāhal</i>	8b	no lion has passed over it.

<sup>8</sup>Lit.: “those forgotten by foot.”

<sup>9</sup>While this verb may have a more specific meaning (e.g., miners who are suspended in a shaft that is located far from society), I leave it unspecified so as not to rule out the figurative meaning of *dll*, commonly seen in the consonantly identical noun *dal*, “to languish” or “to be poor, unimportant, powerless, abject” (see HALOT, 221-22).

<sup>10</sup>In this verse and perhaps in vv.3 and 28 as well, the poet breaks with the Hebrew preference for parallel bicola. There are various problems with translating the verse but the sense that a (wet or dry) bed breaks through in an uninhabited and untraveled place remains across all variances which, for my purposes, need not be detailed.

<sup>11</sup>*lehem*, “bread” or “food,” could be read as a metonym for herbage.

<sup>12</sup>In the niph'al, *hpk* often has a dative indirect object, marked by the *l-* preposition, denoting that one thing has “turned into” something else. With other prepositions, however, the niph'al often assumes an intransitive, even reciprocal sense much like the hith'pa'el (as in Gen 3:24), designating the grammatical subject's continuous (over)turning. Lamentations 1:20, for example, reads, “My heart roils within me.”

<sup>13</sup>Not sapphire, which, according to CLINES (2006, 898), “apparently was unknown before Roman times.”

<sup>14</sup>CLINES (2006, 899) includes a discussion of this word, whose lexical meaning is uncertain but contextually, “see” seems most probable.

<i>baḥallāmîš šālah yādô</i>	9a	Onto the flinty rock he sends his hand,
<i>hāpak<sup>e</sup> miššōreš hārîm</i>	9b	he overturns mountains from the root.
<i>bašûrôt y<sup>e</sup>orîm biqqē<sup>a</sup></i>	10a	Into the rocks he cleaves channels,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>col-y<sup>e</sup>qār rā<sup>a</sup>tāh ēynô</i>	10b	and his eye sees every precious thing.
<i>mibb<sup>e</sup>kî n<sup>e</sup>hārôt ḥibbēš</i>	11a	The sources of rivers he binds,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>ta<sup>a</sup>lumāh yōšî<sup>i</sup> ôr</i>	11b	and its hidden-things he brings to light.
.....		
<i>w<sup>e</sup>haḥok<sup>e</sup>māh mēayin timmāšē</i>	12a	But wisdom, where shall it be found,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>ēy zeh m<sup>e</sup>qôm bînāh</i>	12b	and where is the place of understanding?
<i>lō<sup>i</sup> yāda<sup>a</sup> ḥnôš<sup>i</sup> er<sup>e</sup>kāh</i>	13a	Humans do not know its path, <sup>15</sup>
<i>w<sup>e</sup>lō<sup>i</sup> timmāšē<sup>e</sup> b<sup>e</sup>ereš haḥayyîm</i>	13b	as it is not found in the land of the living.
<i>t<sup>e</sup>hôm āmar lō<sup>i</sup> bî-hî</i>	14a	The deep says, “It is not in me,”
<i>w<sup>e</sup>yām āmar ēyn immādî</i>	14b	and the sea says, “It is not with me.”
.....		
<i>lō<sup>i</sup>-yuttan s<sup>e</sup>gôr taḥ<sup>e</sup>tēhā</i>	15a	Gold <sup>16</sup> cannot be given in place of it,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>lō<sup>i</sup> yiššāqēl kesep m<sup>e</sup>ḥîrāh</i>	15b	and silver cannot be weighed out for its price.
<i>lō<sup>i</sup>-t<sup>e</sup>sulleh b<sup>e</sup>ketem ôpîr</i>	16a	It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir,
<i>b<sup>e</sup>šōham yāqār w<sup>e</sup>sappîr</i>	16b	with onyx or lapis lazuli.
<i>lō<sup>i</sup>-ya<sup>a</sup>ar<sup>e</sup>kennāh zāhāb ūz<sup>e</sup>kôkît</i>	17a	Neither gold nor glass can measure <sup>17</sup> it,

<sup>15</sup>I follow the LXX, “road, way” (ὁδός = *drk*), instead of the MT’s “measure” or “valuation” (*rk*).

<sup>16</sup>I follow the common practice to read this word as a word for gold—one of five in this chapter—even though it is pointed differently here than in its other occurrences in the Hebrew Bible. Otherwise, it is pointed *sāgûr*, as in I Kings 7:49.

<sup>17</sup>This verb, repeated in v.19, can mean to “lay out” or “arrange” objects, such as wood or the terms of an argument, and is even the technical term for lining up in a battle formation. But it is also used to confront one thing with another to which it cannot “measure up” in, for example, Isa 40:18; Ps 40:6; and 89:7.

<i>ût<sup>e</sup>mûrātāh k<sup>e</sup>lî-pāz</i>	17b	no <sup>18</sup> vessel of gold can be exchanged for it.
<i>rāmôt w<sup>e</sup>gābîš lā yizzākēr</i>	18a	Corrals and crystals cannot be mentioned,
<i>ûmešek<sup>e</sup> hok<sup>e</sup>māh mipp<sup>e</sup>nîm</i>	18b	and a pouch <sup>19</sup> of wisdom is more than jewels.
<i>lō-yar<sup>e</sup>kennāh piṭ<sup>e</sup>dat-kūš</i>	19a	The chrysolite of Cush cannot measure it;
<i>b<sup>e</sup>ketem ṭāhōr lō t<sup>e</sup>sulleh</i>	19b	it cannot be valued with pure gold.
	.....	
<i>w<sup>e</sup>haḥok<sup>e</sup>māh mē<sup>e</sup>ayin tābō</i>	20a	Then whence comes wisdom?
<i>w<sup>e</sup>ēy zeh m<sup>e</sup>qôm bînāh</i>	20b	And where is the place of understanding?
<i>w<sup>e</sup>ne<sup>e</sup>el<sup>e</sup>māh mē<sup>e</sup>eynēy kol-ḥāy</i>	21a	It is hidden from the eyes of all the living,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>mē<sup>e</sup>ōp haššāmayim nis<sup>e</sup>tārāh</i>	21b	and from the birds of the heavens it is concealed.
<i>ᵝ<sup>a</sup>baddōn wāmāwet ᵝ<sup>a</sup>m<sup>e</sup>rū</i>	22a	Abaddon and death say,
<i>b<sup>e</sup>oz<sup>e</sup>enēynū sāma<sup>e</sup>nū šim<sup>e</sup>āh</i>	22b	“With our ears we heard a report.”
<i>ᵝ<sup>e</sup>lōhîm hēbîn dar<sup>e</sup>kāh</i>	23a	Elohim understands its way,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>hū yāda<sup>e</sup> et-m<sup>e</sup>qômāh</i>	23b	and he knows its place.
<i>kî-hū liq<sup>e</sup>šōt-hāāreṣ yabbîṭ</i>	24a	For he looks to the ends of the earth,
<i>taḥat kol-haššāmayim yir<sup>e</sup>eh</i>	24b	he sees beneath all the heavens.
<i>la<sup>a</sup>śōt lārū<sup>a</sup>ḥ miš<sup>e</sup>qāl</i>	25a	When he made <sup>20</sup> a scale for the wind,
<i>ūmayim tikkēn b<sup>e</sup>middāh</i>	25b	and apportioned the waters with a measure,
<i>ba<sup>a</sup>stō lammāṭār ḥōq</i>	26a	When he made a decree for the rain,

<sup>18</sup>The *lō* is gapped and does double duty for both cola.

<sup>19</sup>From the root (*mšk*) meaning “to pull away,” a *mešek* is a leather pouch used here to speak metaphorically of holding (pearls of) wisdom (cf. HALOT, 646; Ps 126:6).

<sup>20</sup>The infinitive form of the verb stands out against the finite verbs preceding and following it. The infinitive construct sometimes functions as a finite verb in poetry “to represent a situation successive to that represented by a finite verb or participle” (WALTKE and O’CONNOR, 1990, 611); cf. 5:11; GORDIS (1978), 310. This goes against Clines’ claim that the infinitive here signifies a sense of purpose or result, that is, that the verse presents the making of a scale for the wind as the “purpose of God’s scrutiny of the world”

<i>w<sup>e</sup>derek<sup>e</sup> lah<sup>a</sup>zîz qôlô<sup>t</sup></i>	26b	and a way for the thunderbolt,
<i>âz rā-āh way<sup>e</sup>sapp<sup>e</sup>rāh</i>	27a	Then he saw it and recounted it,
<i>h<sup>ě</sup>kî<sup>n</sup>āh w<sup>e</sup>gam-ḥ<sup>a</sup>qārāh</i>	27b	established it and even fathomed it,
	.....	
<i>wayyomer lā-ādām</i>	28a	And he said to the human,
<i>hēn yir<sup>e</sup>at ṣ<sup>a</sup>dōnāy hî ḥok<sup>e</sup>māh</i>	28b	“Truly the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>sûr mērā<sup>c</sup> bî<sup>n</sup>āh</i>	28c	and to turn from evil, understanding.”

## 81 STRUCTURE AND MOVEMENT

The extended ellipses show where I delimit the poem into three sections.<sup>21</sup> Verses 1-11 describe the hidden places of precious and useful metals and the human quest to search them out. But this section does not only describe such a quest, it also effects a subtle sense in its readers that something else, something bigger, better, and yet-to-be-clarified is being spoken of and will soon be revealed.<sup>22</sup> The second section begins by naming this thing as Wisdom, something humans cannot find. The poem thereby instills in its readers the same desire that fuels the activities it describes. The second and third sections are nicely parallel thanks to the nearly repeated refrain in vv.12 and 20 and the responses to the refrain's questions with respect to living beings (vv.13 and 21) and mythic, cosmic beings (vv.14 and 22). This parallel only highlights the opposition between that which follows in v.24 (CLINES, 2006, 904).

<sup>21</sup>For a list of various positions on the structure and divisions of the poem, see VAN DER LUGT (1995), 315-16. The main lines of division are fairly clear and the decision, for example, to read the refrain as an *inclusio* at the beginning and end of the second section, rather than the introduction to the second and third sections, does not, it seems to me, pose any recognizably necessary or significant consequences to interpretations of the poem.

<sup>22</sup>Through, for example, the poem's proleptic failure to specify the subject of the verb and independent pronoun in v.3, as discussed on page 339.

the refrain and responses in each section. Verses 15-19 recount a series of failures of even the most valuable human riches to measure up to Wisdom, whereas vv.23-27 report that God understands Wisdom's way, knows its place, and encounters it in creation. The poem concludes with an absolutely crucial verse about which many have argued and on which opposed interpretations have been hung.

Having thus laid out the poem's three main sections (vv.1-11, 12-19, 20-27), I turn now to take a closer look at the movement within and among these sections.

## 82 MEDIATION AND THE HERMENEUTICS OF MINING (VV.1-11)

As is evident in the translation, I read vv.1-11 as a movement containing five subsections, divided according to the following schema:

---

vv.1-2	A	Objects hidden and impure
vv.3-4	B	Human ambition
vv.5-6	A'	Objects hidden and impure
vv.7-8	C	The difference with animals
vv.9-11	B'	Human ambition

---

Figure 8.1: Job 28:1-11

The exceptional subsection is not, as one would expect, the central (third) one, but rather the fourth. A nearly scientific, geologic interest guides this parallel alternation between A and B—*objects hidden and impure* and *human ambition*. Whether one's reading is guided by the conventional, vertical images of a miner descending into shafts to get precious metals or, with a more recent proposal, by horizontal images of a king traveling to the far-reaches of the world to get precious metals,<sup>23</sup> the opposition of surface to depth, of immediate

<sup>23</sup>So, SCOTT C. JONES, *Rumors of Wisdom: Job 28 as Poetry* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 35, who reads this section "against the exploits of Mesopotamian kings out to the borders of the world into

proximity and mediated distance, is the dominant opposition exploited throughout vv.1-11.

The first subsection (vv.1-2) is framed by references to the hidden places of precious metals:

- v.1a: Surely silver has a vein (*mwš*)
- v.2b: And rock pours forth (*yšwq*) copper

The parallel terms—“vein,” literally, “a place of exit,” and “pour forth”—both denote outward movement, and thus suggest the necessity of re-tracing inwards or downwards to find the source. What is manifest on the surface is not pure; it requires a mediation before its value is realized. Thus the lines framed by these terms read:

- v.1b: And a place where gold is refined
- v.2a: Iron from dross is taken

Verse 1b speaks of refining, the process of removing mediating materials, and v.2a of iron being taken from dross. Even when valuable materials are on the surface, the mediating dross nonetheless places them on the other side of a necessary process of sifting. The two lines in v.2 thus present four materials that are semantically parallel in an inverted, chiasmic pattern (*abba*)<sup>24</sup>:

iron	dross	rock	copper
base metal	material locus	material locus	base metal
a	b	b'	a'

Figure 8.2: Job 28:2

As Jones rightly notes, this verse “offers contrast of surface and depth. While copper lies deep inside ‘hard rock’ . . . iron ore deposits are found on the surface, that is, in the loose earth treacherous and uninhabited regions full of wealth.”

<sup>24</sup>On parallelism and its semantic aspect in particular, see ADELE BERLIN, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* Rev. and Exp. edition. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 64-102.

here called *‘āpār*.<sup>25</sup> Whether on or below the surface, some mediating work is necessary to extract something more valuable from the materials that are immediately available but less valuable.

Verses 3-4 then turn to the work of mediation between surface and depth, work which is carried out by an apprehending subject. The initial imagery is specular, exploring the possibilities of searching/finding without light: “he puts an end to darkness, and to every limit he searches, for the stone in thick, deep darkness” (v.3). Verse 4 shifts compellingly from images of darkness to those of loneliness; all of this activity is done apart from settled society, even from nomads.

Verses 5-6 return to the initial opposition of surface and depth, though this time the difference is exaggerated. The pastoral scene of a wheat field in v.5a is not followed, as was the case in v.1, by a parallel description of something valuable coming out of another, less-valued material,<sup>26</sup> but instead is contrasted to the violence that lies just beneath: “but under which is roiling, like fire.” The material medium (i.e., “land”) is here a pale, mediating line between fire—roiling, untamed, devouring—and food—verdant, cultivated, nourishing.

Verses 9-11 return to the subject of inquiry. The difficulty of the mediation is again emphasized, but it is clear that much has been accomplished. The hardness of the flint and the mass of the mountains are circumvented by effort; the result: “his eye sees every precious thing . . . and its hidden things he brings to light” (vv.10-11). Thus, before turning to the peculiar reference to animals in vv.7-8, I propose a more formal description of this section’s movement: object (vv.1-2), subject (vv.3-4), object (vv.5-6), subject (vv.9-11).

Verses 7-8 depart from this movement between object and subject, if only to shed a particular light on it. Each of the four verbs in the two lines is negated by the particle *lō* and has as its subject an animal, not just any animals, birds-of-prey and “proud beasts,” animals capable of seeing and traveling great lengths. Four times one reads about some relationship one of these masterful animals does not have to that far-away, lonely, dark

<sup>25</sup> JONES (2009), 43. <sup>26</sup> As one might expect from the repeated use of the verb *yš* in vv.1a and 5a.



depth that is the source of valued materials. One is not told anything positive about these animals; they are mere instruments used to instruct readers about what is “not-them.” Whereas they cannot know, see, tread, or pass over this path, something or someone else can and does.

What, then, is the difference with animals established by vv.7-8? It stems from the difference between the activities negated of the animals and those affirmed of humans. Where the animals are said not to know, see, tread, or pass over this path, the humans are said to wander far away (v.4) to search it out (v.3), and then to overturn mountains (v.9), cleave channels (v.10), and bring to light its hidden things (v.11). In other words, the poem is not absurdly asserting that humans have better sight than birds of prey, or can get to paths that “proud beasts” cannot, but rather that such paths must be forged, being nonexistent until created by human effort, which is animated by human desire, a force that pushes humans beyond the (animal) realm of surfaces and light and into the dark depths of hidden things. There is a realm available to humans that even the most capable animals, far superior to humans in so many ways, cannot access. These verses’ formal movement can then be (re)specified thusly:

---

vv.1-2	object
vv.3-4	subject
vv.5-6	object
vv.7-8	nonsubject
vv.9-11	subject

---

Figure 8.3: Job 28:1-11 (2)

This section not only describes human subjects as capable of mediating an objective world split between surfaces and depths, it also opposes the achievements of desiring human

subjects to the mere instinctual activities of nonsubjective animals.<sup>27</sup>

### 83 WISDOM'S METONYMIC DISPLACEMENT (VV.12-19)

Thus far I have presumed that the subject of the activities in vv.3-11 were a human being. The subject of the verbs, however, is unspecified, and some argue that it is God.<sup>28</sup> The empirical evidence unequivocally supports this minority opinion since the activities attributed to the subject of vv.3-11 are typically divine, not human.<sup>29</sup> So why not read God as the subject of vv.3-11? I will mention two reasons. First, this reading diminishes the poem's aesthetic value and rhetorical effectiveness. If the verbs in vv.3-11 have a divine subject, then the poem celebrates divine achievements with respect to precious metals in vv.3-11, and divine achievements with respect to wisdom in vv.23-27. There is nothing *necessarily* problematic about these celebrations. Yet their co-presence is unfortunate in light of the intervening vv.15-19 that incessantly and completely exclude wisdom from precious metals. In short, when a divine subject is read in vv.3-11 the poem becomes less coherent and effective.

The second reason why I reject this reading stems from the particularly compelling poem that ch. 28 becomes when we read a human subject in vv.3-11 and consider the empirical evidence along with the refrains in vv.12-14 and 20-22. The typically divine activities and the opposition to animals in vv.1-11 initially invite readers to view the poem as a hymnic celebration of human achievement that pushes humans far away from their animal existence and toward the realm of the divine. The poem thus creates a rhetorical shock in vv.12-14

<sup>27</sup>Recall the distinction, sharply drawn for the purpose of effective practice in psychoanalysis and noted above on page 37, between the drives and the instincts.

<sup>28</sup>See, for example, the extended argument in GREENSTEIN (2003, 267-69); and the summary in JONES (2009, 128-30).

<sup>29</sup>So, "These acts may have pale reflections in certain human activities, but it seems to me highly doubtful that any Biblical author, even the iconoclastic poet of Job, would attribute the prerogatives of the divine creator to mere mortals" (GREENSTEIN, 2003, 269).

when it reports that the numerous efforts at mediation and the endless quests for what is valuable crash onto the bedrock of a fundamental limit. Readers must gather their thoughts, and reconsider the poem's first section so that it becomes, retroactively, one long allusion to a fundamental problem of human limitation. That is, what initially reads like an exuberant humanism praising a number of great, nearly or typically divine activities of which humans are capable, turns unexpectedly toward one divine activity of which they are not.

Thus, while it is *possible* to read the shift in v.12 as a turn from divine capability to human incapability, a better reading of this shift seems to be as a turn from human capability to human incapability. This also means that the poem may initially but does not finally have a tripartite movement (as I suggested in section 81) since vv.1-11 do not stand on their own but instead form part of one long section from v.1 to v.19.<sup>30</sup>

Verse 12's question—"But wisdom, where shall it be found?"—is answered with vv.13-14's emphatic "Nowhere!" Wisdom is available neither in the quotidian realm of human beings (v.13), nor in the conventional "beyonds"—the deep and the sea, zones that lie outside human habitation. In vv.15-19 the motif of precious metals is carried over from vv.1-11, though the scene shifts from the mineshaft or pilgrimage path to the market, the realm of exchange. The series of failures to grasp or represent Wisdom in vv.15-19 is usually read as a quest for the one signifier or representative that, in the realm of signifiers, conveys

<sup>30</sup>My claim that vv.1-19 should be (re)read as one long section receives further support from the linguistic parallels between vv.1 and 12, which Newsom specifies as follows: "Verse 1 has a double function in the chapter. In its immediate context, it is paired with v. 2 and introduces the list of precious minerals (silver, gold, iron, copper), together with the places in which they are found and the material from which they are derived. But v. 1 is also the first part of a parallel that is not completed until v. 12. The verbal similarities between the two verses are obscured in English translation, but the two key words in v. 1 are 'mine' (*mô-šā*; lit., 'place of coming forth') and 'place' (*māqôm*). In v. 12b, *māqôm* is also used; and in v. 12a the verb 'be found' (*māšā*), although from a different Hebrew root than *môšā*, has a similar sound. Thus the contrast is established. There is a site where silver can be *found* and a *place* for gold, but where can wisdom be *found*, or where is the *place* of understanding?" (NEWSOM, 1996, 529). Cf. BALENTINE (2006), 419; and JONES (2009), 87-89.

the plenitude of Wisdom *qua* signified.<sup>31</sup> According to this reading, vv.15-19 subject readers to the following succession of recursively negated possibilities:

---

wisdom	=	gold,	no.
wisdom	=	silver,	no.
wisdom	=	gold of Ophir,	no.
wisdom	=	...	no.
wisdom	=	pure gold,	no.

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Figure 8.4: The Movement of Job 28:15-19

On this reading, the poem first asks, “Can wisdom be represented by gold?” And then replies, “No.” “Can wisdom be represented by a weight of silver?” Again, “No.” Here the pathos of the poem arises from the elusive, or rather impossible, quality of the one signifier that could convey Wisdom.<sup>32</sup>

This reading of the failures to grasp Wisdom in vv.15-19 fails to satisfy for at least two reasons. First, while Proverbs does say that wisdom is superior to silver, gold, and jewels (Prov 3:14-15),<sup>33</sup> it also unabashedly and on numerous occasions represents and associates wisdom with the same precious metals, jewels, stones, and other beautiful, material objects (Prov 3:16).<sup>34</sup> Thus it is not enough to assume the falsely pious defense: “Of course one

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<sup>31</sup>So, for example, Gordis writes, “The ‘Hymn to Wisdom’ describes how men mine the earth and face unknown hazards in their search for precious stones in volcanic areas far from human habitation. Yet no such search will avail to find the supernal Wisdom, nor can it be purchased with all the treasures of the world” (GORDIS, 1978, 298). Later he adds, “An object may be inaccessible, either because it is difficult to find or because it is costly in price, so that the one idea suggests the other to the poet by association” (GORDIS, 1978, 308).

<sup>32</sup>Cf. the comparable Neo-Babylonian merchant account from the reign of Nabonidus as it is presented and discussed by JONES (2009), 213.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Prov 8:10, 19; 16:16; 20:15; and 31:10 and 30.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Prov 1:9; 2:4; 4:9; 20:15; 25:11-12; and 31:22 and 31.

cannot buy Wisdom with gold, some things just are not for sale!" From a more theoretical standpoint, one might say that Israel's sages knew better than many modern scholars the fundamental lesson of Saussure's structuralism: language is by definition a linking of two incommensurate elements, the "concept" and the "sound image" or, as they are now called, the "signified" and the "signifier."<sup>35</sup> From two sides it is therefore possible to dismiss as a red herring the temptation to think that the poem's strong "no" derives from the incommensurability of the two objects, one spiritual-divine and the other material-inert.

Could one then conclude that the poem's strong "no" derives not from the idea that wisdom and precious metals are incommensurable but rather from the idea that they are relatively different? I think not since this reading fails to account for this section's arrangement as a series. The fact that the poem does not go from one valuable, good, or true thing, person, or place to another but instead remains within the set of precious metals suggests that something about the comparison of wisdom to precious metals remains unfinished. No, not gold; but perhaps silver? No; but what about onyx? In other words, the dynamic of the passage suggests that it is not the case that wisdom is present each time as a signified and is determined in each case to be relatively different from each particular material. Instead, wisdom remains elusive, evoked by each successive valuable material as displaced, as something that the material is incapable of representing.

The difference between the reading I am proposing and the one that I am opposing can be easily illustrated by considering Lacan's critique of Saussure's idea about how meaning is produced. I already said that Saussure correctly recognizes that language is a linking of two incommensurable elements, the signifier and the signified. He even calls the analysis of the plane of signifiers (i.e., *langue*) a fundamentally different science than the analysis of the plane of signifieds (i.e., *parole*)—synchronic v. diachronic linguistics—and he stipulates that their methodologies and objects must not be confused. But if they are so fundamentally opposed, then whence the ability of language to mean? How is the value of a linguistic

<sup>35</sup>Cf., for example, DE SAUSSURE (1959), 118.

element realized? Saussure's answer was, on the one hand, that signs are arbitrary and, on the other, that language is a purely differential system. What he meant is that signifiers are empty, negative magnitudes, and that there is no substantial reason why any signifier comes to represent a particular signified other than the particular groupings and separations that take place between the two incommensurable fields. He famously likened the connections between the signifier and the signified to the two sides of a single sheet of paper in the following sketch<sup>36</sup>:

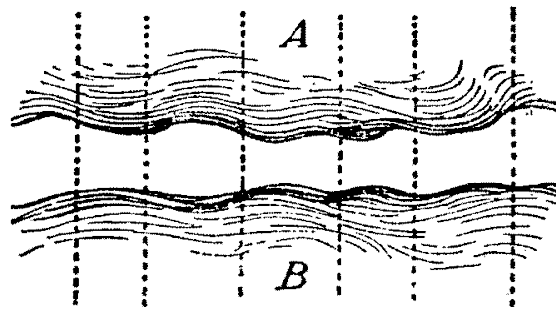


Figure 8.5: Saussure's Sketch of Linguistic Value

The vertical lines punctuating the planes of A (the signified) and B (the signifier) delineate discrete “linguistic units” that emerge from the grouping and separating, according to the rules of *langue*, of the incomprehensible fluxes above and below—“the indefinite plane of jumbled ideas (A) [above] and the equally vague plane of sounds (B) [below].”<sup>37</sup> However, there is a problem with Saussure's solution; it fails to account for certain temporal implications of his understanding of the sign. The lines or planes of the signifier and signified—depicted in the sketch as two flowing rivers—cannot be parallel and cannot flow along together at the same pace since meaning does not arise like a spark between two electrodes.

As any reader of German knows, the meaning of the signifiers in a sentence is in flux until one reaches its end, just as I argued that vv.12-14 alter the meaning of vv.1-11. Meaning

<sup>36</sup>Copied from DE SAUSSURE (1959), 112. <sup>37</sup>DE SAUSSURE (1959), 112.

neither flows along at the same pace nor the same direction as the signifiers that promise to bring it. It is therefore wrong to present the signifiers and the signified as parallel. Recognizing this problem with Saussure's sketch, Lacan went to his blackboard with an alternative model. It is only the first cell of his much more complicated "graph of desire," but it is all that concerns me at this point<sup>38</sup>:

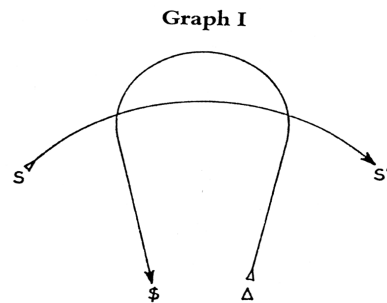


Figure 8.6: The Elementary Cell of Lacan's Graph of Desire

I am interested only in the fact that the line of signifiers ( $\overrightarrow{S.S'}$ ) that unfolds in a temporal chain from left to right is punctured at a certain moment by the line of the signified, which appears to have originated in the speaker's intention ( $\Delta$ ), and which travels back in time to

<sup>38</sup>I take this version of Lacan's graph from his article "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious." Lacan initially drew his graphs in Seminars V and VI and subsequently revisited them in Seminar XVI and elsewhere. About his graph of desire Lacan writes, "This [figure 8.6] is what might be called its elementary cell. In it is articulated what I have called the 'button tie' [*point de capiton*], by which the signifier stops the otherwise indefinite slide of signification. The signifying chain is assumed to be borne by the vector  $\overrightarrow{S.S'}$ ... The diachronic function of this button tie can be found in a sentence, insofar as a sentence closes its signification only with its last term, each term being anticipated in the construction constituted by the other terms and, inversely, sealing their meaning by its retroactive effect" (LACAN, 2006e, 681, 682). There are two detailed discussions of Lacan's article. A chapter-length commentary can be found in BRUCE FINK, *Lacan to the Letter: Reading Écrits Closely* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), ch. 4. For a book-length commentary, see PHILIPPE VAN HAUTE, *Against Adaptation: Lacan's "Subversion" of the Subject* (New York: Other Press, 2002).

retroactively quilt (Lacan’s metaphor) the chain of signifiers together in a meaningful way.<sup>39</sup> That the vector of the signified continues past its second (leftmost) point of intersection with the chain of signifiers simply indicates that the now-quilted chain remains open to new significations and reinterpretations of its meaning.  $\$$  stands for the subject of the statement that haunts but remains elusively below the circuit of meaning and barred from appearing within it (the circuit forms a “hat” traveling left on the vector of the signified and right on the chain of signifiers between the two points of intersection).

So how does Lacan help one read Job 28? Unlike Saussure’s mistaken model—which bears an important resemblance to figure 8.4—the temporal dynamic to Lacan’s schema provides a framework for grasping the movement, along the chain of signifiers, from one valuable material to another without yet arriving at the signified (*point de capiton*). The line of signification does not really return to wisdom after each miss (as in each full stop and successive line in figure 8.4), but takes flight from gold to the next signifier, each time evoking wisdom as displaced. Thus I would suggest that the poetic movement of vv.15-19 is better written as follows:

wisdom → gold → silver → gold of Ophir → ... → pure gold

Figure 8.7: The Movement of Job 28:15-19 Reconsidered

The pathos that emerges on this reading, the only reading to address the signifier, is not (only) the unfathomability of Wisdom but (also) of each subsequent term, ending in the ultimate term—“pure gold”—which, suspended at the end of the line of metals, cannot close the loop and represent the value of each, but instead strands the reader with (at least) one metal too few.

<sup>39</sup>I mentioned the “quilting point” (*point de capiton*) above on page 189. It was initially developed in LACAN (1993), 258-70. See also ŽIŽEK (2002), 16-20.



I can define the poem's movement thus far as metonymic insofar as the signified—Wisdom—keeps being evoked by and yet displaced with each new signifier.<sup>40</sup> By metonymy I mean a signifying relationship in which a manifest term, such as gold or precious things, substitutes for another term, in this case wisdom, with which it has a semantic relation—gold and wisdom are both valued objects.<sup>41</sup> That the substitution is declared a failure—*these things* do not substitute for *that Thing*—simply spurs the metonymic movement onward so that Wisdom is continually evoked and/as displaced. By carrying out this failure from one material to the next we are, by the end of v.19, in a seemingly endless, metonymic process of deferral, carried along by the manifest terms (such as gold), toward that which they evoke (Wisdom).

