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Did Job Suffer for Nothing? The Ethics of Piety, Presumption and the Reception of Disaster in the Prologue of Job

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Abstract

This study argues that the statement about Job suffering for nothing (2.3; cf. 9.17) is not peripheral to the story of Job. When Job begins to suffer, the Satan's theoretical question 'Does Job fear God for nothing?' (1.9) is reframed by Yahweh's evaluative statement: 'You incited me against him to swallow him for nothing' (2.3). Job's suffering is not random; rather, it is well thought out, executed, and evaluated. In response, Job raises the issue about the reception of suffering/disaster (2.10). The Prologue explores the reality of suffering/disaster through the tripartite lens of the causal theory of suffering, the reality of suffering, and the 'reception' theory of suffering. Because systematic and systemic suffering strikes at the moral, existential, and social core of humanity and divinity, it often becomes the most powerful critique of its own causal, existential, and reception theories, regardless of whether such theories are of divine or human origin.

Keywords: Theodicy, disaster/evil, reception theory, piety, justice, bless/curse God, gratuitous suffering.

Introduction

It is with good reason that Maimonides described the book of Job as 'extraordinary and marvelous'.¹ The book raises profound questions and attempts answers on difficult issues. It raises questions about integrity, justice, piety and disaster, all structured around a relationship between a ruling master's council and his servant.² More intriguing is the manner in which the book raises these questions: through suffering and death in the hands of a divine council.³ The result is a range of hermeneutics from *sin-based* analyses that view Job's suffering through the prism of sin and suffering/punishment to *test-based* analyses that understand Job's experience as a divine wager to *trauma-based* analyses that begin with the reality and horror of Job's suffering as their central focus. Where one begins analytically determines not just where one ends, but also the extent to which one tolerates or uses Job's suffering as a component of one's religious and social thought process, and finally the possibility that Job suffered for nothing.

1. Moses ben Maimon, *The Guide for the Perplexed* (trans. Shlomo Pines; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 486.

2. These themes are represented, developed and debated through the fourfold portrayal of Job as the servant who was 'blameless and upright, fearing God and turning away from disaster/evil'.

3. The problem of (innocent) suffering is long-standing, going back as far as to the second millennium BCE, and is expressed in works from ancient Babylon ('I will Praise the Lord of Wisdom') and Egypt (*The Eloquent Peasant*). See Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 145-64; Yair Hoffman, 'The Book of Job as a Trial: A Perspective from a Comparison to Some relevant Ancient Near Eastern Texts', in Thomas Krüger et al. (eds.), *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.-19. August 2005* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2007), pp. 21-31. The framing of the issues in Job is an important part of addressing such questions. Some scholars argue that the central issue of the book is not human suffering or the problem of evil but rather the problem of sanctification, that is, how humans can continue to believe in God when the framework of the Covenant relationship between God and humans is violated. See Susannah Ticciah, *Job and the Disruption of Identity: Reading beyond Barth* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005); James L. Crenshaw, 'Popular Questioning of the Justice of God in Ancient Israel', *ZAW* 83.3 (1970), pp. 180-95; David B. Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy: Why Job has Nothing to Say to the Puzzle of Suffering* (Michigan: Brazos, 2008).

The Theory, Reality and Reception of Disaster in the Prologue

When Job starts to suffer, the Satan's theoretical question, 'Does Job fear God for nothing?' (Job 1.9), is reframed by Yahweh's evaluative statement: 'you incited me against him to swallow him for nothing' (2.3). Within these two poles of theoretical question and evaluative comment structured around nothingness, Job raises the issue of the reception of disaster in 2.10: 'Should we receive the beautiful but not the disastrous from the Lord?' The Prologue explores the reality of disaster not primarily through the prism of human piety, but largely through the tripartite nexus of the *causal theory* of suffering (with an underlying ethical uncertainty), the *reality of suffering* (with its overt horror and ethical crisis), and the *reception theory* of suffering (with its perspectival ethics). The narrative lays bare a vivid illustration of what may happen when particular theories are acted upon. The result is the kind of systematic disaster that the political theorist, Mahmood Mamdani, has called the 'artifacts of violence'.⁴

Given that the narrative is filled with (near) death experiences and destruction, Dan Mathewson has argued that Job should be viewed as a traumatic survivor, and that the hermeneutical way forward is to embark on a radical confrontation with that which caused the rupture in the life of Job: death and disaster.⁵ Reading the book of Job, therefore, is an ethical task; to read the story is to participate in the ethical uncertainties of the divine council and Job. But, for the purpose of the present study, it is also to read beyond and even against the theoretical assumptions and formulations that lead to disaster; it is to read *with* Job's character who turned away from disaster, who suffered for nothing.

4. Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 3.

5. Dan Mathewson, *Death and Survival in the Book of Job: Desymbolization and Traumatic Experience* (LHB/OTS, 450; New York: T&T Clark International, 2006), p. 2. The narrative is infused with the language of death and destruction: (1) the repeated stretching out of Yahweh's hand to touch/strike Job (1.11; 2.5) evokes images and memory of disaster resulting from such divine touching/striking (1 Sam. 6.9); (2) Job is struck with a disastrous plague/disease (2.7), just as the Israelites were struck with incurable diseases by Yahweh (Deut. 28.35); (3) divine and human agents combine to kill both humans and animals, leaving survivors for the sole purpose of their serving as witnesses to the effectiveness of the ruling council's destructive policy (1.13-18); and (4) Yahweh acknowledges having acted as mythical Sheol, swallowing innocent persons for nothing (2.3; cf. Prov. 1.11-12).

Two factors, one textual and the other experiential, lie at the root of my reading. Textually, the book affirms that Job suffered for nothing—Yahweh states it in 2.3 and Job repeats it in 9.17. Experientially, the book deals with issues that resonate with the enormity of suffering in the world. Whether it is genocide or slave trade or (civil) war or terrorist attacks or deadly diseases or poverty, it is abundantly clear to me that many people suffer *from and for* ‘causes’ that are difficult to understand emotionally and intellectually, much less appropriate. And some readers who turn to Job in time of pain do not do so because they feel or think they are being tested or because they have sinned. In fact, very often the ‘official’ ideology that creates and justifies their suffering is rejected, as the sufferers recreate their lives.⁶

Because suffering strikes at the moral, social and existential core of humanity and divinity, it often becomes the most powerful critique of its own causal theory, whether that theory is of divine or human origin. Because of its self-critical power, suffering undermines not just the moral and social status of its victims but also of its authors and agents. In the book of Job, a view emerges that Job’s suffering happened only in order to show that it should not have happened; in other words, Job suffered for nothing.

And yet, Job continued to suffer even after Yahweh admitted that his suffering was for nothing. Therefore, the book does not lend itself to easy answers, or even to easy formulations of the questions at hand.⁷ The

6. J. Gerald Janzen, *Job* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Westminster: John Knox Press, 1985), pp. 119–21, argues that at some point in his self-defense, Job assumes the role of co-creator, just as persons who suffer for nothing may, through wisdom, begin to recreate their lives. See also Gerald West and Bongzi Zengele, ‘Reading Job “Positively” in the Context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa’, in Ellen van Wolde (ed.), *Job’s God* (London: SCM Press, 2004), pp. 112–24.

7. David J.A. Clines, ‘Why Is There a Book of Job and What Does It Do to You If You Read It?’, in William A.M. Beuken (ed.), *The Book of Job* (BETL, 114; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), pp. 1–20 (4). Similarly, Michael Cheney, *Dust, Wind and Agony: Character, Speech and Genre in Job* (CB, 36; Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994), p. 1, argues that ‘variation on character portrayal is quintessential to the complex structure and meanings of the work as a whole’. Victoria Hoffer, ‘Illusion, Allusion, and Literary Artifice in the Frame Narrative of Job’, in Stephen L. Cook *et al.* (eds.), *The Whirlwind: Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse* (JSOTSup, 336; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 84–89 (87), argues that intra- and inter-textuality creates ‘rich and polyvalent images and meanings’. In fact, Hoffer points out that the introductory formula, ‘there was a man’ in Job 1.1 (cf. 2 Sam.