#### 84 DISPLACEMENT DISPLACED (VV.20-27)

The metonymic drift in which vv.1-19 leave readers is abruptly halted by the refrain, which shifts the poem's attention squarely back onto the question of wisdom's locus, initially raised in v.12. This sudden redirection of the poem's drift is almost entirely lost on the reading represented by figure 8.4, which supposes such a return at every moment of the intervening verses. Figure 8.7's alternative depiction of the poem's movement allows for a better reading of the nearly repeated refrain in v.20 (recall, vv.20-22 // 12-14). The verbal variation from v.12 to 20—from "But wisdom, where shall it be *found*?" to "Then whence *comes* wisdom?"—becomes particularly meaningful in light of the metonymic reading of the

<sup>40</sup>As one scholar puts it, metonymy "consists in using for the name of a thing or a relationship, an attribute, a suggested sense, or something closely related, such as effect for cause . . . the imputed relationship being that of contiguity" (WILDEN, 1987, 198).

<sup>41</sup>Although it need not concern this dissertation, I should note that linguists debate whether synecdoche is a separate trope than, or a special form of, metonymy. FONTANIER (1968), for example, classically argued that synecdoche involves two objects that together form a "whole" (e.g., "sail" for "ship") whereas metonymy involves two objects that are separate "wholes" (e.g., "plastic" for "credit card"). Such a distinction seems to me too difficult to maintain. Here I call them both metonymy insofar as both involve the substitution of

poem's preceding movement. Up to v.20 the poem has only spoken of wisdom negatively, as an absence from the field of all that is known or present—it is something that “cannot be found in the land of the living” (v.13b)—but then in v.20, suddenly, wisdom is something that has come, whose presence has arrived, and yet whose origin is unknown.

Though v.20 mysteriously reports that wisdom has “come,” nothing changes for the reader: Wisdom remains concealed from living beings; it is God who understands its way and knows its place. Such an assertion would be rather unsurprising were it not for the supporting claims:

For he looks to the ends of the earth,  
he sees (*rh*) beneath all the heavens.

(v.24)

Surely this is not all! For these are the achievements through which, the poem insists, humans *do not* come to know Wisdom. Humans are the ones who, in v.3, “put an end to darkness and search out (*hqr*) every limit”; in v.10, whose “eye sees (*rh*) every precious thing”; and, in v.11, who “bring to light hidden things.” Given the clear sense in which the poem is structured so as to oppose human beings' relationship with Wisdom (vv.1-22) to God's (vv.23-27), why would the poem not deploy more clearly distinguishable attributes? Why use such similar language to characterize the capabilities of God and of human beings?

Verses 25-27 may seem to resolve v.24's failure to distinguish God from human beings:

When he made a scale for the wind,  
and apportioned the waters with a measure;  
When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the thunderbolt.  
Then he saw (*rh*) it [wisdom] and recounted it,  
established it and even fathomed (*hqr*) it.

(vv.25-27)

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(the sign of) one thing for (the sign of) another with which it has a semantic relation (cf. GRIGG, 2008, 155).

Wisdom appears to God not simply on account of God's keen eyesight, but in an act of creation, an act that is presumably unavailable to creatures.<sup>42</sup> What interests me about the verbs in v.27, and vv.25-27 as a whole, is the way in which they locate Wisdom neither with God—as a divine attribute or a principle that guides God's creative activity—nor with creation—creation supplies the conditions through which Wisdom appears to God, but Wisdom is not of the order of those things that God's activity creates, such as the wind, water, rain and thunderbolt. Wisdom may have no existence apart from the created world, Wisdom may depend upon the world for its appearance, but it somehow pulls itself away from its grip, is irreducible to it, and is seen and fathomed by God separately from it.<sup>43</sup>

Wisdom appears in the co-presence of creator and creation, but wisdom is part neither of God nor of creation. Wisdom emerges as a surplus, subtracted from God and from creation, in a disjunctive space shared by both. Thus I want to employ once again the idiosyncratic Venn diagram present above in figures 7.1 and 7.2, in which the space of overlap is *not* a space of conjunction, as is typically the case in such diagrams, but is rather a space of disjunction. As in the above figures, I have tried to capture this visually by erasing the points of intersection so as to give the impression of circles that turn in on themselves

<sup>42</sup>Cf. the description of wisdom's locus by NEWSOM (2003a, 180): "It is not because God sees further than human beings that God sees wisdom, but because God sees differently. Wisdom, after all, is not in some place beyond place but in the wind, waters, rain, and thunderstorms, that is, in all aspects of creation. But it is not in them as an object but in their construction and interrelationship, in their presence and limits ('weight,' 'measure,' 'limit,' 'way') with respect to other aspects of the created world."

<sup>43</sup>Perhaps, therefore, one could read Job 28 as an potential answer to the vexing issues raised by Woman-Wisdom's account of her own origins in Prov 8:22-31. She claims to have been "acquired" (*qnh*) by YHWH and "the first of his works of old" (Prov 8:22). I would suggest that this double affirmation is quite similar to the sense in Job 28 that wisdom both appears to God in the acts of creation and yet does not preexist creation. Both cases, in other words, are best understood according to the difficult notion—anathema to classical logic—of the production of a transcendent, a notion with which this dissertation wrestles throughout. A much more conventional case for the connection between Job 28 and Prov 8 is provided by MCKANE (2004, 716).

rather than extend through one another.<sup>44</sup>

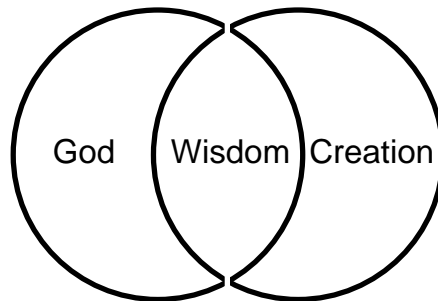


Figure 8.8: Wisdom at the *Disjunction* of God and Creation

God and creation share Wisdom only in the sense that Wisdom appears as something that escapes both of them. Wisdom belongs neither to God nor to creation but this lack is what they share. Since this Wisdom is an immanent transcendence, therefore, it merits the designation WISDOM.

Before moving forward, I should pause to consider an objection which would, were it valid, render any further investigation along this line superfluous. What if WISDOM depends not only upon the objective conditions of creation but also upon the subjective activity of the creator? Is WISDOM's appearance particular to the "historical" moment being described, that is, to the primeval moment of the world's creation? Janzen is one who answers affirmatively:

Verses 23-28 contain a meditation on the divine creativity and the recognition that only in that divine action can one identify the "place" of wisdom. . . wisdom in its primal reality, as original and originating in God, is inaccessible to earthlings, who therefore are to occupy themselves with such wisdom's earthly and creaturely analogue: piety and uprightness.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup>While I think this figure is helpful, it risks conjuring too static an image of the event narrated in vv.25-27, thus obfuscating the temporality of wisdom's emergence in the act of creation.

<sup>45</sup>JANZEN (1985), 189.

If Janzen is correct, then the poem ends in a disappointing contradiction: it insists that humans have no access to WISDOM, but fails to account for the position from which this judgment could be pronounced.<sup>46</sup> If Janzen is right, then one must also reject Newsom's claim that

the poem is in no sense saying that humans have no access to wisdom. They will not find it if they look for it as an object (even an intellectual object) but only if they also know it through a comparable mode of being, a way of acting. The disposition of piety and the moral habit of turning from evil are the way in which one will know wisdom and understanding.<sup>47</sup>

One need not get distracted by the question of whether humans could perform an act comparable to creation since it will suffice to note the problem with the way Janzen's position imagines wisdom's appearance to God at creation as an epiphenomenal appearance of some substance whose "primal reality" is of God's essence, "original and originating in God." WISDOM's appearance to God may be consequent to God's creative acts, but it is not clear that WISDOM is capable of appearing from these acts alone, and it is clear that WISDOM is something other than either a divine attribute or an attribute of the world that God creates.<sup>48</sup> WISDOM is something other than God, something "of-but-not-in" the world, a nonobjective surplus generated out of but not reducible to objectively constituted reality.

Thus, contrary to many readings, I contend that the whole poem depicts wisdom as displaced *not only* from the materials out of which it arises, but also with respect to the subjects related to it. Verses 1-19 clearly present Wisdom as endlessly deferred from that which could be represented by valuable materials. Verse 20 then shifts the perspective

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<sup>46</sup>Such primal activities are the content of what psychoanalysis refers to as "fundamental fantasies" (*Urphantasien*). See, LAPLANCHE and PONTALIS (1973), 331-33, 335-36. In other words, one can only conclude from Janzen's thesis that Job 28 constructs a fantasy that, in itself, has no truth value.

<sup>47</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 180.

<sup>48</sup>As Janzen himself admits, "One would have supposed that wisdom is 'in' God as a divine attribute; yet this verse [23] suggests that even God must 'find' wisdom by following a path that brings God to a place where it exists" (JANZEN, 1985, 197).

on wisdom from something absent to something present, though still displaced (vv.21-22), which appears to God (vv.23-24) in an indirect, unintentional, and surprising event that *happens* during God's creative activities (vv.25-27). In other words, the poem does not oppose God's direct relationship to wisdom to humans' indirect relationship to Wisdom.<sup>49</sup> Instead, the poem opposes God's metaphoric encounter with WISDOM to humans' metonymic relationship with Wisdom.<sup>50</sup>

In vv.23-27 WISDOM appears not as a lack of the sort evoked in metonymy, but as a surplus of the sort created in metaphor. To be sure, certain types of metaphor fit my description of metonymy since some metaphors involve a substitution in which a term or meaning remains latent or "behind" the manifest term. "For example, the rose which is substituted for 'young woman' is, of course, read as 'young woman', yet it also manifests for

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<sup>49</sup>So, for example, "But the ultimate Wisdom cannot be found through human exertion... God alone understands its path and knows its place. What is available to man, therefore, is not transcendent Wisdom, the key to the universe and the meaning of life, but practical Wisdom" ROBERT GORDIS, *The Book of God and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 101.

<sup>50</sup>LACAN (2006e, 677) refers to metaphor and metonymy as the two "most radical axes of the effects of language." Lacan's extended and brilliant, even if convoluted, formulation of the functions of metonymy and metaphor can be found in another of his écrits: LACAN (2006b). Lacan's elaborations of these "radical axes" evolved from his good friend, R. Jakobson's conception of metaphor and metonymy as the most condensed expressions of similarity and contiguity, respectively, which are the two semantic lines through which any discourse develops; see JAKOBSON (1990, 129). A survey of some critiques leveled at Jakobson and Lacan, that is also critical of more recent developments in understanding these two rhetorical figures, can be found in GRIGG (2008, ch. 11). Especially in literary theory it has been common to use the rhetorical figures of metonymy and metaphor as names for the two basic operations through which linguistic units can be selected and combined to create meaning. Many, such as JOHNSON (1982, esp. 38-41), have noted problems and confusions with overly reductive attempts to do so. For a more far-reaching discussion of the use of such tropes in historiography and literary criticism, see the review of Hayden White's *Metahistory* by JAMESON (2008a); and JAMESON (2008b). Here I have nothing so grand or universal in mind. The concepts that I develop as metonymy and metaphor do not aim to account for all meaning making, not even for all metonyms or metaphors. Instead I use them in precise ways to bring together, structure, and differentiate the particular dynamics operative in vv.1-19 and vv.20-27.

a moment the virtualities of color, form, scent, etc.”<sup>51</sup> For my purposes, the key difference with metaphor is the transformation that occurs at the level of meaning, indicated in this example by the production of virtualities that do not simply evoke the young woman but transform her meaning, endow her with a scent, and so on.<sup>52</sup> Metonymy evokes a meaning on the basis of a semantic relationship, whereas metaphor assaults and produces new meanings. So, for the sake of clarity, I will limit my characterization of WISDOM’s appearance to God as metaphoric to the particular case of appositive metaphors. “Silence is golden” and “love is war” are appositive metaphors. As in an apposition, an appositive metaphor juxtaposes two terms, but it is metaphorical because the terms have no prior semantic relation. Unlike substitutionary metaphors, there is no prior semantic relation between “love” and “war” by means of which the saying is understood, and so the copula does not imply that the two are interchangeable or equivalent; it just juxtaposes them. An appositive metaphor thus does not really have a meaning, it rather produces meanings.<sup>53</sup> “Love is war” generates an indefinite series of meanings. In other words, using metaphor as a model for grasping the relations among God, creation, and wisdom in vv.23-27, I would say that God and creation are juxtaposed and wisdom is generated as a surplus out of this juxtaposition. I will return to this idea below in section 87.

#### 85 28:28: A RESIGNED ACCEPTANCE OF METONYMY?

Having presented my reading of the poem, I now want to consider its consequences for understanding the final verse. In v.28 the poet permits God to speak, and God addresses humans as follows: “Truly the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn from evil,

<sup>51</sup>GREIMAS and COURTÉS (1982, 190).

<sup>52</sup>For an example from JOB, recall my argument about the meaning of Job’s use of the demonstrative pronoun “there” in 1:21, the referent of which is “womb.” Since Job uses it to speak of where he is going and “there” is elsewhere used as a metaphoric substitute for “Sheol,” some argue that Job likens “womb” to “tomb.” What I argue, however, is that his substitution for “womb” and “tomb” fundamentally alters the sense of both.

<sup>53</sup>LACAN (2006b, 429) calls the metaphoric effect an “*effet de signification*.”

understanding.” The verse is surprising. After incessantly reporting Wisdom’s unavailability to humans, the poem concludes by identifying wisdom with a distinctly human posture, the fear of the Lord. The verse has given rise to a number of divergent readings.

Some have worried that the equation “the fear of the Lord equals wisdom” implies a commutative property or interchangeability between the fear of the Lord and wisdom: “Il y a une sorte d’identification entre la crainte du Seigneur et la sagesse, au point que les deux termes sont pratiquement interchangeables. Parler de la crainte de Dieu, c’est parler de la sagesse, et réciproquement.”<sup>54</sup> This reading fits easily along the lines of figure 8.4 on page 350:

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wisdom = the fear of the Lord, yes.

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Figure 8.9: The Movement of Job 28 Concluded.

The directness of v.28’s identification of the fear of the Lord with wisdom has sat uneasily with a number of scholars who seem more comfortable with the contiguity latent in the idea, expressed in Prov 1:7a, that the fear-of YHWH is the beginning, first principle, best part, or essence (*rē-šît*) of Wisdom.<sup>55</sup> According to Wilson, 28:28 seems to be “asserting that the concept of wisdom is exhausted by, or equated with, the idea of the ‘fear of God’. If so, this is an excessive claim, based on a fossilised misunderstanding of the book of Proverbs, and one that is qualified by the final form of the story of Job.”<sup>56</sup> The potentially “fossilised misunderstanding” refers to Wilson’s fear that v.28 poses a relationship of semantic equivalence between what is properly related by contiguity. On this reading, v.28 misses the

<sup>54</sup>FRANCK MICHAELI, “Le sagesse et la crainte de Dieu” *Hokhma*, 2 (1976), 43.

<sup>55</sup>FOX (2000), 68, offers a brief discussion of the main interpretations of Prov 1:7a and the evidence used to support them. One should also note the important critique of Fox’s position and the alternative proposal in KNAUBERT (2009), 62-65.

<sup>56</sup>LINDSAY WILSON, “The Book of Job and the Fear of God” *Tyndale Bulletin*, 46 (1995), 72. Incidentally, CLINES (2003, 73) cites Wilson approvingly.



metonymic sense with which Proverbs relates the fear of the Lord to Wisdom, a sense that the word *rēšît* ensures by symbolizing the contiguity of their relationship.

While I understand the logic of this argument, its content seems too unclear to grasp since, as argued above,<sup>57</sup> if the fear of the Lord means anything in its traditional use, it means that the sage fearfully acknowledges the distance that separates him from the Lord, the proper locus of Wisdom.<sup>58</sup> The fear of the Lord inherently involves a sense of alterity or displacement—a *dis*-placement that is literally present in the parallel image of “turning from evil.” The sage’s fear protects him from the folly of being “wise in his own eyes.” So, the predication may seem direct—“the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom”—but, so long as the fear of the Lord is read in its traditional sense, its directness could only make sense as a vector perpetually orienting/directing the fearer toward Wisdom. The following quote articulates well such a reading of v.28:

Only by a dim analogy does such human activity [technological ingenuity and commercial canniness] participate *in* the creative process itself. To that degree humankind remains outside the place of wisdom and knows not the way to it. In such a situation, the nearest one may approximate to the wisdom of the creator is to adopt a posture of piety and moral rectitude before the creator (v.28).<sup>59</sup>

The fear of the Lord can be understood as Wisdom in the sense that it is only by its intervention to name Wisdom’s externality that Wisdom as such comes to function for the sage. Wisdom might not be available to human beings, but the fear of the Lord is, and the fear of the Lord *is* Wisdom insofar as Wisdom exists because the fear of the Lord guides,

<sup>57</sup>In particular, see section 46 on page 187, sections 51 to 52 on pages 207–211, and section 57 on page 238. Finally, cf. KNAUERT (2009), part 2, for an illuminating account of the emergence of the fear-of YHWH as a Master-Signifier in the book of Proverbs.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. the largely polemical essay which, although deeply at odds with the present project, offers numerous examples of this traditional usage in biblical literature: MAYER I. GRUBER, “Human and Divine Wisdom in the Book of Job” in *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World: A Tribute to Cyrus H. Gordon* Edited by MEIR LUBETSKI, CLAIRE GOTTLIEB and SHARON KELLER. (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998), 88–102.

<sup>59</sup>JANZEN (1985), 198.

steers, leads the sage by means of the tradition toward it as that which “always already” exceeds the tradition and its indeterminacies.

Far from a misunderstanding, it would thus be better to consider v.28 a more direct assertion of what grounds but suffers some obfuscation by Proverbs’ formulation of the relation between the fear of the Lord and Wisdom. In accordance with my argument that the friends articulate traditional Wisdom, it is not surprising that this reading of the fear of the Lord in 28:28 accords nicely with the way I have said that the fear of the Lord functions in their discourse. I have argued that wisdom traditionally achieves its coherence by means of its reference to an exception.<sup>60</sup> Now I can add to these previous elaborations of traditional wisdom by characterizing them as metonymic. Like a metonym, the “fear of the Lord” functions in v.28 to circumscribe some Thing—“Wisdom”—that otherwise eludes signification.<sup>61</sup> The locus of truth, Wisdom, God, &c. is declared external to the phenomenal world of what is available to human beings—such transcendent Things are, as Zophar puts it in 11:8, higher than heaven, deeper than Sheol—and the ideal subject position is the sage who nonetheless pursues this transcendent dimension. The system of sapiential belief/fear operates by maintaining a level of contempt for the phenomenal world that is available to human beings, defining it as limited and lacking, and thereby installing that with respect to which the phenomenal world is limited and lacking elsewhere, in a place that is, as Eliphaz says in 22:5b, “without limit” (*yn-qs*). The consistency or inconsistency with which their perceptions correspond to this missing dimension afford them a certain amount

<sup>60</sup>Since section 17 on page 98, I have defined this structure of wisdom as a universal constituted on the basis of an exception and referred to it, in light of Job’s participation in it in 1:5, as a law or logic of sacrifice.

<sup>61</sup>Consider the following example of this standard reading of v.28: “The point of the verse may be to urge that they should be content with elementary but basic precepts of wisdom and should not attempt to climb the higher rungs of the ladder. An awareness of the awesomeness of God and a rejection of evil-doing marks [sic] the limit of their competence as wise men” WILLIAM MCKANE, “The Theology of the Book of Job and Chapter 28 in Particular” in *Gott und Mensch im Dialog: Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag* Edited by MARKUS WITTE. Volume II. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 715.

of knowledge. Progress is promised on the path or search toward Wisdom but progress is required to remain infinite.

The friends'/tradition's epistemology exists only insofar as it includes a negation of itself within itself. This negation is, paradigmatically, the fear-of YHWH. The friends take their limitation, their inability to construct or imagine a reality adequate to the Real of God's presence, as evidence of God's distance from reality. Their fear of God is thus both a humble recognition of the limits of their understanding (of God, the world, wisdom, &c.) and a respectful acknowledgment of God's freedom and ability to disturb even that which they do understand.<sup>62</sup> As is true of every Master-Signifier, the fear of the Lord is capable of signifying Wisdom because it takes the failures of the sapiential discourse, fixes them, assigns them their place, gives them a body, and thereby turns them into successes.

Since I demonstrated in CHAPTER 4 how Eliphaz's first speech performs such a reversal (of ignorance into instruction), I allow myself a contemporary example here. In November of 2003 President Bush visited London. It was a weekday. Much of the city, however, astonishingly put its normal routine on hold and over 100,000 people flooded the streets to protest the war in Iraq. A seventeen foot effigy of the president holding Prime Minister Blair in his pocket was toppled and ripped to shreds in Trafalgar Square—simulating the similar fate faced by Hussein's statue in Baghdad the previous spring. Protestors displayed signs with the most extreme accusations, calling Bush and Blair terrorists, child-murderers, monarchs acting apart from the will of the people, &c. The protestors hoped to send the message to Bush and Blair that opposition to the war was widespread and vehement. Their sentiment was clear and the protests effective. Despite plans to speak to Parliament, Bush was forced to cancel in light of the disruptive heckling he was sure to face. When asked about the mass demonstration, Bush shockingly replied, "It's a fantastic thing to come to a country

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<sup>62</sup>Recall the quote cited on page 102 above, "The willingness to be ignorant in this deepest sense is what the biblical writers call 'the fear of YHWH.' It is 'the beginning of wisdom' (Prov 1:7), for its essence is the rejection of arrogance and intellectual dishonesty" DAVIS (2009), 35.

where people are able to express their views.” He went on to say that such demonstrations were now possible in Iraq and precisely what the coalition forces were fighting for. The president’s deft rhetorical maneuver took the multitude of complaints suggesting that his actions and policies were contradictory and suspect and turned them into evidence of the universal truth and success of these very actions and policies. The protests against the war were transsubstantiated into justifications for the war thanks to Bush’s staggeringly adept inscription of them within a discursive field organized around the infinitely flexible Master-Signifier “freedom.” Bush said, “I fully understand people don’t agree with war. But I hope they agree with peace and freedom and liberty.”

Returning to Janzen’s quote cited on page 363, one can affirm that he is correct so long as a crucial detail is added. The fear of the Lord is—again, on this reading—both the sage’s acknowledgement that human beings remain “outside” and “know not” Wisdom, and the sage’s ethical commitment nonetheless to try to approximate to this absolute and transcendent Wisdom. One must then add that the separation from Wisdom inscribed by the posture of fear is precisely what allows the sage to become wise.

#### 86 PROBLEMS WITH THE METONYMIC READING OF 28:28

Nearly every interpreter recognizes that one problem with this reading of the fear of the Lord in v.28—according to the logic of metonymy set up by vv.1-19 and inherent to the traditional/friends’ notion of fear—is the difficulty of knowing how to understand the sense in which its message follows Job’s experience and most of his speech. In response to the uneasiness created when any traditional reading of the fear of the Lord in 28:28 is juxtaposed to the critique of the tradition presented by Job’s experience and speech, this verse and chapter have often been judged secondary or misplaced within the book. Verse 28’s aphoristic identification of the fear of the Lord with wisdom is most often considered, by those who find comfort in the verse as well as those who despise it, a “pietistic fraud” con-

tradicts, or at least stands in “calculated tension” with the rest of the poem and JOB more broadly.

Critics of the last verse of the poem see it as a dishonest evasion of the issues that the chapter and, by extension, the book raise. So Habel exclaims,

For clearly, “fear/piety” (*yirā*) has not provided Job with the wisdom to understand the crisis he faced. . . For Job to return (in v.28) to the traditional “fear of the Lord” would therefore mean returning to a posture of pious unquestioning submission which the friends had advocated all along and which he had repudiated time and again.<sup>63</sup>

Habel does not even wonder whether any sense of the fear of the Lord could be at play here other than the traditional conception advocated by the friends, and so he finds the idea that this verse could reflect Job’s opinion appalling and preposterous. Habel represents many who find the verse a fraudulent escape from the difficult issues of theodicy raised throughout the book—a charge more often leveled at God’s response from the whirlwind.

Not all find v.28 a negative blemish or a betrayal of the truth handled by the book. Some take it positively, a welcome nuance to the abyssal aspects of Job’s protest and the horrors of some of the “impatient Job’s” statements. Childs thinks the final verse affirms a wisdom “within limits”<sup>64</sup>:

Only God knows the way to wisdom. The inclusion of the rubric as a summary of the chapter. . . offers an explicit canonical directive on how the critical stance to wisdom found in the book of Job relates to the wider wisdom corpus. . . the effect of ch. 28 is to provide a link between the portrayal of the ‘patient Job’ of ch. 2 and the ‘impatient Job’ of the dialogue. The canonical shaping of these chapters suggests that these are not two irreconcilable portrayals, but a calculated tension marking the proper limits of wisdom for the community of faith.<sup>65</sup>

Verse 28, in other words, supplies a canonical directive signaling a limit to how far one can

<sup>63</sup>HABEL (1985), 392-93. <sup>64</sup>Note the significant echoes of Kant.

<sup>65</sup>BREVARD S. CHILDS, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 542-43.

approximate to Job's stance in the dialogue and remain within wisdom proper.

As others have recognized, if v.28 returns to the traditional account of the fear of the Lord and wisdom, then one can only read ch. 28 as if it knows not of, wants nothing to do with, or stands as a corrective against that very different kind of fear exposed by Job's experience and discourse.<sup>66</sup> This reading is left with two less-than-satisfactory options to explain the directness with which wisdom is predicated of the fear of the Lord in v.28.<sup>67</sup> On the one hand it can impose on the wisdom in v.28, the wisdom available to humans, an ontological difference from and inferiority to the Wisdom that appears to God in vv.20-27.<sup>68</sup> Thus the sage may fear the Lord so as to gain wisdom, but this wisdom is a mere approximation of the true Wisdom that is available to God in creation. The other option, which basically amounts to the same thing, posits that a greater degree of indirectness pertains to the human's encounter with wisdom that is available through the fear of the Lord, than to God's encounter with Wisdom that is available through creation. This position seems well supported by the displacement that inheres to the notion of the fear of the Lord and the poem's movement from the human to the divine and back to the human relationship to wisdom.

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<sup>66</sup>This is the conclusion arrived at by, for example, HABEL (1985, 410), who states that the model for fearing God in 28:28 "stands in conflict with the Job of the preceding dialogue. The significance of this verse lies in the function of this counterpoint within the design of the book of Job." The epilogue is also often read as if it knew nothing of the interruption it suffers at the hand of the speeches.

<sup>67</sup>HABEL (1985, 401) articulates a similar position. He describes two major interpretations of the relationship between v.28 and the preceding poem as follows: "According to the first interpretation, the Wisdom of the poem is isolated as 'the' Wisdom, that is, Wisdom of a higher order (*ḥokmā* with the definite article, Gordis) accessible only to God, while the wisdom of the final verse is of a lower order and refers to the piety or practical religion which mortals can practice. According to the second interpretation, the difference between v.28 and the preceding poem lies not so much in the different kinds of wisdom but in the modes by which wisdom is acquired: God acquires eternal Wisdom by an immediate personal discovery deep in the primordial past, while mortals acquire wisdom indirectly through submission to the revealed path and Lord of Wisdom."

<sup>68</sup>A specific example of this standard reading can be found in footnote 61 on page 364.

This reading also fails because it needs the difference between the divine and human relationships to wisdom to be one of a degree of (in)directness. Yet God's encounter with wisdom is indirect in the sense that God encounters it as something that is disconnected from the material medium out of which it arises. In other words, all these readings proceed directly from v.22 to v.28 and do not take into account what God's experience teaches about wisdom. In what follows I argue that, if we take vv.23-27 into account, then the predication in v.28 is best read as saying that wisdom is available to humans in a displaced form through the fear of the Lord just as it is to God through creation.

#### 87 28:28: THE POEM'S CAPSTONE METAPHOR

How might one read v.28 according to the metaphoric logic that characterizes God's encounter with wisdom? I begin by pinpointing exactly how this reading differs from the two sets of readings considered thus far, which I can simplify into these statements:

- (i) v.28 misunderstands the tradition by considering the fear of the Lord interchangeable with wisdom; and
- (ii) v.28, for good or ill, adequately represents the traditional, metonymic understanding of the relation between the subject and predicate.

At first glance, these appear opposed. Common to all readings in both sets, however, is the assumption that a latent semantic relationship binds the fear of the Lord to wisdom. Whether this relationship is one of semantic equivalence, as in the first set that presents subject and predicate as interchangeable, or one of semantic contiguity, as in the second that thinks the subject *is* the predicate in the sense that "the crown" *is* "the king" or "the kingdom" in the classic example of metonymy, a semantic relation is credited with binding together subject and predicate. There is a meaning on the basis of which subject and predicate are related. I want to challenge the credibility of this imputed relationship and suggest instead that their relationship should not be given any semantic character at

all. That is, I think that the final verse is best read, in light of God's metaphoric relationship to wisdom in the poem's second section, as an appositive metaphor.

After the poem transitions from humans, who appear to have no access to a seemingly endlessly deferred Wisdom, to God, who encounters WISDOM indirectly, as displaced, the final verse's identification of the fear of the Lord with wisdom suggests that the fear of the Lord is for humans the equivalent of that mysterious aspect of divine activity through which wisdom comes (mysterious because WISDOM appears to the actor as a surplus over and above the activity). By the fear of the Lord that which is displaced by/from human achievements is made evident in a displaced, metaphoric manner. No special, latent semantic relation binds the two terms; their relation is bald juxtaposition. One can propose all kinds of things that v.28 may mean, but it does not start from any meaningful basis; every meaning is rather a product of its juxtaposition. I am suggesting, in other words, that "the fear of the Lord is wisdom" functions like the appositive metaphor "love is war," not to change, elaborate, or extend a meaningful relationship that already exists between "the fear of the Lord" and "wisdom," but rather to generate new meanings.