alternating scenery between heaven and earth, the use of dialogue as a literary device and the combination of occasional rapid narration (1.14-19) with stretched out silence (2.13) all suggest that the story generates profound theological and anthropological questions that invite artful representation, recurring rituals and even dramatization.⁸ And the folkloric introduction along with the portrayal of Job's experience as lasting 'all the days' (1.1-5) hints, from the very beginning, that the search for 'answers' may indeed take a lifetime. The telling and retelling of the story become part of the search for 'answers'. Not surprisingly, Job's next major formulation was about the reception of suffering on the part of humans.

A major part of such retelling/reception is the depiction (in words, images, and rituals) of Job's experience of suffering. Such depictions symbolize an ironic turn of events, in light of what could very well be the crescendo of the narrator's fourfold introductory portrayal of Job in 1.1, namely, that he turned away from disaster. In fact, the story is not just about Job avoiding physical disaster, but also how his thoughts and actions were geared towards pre-empting suffering (1.5). In contrast to Job, the ruling heavenly council formulated a theory that used disaster as its tool of choice, and proceeded to strike Job with a series of testy attacks.

Whether or not one reads 2.10 as an interrogative,⁹ Job probed not just the agency of suffering but most importantly whether such disaster should be received. Should humankind receive the beautiful and the

12.1; Est. 2.5) departs from a conventional *waw-consecutive* introductory formula, and refers to this literary feature as an 'expression of discontinuity' that effects a story-like tone.

8. The book of Job has inspired much artwork throughout history. See Samuel Terrien, *The Iconography of Job through the Centuries: Artists as Biblical Interpreters* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1996); William Blake, *Illustrations for the Book of Job* (New York: United Book Guild, 1950). Discussions on the book of Job as drama, particularly in comparison to Greek tragedy, goes back to the fifth-century bishop, Theodore of Mopsuestia, but has been prominent in scholarship beginning with the Reformation and extending to the Enlightenment era. See Carol A. Newsom, 'Dramaturgy and the Book of Job', in Krüger *et al.* (eds.), *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen*, pp. 375-93; Katherine J. Dell, 'Job: Sceptics, Philosophers and Tragedians', in Krüger *et al.* (eds.), *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen*, pp. 1-19.

9. Job's words in 2.10 can be translated either as an interrogative ('Should we receive the beautiful from God but not disaster?') or as an affirmative ('Indeed, we should receive the beautiful from God, but not disaster'). I ultimately take it as an affirmative statement.

disastrous from the Lord? This was Job's last statement/question before the introduction of his friends who came to console and comfort him for his disaster (1.11; cf. 42.11). If Job's turning away from disaster was the highpoint of his introduction, as I have suggested, then it is fitting that his last words in the prologue should precisely be on whether humans should receive such trouble.¹⁰

Ethical Complexity: Uncertainty, Presumption and Disaster

In the characterization of Job's experience, the noun רָע ('disaster') is one of the most frequently used words. Along with another keyword, בָּרַךְ, the noun רָע occurs seven times in the prose narrative, six times in the prologue (1.1, 8; 2.3, 7, 10, 11) and once in the epilogue (42.11).¹¹ It is therefore evident that Job cannot be interpreted without careful attention to the impact of רָע on the narrative. It is a word that not only frames the story but also haunts the reader through the scenes of the narrative. Accordingly, I would agree with David Clines that the prologue should be read with subtlety. Clines writes:

Naively read, what it is doing is to proffer the reason for Job's suffering; more subtly read, what it is doing is to offer no reason for any suffering at all—except Job's. What it extends to the reader with one hand it takes away with the other. For a moment it encourages us to believe that there is no mystery at all about suffering; but in the next moment we recognize that what was plain and unmysterious about Job's suffering was trivial, and only its inexplicability is serious.¹²

10. Reception theory is as important in analyzing suffering as is the causal theory, and this is true of the book of Job. In his analysis of the lead up to the Genocide in Rwanda, Mamdani argues that it is not sufficient to investigate the 'official' propaganda without also examining its reception by the population that executed it to perfection. Mamdani, *When Victims become Killers*, p. 7, writes: 'The violence of the genocide was the result of both planning and participation. The agenda imposed from above became a gruesome reality to the extent it resonated with perspectives from below... The design from above involved a tiny minority and is easier to understand. The response and initiative from below involved multitudes and represents the true moral dilemma of the Rwanda genocide.'

11. The verb בָּרַךְ occurs six times in the prologue (1.5, 10, 11, 21; 2.4, 9) and once in the epilogue (42.12). It can mean either 'to bless' or 'to curse' (see n. 15).

12. D.J.A. Clines, 'False Naivety in the Prologue of Job', *HAR* 9 (1985), pp. 127-36 (134).

And as Alan Cooper has argued, there is need and reason to develop ‘a satisfactory hermeneutic for interpreting the book of Job’,¹³ one that takes seriously the fact that God declares God’s actions as having been for no reason (2.3).¹⁴

Having introduced Job as turning away from disaster, the narrator begins to explore the disruptive power of suffering by situating the narrative around the theme of Job’s children holding banquets:

His sons used to hold feasts in the house of each on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them. He would get up early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to their number, for he thought/said, ‘perchance (אולי) my sons have sinned and בָּרַךְ-ed¹⁵ God in their hearts’. Thus Job did all the days. (Job 1.4-5)

Two points are worth highlighting. First, the repeated use of day/days is important, since the debate in heaven (1.6; 2.1) and the disasters (1.13-18) are framed around a ‘day’. The use of day plays on the idea of *occasion* as well as *duration* of potential disaster. There is the individual day of each son, which sets the occasion; then there is the duration of the feast days (perhaps seven days; cf. Judg. 14.12, 17); finally, there is Job’s practice of offering sacrifices and sanctifying his children continually (lit. ‘all the days’). Underneath Job’s comprehensive piety, there is a lifelong uncertainty about his children’s ethical standing before God. Job says/thinks his children may sin and בָּרַךְ God.¹⁶ For the first time, we are introduced to Job’s thought process; his religious ritual was in direct response to potentially unsettling ethical uncertainty, the *ethical perhaps*.

Second, Job’s inability to determine what his children said about God is expressed in the language of the hidden words; his children may בָּרַךְ God ‘in their hearts’. Job’s response was not to interrupt the feasting and the challenge it posed; instead, he acted in the wake of the feasting, after

13. Alan Cooper, ‘Reading and Misreading the Prologue of Job’, *JSOT* 46 (1990), pp. 67-79 (71).

14. Cooper, ‘Reading’, p. 73.

15. The meaning of בָּרַךְ here, as elsewhere in the narrative, is negotiable. Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (AB, 15; New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. 8, translates ‘cursed’ before adding that it literally means ‘blessed’, and its use here is ‘a standard scribal euphemism’. An instructive response to the assumption that בָּרַךְ is to be interpreted here as a standard euphemism for curse is provided by Tod Linafelt, ‘The Undecidability of בָּרַךְ in the Prologue to Job and Beyond’, *BibInt* 4 (1996), pp. 154-72.

16. The narrator’s association of בָּרַךְ with sin makes the uncertainty even more striking.

it had run its course and rekindled his ethical concern. So, even though the story touches on issues of hidden piety, it does so in conjunction with overt manifestations of religious piety in the form of oral expressions and rituals.¹⁷