Reading v.28 as an appositive metaphor not only accords with God's experience of wisdom in vv.23-27, it is also consistent with the experience that affords wisdom to Job. Their experiences may be phenomenologically different, but they are structurally congruent. Both encounter wisdom not as a sensible presence (i.e., a presence that can be given a determinate meaning or that appears alongside other objects of the world), but rather as a disembodied form or a formless body, a presence in excess of sense; i.e., WISDOM. But the appearance of this presence proves to be the impetus behind all sorts of symbolizing and sense-making endeavors. God is said to see, recount, establish and fathom wisdom; Job, I argue in CHAPTER 7, becomes wise to the fact that his speech grants him proximity to the void out of which some new transformation of his situation may occur. The places from which WISDOM comes to both God and Job are heterogeneous to the situations in which God and Job find themselves, the worlds in which all other things appear to them.



Second, the experience through which wisdom comes to Job is quite literally presented by v.28. The debates about this verse among Childs, Habel, et al. (see section 86) almost always assume that it fails to account for Job's experience. Only rarely has an interpreter considered the coincidence between this verse's identification of fear and wisdom and Job's discovery of the concurrence of wisdom and terror.<sup>69</sup> Job's wisdom comes amidst terrifying experiences of God.

In short, v.28 does not carry a message, it gives rise to a multitude of meanings, one very palpable example of which is given by Job's experience. The meaning effects are created by collision more than collusion.<sup>70</sup> Like "love is war," one could go blue in the face and never be satisfied trying to paraphrase what "the fear of the Lord is wisdom" means, but this is because it does not change, elaborate, or extend a meaningful relationship that already exists between "the fear of the Lord" and "wisdom," it rather generates, like God's activity, a world of meanings, one of which Job stands ever ready to concretize.

Ultimately I think the poem favors a reading of the fear of the Lord in accordance with Job's experience and discourse and not the friends'. For both, of course, wisdom is located outside the situation in which they find themselves. For the friends, Wisdom remains external or transcendent, whereas Job encounters this externality inside, in the immanent unfolding of his experience. The difference essentially boils down to the locus of wisdom vis-à-vis the sapiential subject and its world. *For the friends, Wisdom remains the object in front of the world, that which they pursue in the infinite, metonymic unfolding of their desire. For Job, WISDOM is the object that emerges from and no longer fits within the world,*

<sup>69</sup>But consider the following suggestion: "Perhaps we need even to see 'fear' resuming its literal sense" (GOOD, 1990, 292-93). Whereas interpreters may have failed to see how this verse aligns with Job's discovery, they have recognized that Job experiences the fear of God as terror; cf. WILLIAM P. BROWN, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 116.

<sup>70</sup>Cf. RUSSELL GRIGG, *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press,

that on account of which the world does not form any predictable or certain totality. Does Wisdom arise in a final signifier which quilts the primordial reality of a multitude of representations together (like freedom and democracy in Bush's discourse)? Or do the multitude of representations arise out of a primordial void, a displacement that is seen and fathomed as WISDOM? The imagery of creation/origination/generation in vv.23-27 strongly supports the latter. Verse 28 should be read as substituting, for the couple Void-WISDOM that appears to God in creation, the couple Terror-WISDOM that appears to Job through his traumatic experience. WISDOM is the cause and not the objective, the condition and not the intention of the fearer's fear. There is nothing that the experience of trauma and displacement conceals behind it, and that is what makes it so terrifying.

Finally, then, I believe that the poem's repeated suggestions that wisdom's displacement from the world indexes its transcendence to the world should be reread as so much preparation for v.28's conclusion that releases us from the fantasy of just such a transcendent beyond.

#### 88 JOB 28'S ACOUSMATIC CHARACTER

Now I want to consider the consequences of my reassessment of the poem for understanding its awkward placement in its literary context.<sup>71</sup> The relationship of ch. 28 to the rest of the book is highly contested. Just by virtue of its location at the end of the truncated and dissonant final cycle of speeches, and just before the set of longer speeches by Job (29-31), Elihu (32-37), and God (38-41), the poem is awkwardly placed. Many attribute the poem to no speaking subject in particular, seeing it as disembodied speculation about wisdom, (2008), 163-64.

<sup>71</sup>Cf. JONES (2009), who provides helpful and well-documented discussions of this and many issues. See also, NEWSOM (2003a, ch.6), for a refreshing reframing of this issue.

perhaps the author's (or a later author's<sup>72</sup>) opinion, an interjection from some figure like the narrator in a prose tale, or the chorus in Greek tragedy. Others speak of the poem's independence from the dialogue less in terms of its origin and more in terms both of its lack of any particular addressee and the sense in which it neither offers nor invites response.<sup>73</sup> It has been called a "soliloquy,"<sup>74</sup> especially by those who read it as Job's own speech and so must account for the fact that Job continues speaking in chs. 29-31, an "interlude,"<sup>75</sup> or a "conclusion,"<sup>76</sup> especially by those who deny that Job is its speaker.

Detailed treatments of the issue are available in the sources just cited and others discussed therein. For my purposes it is enough to observe that Job 28 stands apart from the dialogue on account of several, often-noted reasons—not only its differences in form and content from the rest of the book, but also its similarities to other meditations on wisdom

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<sup>72</sup>The conclusion that ch. 28 is secondary to the book is a view which, despite its commonality, "betrays a rather wooden notion of the book's composition. Moreover, it overlooks the fact that the diction, grammar, and style of chap. 28 are quite similar to other passages in the dialogues and the divine speeches. The similarities between chaps. 28 and 38 are especially close. The important issue is not whether chap. 28 belongs where it is placed, but what role it plays" NEWSOM (1996), 528.

<sup>73</sup>"[Job 28] is not addressed to any of the participants of the dialogue in Job. There are no indictments, complaints, interactive comments, or direct responses to previous assertions of other speakers" HABEL (1985), 392.

<sup>74</sup>By, for example, JANZEN (1985), 187; and BALENTINE (2006), 415.

<sup>75</sup>The language of "interlude" can be found in GORDIS (1978), 298; and NEWSOM (1996), 528. Hartley thinks it "stands outside the dialogue. It functions as a bridge" (1988, 373). And Westermann calls it an "intermezzo" (1981, 137).

<sup>76</sup>CLINES (2006, 905-9) argues that it concludes Elihu's speech, which he places just before Job's final speech (chs. 29-31), which would then be followed by God's response (chs. 39-41). Even so, CLINES (2006, 925) admits, "It does not matter a very great deal for the general sense of the chapter whether we regard it as an independent poem without significant links to its context (as is the almost universal view) or as the conclusion to the speeches of Elihu." Cf. DAVID J. A. CLINES, "Putting Elihu in his Place: A Proposal for the Relocation of Job 32-37" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 29 (2004), 243-53. GREENSTEIN (2003, 271-72) also (and apparently independently) proposes that ch. 28 be read as the conclusion to Elihu's speech, but he would rather position ch. 28 after ch. 37.

in sapiential texts, e.g., Prov 8, Sir 1 and 24, Bar 3:9-4:4, and perhaps also *1 Enoch* 24 and 4QInstruction.<sup>77</sup> In short, the poem's source, speaker, voice, addressee, and purpose are uncertain.

The interpretation I find most productive for understanding the poem is the one that resists assigning it to any voice in particular and sees it instead as a kind of interlude, abstracted from the voice of any of the characters but no less a part of the book. There are several good reasons why this interpretation strikes some as unsatisfactory and, furthermore, those who reject it and pin the poem to one particular voice or another have achieved several important insights. Clines describes well the difficulties facing the interpretation I am advocating that tries to abstract the poem from a particular voice. He dismisses various attempts in the following fell swoop:

All these metaphors for the chapter [e.g., 'bridge,' 'intermezzo,' 'interlude'] deflect attention from the fact that it is a text within a context of nothing but speeches prefaced by very brief prose introductions to those speeches. We should candidly admit that a poem that is not a speech and is not attributed to one of the characters in the book is an aberration.<sup>78</sup>

But do Clines' rhetorical opponents not readily agree that ch. 28 is out of the ordinary when they say that it is unattributable to any speaker? Are these scholars not eager to admit as much? Clines' polemic blinds him to several important points of agreement he shares with the positions he denounces:

- (i) the poem stands out in its present literary context,
- (ii) it can only be wed to a particular voice after a certain amount of argumentation, and
- (iii) the voice to which it is assigned matters to its meaning.

Again, while I think that a number of options more or less "work," and succeed in providing a different perspective on the poem and its many valences, I do not think any of them can be carried out without losing that presence or power which the poem bears when it is read as an utterance from an unidentified and unknown voice. My thesis, which I take up and

<sup>77</sup>See the argument made in NEWSOM (2003a), 171-74. <sup>78</sup>CLINES (2004), 248.

clarify after the following brief digression, is that the poem only achieves a voice that befits it when its source is acknowledged as unidentifiable. Since there is a name for a voice whose source is unknown or unidentified, I can say that the poem's proper voice is *acousmatic*.

The word acousmatic was used as a name for Pythagoras' disciples who were required to listen to his speeches for five years before they could see him.<sup>79</sup> The philosophical aim seems obvious: novitiates had to focus on his words alone, their meaning and their truth value, apart from any distractions or mesmerizations they might derive from the visual field. The effect, however, was the inverse of rendering Pythagoras unimportant since he became all-important. It is well known that he gained a cult following that revered him as a divinity. Surely contributing to this was his acousmatic voice, arising from behind a curtain, which was endowed with an aura of mystery and "acquired authority and surplus-meaning by virtue of the fact that its source was concealed; it seemed to become omnipresent and omnipotent."<sup>80</sup>

More recently French composer Pierre Schaeffer has used the notion of acousmatic to describe a listening experience reduced to the field of hearing alone.<sup>81</sup> Schaeffer suggests that one's normal listening experience involves much more than hearing and is deeply influenced by what is seen. One imagines the instruments, the chords, the appearance of the musician(s), listens for their accents, locates them, and so on, all of which is to reduce the sound to an effect of a causal field that is (over)determined by the image and the imaginary. Schaeffer encourages what he calls acousmatic listening, listening liberated from anything other than the field of hearing alone.

French film critic Michel Chion also makes use of the notion of acousmatic sound.

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<sup>79</sup>Pythagoras' disciples are known as Acousmatics who "were silent for the period of five years and only listened to the speeches without seeing Pythagoras, until they proved themselves worthy of it" (LAERTIUS, 1925, VIII, 10).

<sup>80</sup>DOLAR (2006), 61-62, on whose analysis I rely here extensively.

<sup>81</sup>PIERRE SCHAEFFER, *Traité des objets musicaux* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966).

Cinema reveals and exploits numerous situations in which sight and sound diverge and converge. Acousmatic is not onscreen sound but neither is it nondiegetic, as in the voice of a commentator or voiceover narration, sounds that are also external to the image. Instead the acousmatic emanates from a crack, an unknown source, and for that reason achieves a particularly powerful, mysterious, and captivating resonance. Fritz Lang's famous 1931 film *M* conceals for as long as possible "the physical appearance of the child-murderer, even though we hear his voice and his maniacal whispering from the very beginning. Lang preserves the mystery of the character for as long as he can, before 'de-acousmatizing' him,"<sup>82</sup> that is, before revealing a source to which we can pin the voice. Chion continues, "It's fairly common in films to see evil, awe-inspiring, or otherwise powerful characters introduced through sound before they are subsequently thrown out to the pasture of visibility, de-acousmatized."<sup>83</sup> Chion takes his insight into the way in which the audible and the visible do not form a couple and shows the great extent to which cinema exploits their separation.<sup>84</sup>

Despite the fact that voices can be mysteriously acousmatic and then de-acousmatized, and thus demystified, philosopher Mladen Dolar has claimed that the acousmatic voice can never really or fully be de-acousmatized.<sup>85</sup> For Dolar, the acousmatic voice "always displays

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<sup>82</sup>MICHEL CHION, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 72.

<sup>83</sup>CHION (1994), 72.

<sup>84</sup>Though Chion or other such critics may have something more or different to say about it—I did not read broadly or deeply in his work or film studies—another filmic phenomenon also seems relevant here. It seems to me that films are rarely mixed so that the sound level (in any realistic sense) matches the camera's perspective (actions are often not louder the closer they are to the camera, &c.). Sometimes, however, films or scenes align sight and sound more closely. Paradoxically, it is in these cases that the division between sight and sound appears most striking. I find the idea compelling that cinema generates so much from the division between sight and sound, in other words, not only because there are obvious examples where the two are separated in ways congenial to the plot, but in large part because I find it surprising, almost uncanny when the two nearly do couple.

<sup>85</sup>"The real problem with the acousmatic voice is: can we actually ever pin it down to a source?" (DOLAR,

something of an effect emancipated from its cause.”<sup>86</sup> It persists even beyond the moment of de-acousmatizing and always threatens to reappear.

I think Dolar is correct that the acousmatic sound has a mysterious and authoritative body that remains liberated from any identifiable body, and readers of the Hebrew Bible can hardly downplay the appropriateness of the acousmatic voice as an interpretive category, familiar as we all are with the divide between sight and sound that so often carries the particularly potent resonance of divine presence:

Then YHWH spoke to you from the midst of the fire.

You heard a voice speaking but you saw no form, a voice alone.

(Deut 4:12)

Israel's aniconism is rooted in their encounter at Horeb with YHWH's voice and nothing more. Lacking form, it would be wrong to say this voice lacks a body all its own.

Returning to Job 28, the voice that befits the poem is acousmatic, a voice that cannot be de-acousmatized. This thesis is not simply based on fact of scholarly uncertainty regarding its source. On the contrary, it has everything to do with the content of the poem and the wisdom of which it speaks. In vv.23-27 the creating God encounters WISDOM as something displaced or liberated from the created conditions from which it stems. Like WISDOM, the poem also lacks an identifiable source. So, Job 28 is a poem whose source seems displaced, that speaks about a WISDOM whose source is displaced. Since WISDOM's source is concealed, the concealment of the source of this poem makes it congruent with the WISDOM about which it speaks. In short, the fact that we cannot be certain who speaks ch. 28 may not register a failure of scholars, redactors, or other factors external to the poem; our uncertainty

<sup>86</sup>DOLAR (2006), 67.

may instead register the acousmatic character of WISDOM itself. That it is initially and perhaps finally impossible to assign the chapter to any particular voice is precisely what the poem prepared us to expect of any presentation of WISDOM, and thus the poem's acousmatic character compels that it be taken as nothing less than WISE.



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**Job 38-41: Aesthetics and the Divine Speeches**

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## 89 INTRODUCTION

Hans Urs von Balthasar describes the apparently independent and contemporaneous publications on “the dialogue principle” by Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Ferdinand Ebner, and Gabriel Marcel, as “one of the strangest phenomena of ‘acausal contemporaneity’ in the history of the intellect.”<sup>1</sup> While perhaps not as far-reaching, another instance of intellectual “acausal contemporaneity” occurred in and around 2003 in multiple interpretations of the divine speeches in *JOB*. None explicitly mentions any of the others, though one may take account of another author’s previous work, and yet they create among them a number of intriguing lines of convergence. They are, in order of appearance, Carol Newsom’s chapter from her 2003 monograph, Kathleen O’Connor’s 2003 article, and Catherine Keller’s chapter from her 2004 monograph.<sup>2</sup> It is as if history itself somehow demanded a shift of interpretive perspective on the divine speeches in Job 38-41, and each of these scholars offered their response.

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<sup>1</sup>HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory I* trans. by G. Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 626; as discussed by WALTER BRUEGGEMANN; PATRICK D. MILLER, editor, *The Covenanted Self* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 1, 19. Brueggemann rightly extrapolates from these thinkers to the later developments of Levinas and Steiner.

<sup>2</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 234-58; O’CONNOR (2003), 171–179; CATHERINE KELLER, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), 124-40. I should add to this list the closely related and independently written study of the divine speeches by BEAL (2002), 35-56. Cf. Beal’s recent, short note considering several points of convergence and divergence between his study and Keller’s in TIMOTHY K.

All three of these readings are immersed in the scholarly literature—even Keller, who is trained as a theologian, not a biblical critic. But each interprets the speeches by means of categories taken from aesthetics. O'Connor draws on E. Scarry's reconsideration of the notion of beauty; Newsom develops what she calls the tragic sublime; and Keller reads the speeches through a comic paradigm. The beautiful, the sublime, tragedy, and comedy are all major and inter-related categories in aesthetics, as is obvious in the common hybrids "tragic sublime," "tragicomic," "sublime beauty," and so forth. It is difficult not to take this strange, simultaneous convergence of readings as symptomatic and worthy of further exploration. Is there a dimension to the interpretations of these speeches the incomprehension of which called forth these these three turns to aesthetics? This is precisely what this chapter aims to discover by coordinating and explicating these interpretations, whose impact has not yet been felt or comprehended. Before doing that, however, some larger orientations are needed: first, to the state of the contemporary critical discussion out of which these turns to aesthetics arise; second, to the speeches themselves; and third, to the aesthetic categories on which they draw.

## 90 BRIEF ORIENTATIONS

In ch. 38 YHWH appears triumphantly in a whirlwind. But what YHWH speaks about initially appears completely alien to that with which the book has previously been concerned.<sup>3</sup> Even though one knows what God is saying in the speeches, it takes some time to grasp

BEAL, "Mimetic Monsters: The Genesis of Horror in the *Face of the Deep*" *Postscripts*, 4 (2008), 85–93.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. EDWARD L. GREENSTEIN, "In Job's Face/Facing Job" in *The Labour of Reading: Desire, Alienation, and Biblical Interpretation* Edited by F. C. BLACK, R. BOER and E. RUNIONS. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 303, which offers what he considered (over a decade ago) two matters of consensus, "It is by now fairly commonplace to regard the divine speeches as ambiguous and enigmatic. . . Two things have become clear to many: God almost entirely avoids or evades the question of justice, but at the same time demonstrates his own knowledge of nature's intricacies."

what it might mean for God to say what is said in the context of the book.<sup>4</sup> Like hearing a new word composed of previously known words, the reader suffers a sense of dissonance and must pause for some time to try to coordinate God's highly aesthetic speeches and Job's largely political demands for justice (treated at length in section 70).<sup>5</sup>

The proposals for such a coordination have varied widely—all the way from exclusion<sup>6</sup> to embrace<sup>7</sup>—and are discussed in a spate of recent works.<sup>8</sup> The three interpretations mentioned at the outset are not without important predecessors, but I believe they nonetheless inaugurate a shift in our interpretive perspective. Bracketing many important differences, previous interpretations treated the aesthetic and the political either as two dimensions separated by an abyss that might be bridged by some mediating explanation, or as though one (the aesthetic) could be easily collapsed into the other (the political). I think the three recent interpreters' turns to aesthetics stem from the need for a more critical conception of

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. VON RAD (1972), 225: "All commentators find the divine speech scandalous, in so far as it bypasses completely Job's particular concerns, and because in it Yahweh in no way condescends to any kind of self-interpretation."

<sup>5</sup>Shakespeare was the master of such word creation. His plays are riddled with words and combinations of words that had never before appeared in print. He was particularly fond of the prefix "un." "Unreal," for example, had not previously appeared in print prior to *Macbeth*. One knows the word "real" and the prefix "un-" but it takes some time to grasp what "unreal" might mean.

<sup>6</sup>That is, by not responding directly to Job's political and juridical concerns, God excludes Godself from the discussion. Two standard references here are DAVID ROBERTSON, *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 48-50; and JACK MILES, *God: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 315-16.

<sup>7</sup>The tendency to side with God and think that this change of subject is a step closer to the truth, whatever one says that is, is quite common. See, for example, R. N. WHYBRAY, *Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998); and, most recently, KATHRYN SCHIFFERDECKER, *Out of the Whirlwind: Creation Theology in the Book of Job* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup>For a quick overview, see NEWSOM (2007), 168-71. A lengthier discussion can be found in SCHIFFERDECKER (2008), 3-11. Cf. PERDUE (1991), 197-98.

the politics of aesthetics.<sup>9</sup>

The speeches clearly divide in half, though there are two ways of drawing the boundary line.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, there are two speeches. The first ends with Job's brief response at the beginning of ch. 40 and the second concludes with Job's second response at the beginning of ch. 42. Each speech is introduced with the same formula—"Then YHWH answered Job from the whirlwind and said. . ." (38:1 // 40:6)—and each starts out with the same demands of Job (38:3 // 40:7). YHWH begins both by speaking directly to Job but then turns to aspects of creation that may at first appear to be mere vehicles for the message but subsequently, as they extend in elaborate detail, seem to assume a more central role as to the message itself. The initial moment of direct address to Job is longer in the second speech than the first (38:2-3; 40:6-14), but the weight of both speeches undoubtedly shifts to those aspects of creation that are subsequently described. Both speeches initially seem aimed at communicating a message from the first person grammatical subject to the second via references to third person objects; these objects, however, ultimately become the principle subjects of the speeches. In both speeches, the sections following the initial direct address to Job have two main subsections. The first divides thematically, focusing initially on inanimate creation in 38:4-38, and then on animate creation in 38:39-39:30. The second divides according to the two particular inhabitants of creation it describes: Behemoth in 40:15-24 and Leviathan in 40:25-41:26 (Eng: 41:1-34). The second way of dividing the speeches in half, therefore, draws the line within the first speech, at the moment God shifts focus from inanimate creation to pairs of animate creatures. The shift in the speeches from inanimate to animate creation is commonly characterized as a movement from cosmos to chaos. Before turning to the aesthetic categories and the three interpreters, I need to consider this characterization in more detail.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. JACQUES RANCIÈRE, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>10</sup>For particular differences, see VAN DER LUGT (1995), 369-70.

## 91 COSMOS AND CHAOS

The biblical and ancient Near Eastern mythos of creation is largely cast as a struggle to wrest order out of chaos. Creation is the emergence of a structured cosmos out of an unstructured chaos.<sup>11</sup> Van Leeuwen's recently published study details the strong, inherent link in creation stories between the order created by the construction of the world and the order maintained by constructions within the world that are formed so as to sustain life within their bounds. He also details a number of important motifs in these stories, including (i) the role of sacred places such as temples as mediators between these two spheres of construction, (ii) the predominance of references to the builder's wisdom (be it the god or king), as well as (iii) the patterned combination of these constructions with the filling or provisioning of that which is constructed.<sup>12</sup>

YHWH's initial focus on inanimate creation draws heavily on these motifs. Job 38:36-37 includes a reference to the builder's wisdom. In 38:4-7 YHWH describes creation in terms primarily associated with construction. YHWH speaks of the earth's "foundations" and "cornerstone" (cf. Jer 51:26), its "dimensions" and "measurements" (cf. Ezek 47:3). Some of the terms are particularly associated with the construction of a sacred building. For example, "bases" (*eden*) in v.6a almost exclusively refers to the footings of the tabernacle in Priestly texts. Thus, Balentine writes, "God is both the architect and the hands-on

<sup>11</sup>Cf. SUSAN NIDITCH, *Chaos to Cosmos: Studies in Biblical Patterns of Creation* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1985).

<sup>12</sup>RAYMOND C. VAN LEEUWEN, "Cosmos, Temple, House: Building and Wisdom in Mesopotamia and Israel" in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel* Edited by RICHARD J. CLIFFORD. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 67-90. Of course, these points are made often and by many others. I mention van Leeuwen because it is a particularly well-documented and concise presentation of the points most relevant to my discussion. With respect to the privilege of temples, Brown, for example, writes, "the Priestly account of creation finds its home in the structural integrity of the sanctuary and its environs. The tabernacle is both the image projected onto the cosmos and the microcosmos lodged in the heart of Israel's own existence" (BROWN, 1998, 385). Cf. JON D. LEVENSON, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of*

builder... God's world is structured not simply as a *safe house* in which one may live without fear of its collapse; it is also envisioned as a *sacred temple* in which one all [sic] may seek refuge from hostile forces (e.g., Pss 23:5-6; 46:4-5; 48:1-4).<sup>13</sup> Such "hostile forces" are paradigmatically represented in creation texts by the primordial waters/chaos that are the focus of vv.8-11:

– "Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst forth from the womb?...

When I set bars and doors and said,

"Thus far shall you come and no further,

and here shall your proud waves stop.'" (Job 38:8, 10b-11)

– "When he set his limit for the sea,

so that the waters would not transgress his command." (Prov 8:29ab)

– "[The bolt], the bar of the sea,

[They had given] to Enki, the prince." (Atra-ḥasis 1.15-16<sup>14</sup>)

Janzen describes the role of the sea in other ancient Near Eastern and biblical creation accounts as follows: "the Sea appears as a chaotic energy threatening destruction; and cosmic order with its life-giving and meaningful forms presupposes the effective limitation of this energy."<sup>15</sup>

In this traditional mythos, not only does the created order emerge originally out of primordial chaos—call it chaos<sub>1</sub>—it continues to constitute itself by defining itself against and excluding from itself figures of chaos that, in the terms made famous by Levenson's classic study,<sup>16</sup> persist in the form (or formlessness) of evil—call these chaos<sub>2</sub>. Thus, while

*Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 66-99.

<sup>13</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 645. Cf. WILLIAM P. BROWN, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 341.

<sup>14</sup>W. G. LAMBERT and A. R. MILLARD, *Atra-ḥasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 43, cf. 166n.

<sup>15</sup>JANZEN (1985), 234.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. LEVENSON (1994).

the mention of the wicked in vv.13 and 15 may seem out of place in speeches that otherwise focus their attention almost exclusively on domains in which humans play no role, the link these speeches have to the ancient mythos of creation hardly makes their presence surprising, especially after the mention of the primordial sea in vv.8-11. That which fills the newly constructed world, as Van Leeuwen shows, continues the creative work of the construction of the world. In vv.12-15 YHWH refers to the “place” of the morning whence “it seizes the hems of the earth and shakes the wicked from it” (v.13). The word I translate “hems” functions elsewhere as an idiom for the ends or edges of the earth (cf. Job 37:3; Isa 11:12) but the image of “shaking” here nicely draws also on its literal meaning of “skirts” (cf. Ruth 3:9). Every day, as it was at the beginning, the world is at odds with itself. “Like the hedging in of the sea with bars and doors, the light of day contains and limits but does not eliminate the wicked from the world.”<sup>17</sup> In this creation tradition, the nonhuman world’s struggle against chaos<sub>1</sub> spills over into chaos<sub>2</sub>, regardless of the fact that the wicked can be distinguished only in a human social order.

In sum, the connections with temple building and constructions within the world, the presence of the sea at the origin of the world, and the transition from the sea to the wicked, all suggest that the traditional mythos of creation informs ch. 38’s description of the cosmos and associates the cosmos with the emergence and constant re-emergence of order over and against chaos. Is this accurate?

## 92 FROM COSMOS TO CHAOS?

According to a number of interpreters, the speeches share the tradition’s perspective on the relationships between order and chaos. Habel writes, for example, “Yahweh’s design for the cosmos is a meticulously controlled network of structures and processes.”<sup>18</sup> About the place of the wicked in vv.12-15, he writes, “The alien forces in the structure of society are also in Yahweh’s design and under his control.”<sup>19</sup> So, Habel thinks, the speeches begin with

<sup>17</sup>NEWSOM (1996), 603. <sup>18</sup>HABEL (1985), 532. <sup>19</sup>HABEL (1985), 533.

a securely bound and ordered cosmos that is duly separated into parts that are synthesized into a fully functioning, inter-connected system. That the speeches mention the sea or the wicked in their account of the cosmos and that they go on to detail a number of figures traditionally associated with chaos are taken as evidence that the latter only exists within the ordered, firm, and secure structure maintained by YHWH's control.

The governing motifs developed in the elaboration of Yahweh's design for the universe can be divided into three major categories: the structural, the functional, and the celebrative. The structural motifs emphasize the wise order and depth of this design, the functional motifs focus on the containment of evil and providential care, while the celebrative motifs reach beyond structure and function to the festive and incongruous dimensions of this design.<sup>20</sup>

Habel is not alone; he is representative of a strong reading of the view that God's message to Job is that the wickedness, freedom or chaos in the world is measured, limited, or bound by the cosmos.<sup>21</sup> According to this view, the figures of chaos and wickedness that are present within and following the description of the cosmos in ch. 38 are either parallel to the role of chaos<sub>2</sub> in traditional creation accounts, meaning that they are external and opposed to the cosmic order, or they are sapped of their chaotic or wicked character since they too are given a place at the table of God's cosmic design. This interpretation tends to grant chaos two possible roles, both of which have textual support; chaos is either ordered and thus negated by, for example, God's bars and doors, or it is externally opposed to the ordered cosmos that negates it by, for example, shaking it out.

<sup>20</sup>HABEL (1985), 532.

<sup>21</sup>Cf., for example, HARTLEY (1988), 497: "Although God grants a measure of freedom to mankind, the wicked never move outside his control." Or, for another example: "The evocation of certain features of the creation myth leaves virtually no room for chaos to exercise any threat whatever. The emphasis falls on God's design and control over the elements. . . Nothing is left to chance here. . . and the suggestion of definite order in the universe moves far beyond mere hinting" JAMES L. CRENSHAW, "When Form and Content Clash: The Theology of Job 38:1-40:5" in *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions: Collected Writings on Old Testament Wisdom* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995 [1993]b), 457.



While Habel represents the view that downplays the figures of chaos in favor of a strongly unified cosmos and, there is also a “weaker” version that grants the forces of chaos a more prominent role and depicts the cosmos as a more complex synthesis. Schifferdecker’s recent publication can be taken as representative of this version:

The world is not a safe place, but it is indeed an ordered one. Forces of chaos and wildness are given a place in the world, but they are also given boundaries so that they cannot overwhelm it. . . Job must acknowledge God’s sovereignty; but he must also live with the knowledge that God’s sovereignty does not exclude forces indifferent toward, and even dangerous to, humanity. Job must submit to God and learn to live in the untamed, dangerous, but stunningly beautiful world that is God’s creation.<sup>22</sup>

Although this argument appears to be a “weaker” version of Habel’s, one should not be fooled; the apparent privileging of chaos finally serves a more extreme sovereignty. The secure boundaries and synthesizing force of the cosmos are never in doubt. The cosmos is simply more complex and testifies all the more to God’s mastery. Ending as it does in an affirmation of mastery, this view cannot help but see God’s message as an insistence on submission.<sup>23</sup>

One might raise a number of questions to this view, the most embarrassing of which involves Job’s place vis-à-vis this cosmos. If the cosmos is so ordered, firm, and secure, then how could Job (or any figures of chaos) have gotten out of line? Is God’s ability to master and synthesize such a complex system somehow threatened by Job? Pursuing such

<sup>22</sup>SCHIFFERDECKER (2008), 125; cf. 73.