The *ethical perhaps* is not just Job's problem. The narrator identifies similar concerns in heaven through the Satan's question—'Does Job fear God for nothing?'—and a theory that would resolve that uncertainty: if touched, Job would בָּרַךְ God (1.9, 11). The Satan's question and remark suggest that the divine–human relationship is, as Carol Newsom puts it, perhaps really a 'trade relationship'.¹⁸ Furthermore, as Ticciati rightly argues, the Satan's question functions as 'a theological irruption into what...might be seen as the deepest theological assumption of the book...that God is one who is to be feared for naught'.¹⁹ The key word here is *assumption*, and one might slightly qualify Ticciati's statement by saying that the assumption about serving God for naught is not so much that of the book as that of the Satan, and by extension the entire ruling divine council. And it is in the interaction between the characters in the book that this assumption will be debated.²⁰ From the Satan's question in 1.9 to Yahweh's remark in 2.3, the story is recast: Job the servant is going to suffer and the only question is whether he will suffer gratuitously or not.²¹

17. It is such thoughts/words of the heart that caused Noah, Job's co-legend identified by Ezekiel, to offer burnt offerings that pleased God and prevented the destruction of the world (Gen. 8.20–22). Job's initial response to the news of the disaster is to rise up, shave his head, fall to the ground and bow down (1.20). The narrative, artistic and ethical response is partly a process, a movement from rising to falling.

18. Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 56. Karl-Johan Illman, 'Theodicy in Job', in Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor (eds.), *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), pp. 304–33 (310), argues that the issue is about divine freedom to do as God pleases. Without such freedom, Illman argues, God would become 'Job's slave'. It is, however, unclear that divine freedom is ever in doubt in the book of Job.

19. Ticciati, *Job and the Disruption of Identity*, p. 50.

20. Ticciati sees the prologue in both a negative and positive light: negatively, it is not rooted in any profound sense of piety, and so shows signs of weakness and cracks in its idyllic façade. Positively, however, some deeper dimension can be discerned in the prologue, so that a critique of the prologue-piety can never be severed from an even more fundamental affirmation of it. Ticciati, *Job and the Disruption of Identity*, p. 53.

21. Kenneth N. Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics of the 'Happy' Ending in Job 42.7–17* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2005), pp. 5–6.

Job's piety and suffering are not unrelated to issues of economics, power and above all to the governance of human communities and ultimately of the universe.²² And one may here refer to the cluster of ethical uncertainties in the dialogue between Abraham and God in Genesis 18. In the back-and-forth conversation, Abraham repeatedly tried to prevent the judge of the earth from carrying out injustice by killing the righteous with the wicked (18.25). Abraham repeatedly asked God, אֵלִי ('what if, perchance') there are some righteous persons in the city (18.24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32). Here is another theoretical assumption: the righteousness of some members of the community ought to avail for the rest of the people. It is not strictly a theology of retributive justice per se, but rather the idea that the justice of God ought to operate on the basis of redemption rather than destruction.²³ In a world of ethical uncertainty, justice is perceived in terms of its ability to preserve human and cosmic existence rather than destroy it.

A similar theology is at work in the prologue of Job, as Job's righteousness seems to avail for his children, if 'perchance' they sinned against God. Job's ethical response to his ethical uncertainty was to create a community of sanctified members, and thereby hopefully avoid disaster.²⁴ Contrary to Job whose ethical uncertainty led to acts of community sanctification and burnt offering to the deity to prevent human suffering, the Satan and the divine council deal with ethical uncertainty by destroying Job's religious resources as well as Job's social network.

The ruling council's uncertainty about Job's loyalty becomes the anchoring rationale for unleashing natural, human, and divine disasters against Job and his community. Through the use of 'one day' to anchor not just the destruction (1.13), but also the theories behind the disasters (1.6; 2.1), the story hacks back to the celebrations that Job's children had in the 'day' of each, the resulting ethical challenge that their feasting posed for Job and Job's response 'all the days'. The causal theory of suffering is so well crafted that the attacks exploited Job at his moment

22. Clines, 'Why Is There a Book of Job?', p. 10. See also Walter Brueggemann, 'Theodicy in a Social Dimension', *JSOT* 33 (1985), pp. 3-25.

23. It is not only Abraham who was unsure about the ethical standing of Sodom and Gomorrah before God; the descent of the angels to investigate the city in response to its outcry shows that the divine council did not know what was happening. Again, suffering raises serious ethical questions for humans and God.