<sup>23</sup>Mathewson provides another example of a study that, while paying attention to forces and figures of chaos in the speeches, claims that their message is a brute insistence on mastery: “The opening section of the Divine Speeches introduces Job to a new field of vision and asks him to locate his place and his experiences in light of it. . . Job must concede that all that occurs in the universe does so as part of God’s design. . . [Job] is one tiny piece of a very large cosmos whose operation depends on the carefully orchestrated direction of God. The type of ‘self’ that Job must be in this type of universe is one who trusts unflinchingly in God’s direction of the universe—one who, though not understanding the world’s operations, nevertheless knows that a master design ultimately undergirds all that surrounds him” MATHEWSON (2006), 157-58.

questions long enough, one will end with the sense that the speeches actually present the empty braggings of a “master” caught in a moment of impotence.<sup>24</sup> One need not pursue such a direction, however, if one thinks that these speeches fail to support such a strong tie between creation and order. Not only do I think that they do not, I think the larger tradition is profoundly ambiguous about it as well.

In APPENDIX A I consider at length the relationship in the tradition between order and chaos, violence and creation, and find it more complicated than a simple external opposition. I do not take the postmodern, deconstructive tack to show that the conditions for the impossibility of order and the cosmos—i.e. chaos and violence—are simultaneously their conditions of possibility, even though this point is valid and often goes unacknowledged. Instead, in a vein that I could call Hegelian with respect to the difference narrated above between Hegel and Kant, I show how order and creation pass directly into chaos and violence.<sup>25</sup> The order of creation is and must be recognized as a force of violence and a source of disorder. So long as those (e.g., Habel) who offer strong readings of order in these speeches and those (e.g., Schifferdecker) who offer weak readings of disorder fail to acknowledge this fundamentally ambiguous character of creation, they will remain blind to the elemental role of God’s speeches in this tradition. The tradition may at times portray order and chaos as mutually exclusive but, I argue, it cannot help betraying the truth of its violent origin, a truth of which, I argue in what follows, God’s speeches are also aware.

### 93 A WEAK OR LESS-THAN-FULLY UNIFIED COSMOS

As many, especially recent interpretations argue, God’s speeches are actually rather uninterested in conjuring an image of the cosmos as an ordered whole. What YHWH describes in

<sup>24</sup>The similitude, which actually goes surprisingly far, with the smoke and mirrors of the great and powerful Oz, has been made in LINA FELT (2006), 94–109. Žižek speaks in several places of the speeches as a massive display God’s impotence, e.g., ŽIŽEK (2002), li. Cf. my discussion of his interpretation in section 7.

<sup>25</sup>I discuss the difference between Hegel and Kant on page 6 and on page 80.

the opening sections of this speech is not a closed totality but a dynamic genesis, not foundations but a founding (v.4a), not a measured whole but the stretching out of a measuring line (v.5b), not a secure basis but the sinking of bases (v.6a). The earth YHWH details is not a bound, eternally secure structure but an active production. And, as Balentine explains, “to the extent that there are *boundaries* or borders in God’s canopied world, they are... *porous* and *permeable*.”<sup>26</sup> I find Brown’s characterization even better, “Creation is polycentric. It has its various centers or domains, each accommodating different forms of life... Earth itself is a multiverse!”<sup>27</sup> As for the figures of chaos and wildness YHWH goes on to describe, O’Connor’s claim is far more satisfying than the idea that the speeches aim to ensure Job that all the cosmos is under control:

[C]ontrol is not the primary issue behind God’s questioning. . . What makes it even less clear that we are to see God as saying “I can do this, but you cannot,” is that each of these animals is unbounded, fearless, and beautiful. Each follows its own way that Job (and God) can neither know nor control. And the only mention of divine control concerns the ostrich whom God created without giving it wisdom, yet even it is wild, fearless, and laughing (39:13-18). When God does claim to act using “I” language (“when I laid the foundation of the earth, I made the clouds for a garment, hail I have reserved for time of trouble”; 38:4, 9, 23), the speech accentuates divine creativity more than control. The poem celebrates abundant, fecund life that needs no control.<sup>28</sup>

These speeches tender a quite different image of the creator God than do their (weak or strong) interpretations discussed above. The latter may note that YHWH delights in beautiful creatures, but the idea that YHWH intends to put Job in his place conditions this delight upon these creatures’ submission to YHWH’s order, and not upon their beautifully

<sup>26</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 638.

<sup>27</sup>WILLIAM P. BROWN, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder* (London: Oxford University Press, 2010), 133.

<sup>28</sup>O’CONNOR (2003), 175.

free and unbound lives.<sup>29</sup>

I want to return to the figure of the sea. I have already noted its appearance in vv.8-11, and that it is followed immediately by the presence of the wicked in vv.12-15. The sea reappears in vv.16-18, thus poetically flanking the wicked on both sides. The sea's reappearance in v.16 occurs at the outset of a subsection that deals with the "deep" (*thwm*), "the gates of death" (*šry-mwt*), and "the gates of deep darkness" (*šry-šlmwt*). Above I referred to the co-presence of the sea and the wicked as indicative of the tradition's tendency to identify them as "figures of chaos." Parallels between the sea, the wicked, the deeps, darkness, and death can be found elsewhere,<sup>30</sup> and so one may think that this poem, which clearly draws on traditions about creation, analogizes these over and against figures such as order, the righteous, life, and light. But even though the sea and the wicked both represent an internal conflict that persists within material reality, the sea is depicted quite differently than the wicked. Verses 8-11 locate the sea, darkness, and depth not with the wicked and that which the dawn shakes out, but rather—and no less than the dawn—at the ontological ground of the cosmos, as figures coddled by the creator. YHWH asks,

Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst forth from the womb?

When I made clouds its clothes,

and deep darkness its swaddling band?

(38:8-9)

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<sup>29</sup>Even Brown, whose interpretation approximates O'Connor's more often than those discussed above, nonetheless includes statements that link the cosmos to a "deeper" unity after his descriptions of this cosmos that imply no such unity. For example, BROWN (1998, 341) writes, "Preceding the extensive litany of wild creatures, the cosmic realm is limned with evocative descriptions of the basic elements of creation: earth, sea, and light (38:4-15), which then gives way to the specific manifestations of these elements: the depths of sea and earth (vv. 16-18), the dwellings of light and darkness (vv. 19-21), various forms of precipitation (vv.22-30, 34-38), and the movement of the constellations (vv.31-33)." But then he insists, "Their respective functions and interrelationships serve to reestablish Yahweh's indomitable plan or design (*'ēšā*, 38:2)."

<sup>30</sup>Cf., for example, Ps 33:7; Ezek 26:19; Jonah 2:5.

Commentators often note the surprising terms with which YHWH describes the sea. Not only is the sea clothed in the “clouds” (*ʿnn*) and the “deep darkness” (*ʿrpl*), figures that are deeply associated in ancient Israel with the appearance of YHWH (cf. Job 22:12-14; Ps 97:1-2; Exod 20:21; Deut 4:11; 5:22; 1 Kings 8:12; Zeph 1:15), but the traditional mythos is stood on its head so that the sea is not subdued or killed but birthed at the moment of creation. The creative act does not oppose the sea in Job 38; it birthes it. Keller describes the scene with characteristic eloquence,

the ocean here bursts forth in amniotic liquidity, caught like a baby by the midwife and wrapped in the soft darkness. A “frigid mastery of the chaos”? Or an intimate tehomophilia? YHWH does not dilute the mythic danger of the sea and the darkness of origins but liberates them from the mood and meaning of evil.<sup>31</sup>

Keller goes on to answer the question—“whose womb is this, that precedes all creatures?”<sup>32</sup>—by suggesting that it is God’s, an answer with which it is hard to disagree in light of their resemblance.

The expanses of the sea (e.g. v.16), earth (e.g. v.18), and sky (e.g. v.22) from which Job is cut off, and the cosmological (e.g., vv.31-33) and meteorological (e.g., vv.28-30) elements of which Job cannot know, are all staged to depict not some unified design interconnecting all material and immaterial reality, but rather a heterogeneous jumble of cosmic worlds, worlds in and between which the gushing forth of the sea is not externally opposed to but an internal condition of creation. It is as if God hard-wires the world with chaotic forces whose presence guarantees that the cosmos’ constituents will always be open to re-wiring, and never achieve harmonious interconnections with one another.<sup>33</sup> Even when the speeches seem to imply connections among the cosmos’ constituents, such “connections” mostly illustrate the opposite: the disconnection and alienation between and among these constituents. For example, consider the waters that rain upon the wilderness and cause the

<sup>31</sup>KELLER (2003), 130. <sup>32</sup>KELLER (2003), 131.

<sup>33</sup>My language intends to evoke JOHNSTON (forthcoming)’s description cited in footnote 76 above of

grass to sprout in vv.26-27. While this certainly implies a connection at some level between these elements, the description itself seems aimed at emphasizing the disconnection and alienation that inheres to the “relationship” between soaking waters and scorched wasteland. The “connection” between the rain and the ground in vv.26-27 is far less connective than it is a tensive encounter between two alien elements. As if to prove the point beyond reproach, YHWH adds that the fecund grass that sprouts out of this alien encounter is located in a place that is cut off from the reach of human beings. This final detail unambiguously suggests that the earths inhabited by the inherently heterogeneous “fecund wasteland” and by human beings form no unified or inter-connected space.

Moreover, any relationships at all are a rare find in these speeches. Forces are named, beings are described, but hardly is anything said to depend upon or even be affected by another. The exceptions again appear designed to prove the rule. For example, within a few verses of one another the ostrich and the horse are described interacting with something human and each are led to laughter. That is, their “relationships” with humans are closer to a collision of aliens than an interdependent collusion. Brown puts it well: “creation teems with life characterized by fierce strength, inalienable freedom, and wild beauty. . . God’s world is filled with scavengers and predators, even monsters (cf. Gen 1:21), all coexisting, though never peacefully. The lions eat their prey; the vultures feast on the slain. This world is God’s wild kingdom.”<sup>34</sup> The elements and beings of these worlds are not unaffected by one another and they are not mere aliens whose only interactions occur in random collisions. But if asked to describe what is most natural about nature in these speeches, I would have to speak about its belief in its independence, the way each inhabitant carries on as if it were alienated from and independent of the others. When dependency is predicated of an animal—such as the raven’s young who cry to El in 38:41—it is always on God; this is no homeostatic, integrated system of fully-functioning harmonious parts.

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recent researches in the cognitive sciences that describe the brain as being “hard-wired to be re-wired.”

<sup>34</sup>BROWN (2010), 129.

Given my reading of the speeches, it is difficult not to feel bewildered before the many readings that conclude that the speeches reveal to Job the cosmic horizon of his existence so as to rebuke him for his particularly human sin of pride. Of course I understand that God's rhetorical mode of address highlights Job's limitation and finitude. Yet I cannot understand how easily interpreters proceed from this focus to reduce the speeches' message to something similar to the east Asian proverb "The nail that sticks out gets hammered down." The content of the speeches would prove disastrously ineffective to such a message since the nature that God describes is all too "human" in its vivid and palpable belief in itself, in its independence, and in its self-sufficiency. This is not a world where everything knows its place and no one takes another's. The raven's young is starving (38:41), the goat's young goes out and does not turn back (*šwb* 39:4); the ox cannot be trusted to return (*šwb* 39:12); the horse is so sure of itself that it laughs at fear and does not turn back (*šwb*) before the sword (39:22). The dirt ground onto which the ostrich fearlessly abandons her egg does not offer a warm embrace or provide a protective womb but rather holds the egg until some other poor dumb animal comes along and tramples it (39:13-17); sure Behemoth finds food (40:20) and a shade tree (40:22), but the river does not wash the beast, bring it its food, or sustain it, it rather rushes against it just as Behemoth's strength and independence are established by withstanding its onrushing force (40:23). Nature in these speeches is fearless, untameable, coursing in directions from which it is not deterred until it collides with another unrelenting creature.

Neither the cosmos nor the earth is described as a solid or safe place. The message is not that Job inhabits a world in which he can find safe refuge, nor is it that the world is unsafe but synthesized in YHWH's great design. The message is rather that Job inhabits a world from whose foundations he is fundamentally disconnected and with which no solid connection is possible insofar as it is not fully connected with itself.

## 94 FROM HERMENEUTICS TO AESTHETICS

Having presented my argument for the speeches' basic message, I can now turn to the difficult task of grasping what this message is supposed to communicate to Job in light of his condition and speeches. I can characterize my argument as anti-hermeneutical since I take hermeneutics to refer to any approach that takes meaning as the ultimate horizon of any gaps or disconnects it confronts. The hermeneut treats discord as merely apparent and aims to find the more essential level or ultimate message discord serves. My argument is anti-hermeneutical since I think the speeches present nothing but an un-unified ground shot through with tensions, cracks, and splits between and within an array of material and immaterial substances. To reduce a complex story, the dominant interpretations that I am labeling hermeneutical locate this un-unified ground and the disjunctions within the world against a more substantial or meaningful background; e.g., the notion of God's great design or complex synthesis. Now, as I turn to the question of the disjunctions between the content of God's speeches and the content of Job's, once again the hermeneutical tendency prevails. Interpreters often seek some deeper, more true level at which the disconnect disappears.

Consider, for example, the following questions:

Have you penetrated the sources of the sea?

Or walked around in the fathoms of the deep?

Have the gates of death been exposed to you?

Have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

Have you comprehended the expanses of the earth?

Declare if you know all this.

(38:16-18)

Discord arises when one reads these questions because, while they occur within a series of questions to which the implied answer is clearly "no," in a number of places Job has testified to his experience of the deep, death, and deep darkness. Keller puts it this way, "Yet these



rhetorical questions give one pause: in some sense Job could answer ‘Yes’—he of all people had seen the gates of deep darkness; it swallowed his children.”<sup>35</sup> Balentine similarly asks, “Who else can speak about death with a conviction that equals the pained experience of Job (e.g., 3:20-22; 7:20-21; 10:18-22; 16:15-17; 17:1-2, 11-16)?”<sup>36</sup> The hermeneut treats such discord as that which an interpretation must resolve in order to conclude. Thus Balentine goes on to suggest, “Perhaps, now at long last, when God says, ‘Declare, if you know all this’ (v.18), the invitation signals that God is indeed willing to listen to what Job has to say about suffering and death.”<sup>37</sup> But few are so eager to see in God’s command an openness to dialogue and, in any case, there is no suggestion that YHWH pauses for a response.<sup>38</sup> Indeed there seems no good reason for reading these questions outside of the series of rhetorical questions in which they occur, a series that marches steadily toward YHWH’s facetious comment in v.21 (“You know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is myriad.”) Others, therefore, find it more likely that God thinks Job knows as much about suffering and death as he does about commanding the morning, laying the foundations of the earth, and so on.<sup>39</sup> From this angle, the hermeneut assures us, YHWH is actually saying to Job, “You may think you want or have seen deep darkness, but you are mistaken.”

I think that the turn to aesthetics made by several scholars at the beginning of the millenium stems in large part from their refusal to take the hermeneutical step toward a deeper level. They analyze the conflict, the contradiction, the discord, as essential to the

<sup>35</sup>KELLER (2003), 131. <sup>36</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 649. <sup>37</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 649.

<sup>38</sup>JANZEN (1985, 236), however, agrees with Balentine by wondering whether the “apparently rhetorical taunts of verses 16-18 in fact intend and convey a solicitation... The language of verses 16-17, of deep, revelation, and deep darkness so resonates with the terms of 12:22 (not to say 10:21-22) that one finds oneself leaning forward in the posture of a kibbitzer, self-involvingly wanting to say, ‘Say yes, Job, say yes! You *have* been there, as your own words attest’.”

<sup>39</sup>Cf., for example, SCHIFFERDECKER (2008, 145): *šal<sup>e</sup>māwet* (“darkness”) first appears “in 3:5, where Job wishes that *šmwut* and *ḥšk* would obliterate the day of his birth. In this verse [38:17] and in 38:19, God challenges Job’s curse. Job has evoked *šmwut* and *ḥšk*, but he cannot even claim to know their dwelling

message; they differ as to how it is best understood. I think they are correct that the move toward resolution at a deeper level is a step in the wrong direction. Rather than searching for some essential connection that merely appears as a disconnect, one needs to discern what the disconnect means, and how it is best understood. I cannot find an interpretation satisfactory that leaves behind either the discord that inheres in the cosmos or the incongruencies that divide the registers in which Job and YHWH speak.

#### 95 THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE SUBLIME

Now I can finally turn to the three interpreters with whom I began and the different aesthetic categories that each draws upon to grasp these disconnects, i.e. the less-than-unified, conflict ridden cosmos, and the discrepancies between YHWH's and Job's perspectives. In this section I discuss the beautiful and the sublime which are, respectively, the primary categories for Newsom and O'Connor. The beautiful and the sublime have a long, complicated history that far exceeds my particular interests, and so will remain largely unexplored (this will also be the case for those aesthetic categories treated below, tragedy and comedy). Though he is not the first to consider them together, I take as my starting point Kant's third *Critique* since the analyses of both O'Connor and Newsom are rooted in it.<sup>40</sup>

A brief overview is in order to situate these aesthetic categories within Kant's larger system. Kant thought our minds worked through the deployments and interactions among various faculties, which might be simplified into the following figure of nested relations:

places. He has longed for death (*mw*) numerous times (first in 3:21), but has never even been to its gates."

<sup>40</sup>Prior to Kant there was, famously, EDMUND BURKE, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958 [1757]).

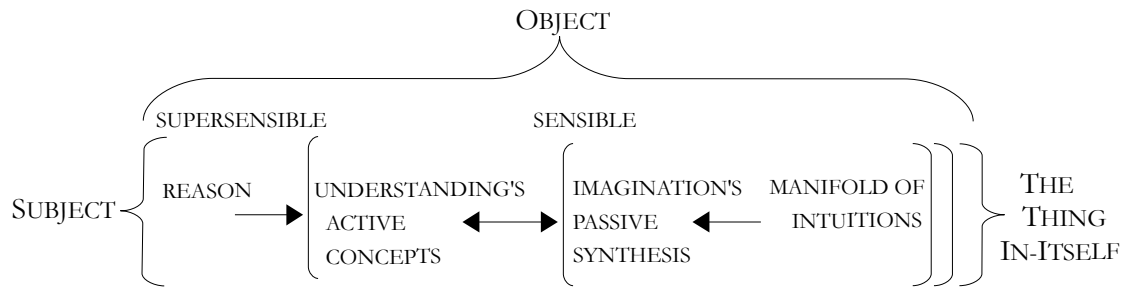


Figure 9.1: Kant's Theory of the Relations among Cognitive Faculties

The imagination can be thought of as that faculty which presents to the mind intuitions drawn from a sensibly given manifold, i.e., from experience. With our imagination we *apprehend*, according to certain rules, whatever intuitions come to mind about our experience. The imagination directly engages our intuitions through a kind of passive synthesis. The imagination looks for patternings, relations, movement; it seeks formal coherence amidst a manifold of intuitions. Then the understanding works with concepts to organize and *comprehend* the object that has been imaginatively apprehended. Reason is then the faculty by which one can reflect on the success or failure of the concepts and categories of the understanding.

One way Kant distinguishes aesthetic judgments such as “X is beautiful” from, say, rational judgments, is that the former do not use concepts. The imagination goes about its business without the understanding pressing in on its apprehensions so as to cognize them conceptually. The imagination continues to do the same kinds of activities it normally does at the behest of the understanding, that is, the imagination continues to try to apprehend the manifold it perceives in a way that is amenable to the conceptualizing activity of the understanding even though, in this case, the understanding does not try to conceptualize. This is why Kant calls the experience of beauty free and playful—before the beautiful object the imagination operates without being determined by any of the understanding's concepts—and yet purposive and harmonious—the object apprehended seems suited for

the work of the understanding and one's powers of judgment in general. The beautiful, he writes, "directly brings with it a feeling of the promotion of life, and hence is compatible with charms and an imagination at play. . . [Beauty] carries with it a purposiveness in its form. . . [that] seems as it were to be predetermined for our power of judgment."<sup>41</sup> When we feel pleasure before a piece of art, Kant thinks that we are feeling a sense of harmony between the imagination and the understanding because the imagination has discerned in the object a form that is suitable for the work of the understanding in general, even though the understanding does not in this case go to work on it. Beauty only pertains to an object that seems as if it were purposive or designed, without any definite purpose or telos actually fitting this purposiveness. For Kant, neither beauty nor the sublime are teleological; "both please for themselves,"<sup>42</sup> they are both liked for their own sake, disinterestedly.

If there is a sense of harmony behind the pleasure that arises with beauty, the experience of the sublime arises in the face of an unpleasurable discord between what the imagination tries to apprehend and that which the understanding could comprehend. That which "excites in us the feeling of the sublime, may to be sure appear in its form to be contrapurposive [*zweckwidrig*] for our power of judgment, unsuitable for our faculty of presentation [*Darstellung*], and as it were doing violence to our imagination, but is nevertheless judged all the more sublime for that."<sup>43</sup> Where the beautiful is *zweckmäßig*, purposive, the sublime is *zweckwidrig*, contrapurposive. The imagination's attempt to unify the manifold into a coherent form is frustrated by the disharmony of the sublime object before which the subject stands. The object is too irregular or idiosyncratic for conceptualization, in short, too formless with respect to the thought of totality. If the idea of a totality is driving one's cognizing activity which is, in this case, failing to apprehend the sensorily-derived manifold of intuitions as formally coherent, then the idea of a totality must be supersensible—in Kant's somewhat archaic terms, above that which can be perceived through the senses. Kant can then posit the faculty of reason as the source of this supersensible idea of a totality.

<sup>41</sup>KANT (2000), 128, 129. <sup>42</sup>KANT (2000), 128. <sup>43</sup>KANT (2000), 129.

The experience of the sublime is, therefore, the experience of something that occasions the feeling that there is a vocation within us that is not governed by and does not derive from anything sensible. In the experience of the sublime we look down upon our sensible nature and its limited capacities from the supersensible and unconditioned heights of pure reason. The sublime thus brings

a pleasure that arises only indirectly, being generated, namely, by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital powers and the immediately following and all the more powerful outpouring of them; hence as an emotion it seems to be not play but something serious in the activity of the imagination. . . the mind is not merely attracted by the object [as it is in the beautiful], but is also always reciprocally repelled by it, the satisfaction in the sublime does not so much contain positive pleasure as it does admiration or respect, i.e., it deserves to be called negative pleasure.<sup>44</sup>

The subject experiencing the sublime is both audience and hero of a tragic drama, lured into viewing something that will expose and overwhelm the limits and capacities of her sensible being, and yet will thereby also reaffirm her heroic transcendence beyond the sensible. Sublime pleasure thus arrives not only through a negative pleasure, it also arises in a negative way, not through some representation one has of the actual object encountered, but rather through a dimension that one's imagination fails to represent and which comes not from the object but from the subject, from reason.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>KANT (2000), 128-29.

<sup>45</sup>Of course, the harmony that gives one pleasure in the experience of beauty does not come from the object either since it is a harmony between the subject's own faculties. Cf. "It is in the negative space opened up by the failure of representation that this negative presentation takes place; it is through the breakdown of representation, the point at which our representative faculties are confronted with their immanent limit, that the realm of the supersensible is opened up as the beyond of representation itself. . . The sublime can only be presented negatively, as the experience of a lack as the nonplace of the idea—a necessary absence that summons the presence-through-absence of the power of reason" GEORGE HARTLEY, *The Abyss of Representation: Marxism and the Postmodern Sublime* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 35, 37.

For Kant there are two basic modes or structures through which this failure appears and gives rise to the feeling of the sublime, the first he calls mathematical and associates with quantity or magnitude, the second he calls dynamical and associates with quality. The primary object of the mathematical sublime is infinity, which he illustrates by reference to the stars. When the imagination looks up at the stars, reason wants to totalize the starry sky into a whole, and so demands that the imagination start counting. But there is a moment when the imagination fails, fails to keep in mind, in a single intuition, a single whole, the beginning of the counting and where it is in its counting at a later moment, and so the counter is confronted with the failure of her imagination before reason's requirement to totalize the infinity of stars over her head. With that, reason appears as a supersensible power within us, a power that demands what one cannot even imagine, and so surpasses any standard of sense.<sup>46</sup> The dynamically sublime, however, is felt before figures of power and might, violence and destruction; threatening cliffs, a lofty waterfall on a mighty river, volcanoes and hurricanes trailing destruction, thunder clouds towering to the heavens. Before them, "as long as we find ourselves in safety,"<sup>47</sup> we recognize our physical impotence, but nonetheless confront within ourselves a capacity for judging ourselves that remains independent of such sublime objects.<sup>48</sup>

#### 96 JOB'S SUBLIME EXPERIENCE

According to Newsom, "Chapter 38 is largely concerned with what Kant would call the 'mathematical sublime,' which engenders sublimity by overwhelming the mind with what

<sup>46</sup>"Even to be able think the given infinite without contradiction requires a faculty in the human mind that is itself supersensible. . . Nature is thus sublime in those of its appearances the intuition of which brings with them the idea of infinity. Now the latter cannot happen except through the inadequacy of even the greatest effort of our imagination in the estimation of the magnitude of an object" KANT (2000), 138.

<sup>47</sup>KANT (2000), 144.

<sup>48</sup>"The irresistibility of [nature's] power certainly makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical powerlessness, but at the same time it reveals a capacity for judging ourselves as independent of

it cannot comprehend in the categories available to it. . . [whereas] chapters 39-41 are more concerned with the 'dynamically sublime.'"<sup>49</sup> My discussion of ch. 38 would seem to agree fully with her former point since I found that the speech consistently describes material reality in ways that fail to represent it as a totalized whole. Since the cosmos fails to form a unified whole, Job's imagination is unable to apprehend it as a unified whole, which is what the interrogative mood through which God presents the cosmos to Job implies by emphasizing the cosmos' incomprehensibility. Many readers, I argued above, misapprehend this connection, believing that the interrogatives imply a merely human, epistemological limitation. On the contrary, I have argued that the cosmos is less-than-fully unified at an *ontological* level. That is, this cosmos is not some thing that could be comprehended were it not for humans' epistemological limitations. Yet the inadequacy of subjective comprehension is certainly on display in these speeches.

The animals in chs. 39-41 provide wonderful illustrations of dynamically sublime objects. They are "the wild and fierce denizens of inaccessible mountains and desert wastelands."<sup>50</sup> Newsom describes them as "liminal beings who belong to the boundaries of the symbolic world. . . they manifest the alien Other, with the terror of the chaotic present in their very being."<sup>51</sup> Just as Kant describes a sublime object as absolute, in every respect beyond all comparison since "we do not allow a suitable standard for it to be sought outside of it, but merely within it,"<sup>52</sup> so too does God limn Behemoth: "the first/chief of the acts of God" (40:19a). "Like Behemoth," Newsom adds, "Leviathan will also be described as a creature 'without equal,' a king over all the proud (41:25-26)."<sup>53</sup> Although she thinks the speeches begin with more attention than I have allowed to the order of the cosmos,<sup>54</sup> throughout her analysis Newsom draws attention to the properly sublime character of the objects of God's [nature] and a superiority over nature on which is grounded a self-preservation of quite another kind than that which can be threatened and endangered by nature outside us" KANT (2000), 145.

<sup>49</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 242. Newsom's judgment is echoed by LINAFFELT (2006), 102.

<sup>50</sup>LINAFFELT (2006), 103. <sup>51</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 248. <sup>52</sup>KANT (2000), 134. <sup>53</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 249-50.

<sup>54</sup>"Since God's speeches begin with such attention to the order of the cosmos, I would not be inclined to see

focus, be it in their vast expansiveness (mathematical), their alien habitat, or terrifying strength and violence (dynamic).

The objects God represents to Job in these speeches may provide prime candidates for affording an experience of the sublime, but one does not necessarily have a sublime experience when faced with such objects. Thus far I have only suggested one side of the experience of the sublime that these speeches seem to be aimed at arousing in Job—that is, feelings of impotence, nullity, and inhibition—but where in these speeches is there evidence of the sublime’s feelings of supremacy, independence, and respect? Echoing an earlier interpretation by Gordis, Newsom argues that Job’s experience can be seen to be doubled or indirect in the same way as the experience of the sublime when he cites in his second response what God previously said (42:3a // 38:2; 42:4b // 38:3b; 40:7b).<sup>55</sup> In his citations, Job testifies to an experience of “ex-static transport” in which God’s words become his own and he experiences himself as though he were the source of their creative power,

as though he had created what he heard. . . It is a profound loss of unity, a recognition of the deeply fractured nature of reality. The experience of sublime transport resolves nothing substantively. It does, however, provide a means by which the loss of unity is itself experientially displaced, as Job feels the words of the divine speech as though he himself were speaking them.<sup>56</sup>

To ask, apropos Job’s ambiguous response, whether Job has accepted or defied God’s rebuke, is to miss the sense in which the line between Job’s and God’s positions is transgressed in the moment of sublime transport. Job not only assumes God’s words about his the speeches as a rejection of God’s role as source of moral order in the social realm” NEWSOM (2003a), 252.

<sup>55</sup>GORDIS (1965), 187-88, “After God has spoken, Job is overcome. He is overwhelmed by the disclosure of the vast miracle and mystery of the world, of which man’s existence and suffering constitute only a minor facet. In voicing his submission, Job repeats the Lord’s opening challenge to him. . . After each citation he adds his humble comment. In his humility there is a note of triumph that God has deigned to meet and argue with him.” Gordis recognizes the indirect, doubled feeling of the sublime when he speaks about the “note of triumph” betrayed by each “humble comment.”

<sup>56</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 255.



inadequacy ("Who is this who darkens counsel without knowledge" 42:3a), but also stands victorious in his defeat, having now gained an idea of that which is too wonderful for him to know (42:3c).