24. As noted above (n. 17) burnt offerings could be a kind of food offering to the deity, and God is said to enjoy the smell of such burnt offerings, which trigger a response from God's heart to prevent destruction of humans (Gen. 8.20-21).

of ethical vulnerability and destroyed his family at their happiest and most unified moment. The council's 'test' theory sanitized its disastrous acts by suggesting that the reason for Job's disaster was not the council's own uncertainties but rather some assumed dubiousness of Job's piety. As it turns out, there is no conclusive evidence that Job's piety became purer in the wake of his suffering.

Looking to Make Meaning of the Issues

Readers of the book of Job wrestle not just with *what* to think and ask and do in the face of unforeseen, abrupt and senseless suffering, but also with *how* to act when disaster is clearly foreseeable (by following the proceedings of the divine council, the reader is able to anticipate or even foresee Job's suffering).²⁵ Zachary Newton has provided a helpful formulation of the ethical responsibility that accompanies reading. In his *Narrative Ethics*, Newton shows that literature sometimes disrupts the conventionally understood synonymy of the words *moral* and *ethical*. Newton argues that such disruption occurs, for example, in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Independent of any external moral brought to bear on the poem, the poem itself is

built around an amature of intersubjective relation accomplished through story. That amature is what I will call *ethics*: narrative as relationship and human connectivity, as Saying over and above Said, or as Said called into account in Saying; narrative as claim, as risk, as responsibility, as gift, as price.²⁶

Narrative ethics itself is construed in two ways: as attributing to narrative some kind of ethical status, and as referring to the way in which ethical discourse often depends on narrative structures. But it is the narrating act itself that Newton identifies as the most crucial component of his theory, which Newton develops in three themes: narrational ethics (the exigent conditions and consequences of the narrative act itself);

25. In the midst of such ethical uncertainty and foreseeable attack, Job is repeatedly described as upright and blameless, fearing God and turning away from disaster (1.8; 2.3, 9; 4.2-6). See Ellen F. Davies, 'Job and Jacob: The Integrity of Faith', in Cook *et al.* (eds.), *The Whirlwind*, pp. 100-20. Given that Job is already suffering when God speaks in 2.3, one must understand 'turning away from trouble' here not in terms of escaping from physical suffering, but in terms of mental resistance to the ideology that theorizes about the use of the suffering of others as a tool to achieve one's selfish goals.

26. See Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 7.

representational ethics (the cost incurred in fictionalizing oneself or others by exchanging 'person' for 'character'); and hermeneutic ethics (the ethico-critical accountability which acts of reading hold their readers to).²⁷

The interaction between moral proportionality and ethical performance is at the center of the Prologue of Job, and the three representations of narrative ethics described by Newton are present in the story.²⁸ First, the narrational ethics of the story revolves around the description of an attack on Job, which appears suddenly and randomly from Job's vantage point, but which is a well thought out strategy advocated by members of the ruling council and structured by the narrator's repetitive use of the phrase 'one day'.²⁹ What appears to be random disaster is given structure and purpose through narration.

Second, the representational ethics of the story is framed around the genre of the story, which opens as a folktale, and which repeatedly portrays the character of Job and his righteousness in almost superhuman ways.³⁰ At the same time, though, the potency of such folkloric, even parabolic narrative, where the ethereal and the real, the imaginative and the empirical worlds coagulate is that it captures and preserves the dynamic between ethical 'particularity' and 'universality', a dynamic that is central to the ethical worldview of folk tradition in general and the wisdom tradition in particular.³¹

And third, the hermeneutic ethics is the interactive location where the reader becomes a part of the story, just as Job's friends became a part of the story by sitting with him and articulating views about his suffering.

27. Newton, *Narrative Ethics*, pp. 17-18

28. See a helpful analysis by Carol A. Newsom, 'Narrative Ethics, Character and the Prose Tale of Job', in William P. Brown (ed.), *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 121-34.