#### 97 JOB'S EXPERIENCE OF BEAUTY

In her brief but provocative essay, O'Connor argues that the divine speeches afford Job an experience of beauty in the specific sense defined by E. Scarry.<sup>57</sup> Scarry's work tries to rehabilitate beauty despite its detractors across the humanities.<sup>58</sup> Beauty's opposition to the sublime has been strongly operative in earning it this bad reputation.<sup>59</sup> Kant's work is certainly influenced by this opposition but he is more guilty of the particular offenses Scarry rejects in an earlier, pre-critical text<sup>60</sup> than he is in the third *Critique*. In the traditional opposition, the beautiful "was almost always the diminutive member, [so] it was also the dismissible member."<sup>61</sup> Scarry attempts a thorough redefinition of the beautiful that would restore to it the potent and perturbing aspects that have been cut off from it by dint of their attribution to the sublime, beauty's so-called opposite. Scarry thinks the experience of beauty is potent and perturbing because it is decentering and "unselfing." Beauty forces us to surrender our imaginary position at the center of the world and incites in us an ethical

<sup>57</sup>In particular, ELAINE SCARRY, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>58</sup>LINAFELT (2006, 106), sees this as part of a larger movement: "there has been a recent spate of books that attempt to reclaim an aesthetics of beauty, over against the dominant tradition since Kant that has seen the beautiful as too mundane, too available, too this-worldly, too much in the service of pleasure and of love and domesticity, and too much the preserve of women." In addition to Scarry, he cites STEINER (2001); and DONOGHUE (2003).

<sup>59</sup>SCARRY (1999), 82-86.

<sup>60</sup>IMMANUEL KANT, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* trans. by John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960).

<sup>61</sup>SCARRY (1999), 84.

will to share and replicate for the sake of others what we have experienced.<sup>62</sup>

Scarry's understanding of beauty specifies but does not wholly depart from Kant's. Scarry's framework is no more limited to beauty's agitating force than Kant's is to its symmetry. Scarry adopts J. Rawls' definition of fairness as a "symmetry of everyone's relation to each other,"<sup>63</sup> which serves as the referent for her claim that beauty heightens our awareness of justice, awakens us to injustice, and begets in us a will toward ethical fairness. Kant thinks there must be in judgments of beauty a moment of excess or indeterminateness in which form emerges out of or breaks away from conceptuality. This excess beyond conceptuality is what allows the purposiveness of form or mere form to be experienced.<sup>64</sup>

So, for Scarry, beholding a beautiful object displaces us from the inertia plaguing our ego-driven pursuits and into a posture that believes that symmetrical relations with all are possible; and it prompts in us a positive pleasure. In light of Scarry's redefinition of the experience of beauty, it may be helpful to reformulate the difference between beauty and the sublime. The sublime affords a negative pleasure, a pleasure which arises from a displeasure, as well as from a discontinuity with the world and with ourselves. Both the beautiful and the sublime tear us from our narcissistic complacency, the unity of an imaginary one, but they do so in two different ways and to two different ends. Beauty divides us in half, cuts us off from ourselves, but instills in us a belief that we can create a world in and with which we could be unified. The sublime cleaves us in two, but pleases us by locating us in a seemingly

<sup>62</sup>I have benefited from the discussion of Scarry's work in COPJEC (2002), 169-71. <sup>63</sup>SCARRY (1999), 89.

<sup>64</sup>Gasché tries to correct the common misreading that ignores this aspect of Kant's notion of beauty: "if beauty is linked to an agreement of a manifold with a unity, such agreement is not to be understood in terms of regularity, symmetry, and uniformity... Neither regularity and symmetry nor their opposites constitute the beautiful form; instead a certain richness of the form itself, its indeterminateness, or dynamism (of possibilities), constitutes that beauty. Rather than being opposed to content, form, in this sense, gestures toward what is otherwise than form and content—an exuberance of indeterminateness prior to any fixing of objective meaning and its constraining formal characteristics... The form that is thus judged beautiful is form in the wild" RUDOLPHE GASCHÉ, *The Idea of Form: Rethinking Kant's Aesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 65-66.

impossible place wherefrom our split self can be perceived.<sup>65</sup> Beauty appears at first to be a more or less unified and harmonious experience of satisfaction that actually constitutes us as desiring, less-than-unified subjects. The sublime, on the other hand, appears at first an unpleasurable experience of a profound loss of unity that actually turns out to please by placing us in an impossible confrontation with the (split) essence of our being. In short, beauty promises us unity by cutting us off from it, and the sublime gives us unity that we can only perceive as two. The senses of "unity" involved at the end of both experiences are far from the imaginary "one" in which we previously lived.

A number of prominent interpretations prior to O'Connor's describe as beautiful that which the speeches convey to Job.<sup>66</sup> The aspects of the poem that she finds beautiful are in many places similar to what these prior studies have found. And I have to agree that nature's mysteries do seem in these speeches to convey a particularly vivid beauty. The speeches describe the overflowing glory of the cosmos and its inhabitants, and accompanying these descriptions are statements of God's pride, detailed attention, and delight in creation and its creatures.

But again, beautiful objects, like sublime objects, do not necessarily afford an experience of beauty. To demonstrate that Job has enjoyed and been transformed by beauty as she understands it, O'Connor, like Newsom, draws heavily on Job's second response and the epilogue:

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<sup>65</sup>Recall that NEWSOM (2003a, 255) describes Job's sublime experience as "a profound loss of unity, a recognition of the deeply fractured nature of reality," that is itself displaced. This experience of the displacement of the experience of a loss of unity does not return Job to the previous unity but affords him a new experience of unity that somehow holds the loss of unity within itself.

<sup>66</sup>In particular, see the deservedly classic study by ROBERT ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic, 1985), 85-110. One could also go back to the discussion of God's speeches in JOHANN GOTTFRIED HERDER, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* trans. by James Marsh (Burlington, Vt.: Edward Smith, 1833). O'Connor's work differs in that she does not treat the speeches' beauty as a hermeneutical clue that would dispel their incongruencies but analyzes instead the beauty of these incongruencies.

There is language of sight: "But now my eyes see you" (42:5); there is Job's unselfing: "I put my hand over my mouth, I am of small account," "I repent in/of/concerning dust and ashes" (42:6). There is evidence that his focus turns outward as he repairs injuries, interceding for his friends (42:7-9) and extending extraordinary care to his daughters (42:13-15).<sup>67</sup>

Linafelt's similar point more clearly states how Job's care for his daughters aligns with Scarry's argument that beauty begets in the beholder a will toward justice:

Job also, we are told in an understated aside, gives his daughters an inheritance along with their brothers—an act that would seem to more or less directly subvert the gendered basis of ancient inheritance laws, which allowed daughters to inherit only if there were no living male relatives. . . In the social structure that Job has just subverted, a daughter did not inherit because she was essentially sold off for a brideprice to a suitor, whose responsibility she would now be, and the value of beauty lay in its ability to bring a heftier brideprice. But by giving his daughters an inheritance, Job has provided them a way out of this economic system; their beauty is not defined by its use-value.<sup>68</sup>

The pressure exerted by the speeches' beauty also extends to present readers:

The speeches invite us to participate in God's wild, raging creativity, to replicate beauty, to create new beauty, to generate harmony and wild freedom in our work and relationships, to extend our realm of care from our families to the whole cosmos and its denizens, to make a world where creative flourishing is available to all beings.<sup>69</sup>

O'Connor's move from Job to the reader is not simply another iteration of the pervasive "So what?" question at the end of nearly every "theological" or "ethical" reading. Her move arises immanently from her interpretation, according to which an experience of beauty in itself compels an ethical will toward universal symmetry. Such universality is not the postulate that there is or should be a symmetry among all that X is beautiful, nor even that the beauty that one experiences as a symmetry among her faculties can or should be taken as an analogy for political equality, but rather that the concrete, aesthetic symmetry one experiences from beauty compels and helps her to actualize just symmetrical relations

<sup>67</sup>O'CONNOR (2003), 179. <sup>68</sup>LINAFELT (2006), 108. Cf. BROWN (1996), 113-14. <sup>69</sup>O'CONNOR (2003), 179.

for all.<sup>70</sup>

#### 98 BEAUTIFUL OR SUBLIME?

The largest obstacles to describing the experience that the divine speeches afford as one of beauty may initially seem to stem from the discordances that plague the speeches (described in section 93). However, Scarry's redefinition predicates the experience of beauty on just such discordances.<sup>71</sup> The un-unified, conflict ridden nature of the cosmos, as well as the incongruencies dividing YHWH from Job and Job from the world, can all be taken as the instigating forces behind beauty's perturbing effects. O'Connor denies that the speeches attempt to bully Job into humiliation and instead thinks that the speeches' antagonistic features participate in the same sort of disruption of one's general narcissism that an encounter with something beautiful effects when it draws one's attention away from oneself, out of her unmindfulness.

Beauty is quite helpful for grasping those moments when Job recedes into irrelevance as God gets absorbed in the intricacies of a creature, but God does not remain there, which makes beauty a difficult paradigm to stay within. In the experience of beauty the decentering moment is preliminary and, once accomplished, the self falls away as one's regard shifts laterally. Job may recede but he does not ever fall away. In the end, these speeches remain staged for Job. Well into the speeches, just before turning to Behemoth and Leviathan, God again focuses squarely on Job (40:1-14). And Job's concern in both verbal responses is less with the beauty or even the existence of creation and its creatures,

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<sup>70</sup>SCARRY (1999, 96) likens the experience of beauty to "one term of an analogy actively call[ing] out for its missing fellow," that is, justice, and she explicitly opposes this to the weaker claim that the symmetries of beauty and justice are (passively) analogous: "An analogy is inert and at rest only if both terms are present in the world; when one term is absent, the other becomes an active conspirator for the exile's return." When given its proper Kantian background, justice for Scarry is structurally similar to the understanding for Kant in that both constitute the missing second term of an analogy whose first term is supplied by beauty.

<sup>71</sup>Recall Scarry's statement, "The surfaces of the world are aesthetically uneven" (1999, 106).

and more with himself and what God has said about him. Thus, beauty may be most helpful at particular moments within and after the speeches, e.g., when he gives his daughters such sensuous and aesthetic names and shows his concern for justice, but I do not think that beauty can be used to approach the speeches more broadly.

The sublime seems particularly well-suited for grasping those aspects of the speeches for which beauty seems ill-suited, namely, the uses to which God puts creation. The speeches emphasize Job's powerlessness and inabilities (what Kant calls *Unvermögen*) and certainly seem intended to evoke his deep displeasure. They present so many attempts at humiliation and violence in the experience of limitation. All these—humiliation, limitation, violence, impotence, &c.—are precisely the terms with which Kant refers to the displeasure that characterizes one half of the sublime.

Although the sublime and the beautiful are each productive paradigms for grasping particular moments in the speeches, neither is without its problems. The most troubling issue for both is the sense in which Job fails to meet the conditions they require of the one who will experience their feelings. Both frameworks need the speeches to address and perturb a man who finds himself in a state of imaginary unity. Whether it is the vertical image of sublime humiliation (looking down on oneself), or the horizontal image of beauty's decentering (lateral regard toward others), both rely on a reference to Job's self-regard or self-absorption. Textual support can be found for such a reference; Job's speeches in chs. 3 and 29-31 often perform this task. But it strikes me as odd to refer to Job—considered across his speeches—as arrogant, self-absorbed, or one with too high a sense of entitlement. I think in particular of all those texts I drew on in CHAPTER 5 to describe Job's anxiety, and in CHAPTER 7 to describe Job's shame. The image they depict cannot be called self-absorption since in them Job repeatedly asserts that he is not at one with himself.

The friends, I argued in section 53, relate to Job through the experience of the sublime and they encourage Job to adopt a similar relationship to his experience. But, I argued (in sections 54-55), Job is incapable of assuming the sublime standpoint on his experience

because of his profound sense of a lack of unity and self-identity. Does YHWH here repeat the friends' offer? Does YHWH operate with the same ethic?<sup>72</sup> I said Job is unable to assume a sublime stance toward his condition in the dialogue since he lacks the ground from which he could get beyond or rise above his condition. Even if one were to argue that chs. 29-31 show that Job has attained what he previously lacked, would this be enough to annul or render irrelevant Job's previous condition? To read the divine speeches as if they responded only to Job's speech in chs. 29-31 would certainly sap them of much of their force. In either case, however, if YHWH's solution seeks to afford Job a sublime experience, then YHWH would seem, no less than the friends, to offer him a solution that is at least ineffective and at most ignorant with respect to that dimension of his experience which, I argued above, the sublime is unable to account for.

In sum, while the unselfing involved in the experience of beauty misses the sense in which Job remains a focal point for these speeches, the sublime's focus on the demotion of the self misses the already abundantly demoted condition of the speeches' addressee. It is now, finally, appropriate to introduce Keller's work.

#### 99 TRAGEDY AND COMEDY

Keller's work turns from the aesthetic opposition beautiful—sublime to another, tragedy—comedy. Tragedy functions as a sort of mediating term since Newsom argues that there is a tragic structure to the sublime experience that the speeches afford Job. Newsom associates the tragic not with the chaotic or the evil that destroys human plans and desires, but rather with "the inevitable clash of two necessities,"<sup>73</sup> by which she means a clash between Job's passion in chs. 29-31 for a rationally transparent world and the intrinsic and unmasterable violence of existence. Confronted with this clash, Job's aim is no longer to preserve the

<sup>72</sup>Although she differentiates one from the other, Newsom predicates a notion of the sublime both to the friends and to God. The former she calls the "masochistic sublime" (NEWSOM, 2003a, 138-50), the latter, the "tragic sublime."

<sup>73</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 253.

possibility of emancipation, but to testify with his mourning to the irremediable catastrophe, and with his silence to his subjection to an unrepresentable otherness. Job testifies to a catastrophe and an otherness, a catastrophic and sublime otherness that lies at the origin and essence of cosmic and human being.

Because of his experience of sublime transport, Job is not simply subjected to this tragic structure, he is also allowed to grasp it as such. In his assumption of YHWH's words as his own he freely assumes the necessity of his tragic existence. Job's embrace of tragic existence in his experience of sublime transport allows him a modicum of pleasure that can be indexed in Job's decision in the epilogue to bring children into the world once again, to endow them with inheritances and names that conjure various forms of beauty. "Such playful names," Newsom writes, "are a form of laughter—not heedless or anarchic laughter—but human and therefore tragic laughter."<sup>74</sup> Tragic existence consists in this clash between two heterogeneous dimensions. The experience of this clash brings not only pain and violence but can also inspire respect for the unrepresentable and unconditional dimension in which the subject can recognize, and freely assume, its destiny. From this complex experience emerges the subject that can be seen laughing and enjoying, in all its tragically sublime splendor.

Tragedy is often characterized by a certain disconnect between the subjective views of the hero and the objective circumstances in which he finds himself. Tragedies create suspense by building toward the clash of two contradictory elements.<sup>75</sup> The hero will embody this clash at the moment she is brought down and simultaneously elevated. Think of Oedipus in Sophocles' plays. One element is the Oracle's prediction of what will happen; the other is the characters' actions that aim to prevent the fulfillment of this prediction, along with the events consequent to these actions. Suspense is thus created, sustained, and

<sup>74</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 258.

<sup>75</sup>My understanding of comedy, tragedy, and the relationship between them is deeply indebted to the analysis of ALENKA ZUPANČIČ, *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008).



escalated as readers progress toward the moment these two elements clash. When they do, they take Oedipus down, but nonetheless elevate him in tragic dignity at the moment of his assumption of guilt.

Keller draws on comedy for the ways in which it opposes tragedy and transcendence. “This comedy would not be a joke but a laughter of resistance. . . Does tragic rage meld dissonantly in the book of Job with a defiant humor? . . . Does laughter transgress the very transcendence of a distanced Sovereign?”<sup>76</sup> There is a much larger debate around the idea that JOB is a comedy and Keller relies on some of its most prominent proponents.<sup>77</sup> Most of her argument explores various senses in which YHWH’s speeches and other parts of JOB parody, subvert, and transform the traditional mythos of creation, both ancient and modern.<sup>78</sup> In the end, Keller’s transgressive laughter approximates what Newsom calls Job’s “human and therefore tragic laughter.”<sup>79</sup>

In what follows I also develop a notion of comedy in opposition to tragedy, but the actual direction my reflections take is rather tangential to the current debate about whether JOB is a comedy. This debate is concerned with matters of genre; it usually determines comedy through something like Wittgenstein’s well known “family resemblance” model; and as regards JOB, interpreters have turned to comedy for its potential ability to encompass all

<sup>76</sup>KELLER (2003), 124-25.

<sup>77</sup>The foundational arguments can be found in ROBERT POLZIN and DAVID ROBERTSON, editors, *Semeia 7: Studies in the Book of Job* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1977). For an updated version of Whedbee’s central article, see J. WILLIAM WHEDBEE, *The Bible and the Comic Vision* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002 [1998]), 221-62.

<sup>78</sup>As Keller undoubtedly knows, I should note that not all comedy is subversive or transformative, much less celebrative or affirmative. Indeed, my sense is that comedy is at least as often quite conservative. Can the comic not provide concrete support for an ideology by rendering its atrocities minimally palatable? Can we not think of times when it was clear that, were it not for the ability to laugh at a situation, we would never have been able to tolerate it? I do not mean that all comedies or laughter are conservative, just that the line between conserving and subverting must be drawn right through the comic, not between it and something else.

<sup>79</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 258.

the book's diverse material.<sup>80</sup> However, I am concerned with what I will define as a comic structure, which I will distinguish from a tragic structure on the basis of the way in which each manages an impossible relationship between (at least) two non-relational elements. That is, both comedy and tragedy designate structures that relate multiple elements that for some reason exclude one another. *In tragedy* the clash of the two heterogeneous elements is held in suspense until a final moment when certain figures (such as the hero's body in *Antigone*) are brought down only to have others (such as the idea of fidelity) elevated. *In comedy*, however, the co-presence of the heterogeneous elements gets the sequence going, and the various ways of dealing with this presence, of manipulating and developing it through literary devices, and so on, is what makes it funny. Comic suspense does not derive principally from a desire to discover how the events will turn out but rather from one's enjoyment of how they continue to be turned over. The comic sequence neither unifies nor connects the two elements; it depends upon maintaining and simultaneously manifesting their disconnect. Of course, many comedies conclude with a unification and, as Northrup Frye famously observes, "Comedy has a U-shaped plot."<sup>81</sup> Yet the crucial point is that any unification takes place at the conclusion, that is, it marks the end of the comic sequence. Needless to say, the actual, dramaturgical ways in which the tragic and comic structures are played out can range widely. This preliminary definition and the following discussion sacrifices a great deal of nuance to the gods of concision.

Before turning to JOB, some examples will not only clarify this comic structure, they will also demonstrate its presence elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern literature. First, consider the Akkadian "Dialogue of Pessimism"/"Obliging Slave."<sup>82</sup> In this dialogue, the master proposes to engage in ten different activities, and each time the slave obliges the master's

<sup>80</sup>Cf. J. WILLIAM WHEDBEE, "The Comedy of Job" *Semeia*, 7 (1977), 1-39. For the family resemblance model, see WHEDBEE (2002 [1998]), 6.

<sup>81</sup>NORTHROP FRYE, *Fables of Identity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1963), 25.

<sup>82</sup>WILLIAM W. HALLO and JR. K. LAWSON YOUNGER, editors, *The Context of Scripture, vol. I: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 495-96.

volition with motivations. Each time, however, the master decides not to take the action and the slave responds once again with motivations in favor of avoiding the action:

“Slave, oblige me again!” “Here, master! Here!”

“I’m going to fall in love with a woman!”

“Fall in love, master, fall in love! The man who falls in love with a woman forgets depression and melancholy.”

“No way, slave, I will not fall in love with a woman.”

“Don’t fall in love, master, don’t fall in love. Woman is a well, she’s a well, a pit, a hole. Woman is a whetted iron dagger that cuts the throat of a fine man.”

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“Slave, oblige me again!” “Here, master! Here!”

“Get a move on and get water for my hands and give it to me so that I can make a sacrifice to my personal god!”

“Make a sacrifice, master, make a sacrifice! A man who makes a sacrifice to his personal god will be content. On trust he is making loan upon loan.”

“No way, slave, I will not make a sacrifice to my personal god.”

“Don’t do it, master, don’t do it. Can you teach your personal god to run after you like a dog? He’ll just demand of you rites, a votive statue, and many other things.”

In this brilliant burlesque of master-slave relations, the two non-relational or heterogeneous elements are easy to identify: master and slave.<sup>83</sup> At first, one may think of master and slave as co-dependent social roles assumed by two different subjects. The subject in the master’s role is able to exercise his subjectivity, whereas the slave’s subjection to the master forces him to exercise his subjectivity by the only means available—in this case, by expressing his enthusiasm and articulating his support for whatever the master decides to do. The comic dimension of the dialogue appears once the slave supports, with equal passion and

<sup>83</sup>It is unfortunate that it is called a dialogue of *pessimism*, and that some such as CRENSHAW (1998, 221) disparage it as an expression of “crippling ennui,” since on my reading it only appears in such a negative light when it is read from the perspective of the master.

substance, a position that is the opposite of the one he previously supported. The master and slave no longer appear to be two subjects who each play one of the two constituent parts of the societal institution of slavery. With the slave's second answer, his apparently external subjectivity disappears, and he becomes identified with his role as the producer of the substance—the knowledge and incentive—that the master can decide whether or not to use in the master's realization of his subjective desires. The dialogue thereby defines the slave as one without subjectivity who produces the material that actual subjects can use or not. Yet the master's subjectivity is also qualified by this dialogue's depiction of him as one who is only capable of deciding, and not of supplying the knowledge or incentive for adjudicating among opposed decisions, or even for carrying them out. Thus, if the slave is subjectless substance, the master is substanceless subject, incapable of mastering anything without appropriating the products of slave labor.

One could subject master-slave relations to this critique without being funny. The dialogue's comic effect derives from its presentation at the outset, and its further development and manipulation of an impossible relationship between two non-relational elements. There are at least two ways to think about this impossible relationship and these two elements. First, the master and slave are impossibly related in the sense that they are baldly juxtaposed but do not relate to one another (somewhat like an appositive metaphor<sup>84</sup>). Each time the master proposes an action, the slave produces the substance with which the master could proceed, and the comic effect is generated as the product of the slave's labor goes unused, and as the master's "mastery" prevents him from accomplishing anything. That is, the master's failure to recognize or use the perfectly useful products created for him by slave labor maintains the distinctiveness of his independent sovereign mastery, yet also demonstrates the impotence of his "mastery" insofar as it keeps him from doing anything substantial. The dialogue shows that the actual master is no master at all, since actual mastery affords the master only decisive indecisiveness and impotent inactivity. One way

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<sup>84</sup>I discuss appositive metaphors on page 361 and on page 370.

this appears as comical is in the disconnect between the way that the master continues to act like a master—making decisions for this or that, barking commands at the slave, having a slave who serves his needs, and so on—even though his failure to acknowledge the slave’s mastery—by recognizing and appropriating the knowledge and incentive produced by the slave’s labor—exposes an impotence at the heart of his mastery.

The second sense of an impossible relationship that the dialogue creates concerns not the relationship of master/subject to slave/substance, but the contradiction internal to slavery itself. The scene shows that the institution cannot function if the roles on which it depends were actually assumed. The two non-relational elements are the actual roles of the master and slave—the master as impotent unless he somehow recognizes his dependency upon the slave’s production, and the slave’s active role in surrendering the product of his labor for the master’s use. The dialogue illustrates how slavery must obfuscate these actual conditions or else cease functioning. Slavery ceases to exist when masters actually act like masters, no matter how obliging the slave, since the master cannot do anything, and the products of the slave’s labor go unused. Slavery is thus the link that must remain hidden between the two, non-relational elements in order for the comic effect to continue. The master cannot exist without in some way acknowledging his enslavement to the slave, and his failure to do so keeps the master and slave together as two, impossibly co-present, heterogeneous elements.

A second example from the ancient Near East also comes from the Akkadian archives. In this tale *Ninurta-sagentarbi-zaemen*, a rich resident of Nippur, is bitten by a dog, and goes to Isin to be cured. Amel Ba’u, citizen of Isin, priest of Gula, cures him. To pay for these services, *Ninurta-sagentarbi-Zaemen* thanks Amel Ba’u and promises that a lavish reward awaits him in Nippur. *Ninurta-sagentarbi-Zaemen* gives Amel Ba’u a complex set of directions to Nippur that culminate in telling him to ask for help from the vegetable seller *Nin-lugal-absu*. Amel Ba’u finds *Nin-lugal-absu*, and then the comedy begins. To understand what happens, one should know that Nippur was a Mesopotamian city famed for its scholarly prowess. Amel Ba’u, being a talented physician, should understand the

guttural language of the sages. Yet he assumes the Nippurians are accosting him with the dark arts. Here is his conversation with the vegetable seller<sup>85</sup>:

“Nin-lugal-absu?” “anni lugalmu.”

“Why do you curse me?” “Why would I curse you? I said, ‘Yes, sir.’”

“May I ask you to show me the way to the house of Ninurta-sagentarbi-zaemen, son of Mizidesh-ki’aggani, nephew of Enlil-Nibru-kibigi?” “ennutushmen.”

“Why do you curse me?” “Why would I curse you? I said, ‘He is not at home.’”

“Where did he go?” “Edingirbi shuzianna sizkur gabari munbala.”

“Why do you curse me?” “Why would I curse you? I said, ‘He is making an offering in the temple of his personal god Shuzianna.’”

What a fool he is! The students ought to get together and chase him out of the Grand Gate with their practice tablets!

In the last line the poor Nippurian vegetable seller’s frustration with the physician’s continuous misunderstandings erupts in a plea for the young students in Nippur to chase him out of town with the very tablets the physician clearly needs to study. The two heterogeneous elements in this sequence are the physician’s Akkadian questions and the seller’s Sumerian answers. The disconnect between them renders him incapable of grasping what she might be saying to him as anything other than a curse, and it renders her continuously surprised at his accusations of cursing. This “nonversation” adumbrates my argument about what transpires between Job and YHWH, just as it anticipates the famous sketch by Abbott and Costello that I discuss below.

One further specification is needed before I turn to JOB. I do not think that one must find YHWH’s speeches or the book humorous in order to agree with my argument. I neither wish to affirm that JOB or some part of JOB is a comedy, nor to imply that its ancient audiences would have found it funny. I make this qualification not only because of the commonly noted difference between comedy and humor, or even because of the difficulties

<sup>85</sup>As found in BENJAMIN R. FOSTER, editor, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* 3rd edition. (Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2005), 937-38.

of knowing what is funny in any context—our own and *a fortiori* an ancient one. Instead, I am primarily interested in showing that the relationship between YHWH's speeches and the book is animated by a structural dynamic that characterizes comedy. Thus, the following demonstration of some comic effects of these speeches aims to indicate not that the speeches are humorous, but that the paradigm of comedy better grasps the speeches' relationship to the rest of the book—better, for example, than the tragic paradigm by which they are most often read.

To summarize, comedy presents together two excluding realities. The comic sequence does not derive its comic dimension from its movement toward a synthesis or an overcoming of one by the other, but instead from oscillating, in a mode that is neither conclusive nor fluid, like an old pick up truck, propelled in more or less one direction by its own movement of fits and starts. Comic movement is peppered and prolonged by abrupt and delayed starts and stops between the two ditches that it somehow avoids falling into. The road on which the comic sequence travels is generated by the disconnect between two entities whose (impossible) coexistence it spans.

#### 100 JOB'S COMIC SEQUENCE

There is no question that the divine speeches present a coexistent encounter of two excluding realities. They bring a sudden intrusion of the heavens into the earth in the form of a storm or whirlwind (*hass<sup>ē</sup>ārāh*). This theophany does not provide instructions on how to live, as was the case for Moses and Aaron in Exod 19:16-20:18, deliverance from enemies, as for David in 2 Sam 22:8-18 (// Ps 18:8-18), clarity regarding the historical situation and what should be done in it, as for Elijah in 1 Kings 19:11-18. Instead, in JOB God indulges in a speech that is truly heterogeneous to the situation into which it has intruded. The situation and the speech therefore coexist alongside each other and become articulated in one and the same scene.

The question is whether this co-existence of two heterogeneous realities is better read according to the tragic or the comic paradigm. As is clear from my above discussions of the sublime and tragedy, some favor the former, thinking that the book suspends the confrontation between two non-relational elements—God and Job, covenantal fidelity and sovereign freedom, &c.—until the divine speeches.<sup>86</sup> But, following my thoughts from the end of section 98, if one were to take seriously Job’s comments throughout the dialogue about God’s presence and Job’s failure to be at one with himself, then one would have to say that the co-presence of two excluding elements has taken place from the beginning and continues to take place throughout the book. In other words, the appearance of YHWH in the whirlwind does not restructure the situation into which it arrives, it presents what is better described as a variation or new development of the same structure that has animated the book throughout.

I first want to illustrate Job’s comic structure by recalling Groucho Marx’s famous plea in *Duck Soup*, apropos a defendant on trial: “He may look like an idiot and talk like an idiot but don’t let that fool you. He really is an idiot.” With this in mind, consider 9:16-20, in which Job imagines summoning God and God granting him a response, the outcome of which Job fears, “God will crush me with a tempest (*šēārāh*) . . . he is the strong one. . . my own mouth will condemn me. . . [and] will prove me perverse.” When YHWH does show up, it is indeed in a tempest (*hassēārāh*) and with speech that celebrates YHWH’s strength, declares that Job’s mouth has condemned him, and proves Job perverse (esp. 38:1-3; 40:6-8). I am thus inclined to rephrase Job’s sentiment in the form of Marx’s plea, “I am afraid that God is going to show up in a tempest, overpower and condemn me but don’t let that fool you. God really will show up in a tempest, overpower and condemn me!”<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup>Hartley claims, for example, “Although the plot requires a word from God, his coming surprises everyone. The air is full of excitement. The greatest wonder of all is that God himself speaks to a mere man. Job has had to wait for the moment of Yahweh’s choosing” HARTLEY (1988), 487.

<sup>87</sup>Others (e.g., WHEDBEE, 1977, 22) have similarly noted the comic aspect of Job’s “set-up” of YHWH in ch. 9. Cf. DAVID ROBERTSON, “The Book of Job: A Literary Study” *Soundings*, 56 (1973), 462-69.



Similar exercises could be performed on much of what YHWH says. Let me take a few verses from ch. 40 as examples. YHWH asks Job,

Have you an arm like God,  
and can you thunder with a voice like his?

(40:9)

As far as Job is concerned, there is no question of comparing his strength to God's because the contest is continuously being carried out. Each time he loses, losses for which he repeatedly suffers:

If it is about strength, look at [his] might.

(9:19a)

Water wears down stones, its torrents wash away the earth's soil,  
so you destroy a human's hope. You overpower him forever.

(14:19-20a)

Pity me, pity me. You are my friends.

For the hand of Eloah has struck me.

(19:21)

In the next verse YHWH demands,

Deck yourself with majesty and dignity;  
clothe yourself with glory and splendor. . .

(40:10)

But Job has no delusions about his own majesty, glory, or splendor:

He has stripped my honor from me,  
and removed the crown from my head.

(19:9)

Above (in section 73) I argued that at their most extreme, Job's experiences dislocated him into a place where the categories of dignity, glory, innocence, and guilt became irrelevant.

But YHWH seems unaware of these parts of Job's speeches when YHWH concludes that, if Job answers the questions and complies with the demands,

Then I will also acknowledge you  
that your own right hand can give you victory.

(40:14)

What has Job had to say about his hand?

Why do I place my flesh in my teeth,  
and take my life in my hand?  
If he kills me, I will not wait;  
but I will argue my path to his face.

(13:14-15)

My own hand weighs heavily upon my groaning.<sup>88</sup>

(23:2b)

Far from the tool with which he thinks he can gain victory, Job speaks of his hand as that which weighs heavily on him but with which he will nevertheless grasp what is left of his life and hurl it before God, come what may. This is a final gesture of desperation, not triumph. Furthermore, Job has had much more to say about the power and authority of God's hand than his own, as in this echo of certain statements in the Psalms (e.g., 104:27-30; 145:15-16),

In his hand is the life of every living being,  
and the breath of every human being.

(12:10)

Again, I can rephrase the issues in the form of Marx's plea; YHWH says, "Job says he is weak, that he has had his glory taken from him and that his own hand opposes him, but don't let that fool you. My questions and demands will prove to you that Job is weak and

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<sup>88</sup>For a discussion of the translation, see footnote 4 on page 249; I further discuss the meaning of this verse on page 255.

cannot save himself by his own hand!"

Similarly, in 38:21 YHWH sarcastically quips, following a set of questions challenging Job's knowledge and experience of the dwelling places of light and darkness, "You know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is many." Job, however, has not said that he has lived many days, but that the days he lives stretch out in indefinite suffering (7:1). Far from a claim to eternal being, Job has rather longed for a finite ending to days that pose infinitely more than he can bear. Later, Job speaks about the number of days humans live, but he calls them "short (*q̣̣̣sar yāmiym*) and replete with anguish" (14:1). He likens humans not to eternal stalwarts, but to rotting waste and moth-eaten garments (13:28), withering flowers and fleeing shadows (14:2). Job speaks not of many days but of few, very long ones. In light of such statements, it seems difficult not to see something, well, comical about YHWH's quip in 38:21. One could imagine Job thinking, "Well, no, I was not born then but, thanks to you, it certainly feels like it!"

YHWH not only challenges Job's capabilities and knowledge, but also seems to think Job has failed to acknowledge YHWH's own capabilities and sovereignty. Right after saying that Job lacks knowledge in 38:2b, YHWH asks if Job knows who laid out the dimensions of the cosmos (38:4-6), who shut in the sea with doors (38:8), who has the wisdom to count the clouds (38:37), if Job has ever commanded the dawn so that it seizes and shakes the earth (38:12-13), or if he can orchestrate the constellations (38:31-33). One cannot help but think of Job's earlier citation of the following hymn fragment:

Truly I know this is so... [El is] wise-hearted and mightily strong...

Who shakes the earth from its place so that its pillars tremble.

Who commands the sun and it does not shine,

and who seals up the stars.

Who spread out the heavens by himself,

and who trod upon the back of the sea.

Who made Ash, Kesil, and Kimah, and the chambers of the south.

Who does greatness unfathomable and wonders innumerable.

(9:2a, 4a, 6-10)

If one turns what they say into propositions, YHWH and Job appear to say the same thing, but they clearly speak as if their statements present some sort of challenge to the other. Again, what makes this comic is that two heterogeneous elements are co-present, bound together by the appearance that they say the same thing. Job acknowledges YHWH's principle role in creation; YHWH responds by asking Job him if he knows who holds or if he has ever held the principle role in creation—all the while suggesting that it is YHWH himself who holds this role. Despite the apparent agreement, each speaks as if his statement disagrees and somehow challenges the other's position.

The comic dimension I am trying to uncover is a structure in which there exists some point from which two elements resonantly diverge or dissonantly converge, it does not matter which. The same comic effect is created whether Job and YHWH appear to disagree despite making the same basic point or make contradictory statements that actually agree. Consider this question from YHWH, followed by one of Job's previous statements:

Have you commanded the morning since your days began,  
and caused the dawn to know its place?

(38:12)

Let the stars of its dawn be dark;  
let it hope for light, but have none;  
may it not see the eyelids of the morning.

(3:9)

After YHWH asks Job whether he has ever commanded the morning, one might imagine Job's slightly stammering response, "Well, uh, I think I did something like that in the curse of my opening lament." A similar dynamic lies behind interpreters' responses to YHWH's

questions cited above in section 94:

Have you penetrated the sources of the sea?

Or walked around in the fathoms of the deep?

Have the gates of death been exposed to you?

Have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

(38:16-17)

As I noted above, much of Job's testimony suggests that he could indeed answer "yes."<sup>89</sup> Anyone watching this unfold would likely look, somewhat quizzically, from YHWH to Job, back to YHWH, back to Job, and all it would take is one titter from a viewer or a sideways glance from Job for the scene's inherent comedy to surface. That this does not happen is of no concern to me since my aim is to demonstrate that a comic structure is operative in these speeches. In the first set of texts, YHWH and Job appear to say the same thing and yet oppose one another; in the second set, they appear to make contradictory statements that actually agree; in both, the utterly heterogeneous figures of YHWH and Job are paradoxically united around a point that remains missing.

This "missing" point of "unification" is crucial, for the comic effect is lost once the link is made present. Consider Abbott and Costello's famous "Who's on first?" routine, whose dynamic can be seen from a few sample lines:

"Who's on first?"—"Yes."—"I mean the fellow's name."—"Who."—"The guy on first."—"Who."—"I am asking YOU who's on first."—"That's the man's name."—"When you pay off the first baseman every month, who get's the money?"—"Every dollar of it."—"Who gets the money."—"He does, every dollar. Sometimes his wife comes down and collects it."—"Whose wife?"—"Yes."—"All I'm trying to figure out is what's the guy's name on first base."—"No. What is on second base" . . .

No one hearing this routine tries to resolve the divide separating the two uses of "who," for the sequence is amplified as the encounter between the two exclusive meanings of "who" is

<sup>89</sup>Cf. KELLER (2003), 131.

sustained and stretched to completely unrealistic lengths. The missing link is simply the word, the sound, the signifier “who,” which has a different signified in the two heterogeneous discourses of Abbott and Costello. The comedy commences once the missing link is established, and the link must remain missing or unacknowledged for the comedy to continue. The minute Costello were to say, “You think I am using the interrogative pronoun ‘who’ whereas I am actually speaking about the man’s name, which happens to be its homonym,” the sequence would cease.

Now consider again YHWH’s description of the closing in of the sea with doors in 38:8. Rather than positing some “deeper” reason why this image counters Job’s earlier statement that YHWH is treating him like a chaos monster, what if this disconnect were read within a comic structure?

Job                    “You are treating me like a chaos monster and I cannot endure it.  
Do you not remember that you shaped and made me?”<sup>90</sup>

YHWH                “Oh yes, the creation of the sea. You should have seen it.  
She burst forth in her amniotic liquidity and I swaddled her  
with clouds and gave her glory a place to thrive.”

Job                    “Yes, you have also put me behind doors and  
under the gaze of your oppressive presence.”

YHWH                “Ah yes, gazing on the chaos monsters is a favorite pastime.  
Do you know how powerful they are?

                          how large is the one’s member?

                          how exquisite the other’s armor?

                          What wonderful creatures! Oh how I love watching them!”

And back and forth they go. The important point is the structure. YHWH initiates the

<sup>90</sup>Job tries in 10:8-11 to get God to remember that he is God’s creature and not an enemy. In 7:12 Job asks, “Am I the Sea or the Dragon that you have set watch over me?” In 13:27, Job complains that God has shackled and bound him which, in 14:5, he broadens to a general condition of humanity.

comic structure by taking something Job has talked about in one way and “responding” by speaking about the same thing in a totally different register. The chaos monster sequence is amplified in much the same way as the “Who’s on first?” routine. Job’s complaint likened himself to a chaos monster because of the excessive divine attention and overbearing scrutiny with which he felt oppressed by YHWH; YHWH then responds with an excessive amount of attention and scrutiny to the chaos monsters, although in a mode that is delightful and enraptured rather than heavy and abusive.

The “missing link” is essential to the comic effect. Here, YHWH and Job are linked by excessive divine attention, but this link remains missing since they do not in any sense share it, it being so different for each (just like *who* “links” the two heterogeneous discourses of Abbott and Costello). The “presence” of this missing link is what animates the dynamic between their discourses. The fact that the two discourses remain uncoordinated is not a problem in need of resolution but the engine that makes the dynamic between them “work.” One’s interest in this dynamic is not sustained, as in the tragic reading, by suspense as to the outcome of this clash, but rather by the surprise that results from the ways in which this clash is continuously overturned, manipulated, and furthered.

#### 101 COMEDY AND THE MATHEMATICAL SUBLIME

Throughout I have qualified my case for a comic reading by affirming tragic readings and by insisting that I am concerned with a comic “structure.” One need not think the speeches are funny to agree, just see that they are animated by a characteristically comic dynamic. Behind these qualifications is my belief that the difference I am after is a matter of perspective. By characterizing the difference as perspectival I do not mean that comedy merely offers one valid perspective on some thing, since the perspective configures the thing from the outset. I am using comedy and tragedy not as subjects naming two sets of predicates—as when these terms are used to name a genre—but rather as two different perspectives on

or configurations of non-relational elements. The comic perspective is not simply a mode of approaching the speeches; it is a structure operating immanently within the book itself.

One could think of the beautiful and the sublime as two opposing manifestations of the tragic paradigm since I have defined tragedy around a point from which two clashing elements can be perceived. I argued on page 404 that beauty splits us from ourselves but instills in us a belief that we can create a world in and with which we could be unified, whereas the sublime cleaves us in two, but pleases us by locating us in a place wherefrom our split self can be perceived. In both there is a fundamental duality that achieves an impossible unity, which is also how I have described tragedy. The tragic perspective consists in exposing the impasses that arise from the clash of non-intersecting elements as well as the effects that these impasses have on the individuals caught within the structures in which the impasses inhere. Where a tragic reading focuses on how Job is caught within the impasses of his world, the comic reading sees that Job incarnates the impasse of the system. It is not that Job is distanced from the world and that God's speeches aim to "put him in his place," as many are wont to say; Job's distance from himself and the world does not oppose him to the world but makes him continuous with it since this distance also inheres within the world. There are not two—Job and the world—that are brought together, but one substance—Job-and-the-world alike—that is internally divided against itself.

The comic reading does not eliminate the opposition between Job and the world, it just insists that the opposition is inherent to and thus shared by both Job and the world. Job and the world resonate with each other because they share this inherent distance. Even if YHWH is unaware of it, the kind of world YHWH describes is clearly one in which Job could come to be as he is. Job is the truth of the "multiverse" YHWH describes in the sense that the kind of existence Job has suffered could only have occurred within less-than-fully unified multiverse. By suggesting that each may be the truth of the other I do not mean that one determines or undermines the other. I rather mean that the truth of both is half-said by each. Both YHWH and Job speak as if their speech implies that the other is wrong.



However, what each describes is merely one side of a double-sided entity whose other side is that which the other describes. The topological model here is a Möbius band. If you persist on the side of Job long enough, you will have to end up imagining the kind of world YHWH describes; if you persist on the side of the world YHWH describes long enough, you will end up coming to terms with the kinds of monsters it can produce, not just the beautiful ones God describes—but the horrid, rancid ones atop the trash heap like Job. The truth of Job's situation as well as God's cosmos is constituted only at the moment they are brought together and read coterminously.

In conclusion I want to suggest that the model for the comic structure and the way in which it differs from tragedy coincides with the difference mentioned above between the mathematical and the dynamical sublime. Whereas I have operated up to now with a tacit similitude between tragedy and the sublime, I now want to suggest that tragedy coincides with the dynamical sublime alone and that the mathematical sublime is closer to the comic structure. The mathematical sublime arises when one can find no limit to phenomena within the phenomenal realm and is thereby confronted with the impossibility of imagining a totality. The awareness of this impossibility affords the observer a sublime sense that there must be a supersensible power at the root of his cognizing activities, a power that does not derive from his senses. The dynamical sublime arises when one is confronted with a phenomenon that is exceptional to the phenomenal realm, some figure for which no suitable standard can be found, but which has no dominion over us since, although we find it inconceivable, we are nonetheless capable of conceptualizing its inconceivability.

Comedy is similar to the mathematical sublime in the sense that the source of its activity is also an immanent impossibility. Tragedy, on the other hand, is famously characterized by external limitations. Does Newsom's argument that the speeches move from the mathematical to the dynamical sublime suggest that the comic gives way to a tragic relationship between God's speeches and Job's? I think not, since the mathematical sublime insists even within the animals that conclude the speeches and are supposed to exemplify the dynamical

sublime. To be sure, both Behemoth and Leviathan are described as qualitatively singular (40:19a; 41:25-26) and celebrated for their power and prowess, but YHWH's speech about them "engages Job in a tightly focused exercise of close and rigorous contemplation."<sup>91</sup> As much as YHWH celebrates Behemoth and Leviathan for standing out against their environment, they are nonetheless pulled under YHWH's gaze and become objects of YHWH's fascination at the most detailed, minute level.

I was especially struck by this "mathematization" of the dynamically sublime objects when I read a section of Brown's recent argument in which he claims that the speeches transport Job to the very places its questions imply that he has not been, seen, known. In itself, this paradox is not new, but his description alerted me to the sense in which the standard reading is misleading—according to it, God's speeches are dilatatic; they intend to broaden Job's vision beyond himself and toward the vast and variegated cosmos. All the broadening will be misread if one remains within the logic of extension, imagining something external to the cosmos on account of which it extends beyond the borders of some previous consideration. Within this misleading logic, the limits displayed by the speeches—the limits of Job's knowledge of the world, of Job's power and capabilities, of the world's coherence, its denizens, environs, and so on—remain external to the world, defining it as if from beyond it. Instead, I contend, the speeches' excessive inclusion of all that appears to stand out stems from God's primary fascination and concern with an internal limit to the cosmos, a limit that inheres within and defines the cosmos' very nature, a limit that divides even one scale from another on the underside of the king of all the proud:

[Job] is flung far off to "the gates of death" and dragged next to Leviathan's underbelly, zooming in close enough to view the infinitesimal space that separates one scaly shield from another. Vast disparities of scale are dramatically covered as Job is taken across incalculable distances and depths.<sup>92</sup>

In the end, I believe that the speeches are principally concerned with this internal incalcula-

<sup>91</sup>NEWSOM (2003a), 248. <sup>92</sup>BROWN (2010), 126.

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bility that characterizes the mathematical sublime and not the transcendent, unaccounted for spaces that characterize the dynamical sublime. Furthermore, I think that it is just such an immanent limit as defines the mathematical sublime that serves as the “missing link” relating God’s speeches to Job’s, a missing link on account of which I have argued that this relationship has a comic structure. In the next chapter I deal with Job’s response, the prose epilogue, and the way that the book concludes the relationship between Job and YHWH.

Must one smash their ears before they  
learn to listen with their eyes?

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F. Nietzsche

102 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the two subjects named in its title. First I consider a recent trend in biblical studies to embrace character ethics as the privileged discourse for articulating the ethical implications of biblical texts and, in particular, of wisdom literature. After introducing this trend I consider some of the implications posed to it by various aspects of my approach to *JOB*. I demonstrate how the present project's distinctive analysis of *JOB* and its issues poses fatal problems for any attempt to privilege character in one's approach to the book. For character ethics, at least as it is practiced by certain key figures in biblical studies, the fundamental framework and inevitable condition of all ethical formation is a process of character development, a dialogical negotiation of communal standards and values in light of the community's ongoing experiences and developing knowledge. Job, however, emerges as an ethical subject at the moment of a traumatic experience of rupture from his past and himself. He does not struggle to negotiate his experience with communal standards, but to discern and articulate how the truth revealed to him by his experience exposes the distance that separates him and his burgeoning knowledge from the previous situation's misconceptions. The second part of this chapter turns to the book's final chapter. I read

Job's (in)famous second response to YHWH (42:1-6) and the subsequent prose conclusion (42:7-17) in ways that continue and develop some of my previous analyses and, in their light, appear anew.

### 103 THE (RE)TURN TO VIRTUE ETHICS

Aristotle is usually credited as the progenitor of character ethics, if not ethics in general, with his founding document, the *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>1</sup> Virtue ethics thrived up through medieval thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas, suffered attack from some Reformers such as Luther,<sup>2</sup> as well as from "natural law" philosophers such as Grotius, was eclipsed by moral systems of modernity such as Kantian and utilitarian consequentialist, but notably returned to prominence in the second half of the twentieth century, especially in the work of ethicists such as Alasdair MacIntyre and theologians such as Stanley Hauerwas.<sup>3</sup>

The reclamation of virtue ethics is no simple repetition of Aristotle or Aquinas, but instead adopts many of the paradigmatic changes brought about in modernity.<sup>4</sup> Scholars most often define the ethic ushered in by modernity as a transition away from the pre-modern Western practice of grounding ethics in life, in being, in an order that is the natural

<sup>1</sup>"I believe that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is properly speaking the first book to be organized around the problem of an ethics" LACAN (1992), 36.

<sup>2</sup>In 1517, just before nailing his ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenburg, Luther wrote another set entitled "Disputation against Scholastic Theology," which included these: "41: Virtually the entire *Ethics* of Aristotle is the worst enemy of grace." "43: It is an error to say that no man can become a theologian without Aristotle." "44: Indeed, no one can become a theologian unless he becomes one without Aristotle."

<sup>3</sup>The revival of virtue ethics is usually traced to ANSCOMBE (1958). Cf., famously, MACINTYRE (1981); and its three sequels (1988; 1990; 1999). A recent, acclaimed study of MacIntyre's work can be found in KNIGHT (2007). On the theological side, see, famously, HAUERWAS (1975) and (1981). In an instructive essay, DENIS (2006, 536n.82) recommends two recent works of constructive, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics by HURSTHOUSE (1999); and SWANTON (2003).

<sup>4</sup>For a concise, sweeping perspective on these changes, see TAYLOR (2006). What follows is indebted to a number of other works: ZUPANČIĆ (2000); BADIOU (2001); LACAN (1992); COPJEC (2002); DE KESEL (2009,

and right form of society. Pre-modern, hierarchical societies are often rooted in ontological ideas about the goodness of their arrangement (in the well-known medieval arrangement, there are those who pray, those who fight, and those who work). The arrangement of functions is not perceived as contingent but natural, cosmological, and divine. The result is a complementarity of the social body—the body being an important metaphor throughout this tradition—such that it can, when arranged in right relation, function as a cosmological whole enabling the flourishing and excellence of all its parts. The ethic, therefore, asks how one should live and it strives for virtuous excellence according to the extent possible and to one's allotted role. So, while deep mutuality and a strong sense of co-dependence are present, these mutual and co-dependent relations are rooted in a normative, hierarchical order that permeates the substance of all creation.

Modern thought's departure from this virtue ethic is fundamentally related to its view of every distribution of social functions as contingent, and its axiom of universal human equality. With the rise of universal humanity, no structure of social organization or differentiation could define the good, and every such structure could only be justified or judged instrumentally. This is not to say that there are no normative principles, no sense of order, and no complementarity. On the contrary, the new order aims to ensure for each of its members certain minimal rights and freedoms. Each of society's members is obliged to respect one another and participate actively and productively in the social order that secures their rights and freedoms. No longer is one a moral agent only within the social order, judged according to one's virtuous participation in a hierarchical complementarity; now citizens are judged as free agents, ultimately responsible to God and the moral law. Rather than trying to play a rightful role, individuals must now decide what the right thing to do is. In short, in pre-modern thought, the order is considered primary, real, and effective; the lives within it are responsible to it; and it aims to further human flourishing. In modern thought, the individual is considered primary, the order contingent and instrumental, and

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57-82); and finally, the introduction of MAY (2005, 1-25).

the individual responsible for reforming and reinventing this order so as to improve its ability to secure the basic rights of its subjects.<sup>5</sup>

The recent reclamation of virtue ethics returns to the pre-modern question *How should one live?* out of frustration with several characteristics of modern moral systems, not all of which are equally well-founded. First, virtue ethics rejects the way the modern question *How should one act?* separates persons from their actions. “If a person is forced to ask about how to act without at the same time seeing the answer to that question as being related to one’s particular life, then one’s relation to morality becomes fissured.”<sup>6</sup> Virtue ethics also rejects other related tendencies in modernist ethics such as its hostility to emotions or its reliance on various false conceptions of a transcendental, a priori, autonomous, and/or rational ethical agents. In other words, the return to virtue ethics is in large part motivated by a rejection of what are seen as modern ethics’ false premises concerning what is possible for human beings.

The new virtue ethics thinks modern thought makes two big mistakes. First, modern ethics treats individuals as too autonomous, too capable of making unconditioned decisions about actions. Virtue ethicists reject the idea that moral agents or their ideas about morality could exist prior to or beyond the conditions of their socially contextualized lives. Secondly, modern moral thought treats the Symbolic order as too disconnected from the Real when it prohibits moral reflection beyond action to lives. Despite modernity’s apparent intentions to protect certain freedoms and to protect ethics from being reduced to an effect of the existing social order, virtue ethics rejects the prohibition against asking how people should live because it denies that actions can be divorced from life conditions. If actions necessarily stem from and in turn affect a person’s life and character, then life, experience, desire, and

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<sup>5</sup>Thus it is often wrongly said that individualism arises at the cost of a social ethic and communal bond. It is rather the case that individualism brings a different social ethic and communal bond. For a polemical but informative critique of modern ethics from a very different angle than virtue ethics, see ALAIN BADIOU, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* trans. by Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001).

<sup>6</sup>TODD MAY, *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6.

actions are ethical through and through. The ethicist therefore cannot avoid investigating the relationship that links actions to life, and exploring the ethical conclusions that could be drawn from this relationship.

In light of the renewed interest in wisdom literature in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as the concurrent return to classical forms of ethical inquiry, it is no surprise that scholars have recently mined wisdom literature for ethical insight, and that they have done so from the perspective of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. At the center of the recent embrace of virtue ethics as the privileged hermeneutic for ethical explorations of biblical and wisdom literature stands William P. Brown, on whose work my reflections focus.<sup>7</sup> Brown draws on the shared use of the term “character” in literary and ethical discourses to explain the way his approach joins ethical inquiry with literary analysis. After the previous section, it should be clear that this aligns with what I characterized as the post-modern return to the pre-modern ethical question *How should one live?*<sup>8</sup> Brown’s approach seeks the ethical character of a person and community in their perception (i.e. the content that forms their perspective),<sup>9</sup> intention (evident in the thread that unites their decisions and actions), and virtues. Virtues are normative dispositions, that is, habits, attitudes, thoughts,

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. BROWN (1996); BROWN (1998), 379; and WILLIAM P. BROWN, editor, *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002a). I should add that Brown’s work on wisdom literature has a number of important parallels, especially to CRENSHAW (1998), which frames wisdom as a search. For another recent volume, which includes an essay by Brown along and an introduction with a short bibliography, see M. DANIEL CARROLL R. and JACQUELINE E. LAPSLEY, editors, *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

<sup>8</sup>Incidentally, BROWN (1996, 7) suggests that ethical character has much in common with literary character but, whereas literary qualities tend to “highlight a person’s uniqueness, ethical character represents a *generalizing* aspect that sets in relief certain values and virtues that have a normative claim to be shared and embodied by others.”

<sup>9</sup>“Simply put, to alter one’s perception of God and the world is to shape and reshape character, the goal of sapiential rhetoric” BROWN (1996), 8.



and emotions, “that dispose one to a consistency of certain action and expression”<sup>10</sup> that “makes good he who has it and renders good his work.”<sup>11</sup> While virtues resemble and consist of habits, skills, abilities, and moral standards, Brown and others insist on their distinctiveness: unlike habits, virtues are not automatic but instead elevate one’s rational and volitional capacities;<sup>12</sup> unlike skills, virtues do not guarantee success; unlike abilities, virtues are not potential but exercised and used; unlike moral principles, virtues take into account intentions, motivations, and the exigencies of a situation.

The aim of virtue ethics remains as it was at the beginning: to cultivate and enable human flourishing or happiness, a chief end that each virtue supposedly serves. But exactly what such happiness and flourishing look like is unclear and must be continually renegotiated by the community. Thus the new virtue ethicists ultimately define virtue in ways that are not too distant from the Kantian terms they seem to despise: on one hand, I must adjudicate the virtuous dimension of what I do, say, or think by relating it to some transcendent rules or values; on the other, virtue is declared an end in itself, an immanent or intrinsic judge of what one says, does, thinks, or feels.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>BROWN (1996), 9. This echoes the standard Brown associates with Aristotle, who speaks of virtues as “a deliberated and permanent disposition.”

<sup>11</sup>BROWN (1996, 9) offers this quote from Aquinas.

<sup>12</sup>Yet one should note that in Latin and thus in Aquinas, the word translated “virtue” is *habitus*. KANT (1996c, 535, 593) defines habit as an aptitude for “uniformity in action that has become a *necessity* through frequent repetition,” and “a lasting inclination apart from any maxim,” whereas virtue presupposes a maxim that the subject freely adopts.

<sup>13</sup>“[M]oral virtue is no guarantee of success, and success is not necessarily a sign of moral integrity. The appeal of virtuous life is intrinsic. Distinct from professional skills, moral virtue is characteristic of a ‘unitary life.’ In other words, moral virtues tend to cut across all situations of conduct, from professional to personal. To compartmentalize the virtue of honesty by relegating it to, for example, one’s personal life but excluding it from one’s professional conduct, is no virtue. Virtues are by nature all encompassing” (BROWN, 1996, 11). Many presentations of virtue ethics, however, think Kant exemplifies the strand of modern ethics that defines the virtuous as the fulfillment of a duty regardless of its effects on human beings. Kant does define

## 104 CHARACTER ETHICS, WISDOM LITERATURE, AND THE JOBAN PROLOGUE

According to Brown, what Proverbs, Job, and Qohelet share “from a character standpoint is that all three chart the self as it starts from a central, familiar locale that provides expected security and identity. But the moral subject does not remain in this position for long; it moves into certain realms of liminality, to the frontiers of community, creation, and knowledge.”<sup>14</sup> In each case different characters, virtues, and dispositions are (re)formed:

- in Proverbs the son learns to associate all that maintains and strengthens the communal bond with wisdom, and all that threatens that bond with folly, as he steps out of the family and into the larger community;
- Job suffers the destruction of all communal bonds and the undermining of every norm. By Job’s grievances, protests, and sense of entitlement he comes to understand his solidarity with the dynamic, strange, free, insecure, and incalculable. YHWH’s speech from the whirlwind then compels him to “return home in humble gratitude and service to his community”<sup>15</sup> and to those at its margins; and
- Qohelet is catapulted by despair out of the monotonous repetition of his miserable life, only to find that there is no telos and existence is meaningless. Yet he thereby achieves a new perspective on the fleeting pleasures that alone can be enjoyed.

While Brown says that none emerge as normative and that they cannot be synthesized,<sup>16</sup>

[T]hese portraits of character are part of a larger canvas: the inclusive, empathetic community of God’s good creation, one filled with enjoyment and potency as well as suffering

virtue “despite the benefits it confers on human beings” (KANT, 1996c, 526). But Kant does not disregard happiness or consequences. Instead, he says “The happiness of others is . . . an end that is also a duty” (KANT, 1996c, 524). Kant insists that if virtue is to be treated as “its own end and . . . also its own reward,” it must also be an unconditional duty (KANT, 1996c, 526).

<sup>14</sup>BROWN (1996), 152. <sup>15</sup>BROWN (1996), 156.

<sup>16</sup>This does not mean that Brown does not play favorites. He prefers Proverbs, awards a close second to the prose conclusion to JOB and grants Qohelet a distant third: “Qoheleth’s view of character is deficiently individualized and self-referential. By contrast, the ideals of the sagacious community are vividly portrayed

and consolation. Such wisdom calls for a greater humility regarding humanity's place in the cosmos and, concomitantly, a greater sense of responsibility toward all of life.<sup>17</sup>

In what follows I argue that most of what I have said thus far about the book of Job is excluded from or even extinguished by Brown's liberal-humanist ethical canvas.<sup>18</sup> In the dialogue Job does not try to include or respect those with whom he differs; he either opposes or is indifferent toward them. From YHWH's speeches Job does not learn to assume his place in the cosmos, but that those placed in the cosmos seem to exceed its bounds and relate to one another as aliens. And in the epilogue, Job does not gain a greater sense of responsibility toward all life but compiles a community on the basis of the particular truth of his experience. All of these points merit elaboration.

First, consider the "critique of pure fear" that *haśśāṭān* issues to traditional wisdom in 1:9. His question defines the truly wise act as unconditional by abstracting it from the conditions that may influence piety, and then he asks whether such an unconditional act is possible. The tale's resounding "yes" utterly opposes virtue ethics' unequivocal "no" since virtue ethics does not allow for an unconditioned act. The subjective position of unconditional fear falls outside the bounds of any ethic conceived in terms of character and community or virtue and duty. The fear of God for naught disallows that any appeal to virtue or duty, or that any reliance on historical experience or communal goods, could serve as incentives for an authentically wise act. In the wake of the prose tale WISDOM becomes founded not on any sort of humanistic concern for others, but rather on an event that subtracts the subject from its conditions and reduces it to abject destitution. The wise subject is thus the one who perseveres with the burden and trajectory of this event that

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in Proverbs and the end of Job" BROWN (1996), 159.

<sup>17</sup>BROWN (1996), 158.

<sup>18</sup>JOB is not alone in this regard. I also do not believe that Proverbs or Qohelet support Brown's attempt to treat "character formation as the central framework and goal of biblical wisdom" (BROWN, 1996, 4). While Qohelet will have to await a future project, an analysis of Proverbs that poses problems for a character-based ethic has been provided by KNAUBERT (2009), part 3.

breaks her out of a past situation. In a sense I agree with the virtue ethicists: WISDOM's genesis in a particular event renders it specific and immanent to a situation. WISDOM can therefore neither be grasped as an *ethic in general* nor as a Kantian *transcendental a priori*. What virtue ethics does not allow for is that the WISDOM that Job must display could be both *particular* to his situation and *universal* for his situation. Job's particular experience renders him non-particular, the incarnation of *nepeš* as such, the limit of experience for all in his situation.<sup>19</sup> The prologue clearly intends to depict the event out of which these limits emerge into view as a quintessentially unanticipatable incident, something to which a situation's internal logic renders it blind. Thus, while these limits are produced by a situation, their appearance within the situation nonetheless breaks the one who follows them out of that situation. The universal appeal of his experience is evident in the generality and anonymity of his responses in the prologue, as well as in his rejection of his wife's attempt to reduce his experience to a particular, contingent anomaly that could only be escaped through death. On the contrary, he says, his experience has everything to do with the universal ways of God. There is an ethical reason why it is crucial to realize that the limits that Job embodies are immanent to the situation from which he is torn through his embodiment of its limits: this immanence acts as a check preventing one from easily venerating Job's abjection. That is, there are logical reasons that run deeper than Job's abjection that cause him to embody the universal truth of his situation. Job's speeches in the dialogue continue to testify to aspects of his experience for which character ethics cannot account. But before moving on, more needs to be said about the prologue.

Virtue-based interpretations predominately frame ethical conduct within a notion of character that includes, restricts, and/or eliminates any idea of excess. The focus falls on characters located within a stream of history and tradition whose identities are in flux—but

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<sup>19</sup>For other examples, see Žižek's various discussions of "concrete universals," and Agamben's discussions of *homo sacer* and the the *Muselmänner* in Shoah survivors testimony. I discussed Agamben work in footnote on page 320.

never absent<sup>20</sup>—and on virtues that must be recontextualized, reapplied, and revised—but never decontextualized. In the end, character ethics is framed and led by its interest in “coherence,” “consistency,” “normativity,” “wholeness,” and “identity”:

[C]haracter is more than the sum of its constituent parts. The shape of character entails an organized, harmonious unity. . . . From Aristotle’s perspective, the exercise of the virtues requires a unity of the soul in its three elements—perception, intelligence, and desire. Cast another way, there is an *integrity* to the person of character, a wholeness or completeness regarding the exercise of virtue. Such a holistic notion of integrity is crucial to biblical wisdom, particularly in the character of Job.<sup>21</sup>

While virtue ethics does not imagine any simple (i.e. non-complex) integrity, identity, or consistency, a degree of complexity or even a transformation of content bears not on the integral, identical, and consistent frame within which ethical conduct occurs.

Unlike character ethics’ consistent frame, my reading repeatedly uncovers and analyzes numerous excessive elements that the prologue presents as necessary components at the heart of the ethical act. By “excessive” I mean those crucial elements in the prologue that fall outside of a mutually exclusive alternative. The first such excess is evident in the subjective stance of unconditional fear that is a surplus beyond the alternative between pious and impious activity. The first affliction and YHWH’s description of it present a second excessive element involved in the ethical act. The affliction systematically “swallows up” everything readers have been told about Job. YHWH claims to have destroyed Job and then leaves behind an unrecognizable *nepeš* of what once was Job. Here the excessive element, the *nepeš* that “Job” now is, falls outside the mutually exclusive alternative between Job’s pre-afflicted and post-afflicted character since nothing about Job’s character can supply a continuum here. To describe Job’s experience as a “transformation” is inappropriate if not obscene. Through numerous devices the narrative attempts to foreclose any sense of

<sup>20</sup>“Job’s character unites the prose and poetry of his story as well as provides for the story’s literary tension” BROWN (1996), 60.

<sup>21</sup>BROWN (1996), 12, emphasis in original.

continuity. Job becomes a *nepes̄* completely discontinuous with that which we previously thought of as Job. Third, Job performs several mourning rites and sits outside the social body, amidst its excesses, on a trash heap or, according to the Greek tradition, atop a dunghill (see section 23). There he scrapes himself with a potsherd. The details are crucial, for Job is not just outside the social body, excluded from it as an animal, foreigner, or unclean person; Job is positioned in a particular place reserved for that which the social body excretes from itself. The excesses pushed out of the pores of town and body define Job. Job's position is excessive with respect to the mutually exclusive alternatives of inside and outside the social body (on the trash heap), and inside and outside his own body (his excreting boils). Fourth, Job's friends do not recognize him, and they relate to him as if he were already dead. Here again Job occupies an excessive position, an unrecognizable, undead monster removed from the mutually exclusive alternatives of life and death.

In these four examples the prologue unequivocally displays an excessive component at the core of the ethic it initiates—an excess that I have identified throughout with Lacan's *objet petit a*. There is a lack of unity or incoherence, a dislocated or excessive element that must be present within a situation in order for ethical conduct to occur. Like Job to his friends, this component will never be visible to those who read through the lens of character ethics.

Furthermore, the character of God in the prologue acts in ways that directly oppose the sense of character to which virtue ethics refers. Character ethics rightly points out and distinguishes itself from some mistakes of the previous generation's focus on "God's mighty acts in history."<sup>22</sup> In particular, character ethics rejects the vestiges of a supernaturalist,

<sup>22</sup>While I find it problematic at numerous points, an example can be found in THEODORE HIEBERT, "Beyond *Heilsgeschichte*" in *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* Edited by M. DANIEL CARROLL R. and JACQUELINE E. LAPSLEY. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 3–10; cf. the brief but effective engagement of WALTER BRUEGGEMANN, "Forword" in *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* Edited by M. DANIEL CARROLL R. and JACQUELINE E. LAPSLEY. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), x.

transcendent God who intervenes into history and creation from some place beyond them. Instead, character ethics embraces notions of creation and community as foundational and singular planes on which all characters work themselves out—divine and human alike.<sup>23</sup> While character ethics merits praise for the way it investigates the God of the text as variously characterized and operative with desires, interests, guilt, enjoyment, laudable virtues, and deplorable vices, all the transcendent weight that character ethics thinks it has unloaded continues to be carried by this notion of a foundational and singular plane. This foundation often comes in the form of a divinely willed, ahistorical, and transcendent notion of creation or community. In the prologue God destroys just such a foundation because the tale identifies it as the very thing that renders imperceptible what the tale defines as an ethical act. YHWH's activity not only fails to adhere to the notion of a singular plane within which human experience and history unfold, YHWH acts precisely so as to ensure that no such foundation exists. God may be a developing character but this development does not take place against the meaningful background for all character development. Instead, God acts (at the ethical moment!) as the force that keeps character, community, and creation from ever establishing any foundation.

Granted that the prologue establishes that the Joban ethic will be anti-foundational, does this mean that it is akin to some sort of post-structural, anti-essentialist celebration of difference, multiplicity, and fragmentation? I think not, and I argue this in the following section by drawing on Job's testimony in the dialogue, which may seem an unlikely source given its focus on the shattering experience of anxiety.

#### 105 THE DIALOGUE AND CHARACTER-BASED READINGS

In the dialogue Job testifies to an experience that challenges the idea that the prologue's clearly anti-foundationalist ethic ends in a celebration of difference and multiplicity. Job

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<sup>23</sup>“Creation is an indispensable feature of biblical wisdom, but not in isolation. Necessarily rooted in the perception and worldview of the inquirer of wisdom, the cosmic perspective is embodied and lived out in

repeatedly cites a disruptive experience that I discussed at length in section 55. In this experience Job describes himself as a desiring subject whose pursuits are repeatedly frustrated when he stumbles against an impediment that is a part of himself and yet displaced from himself such that he experiences it as a foreign obstruction. Job links this experience of self-estrangement and autoimmunity to the work of God. So, God may be the one who prevents any foundation from settling, but this is not because God fragments, multiplies, or differentiates a foundation; it is rather because God appears in the splitting of an entity from itself. Job is not impeded because he runs toward an infinite difference, a transcendent Other, or into a countless multitude, but because he runs into himself. In short and at the risk of unfairly reducing complex figures in contemporary ethics, an ethic that takes Job's testimony in the dialogue into account will neither sound like a Levinasian concern with responsibility to the unfathomable abyss of the Other, nor a Deleuzian concern with celebrating new and proliferating subjectivities. It will instead be concerned primarily with a subject that is capable of operating independently of itself and others.

While Job's testimony in the dialogue departs from a postmodern ethic that celebrates otherness, difference, and multiplicity, it comes no closer to an ethic based on character. Job's testimony in the dialogue challenges the attempt to treat character ethics as the proper horizon for wisdom hermeneutics from a different angle than the prologue did. While the prologue displays an *objective* excess that disrupts every background to character formation, the dialogue shifts the lens to the *subject* in a way that problematizes recourse to character as ethical. Job is not primarily concerned with identity. Job does not struggle with integrating disparate or foreign elements into his sense of self because Job lacks any framework within which such incorporating activity could take place.<sup>24</sup> Job repeatedly insists that he does not coincide with himself, and yet he never achieves any sort of perspective on his split selves. Job is fundamentally alienated from *and* essentially

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conduct... both creation and community are bound up with worldview" BROWN (1996), 158.

<sup>24</sup>See the discussion on page 231.



attached to himself. Job's primary concern is not with fusing his sense of self with that part of himself that he confronts as foreign, but rather with understanding the cause that produces his difference from himself. He struggles to grasp his uncanny experience and he ultimately locates his salvation not in some future fusion of himself or strong and secure self, but in his willingness to betray his sense of self so as to explore his current condition as the venue that opens onto a transformed and unknown future. It is difficult for me to imagine a character-based approach that could explore Job's sense of salvation.

Brown strongly differentiates the characters and virtues that each of the three main wisdom books depicts, and yet he sees them as "part of a larger canvas"<sup>25</sup> whose internal differences illustrate "the *developmental* nature of wisdom as one rooted in the *continuum* of character."<sup>26</sup> For Brown, each book begins with a character that is firmly rooted in a context that is subsequently altered. Each character then develops and adapts in various ways to its new environment such that each book "does not conclude with the self in limbo, severed from its point of departure... All three main characters in the wisdom books end with a full profile of character formed or reformed."<sup>27</sup> Each character returns to its now-transformed original context as a more full and virtuous character. Character and context develop on a continuum.

Brown treats the developments within each book as a model for reading the three books on a continuum. Their differences illustrate different moments within the ethical life of an ever fluxuating and developing character and community. Characters are always formed against the background of their community, and thus the community's different contexts require it to tolerate different moral characters.<sup>28</sup> The differences within and between the books result from the different contexts they describe. Brown takes the canon's inclusion of all three as a model for the proper ethical community, which is "more than pedagogical"

<sup>25</sup>BROWN (1996), 158. <sup>26</sup>BROWN (1996), 151, emphasis added. <sup>27</sup>BROWN (1996), 154, 55.

<sup>28</sup>"[T]he journeying self is no island... The way of wisdom is the prescribed way of the community... Character in and of itself is necessarily character *in relation*... the development of character is in-

since it provides “established structures of interdependence and support” within which different characters are free to form.<sup>29</sup> The ideal sagacious community tolerates differences and freedoms so long as they do not engender moral fascists or sectarian divisions, “for both roads cut off the possibility of genuine, informed dialogue as well as new frontiers of empathy and fellowship.”<sup>30</sup>

From the perspective of Job’s testimony, Brown’s ideal ethical community is problematic because it fails to account for many of his speeches’ ethical implications. This ideal community could only see Job’s split subjectivity as a problem in need of overcoming. Recall that Brown repeatedly emphasizes the importance to the ethical subject of integrity, consistency, wholeness, and identity, whereas Job insists that he is stricken with division through and through. Moreover, Job ultimately places his hope nowhere other than in his experience of division. Job’s perseverance with respect to what overturns him in the prologue is just like the resolve he expresses in the dialogue that is precipitated by his experience of shame. Both his perseverance and his resolve are adopted after experiences of rupture and they both carry Job into situations whose consequences he cannot comprehend since they are fundamentally discontinuous with the preceding situation. The book presents these acts as models of truly ethical behavior that contrast with the perpetual character development Brown describes as the inevitable condition of ethical formation since the latter preserves a sense of a single subjective continuity and a continuum of ethical formation. As Johnston puts it apropos of Lacanian psychoanalysis, JOB too “favors models of, as it were, punctuated as opposed to gradual evolution.”<sup>31</sup> Job’s ethical subjectivity is not generated out of the unfolding, dialogical interactions between his present experiences, past history, personal convictions, and community’s values. Instead, Job emerges as an ethical subject at the moment of a traumatic experience of rupture from his present and his past. His

evitable” BROWN (1996), 151.

<sup>29</sup>BROWN (1996), 159. <sup>30</sup>BROWN (1996), 159.

<sup>31</sup>ADRIAN JOHNSTON, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 149.

subjectivity is incommensurable with his past self and the community with which he sits and speaks. Job's struggle in the dialogue to grasp the ethical implications of his experience is not a result of his community's failure to provide him with interdependency and mutual support, but of a unique subjectifying event that ushers in a truly new reality.

## 106 42:1-6: TEXT, TRANSLATION, AND STRUCTURE

Beginning in this section I turn to the book's final chapter, which includes Job's (in)famous second response to YHWH's speeches, and the equally (in)famous prose conclusion to the book. Translating and, *a fortiori*, understanding Job's second response to God's speeches is notoriously difficult, but the following can provide a provisional starting point:

<i>wayya'an ʾôb ʾet-yhwh wayyômar</i>	1	Then Job answered YHWH and said,
<i>yādatā [yādatî] kî-kôl tûkāl</i>	2a	I know <sup>32</sup> that you can do all things,
<i>w<sup>e</sup>lô-yibbāšēr mim<sup>e</sup>kā m<sup>e</sup>zimmāh</i>	2b	and no purpose is beyond you.
<i>mî zeh maʾlîm ʿēšāh b<sup>e</sup>lî dāʿat</i>	3a	Who is this obscuring counsel without knowledge? <sup>33</sup>
<i>lākēn higgadtî w<sup>e</sup>lô ʾābîn</i>	3b	Thus I spoke and I did not understand,
<i>niplāʾôt mim<sup>e</sup>mennî w<sup>e</sup>lô ʾēdā</i>	3c	wonders beyond me that I did not know.
<i>š<sup>e</sup>ma-nā w<sup>e</sup>ʾānōkî ʾ<sup>a</sup>dabbēr</i>	4a	Hear, and I will speak;
<i>ʿešʾāl<sup>e</sup>kā w<sup>e</sup>hōdîʿenî</i>	4b	I will ask you and you inform me. <sup>34</sup>
<i>l<sup>e</sup>šēma-ʾōzen š<sup>e</sup>matîkā</i>	5a	By the hearing of the ear I heard you, <sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup>While I read with the Qere, the Kethib (“you know”) is also possible. There is no reason to think that Job means to imply that he knows something that YHWH does not. As for Job's knowledge, even if Job says “You know that you can do all things. . .” the fact that Job is the speaker requires us to understand an implicit “I know,” as in, “[I know that] You know that you can. . .”

<sup>33</sup>Job's question nearly quotes God's in 38:2: “Who is this darkening (*mḥšyk*) counsel with words without knowledge?”

<sup>34</sup>Again Job quotes God, who spoke these words in 38:3b and 40:7b.

<sup>35</sup>While this wooden translation lacks elegance, I render it literally so as to preserve the continuation of

<i>w<sup>e</sup>attāh ʿênî rāʾāt<sup>e</sup>kā</i>	5b	and now my eye sees you. <sup>36</sup>
<i>ʿal-kēn ʾemʾas</i>	6a	Therefore I reject and I am consoled
<i>w<sup>e</sup>niḥamtî ʿal-ʾāpār wāʾēper</i>	6b	concerning dust and ashes. <sup>37</sup>

The interpretive difficulties extend from v.2 to 6. While the translation of each word in vv.2-5 is rarely a problem, the meaning of these verses is deeply disputed. Far from clarifying matters, v.6 brings a litany of translational difficulties and occupies the lion's share of critical attention on the passage.<sup>38</sup> The passage is patterned with one enveloping and two enframed parallelisms, each of which concerns the relationship between YHWH and Job, divinity and humanity:

hearing from the imperative in v.4 through its two occurrences in this line.

<sup>36</sup>Following the argument of GOOD (1990, 373-75; cf. NEWSOM, 1996, 628) and in contrast to most interpreters (e.g., DHORME 1984, 646; POPE, 1973, 347; HARTLEY, 1988, 536), I doubt that the "now" that begins this line distinguishes present, firsthand seeing from past, secondhand hearing (cf. Ps 18:44[45] and Isa 11:3). Instead, since Job has been listening to YHWH for nearly four chapters, and since Job alludes in v.4 to YHWH's command to "hear" in 40:7b, Job's response in v.5 assures YHWH that he has heard and even now sees YHWH.

<sup>37</sup>I discuss the translation and meaning of this difficult line below. Thorough philological and grammatical analyses have been provided by ELLEN VAN WOLDE, "Job 42,1-6: The Reversal of Job" in *The Book of Job* Edited by W.A.M. BEUKEN. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 223-50; and WILLIAM MORROW, "Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42:6" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 105 (1986), 211-25; Cf. NEWSOM (1996), 627-29.

<sup>38</sup>In many semantic studies about Job 42,1-6 usually all attention is concentrated on verse 6. What is more, sometimes the content of the preceding verses is determined on the basis of verse 6" (VAN WOLDE, 1994, 237). Van Wolde cites as an example DALE PATRICK, "The Translation of Job XLII 6" *Vetus Testamentum*, 26 (1976), n.17.

A	Job's second-order reflections about YHWH	v.2
B	Job quotes YHWH's statement about him	v.3a
C	Job's testimony in response to YHWH's statement	v.3bc
B'	Job quotes YHWH's statement about him	v.4
C'	Job's testimony in response to YHWH's statement	v.5
A'	Job's second-order reflections about himself	v.6

Figure 10.1: Job 42:2-6—Enframing and Enframed Parallelisms

Job's opening statement in v.2 presents two theological judgments: the first affirms that YHWH can do all things; the second denies that any purpose is impossible for YHWH. Job quotes two of YHWH's statements about and to him in vv.3a and 4, to which he responds in vv.3bc and 5. In v.3 Job cites one of YHWH's rhetorical questions that positions Job as one who "darkens counsel," and then Job admits that he spoke without understanding.<sup>39</sup> In v.4 Job again cites YHWH, though this time Job cites YHWH's commands that he hear what YHWH says and asks, and that he respond by informing YHWH.<sup>40</sup> Job responds in v.5 by claiming that he has heard and now sees God. The "therefore" (*al-kēn*) that introduces v.6 marks it as his concluding statement.

The final verse of Job's response requires an extended discussion because it brings a host of interpretive difficulties and scholarly attempts to address them. While I limit this discussion to a few central issues, "Almost every word in this verse raises questions."<sup>41</sup> The first issues arise from the first verb, *ms*. There are two roots for the three consonants

<sup>39</sup>"The hero concedes Yahweh's superior wisdom and confesses that he spoke out of ignorance" HABEL (1985), 579.

<sup>40</sup>"Technically speaking only verse 4b is a quotation (see 38:3 and 40:7) and verse 4a is not. However, verse 4a is an introduction to this quotation and is essential in this situation since it exactly marks the syntactic reversal brought about by the switch in point of view" VAN WOLDE (1994), 232-33.

<sup>41</sup>VAN WOLDE (1994), 242. For a list of a few notable and representative works on this verse, see BALENTINE (2006), 705n.21.

*m's*, one means “to despise, reject, or [perhaps] feel loathing,” and the other, which is likely a byform of *mss*, means “to waste away, to flow out or flow away.”<sup>42</sup> The first occurs frequently, the second rarely. The LXX includes both, but most interpreters choose the first.<sup>43</sup> The lack of any object that would be rejected or despised poses some problems to this choice. The verb is usually transitive, but in a number of notable instances—notable because four occur in JOB—it lacks a clear object, which may suggest that it also has an intransitive meaning (Ps 89:38[39]; Job 7:16; 34:33; 36:5; 42:6). Many reject the intransitive reading and, in each case, show why the text is corrupt or another object serves double duty, and so on, but no argument can carry the day about which object one should choose when reading the verb transitively.<sup>44</sup> As in my translation of 7:16 on page 225, in light of the larger function this verb assumes throughout the dialogue (cf., for example, 5:17; 8:20; 9:21; 10:3), I deliberately leave it on its own and without an object since I find the indeterminacies this may produce more palatable than the limitation of Job’s rejection to a particular object.

The second set of questions I want to raise concerns the second verb: *nḥmty*. Though there is only one root, again there are two basic semantic domains to choose from (unless one reads a double entendre). *nḥm* can have a range of meanings such as “to regret, be sorry, be moved to pity, repent (of), or relent,” or it can have a range of meanings such as “to comfort or console oneself, to be comforted or consoled, to observe a time of mourning, or to find consolation about something.” One could justify a number of translations.<sup>45</sup> The most important data for my translation are the other occurrences of *nḥm* with the preposition *l*, and the other occurrences of *nḥm* within the book of Job. No matter how much weight one wants to place on the *atnach*, I do not think the verb can be separated from the preposition that governs its object. Within the verses where *nḥm* is followed by the preposition *l*,

<sup>42</sup>Cf. CLINES (2009), 199-200.

<sup>43</sup>The LXX has διὸ ἐφάυλισα ἑμαυτὸν καὶ ἐτάκην, “Therefore I have disparaged myself and dissolved.”

<sup>44</sup>Cf. the discussion in VAN WOLDE (1994), 243-44.

<sup>45</sup>For a list and discussion of five, see NEWSOM (1996), 629; cf. BALENTINE (2006), 694.

the object of the prepositional phrase is often *rḥ* (“bad, evil, wicked”) or, in one instance, its regular pair *ṭbh* (“good, pleasing, delightful”)—in this case *rḥ* is present earlier in the verse.<sup>46</sup> These clearly show a convention for using *nḥm + ṭ + rḥ* to say that the subject repents or relents over an evil, wicked, or bad thing. In the other verses such as Job 42:6 in which *nḥm* is followed by *ṭ* but not *rḥ* or *ṭbh*, it predominately has the consolatory sense, as in Ps 90:13; Jer 31:15; Ezek 32:31; and 2 Sam 13:39. The other occurrences of *nḥm* in JOB, when considered in their contexts, buttress my inclination to favor the consolatory sense in 42:6:

- In the prose conclusion, just after 42:6 and after his restoration, Job’s brothers, sisters, and friends “console” him in 42:11.
- In the prologue Job’s friends come to “console” him after his affliction in 2:11.
- In the dialogue, Job imagines that his bed will “comfort” him in 7:13.
- Job refers to the friends as “labored comforters” (*mnḥmy ml*) in 16:2.
- Job asks his friends how they can “comfort” him with nothingness (*hebel*) in 21:34.
- In Job’s final speech he remembers living like one who “comforts” mourners in 29:25.

Because *nḥm* with *ṭ* but without *rḥ* or *ṭbh* predominately has the consolatory sense, and because *nḥm* clearly has a consolatory sense in *all* six of its other occurrences in the book of Job, I translate it with this sense in its seventh occurrence in 42:6.

#### 107 FROM RECOGNIZING A TRANSCENDENT LIMIT. . .

Interpretations predominately think that Job recognizes a limit to his situation with respect to something that transcends it and defines it.<sup>47</sup> This thought provides the source for all kinds of interpretations. Perhaps Job submits because he accepts his insignificance, or because he is comforted about his insignificance.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps Job remains defiant but finally

<sup>46</sup>E.g., Exod 32:12, 14; Jer 8:6; 18:8, 10 (with *ṭbh*); Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; 1 Chr 21:15.

<sup>47</sup>An example of a similar analysis can be found in GOOD (1990), 375-76.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. STEPHEN MITCHELL, *The Book of Job* Rev. ed. of *Into the Whirlwind* (1979) edition. (New York:

accepts that God is a brutal sovereign.<sup>49</sup> Or perhaps Job accepts the limits of his condition by means of God's perspective on it.<sup>50</sup> In all these and many other interpretations, Job's response recognizes the limits of his finite knowledge (v.3bc) and his mortal body (v.6b) with respect to wonders (v.3c) and a God (v.5) that transcend them. On this reading, which I also discuss on page 402, Job's response testifies to his experience of momentarily and miraculously transcending the limits of his condition so that he could perceive his condition as limited with respect to a transcendent realm that escapes and remains untouched by his condition's limitations of finitude and mortality.

The fundamental mistake of this standard interpretation is the sense in which it treats mortality (dust and ashes in v.6b) and finitude (ignorance in v.3bc) as negative limitations that prevent Job from accessing the transcendent truths of wonders (v.3c) and God (v.5) that lie beyond him. A negative limit that constrains the subject with respect to a figure of transcendence is precisely the position that I have consistently argued that JOB rejects and critiques. Because this reading defines Job's limitations with respect to entities in a realm that transcends him, it requires one to imagine that YHWH's speeches somehow allow or enable Job to escape the limitations of his human condition and come to know (about) something that one who is subject to these limitations could not know. Balentine puts

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HarperCollins, 1987), xxxii, 88.

<sup>49</sup>ROBERTSON (1973), 446–69; JOHN CURTIS BRIGGS, "On Job's Response to Yahweh" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 98 (1979), 497–511.

<sup>50</sup>Unlike the others, this interpretation does not first ask whether Job is submissive or defiant. Here are two examples of the different forms it takes: for VAN WOLDE (1994, 250) Job "discovers that most things are beyond his scope, that he does not have insight, nor could have, in the masterplan of creation, and he briefly recognises YHWH's way of looking. Because Job's view changes, there can also be a reversal in his attitude: Job turns away from what is past and turns towards the future." For BALENTINE (2006, 698), Job's experience of God's perspective does not enable him to turn away from the past but assume responsibility for it insofar as Job is meant to identify with the animals that are given power and responsibility for their domains. While Balentine comes close to departing from the logic of this reading, he ultimately does not since he thinks Job finally accepts his destiny "to live at the dangerous intersection between the merely



this position well when he claims that Job is enabled “to live at the dangerous intersection between the merely human and the supremely divine.”<sup>51</sup>

But on what basis is it argued that Job’s (human) conditions place him outside the (divine) realm of God and wonders that he somehow exceptionally experiences? In the next section I contend that Job’s second response would be better read as a refutation of the idea that the limits of knowledge and mortality are opposed to God and to wonders. Do we not get a cleaner interpretation if we shift our perspective on Job’s statements so that they become an affirmation of his finite and mortal conditions as the conditions within which God and wonders appear and can be perceived? After all, Job does not say that God miraculously and momentarily excludes him from his limited conditions such that his eye sees God. On the contrary, Job approvingly cites God’s statements about him that imply that the limits of his conditions are unlimited.

#### 108 . . . TO AFFIRMING AN IMMANENT CONDITION

The alternative reading I am proposing adheres to the same logical opposition to which I have returned throughout this dissertation. One thing can be limited not only by another that transcends it, but also by its own immanent condition. Transcendence is not the only structure by which something can be limited. Since Job says nothing to suggest that he has been excluded from the limits of his conditions, and since he says that the divine and wondrous have appeared to him, then it seems best to conclude that the divine and the wondrous appear to him *within* his conditions of limitation, and thus that Job’s body and mind are contaminated not only by ignorance and death, but also by the divine and the wondrous. Job’s response opposes the idea that his limits are limits with respect to something external or transcendent and it suggests instead that it is precisely through such limited conditions that anything divine and wondrous appears. Recalling Nietzsche’s

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human and the supremely divine.”

<sup>51</sup>BALENTINE (2006), 698.

quotation that supplies the epigraph for this chapter, perhaps the divine and the wondrous are heard and appear when one's ears are smashed and hearing comes through the eyes, or when one's eyes are crushed and seeing comes through the ears. In any case, at the zones of the ear and eye things wondrous and divine can be seen and heard.

This interpretation presents v.6 in a light that seems consistent with certain features of the prologue and the dialogue, especially the subjective position that I defined as shame in CHAPTER 7. Job's concluding statement shares a few notable similarities with his verbal responses in the prose tale that begins the book.

- In Job's first response in the prologue: "the noun (Adonai) or predicate complement (naked; mother's womb/there) remains the same in each half, whereas the verbs are binary opposites (come forth/return; give/take)."<sup>52</sup>
- In Job's second response in the prologue: "the verb ('receive') is the repeated term, whereas the contrast comes with the object, 'good' and 'trouble'. "<sup>53</sup>

So, in the prologue Job first declares that YHWH gives and takes, and second he characterizes that which is given and taken as both good and bad. In his second response to YHWH's speeches, Job again uses verbs that appear opposed with two objects that remain the same: he "rejects" and "is consoled" about the same condition—"dust and ashes." Most interpreters think that by dust and ashes Job characterizes his condition in a way that is either rejectable or consolatory. But along the lines of his affirmations of apparent opposites in the prologue, perhaps we should rethink the relationship between rejection and consolation as non-oppositional. Verses 6a and 6b could then be read as two balanced lines in which the first *waw* is a conjunction (not a disjunction) and the *atnach* indicates the balanced division between two strongly parallel lines (not the separation of the verb[s] from the objects):

<sup>52</sup>CAROL A. NEWSOM, "Narrative Ethics, Character, and the Prose Tale of Job" in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation* Edited by WILLIAM P. BROWN. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 127.

<sup>53</sup>NEWSOM (2002), 128.

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therefore	I reject	and	I am consoled
<i>l-kn</i>	<i>m's</i>	<i>w-</i>	<i>nhmty</i>
particle	verb 1	conjunction	verb 2
⇕	⇕	⇕	⇕
particle	object 1	conjunction	object 2
<i>l</i>	<i>pr</i>	<i>w-</i>	<i>pr</i>
concerning	dust	and	ashes

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Figure 10.2: Job 42:6—Syntactic Parallels

In short, Job rejects and is consoled about one and the same condition—dust and ashes. It is not difficult to understand Job's rejection of his condition, but why would he simultaneously claim to be consoled by it? Job has just indicated that God and things too wonderful for him are not beyond but are experienced within his mortal and finite conditions. That is, they are temporal, experienced in the passing of dust and ashes. If God and wonders are temporal, then the temporality of his condition is consolable because it means that God and wonders remain as open as he to transformation. This interpretation accords well with what I discovered about Job's subjective position of shame. In CHAPTER 7 I argued that Job's ultimate consolation in the dialogue derives from his realization that the unlimited openness of his condition is not lamentable but constitutes the only ground in which he can invest his hope. Thus in the dialogue as well as in his final response Job asserts that the ultimate groundlessness of his condition has not only opened him to rejectable conditions, it also keeps his conditions open to transformations in which he can hope.

In sum, I believe that in his final response to YHWH's speeches from the whirlwind, Job testifies that the limits of his knowledge and experience do not prevent but enable him to experience the divine and wonders that are beyond them. This beyond is not an outside, but a surplus that appears within his knowledge and experience as that which keeps them open to transformation and capable of exceeding themselves. Job's final testimony is consistent

with his discovery in the dialogue that God is immanent to his conditions as that which keeps them from coinciding with themselves, and thus indefinitely open to transformation. Since God is immanent to his conditions, God is also subject to the unconditional openness of his conditions that has exposed him to radical transformation. Job can therefore reject his particular conditions and find consoling hope that their unconditional groundlessness keeps them as well as God open to possible future transformation.

109 42:7-17: JOB'S TURN TO COLLECTIVITY

In this section I turn to the book's prose conclusion that narrates a scene that has elicited rejection *and* consolation from the most ethically naïve to the most sophisticated reader.<sup>54</sup> Prior to considering the features of the narrative that most often instigate such reactions, it is worth reflecting on the ethical implications of the rather paltry space and detail devoted to this situation. It seems to me that the book's ethic is first and foremost concerned with depicting the difficulty of experiencing, discerning, and articulating the WISDOM that derives from a particular event that forces a break with a past situation. The book witnesses to the great endurance that can be required of one who seeks to articulate the consequences and truth of an unanticipated event for the situation in which it occurs.

Any ethical consideration of the book should also note the lion's share of attention that the book gives to the opposing figures that one could face in the attempt to discern and articulate WISDOM. Representatives of the previous situation—from his wife in ch. 2 all the way to Elihu in ch. 37 and even up through contemporary interpreters—all bombard Job with various attempts to refer his experience to a realm that transcends the situation

<sup>54</sup>By naïve, I simply mean the response most readers have of both relief at Job's reintegration into the community, and distress at the tale's apparent attempt to conclude the story by "restoring" Job's possessions without dealing with the mistreatment that removed them in the first place. For an ethically sophisticated reading that also responds with both consolation and rejection at the prose tale, see NEWSOM (2002), 121–34; cf. NEWSOM (2003a), ch. 2.

in which it occurs.<sup>55</sup> When faced with an event that exceeds what a framework is capable of knowing, such appeals to a realm that transcends the situation may appear humble or even critical of that situation's framework. Even though they may serve one or another progressive cause at any moment, I still find such appeals inherently conservative insofar as their exclusion of the event from the situation places a stumbling block in the way of any attempts to hold the situation responsible for the event's consequences. In other words, humility before an unanticipated event can function to protect the framework that delimits what is (un)knowable from the event's unsettling implications. The primary ethic that JOB models illustrates the importance, difficulty, and opposition that may face the one who attempts to discern and articulate how an unanticipatable event can present the limits that define what a situation can and cannot know.

The book's prose conclusion is meager in size and detail when compared with these larger issues that the book explores at length, but its ethical significance has not and should not be overlooked. The conclusion opens a window onto some of the concrete practices of a community constituted with respect to the truth or WISDOM of an event. The first thing that the prose conclusion reports is that the community is constituted with respect to the truth of Job's words (42:7). This truth is not respectful of all differences and opinions, but implies the falsity of the words of Eliphaz and his two friends. Reparations must be made for the friends' distorting falsities (v.8). YHWH commands the friends to take animals to "my servant Job" so that he can sacrifice them on their behalf, and so that "my servant Job"

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<sup>55</sup>In addition to appealing to a realm that transcends a situation, many people also react to an event by appealing to a particular or contingent aspect of the situation that would explain it from within what the situation is capable of understanding. In Job's case, of course, one thinks of appeals to Job's guilt. With respect to the recent financial crisis, one thinks of all of the blaming of Wall Street greed, predatory practices, and so on. These and others are undoubtedly correct, but rendering them the cause of the crisis fails to appreciate how capitalism's own dynamic inevitably generates such crises. That is, by appealing to the particular guilty parties alone, one gives the false impression that capitalism would function smoothly if only everyone would play fairly.

can pray over them, all so that YHWH's anger will subside and YHWH will not act against them since, we are told once again, they did speak the truth like "my servant Job." The friends obey YHWH's command and YHWH looks favorably upon Job (v.9). YHWH returns to Job twice as much as Job previously had (v.10).

Several aspects of the scene recounted in vv.7-10 seem awkward. YHWH shifts perspective on Job's words—from "without knowledge" (cf. 38:2) to "true"—and on Job himself—from one who is excessively limited (who has not seen, does not know, has not been, &c.) to one who is excessively lauded as "my servant" (four times in two verses). Second, there is the "restoration." Is this a retributive reward?<sup>56</sup> Is it "hush money"? Does Job "sell out"? Does this doubling double right back over the difficult issues raised by the book? Some may think so, but others read YHWH's command to the friends to get Job to sacrifice for them as a chance for Job to overcome any antagonism that remains from the dialogue between himself and the friends, and to reconstitute the community as a place that sanctions the truth of his experience.<sup>57</sup>

In v.11, after over thirty-nine chapters, the scene returns to the intimate community of Job's brothers and sisters and "all who previously knew him." They bring him symbolic gifts: money—which will enable him to re-enter communal life—and jewelry—a signifier

<sup>56</sup>While I cannot develop it here, I should note that the appearance that the situation reported in 42:7-10 directly opposes the implications of the prologue may be an instance of what Clines calls "false naïveté." In vv.7-10 God commands a human being to do what God wants, gives motivating conditions in the interest of the human being to carry out this activity, and then reports that God's servant obediently carried out the sacrifice, which effectively abated God's anger and controlled God's activities. It would be easy to attack this as an exact reversal of the prose prologue's description of Job's sacrificial deeds in 1:5, its subsequent challenge to Job's piety, and its determination of authentic piety and authentic worship as unconditional in 1:9-10. However, this would be to consider the events of the conclusion in relation to the first ten verses of the book and nothing else. More instructive may be to consider the "immanent theology" I have uncovered throughout the dialogue, wisdom poem, and YHWH's speeches. Is the God to whom Job sacrifices in the conclusion not quite different than the God to whom Job sacrifices prior to *haśśāṭān's* challenge in 1:9-10?

<sup>57</sup>Cf., for example, the interpretations discussed in CHAPTER 9 by O'CONNOR (2003), 171-179 and NEW-

of value over and above use-value. YHWH also gives Job great wealth (v.12). The gifts he receives from his family are homologous with the gifts he gives his daughters (vv.13-15). Job gives them very useful inheritances along with their brothers as well as aesthetically-charged names that signify their value in excess of use-value. Their beauty, greater than any women in all the land, is enough even to grab the attention of this terse narrative. Job's gifts to his daughters are unusual and ethically-charged since, according to ancient inheritance laws, daughters inherit only when there are no living male relatives. Their inheritances may free them from relying on their beauty and other means to secure their financial futures by procuring a hefty brideprice.<sup>58</sup> The community that vv.7-17 recount is extensive in horizontal and vertical relations, beautiful and aesthetically-charged, and enduring over four generations and one hundred and forty years (vv.16-17).

From an ethical standpoint, the most significant aspect of the prose conclusion is the way in which it shifts its focus from a subject-centered concern with Job's understanding, activities, and obedience, to Job's role in what constitutes and maintains the cultural, legal, and religious institutions of the community. From the outset the book focuses on the individual character of Job, and it often either isolates or reveals Job's isolation from the community. Furthermore, much of the book's content suggests that one's neighbors in the community and the traditions that one inherits function as obstacles to ethical thought and activity, blinders to any attempt to discern an event and persevere in its truth. In other words, the book initially seems to offer little to help someone think about ethical matters beyond the individual and with respect to the community. The prose conclusion, however, shifts focus toward the community and toward Job's role in what constitutes and maintains the collective.

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SOM (2003a).

<sup>58</sup>See especially Linafelt's quote on page 406.

## 110 THE DOUBLE AFFIRMATIONS OF JOB AND YHWH

Before concluding, I want to consider briefly the somewhat surprising sense many get from the way in which YHWH and Job each affirm one another in the book's final chapter. It will help to reconsider my argument in CHAPTER 9 that, while Job and YHWH both speak as if their speech implies that the other is wrong, one should not treat them as externally opposed to one another. Instead of two different and clashing positions, on page 427 I evoked the figure of a Möbius strip to illustrate my sense that each stands on two sides of the same surface and mistakenly thinks that the other's stance on the other side implies that there is an edge between them. The Möbius strip is key because in it one need only persist on one side and not cross an edge in order to arrive at the other side. It presents one surface with two sides. If we take Job's testimony seriously and try to think through its ontological implications, the kind of world it implies must be like the one YHWH describes: structurally incomplete and generative of wild, monstrous creatures. Alternatively, if we persist in thinking through the implications of the world YHWH describes, we will have to account not only for the beautiful and majestic monsters it relates but also the horrid and rancid ones like Job. The truth of YHWH's cosmos and of Job's experience is constituted only when they are read coterminously, such that one does not determine or oppose the other, and both are seen as two sides of the same truth.

CHAPTER 9's argument receives a further twist in Job 42's mutual affirmations. After so many chapters railing against God, Job says, "I know that you can do all things, and no purpose is beyond you. . . I spoke and I did not understand, wonders beyond me that I did not know. . . I heard you, and now my eye sees you" (42:2, 3, 5). After four chapters attacking Job, YHWH can hardly get a phrase out without referring to "my servant Job," and twice YHWH says to Eliphaz, "You did not speak truth to me like my servant Job" (vv.7, 8). Many read these two affirmations as strikingly incongruous with, if not vapid abandonments of the previous chapters. After CHAPTER 9, however, the full weight of truth behind these



affirmations can be recognized. Both YHWH and Job finally assume the truth of the other's speech as their own truth.

Therefore, rather than departures from the previous chapters, I propose that the affirmations in ch. 42 be read like a final twist in the plot of a psychological thriller that reveals what has been true all along. Throughout the book the two main characters oppose one another at many levels until, at the end, each realizes that he has misapprehended his position in the opposition. At the end, YHWH and Job remain two different figures, and one does not require the other's destruction.<sup>59</sup> Instead, the truth of each of their positions is ultimately found on the side of the other. This could easily be misunderstood, however, since it does not mean that they could be added together to create one truth, or that the truth of each is outside of its position, or that the sense of opposition no longer holds between them. Thinking again of the Möbius strip, they complete each other's position in the sense that each one is always on the other side of the single-sided surface that their positions articulate. Each one occupies the place of the blind spot produced by the other's position; the other is positioned for each in the blind spot his own position inherently produces. Neither is the completion or transcendental truth of the other. It only becomes clear that each occupies the place of the truth of the other's position one we change our perspective on that position. That is, the truth of one position that the other articulates or embodies is not evident from within that position, but only after we shift our perspective out of it. So what enables them to shift their perspective? Their encounter with the other enables them to grasp the truth about themselves from what the other says.

#### 111 THE COHERENT AND CONSISTENT WISDOM OF JOB

This dissertation has found that the book of Job clearly and consistently presents a single conception of WISDOM in opposition to the two-tiered conception of wisdom-and-Wisdom.

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<sup>59</sup>The latter scenario describes many readings that think that God's speeches imply nothing other than a mutually exclusive opposition. One might consider those readings that think YHWH's speeches insist that

My argument differs both from the older critical quest to discern a single, overarching message that brings the book's different voices to speak in one accord, as well as from the recent scholarly trend, at the forefront of which stands Newsom's work, to deny the possibility of such efforts at homogenization, and to articulate instead, on one hand, the book's messages as multiple and ultimately heterogeneous and, on the other, the significance of the (lack of) relationship among them. My work breaks out of these apparently exhaustive possibilities—either unity or multiplicity—by accepting the recent arguments against abstract unity and yet articulating what I see as a single, coherent issue that generates and underlies the multitude of messages that the book presents. Ultimately the book of Job is fragmented and heterogeneous; it lacks an overarching or general message and it even includes messages that directly oppose attempts to read it through a unifying perspective. However, the multitude of messages in the book all issue from a single, consistent struggle: to articulate and endorse a WISDOM theology that is immanent to a single though un-unified plane of existence in opposition to the tradition's two-tiered conception—one for what is available to human, finite, limited subjects, and another for theological ideas such as God and Wisdom that transcend and yet are indicated by the limits of human knowledge. The book's struggle is, in other words, similar to the scholar's struggle to articulate its own WISDOM. Just as I accept that the book offers a series of heterogeneous messages, so too do I deny that the book consistently presents its WISDOM in opposition to Wisdom. On the contrary, it sometimes fails to persevere in its explorations of the immanent consequences of the presence of WISDOM (as when Job posits and desires such a transcendent realm in his use of the legal metaphor). However, these moments almost always return to a realization of the ontological priority of WISDOM with respect to wisdom-and-Wisdom. So, while I have not suggested that the book presents a single, consistent position, I believe that I have demonstrated that a single, consistent issue informs its positions from beginning to Job submit to YHWH's position, or those that think the speeches tacitly subject YHWH—by YHWH's failure to engage the implications of Job's actual position—to the claims of Job's position.

end (minus, of course, my silence on Elihu's speeches).

This description aligns my dissertation squarely with two works on contemporary philosophers that appeared over the course of its composition: Adrian Johnston's monograph on Slavoj Žižek, and Martin Hägglund's monograph on Jacques Derrida.<sup>60</sup> Both Johnston and Hägglund argue that a single logic unifies and informs these two prolific philosophers whose wide-ranging works seem in many ways to resist systematization. So, for example, neither Žižek's "dizzying rampage through any and every disciplinary area and level of conceptual analysis,"<sup>61</sup> nor Derrida's so-called ethical or religious "turn," show evidence of inconsistencies or qualitative differences in the conceptual and theoretical apparatuses of these two thinkers. What they show instead are the deployments of the same apparatus into a plurality of areas that add to and do not detract from the persuasiveness of these apparatuses.<sup>62</sup> This approach to a plurality of messages as persuasive deployments of a consistent logic also characterizes the plurality of messages of the book of Job. I articulated this singular logic and these multiple messages by developing and organizing my arguments with respect to multiple oppositions—desire and drive, sacrifice and satisfaction, fear and anxiety, guilt and shame, tragedy and comedy, masculine and feminine, and the dynamical and mathematical sublimes. Each has, on one side, a two-tiered structure in which an immanent plane is limited with respect to a transcendence that lies beyond it and, on the other, a transcendence that refers to nothing other than the immanent plane's non-coincidence with itself on account of which it remains ever capable of generating beings that exceed it. The latter transcendence provides Job the only hope he maintains for moving beyond his immanent conditions.

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<sup>60</sup> JOHNSTON (2008b); HÄGGLUND (2008). Whereas I am deeply indebted to Žižek's and Johnston's works, I read Hägglund's work only after the dissertation was mostly completed.

<sup>61</sup> JOHNSTON (2008b), xiv.

<sup>62</sup> As Johnston acknowledges at the beginning of his preface, an important precursor to these works that similarly approaches Gilles Deleuze's corpus is by ALAIN BADIOU, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* trans. by Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

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The book of Job's concluding moment follows and encourages Job's hope with its brief glimpse into a possible outcome of his experience. The ethical implications of YHWH's affirmation thus go much further than a celebration of Job's ethical triumph. YHWH does not only ordain Job's speech, YHWH's affirmation enables Job to reorient himself out of an individual and toward a collective struggle. The prose conclusion affords a glimpse of what could occur after a wise subject barges through the door opened by his conditions and constitutes a collective with respect to the truth that resounds within its gaping hole.

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 Order and Violence
 

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The following two epigraphs constitute between them the space in which lies the truth of this appendix.<sup>1</sup> The quote from novelist Neal Stephenson should be read with Job 38:12-15 as it uses JOB's image to describe the expansion of London around the turn of the eighteenth century:

There is no life present *at first* which would *then* come to protect, postpone, or reserve itself.

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Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*

As a wave passes through a rug that is being shaken, driving before it a front of grit, fleas, apples seeds, tobacco-ashes, pubic hairs, scabheads, &c., so the expansion of London across the defenseless green countryside pushed before it all who had been jarred loose by Change, or who simply hadn't been firmly tied down to begin with. A farmer living out in the green pastures north of the city might notice the buildings creeping his way, year by year, but not know that his pasture was soon to become part of London until drunks, footpads, whores, and molly-boys began to congregate under his windows.

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Neal Stephenson, *The System of the World*

I begin by lingering over the details of the chain of associations, ubiquitous to the traditional reading of creation and chaos: light → order → creation, a line that leads steadily to the

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<sup>1</sup>NEAL STEPHENSON, *The System of the World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 116; JACQUES DER-

Priestly creation account in Gen 1:1-2:4a. The mythic tradition of the creator God, subduing the primordial, hostile sea (i.e. chaos<sub>1</sub>), and then creating light, darkness, the earth, the sun, the moon, and so on is well known (cf. Ps 74:12-17), as is the way in which the light, the righteous, and the creator God continue to act in ways that “create” an ordered earth and subdue an undifferentiated formlessness (i.e. chaos<sub>2</sub>).<sup>2</sup> Brown describes the continuing work of creation suggested by Prov 8-9 as follows: “In Wisdom’s cosmic domicile, watery chaos is contained. . . In the stranger’s household, the turbid waters of unbounded chaos wreak only havoc and death. . . Yet that chaos is contained by YHWH’s cosmic decree, and the conduct of the righteous effectively keeps the latch in place.”<sup>3</sup> But then of the Priestly creation account, Brown says,

Gen 1:1-2:3(4a) evinces a literary cohesion that bears certain theological and ethical implications. Suggestively absent is any hint of opposition or disruption in the cosmic process. Chaos, with a capital ‘C,’ has no place in this cosmic order, for creation is conducted decently and in order. . . . [The Priestly creation account] is governed by a sequence of days that exhibit an internal correspondence, particularly Days 1-6, the so-called Hexameron. The left column (Days 1-3) presents a series of separations: light from darkness, sky from the waters, and land out of the waters. The right column (Days 4-6) describes the filling of these discrete domains: the celestial luminaries, aquatic and aerial creatures, and land-based animals as well as human beings. The daily progression reflects not so much a linear or evolutionary order as a coordinated one in which domains are delineated and populated. The sequence makes clear that the order of creation begins with the establishment of particular domains: sky, water, and land.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, God’s twofold activity of separation and filling takes place against the backdrop of a preontological state, in Hebrew, *tohû wābohû*, which Brown takes as “without form and void.” For Brown, separation negates formlessness; filling negates emptiness.

RIDA, *Writing and Difference* trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 203.

<sup>2</sup>I introduced the distinction between these sense of chaos on page 384. <sup>3</sup>BROWN (1998), 393-94.

<sup>4</sup>BROWN (1998), 36-37.

“Formed and filled,” Brown concludes his reading, “creation is complete. God is creation’s formal and material cause.”<sup>5</sup>

I am wary of the overly schematic translation of *tohû wābohû* since I think it should be read as hendiadys—not as ascribing two distinct predicates to what existed before creation. But this is a quibble. A more important objection has to do with Brown’s evaluative pronouncements regarding the absence of “any hint of opposition or disruption . . . conducted decently and in order.” While the Priestly account certainly paints a picture different than the violent, mythic struggle found elsewhere, it is not so easy to distinguish the operations of separation and filling, of division and population, from the violence that is obviously written out of it.

A return to the archival accounts of Darius’ bureaucracy illustrates this difficulty with particular relevance since that is as good an historical context as any for thinking about the conditions within which the Priestly text functioned. Two quotes from Briant’s monumental work suffice to make my point as to the principle means by which Persia established its order:

The method that Darius used to determine the boundaries of the districts and their tribute, as reported by Herodotus, is most interesting: “for administrative purposes neighboring nations were joined in a single unit (*kata ethnea*), outlying peoples were considered to belong to this nation or that, according to convenience” (Herodotus III.89). From the perspective of tribute, the peoples of a nome were “grouped together” (III.92), “a particular sum of tribute was set for all the peoples [of a nome]” (III.90). With just one exception. . . the borders of the districts are never given with reference to geographical features. A tribute district was first and foremost a combination of neighboring peoples. The term *ethnos* corresponds fairly closely to a word used by the Great Kings in their inscriptions, *dahyu*. Both refer to a community and to the territory in which that community lived and reproduced.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>BROWN (1998), 39.

<sup>6</sup>PIERRE BRIANT, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* trans. by Peter T. Daniels (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 393.

We may remark that the ethnic principle was the rule in the military organization of the Empire. . . [which was] organized by people, with each ethnic contingent led by a local leader, and in every Achaemenid army the contingents were arranged *kata ethnea*. Similarly, in the organization of work on the site of the Athos canal “The ground was divided into sections for the men of the various nations *kata ethnea*” (Herodotus VII.23)<sup>7</sup>

In other words, Achaemenid governance controlled its subjects not mainly through violence but by the practices of division and assignment, practices which resonate deeply with Gen 1, wherein the teeming world of *tohû wābbohû* is brought to order by a series of tactical partitions and distributions.

In various analyses of institutional discipline—whether the prison or the asylum, the military, the hospital, or the school—M. Foucault has most forcefully argued for the efficacy of such micro- over macro-techniques of power. Again, the following quote will suffice to make the point:

In France, it seemed that Rochefort served both as experiment and model. A port, and a military port is – with its circulation of goods, men signed up willingly or by force, sailors embarking and disembarking, diseases and epidemics – a place of desertion, smuggling, contagion: it is a crossroads for dangerous mixtures, a meeting-place for forbidden circulations. The naval hospital must therefore treat, but in order to do this it must be a filter, a mechanism that pins down and partitions; it must provide a hold over this whole mobile, swarming mass, by dissipating the confusion of illegality and evil. The medical supervision of diseases and contagions is inseparable from a whole series of other controls: the military control over deserters, fiscal control over commodities, administrative control over remedies, rations, disappearances, cures, deaths, simulations. Hence the need to distribute and partition off space in a rigorous manner. . . Gradually, an administrative and political space was articulated upon a therapeutic space; it tended to individualize bodies, diseases, symptoms, lives and deaths; it constituted a real table of juxtaposed and carefully distinct singularities.

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<sup>7</sup>BRIANT (2002), 410.



Out of discipline, a medically useful space was born.<sup>8</sup>

While Foucault understood disciplinarity as a modern emergence, I cannot help but recognize it in every sphere of Persian imperial concern laid out above by Briant via Herodotus.

All this is to say that the socio-political implementation of “creation” is at best ambiguous regarding the categories of order/chaos, at least insofar as violence is understood as a form of chaos, as it is in Job 38:12-15 where the “containment of the violence of the wicked is set in the context of the work of creation, which is renewed each day.”<sup>9</sup> For even the most positive reading of (Genesis’ light, Stephenson’s London, or) the Achaemenid dynasty—that it was a time of prosperity, peace and stability for the Levant; that its leadership exhibited the supreme virtue of tolerance, even to the point of being patrons of diverse local cultures—must finally reckon with the naked will to dominate (a point that will not have been lost on the “autonomous” local elites who over-exercised their self-determination in the eyes of Darius et al.). This primal violence vanishes from view beneath the administrative, bureaucratic order it has established, even though it returns, in the manner of the repressed, as a series of symptomatic revolts, such as those that broke out between 522-520 BCE and threatened the survival of the imperial system established by Cyrus and extended by Cambyses.

In other words, one must posit what may seem paradoxical—the identification of order and violence—in order to understand the workings of Persian rule as well as the workings of creation.<sup>10</sup> There are stirrings of sedition in Gen 1 as much as there are in Job 38 or

<sup>8</sup>MICHEL FOUCAULT, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 144.

<sup>9</sup>NEWSOM (1996), 603.

<sup>10</sup>By phrasing my argument in these terms I intend to allude to the larger and more complicated issues present in a discussion that traces its roots to Benjamin’s distinction between uses of violence, often referred to as constituted and constitutive violence; WALTER BENJAMIN, “Critique of Violence” trans. by Edmund Jephcott in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken, 1978), 277–300. There have been a number of important engagements with Benjamin’s essay, of which the

the Persian empire in the late sixth century BCE. Regarding Gen 1—contrary to Brown’s argument that creation is represented “decently and in order” and without “any hint of opposition or disruption”—it will suffice for my argument to consider the main verb used to describe the actual mechanism of YHWH’s creative activity,  $\sqrt{bdl}$  :

Gen 1:4: And God separated (*wybdl ʾlhym*) the light from the darkness.

1:6: And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate (*wyhy mbdyl*) the waters from the waters.”

1:7: God made the dome and separated (*wybdl*) the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome.

1:14a: And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate (*lhbdyl*) the day from the night.”

1:17-18: God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate (*wlhbdyl*) the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

It requires no special act of imagination to detect the *potential* for violence in the act of separation.<sup>11</sup> It is nevertheless instructive to mark, in those texts with the most explicit connection to the Persian milieu, a cluster of usages wherein *bdl* moves steadily toward violence.

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most famous may be JACQUES DERRIDA, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’” trans. by Mary Quaintance in *Acts of Religion* Edited by GIL ANIDJAR. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002b), 228–98. A well-documented and clear discussion of these issues can be found in BEATRICE HANSEN, *Critique of Violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>11</sup>One might also consider the accounts of the creation and organization of the world in cognate literatures, many of which conceive of creation as a process of separation, and in many of these there are deep associations between separation and violence (e.g., in the *Enuma Elish*). “[T]he Sumerian, bilingual, and Akkadian creation texts, and the Sumerian verb *bad* and the Akkadian verb *parāsu* [both words for ‘separation’], demonstrate that in ancient Mesopotamia the (divine) opening act is conceived in terms of the separation of heaven and earth” ELLEN VAN WOLDE, “Why the Verb *br’* Does Not Mean ‘to create’ in Genesis 1.1-2.4a” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 34 (2009), 12-13.

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Although other options are available, e.g., Isa 56:3, it is Ezra and Nehemiah who bring the underside of *ddl* into plain view. For what the new order is separated from is neither the scab in Stephenson nor the wicked in JOB, but something closer to what Stephenson refers to as those “who had been jarred loose by Change, or who simply hadn’t been firmly tied down to begin with,” that is, those with *already established* marriages and families, an old order that must be ripped apart to make way for what will be called a “restoration” by only some at first but, perhaps later, by most:

Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have trespassed and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. Now make confession to YHWH the God of your ancestors, and do his will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.” Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, “It is so; we must do as you have said. But the people are many, and it is a time of heavy rain; we cannot stand in the open. Nor is this a task for one day or for two, for many of us have transgressed in this matter. Let our officials represent the whole assembly, and let all in our towns who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times, and with them the elders and judges of every town, until the fierce wrath of our God on this account is averted from us.” Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levites supported them.

(Ezra 10:10-15)

That the text reluctantly records the protest against these events is remarkable.<sup>12</sup> In any case, this episode makes clear the extent to which the new order will go to ensure that whatever was there before it will be perceived as “not firmly tied down,” in need of new security.

YHWH’s speeches in JOB overwhelmingly resist interpretations that take chaos and cosmos to be two, externally opposed cosmic forces. The cosmos YHWH presents is a weak, less-than-fully unified design that is riven with contradictions, disjunctions, and antagonisms, and that is capable of producing wild, fearless, and free beings that transcend their un-unified ground. For their part, YHWH presents chaos and figures of chaos—the sea, the deep, the gates of death, the gates of deep darkness in 38:16-18—as *essential* conditions of the cosmos. More than a place within the ontological ground of the cosmos, these figures of chaos are even coddled by the creator. YHWH clothes the sea with “clouds” and “deep darkness” when it is birthed at the moment of creation in 38:8-9. The point of this appendix is most strikingly illustrated by the image in Job 38 of the sea when the creative activity of the creator does not in any way oppose it, but births it. YHWH’s speeches lend themselves to a reading of creation as a more plastic concept than usual—plastic in the sense long given to the brain in the cognitive sciences. Creation can refer the act of bestowing form, destroying form, as well as to what can receive, destroy, and give form. The concept of plasticity may afford new ways of understanding creative elements as capable of receiving,

<sup>12</sup>The “all” (*kāl*) in v.12 that is followed by the “only” (*ak*) in v.15 is reminiscent of Stalin’s report about a party congress, cited numerous times by Žižek. For example, in a letter to the London Review of Books on December 2, 2004, Žižek writes, “In *The History of the VKP(b)*, Stalin (who ghost-wrote the book) describes the outcome of the voting at a party congress in the late 1920s: ‘With a large majority, the delegates unanimously approved the resolution proposed by the Central Committee.’” In other words, whoever found themselves in the “minority” that apparently opposed the “majority” found themselves, after the vote, outside of the party whose vote now appears “unanimous.” So too did the “assembly” (*qhl*) before Ezra in v.12, at the moment they voted as they did, immediately account for everyone since, after the vote, Jonathan, Jahzeiah, Meshullam, and Shabbethai were no longer members of the assembly.

giving, and destroying forms or orders, as well as of understanding the relationships between the materials out of which creatures emerge and the more-than-material courses that their lives pursue.<sup>13</sup> This new understanding would not only allow for more nuanced readings of creation traditions in the Hebrew Bible, it also betrays within some of the ancient sources themselves an awareness of notions close to that of plasticity that have up to now remained unnoticed.

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<sup>13</sup>The notion of plasticity I have in mind stems primarily from its development in the work of the French philosopher Catharine Malabou.

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