29. See the repeated use of the phrase 'one day' in the structure of the narrative (Job 1.5, 6; 2.1)

30. Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, pp. 296-300, referred to Job as 'a parable intended to set forth the opinions of people concerning providence'. Athalya Brenner has argued that the character of Job in the prose section is so exaggerated that it can only be intended to serve as an indication that the realistic story is in the poetic section. See Athalya Brenner, 'Job the Pious? The Characterization of Job in the Narrative Framework of the Book', *JSOT* 43 (1989), pp. 37-52.

31. On the concept of 'parabolic narrative' and its combination of the ethereal and the real, see Simon Gikandi, *Reading the African Novel* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1987), p. 4.

We are addressed not just by the narrator as the storyteller but also by the characters in the narrative. We become either sympathetic to their claims or cringe at some of their presuppositions and propositions. And we do not read because we enjoy the narrative but because we are horrified by some of its presumptuous claims and ethical stances, stances that lead to suffering for others.³²

As I have already suggested, to read Job's story is to be faced with his reception theory statement/question on suffering in 2.10. The biblical tradition provides two broad 'reception' traditions. In the book of Ezekiel (ch. 14), Job is remembered for being securely righteous in the midst of large-scale community suffering (Ezek. 14.19-20). The other tradition is in the New Testament letter of James. Curiously, it is not escape from suffering that distinguished the noble religious Job. Rather, it was Job's ability to endure suffering, and this ability was referred to as 'blessed' (Jas 5.10-11). Apparently unaware of the text of Ezekiel or desirous of highlighting a different tradition about Job, the writer of James directed his audience to an oral tradition according to which Job endured suffering. It is quite possible that the writer of James was echoing what we read in the extra-biblical *Testament of Job*, rather than what we find in the biblical Job.³³ Nevertheless, outside of the book of Job itself, the interpretive lenses provided by the other biblical traditions take the reader from the safe righteous person unable to help his community to the person whose enduring righteousness was being extolled as an example for the community. Ezekiel and James represent the two possible understandings of Job's statement/question about receiving disaster from God. If 2.10 is read as a statement, then we find that in Ezekiel, the response is no, indeed, we should not receive the disastrous; in James, yes—with the qualification that the Lord is compassionate. If 2.10 is understood as a question, again the answer in Ezekiel is no, we should not receive the disastrous; in James, yes—qualified by the Lord's compassion. When it comes to Job, the burden of proof seems to be on the reception theory that endorses suffering, hence the qualifying clause about divine compassion. In Job, we do not find the qualifying attribute

32. Survivors of major traumatic experiences have often told their stories not because they expect their audiences to enjoy the story but to be horrified by it. This is the feeling I get from reading survivor stories from ethnic and civil strife as well as from disasters. See Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform you that Tomorrow We will be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Picador, 1998).

33. Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics*, pp. 47-50.

about divine compassion; instead, Yahweh states that Job was suffering for nothing, thereby rejecting the reception tradition that sanitizes Job's suffering.

Suffering and Ethics in the Text

Two key words hold the intersection between disaster and ethics: **רע** and **ברך**. Both words frame and permeate the narrative; they not only capture Job's religious and ethical perspective *vis-à-vis* the divine council, but also the council's theories and actions towards Job, and the focal point of Job's conversation with his wife. It is therefore important to examine how **ברך** informs Job's thinking before and after the attack.

Michael Cheney has argued that one ought not to read **ברך** as a euphemism for 'curse' (especially in 1.5, 11; 2.5). Cheney suggests that **ברך** may be a *Leitwort* for the author, and argues that a reading of **ברך** as a euphemism may cause the ambiguity of the text to 'evaporate', making the Satan look suspiciously malevolent. When read simply as 'bless', the text becomes more complex, and 'provokes one to read the text beyond its surface dimension to understand the subtext, that the Satan has his own view of what really lies behind pious humans' relationship to God. It is mere economics, an exchange of goods and services.' And the testing of Job becomes equally 'a contest of wits between Yahweh and the Satan'.³⁴ Furthermore, as Carol Newsom has shown, every time that **ברך** is used, its meaning has to be negotiated in context: 'not only must the reader negotiate its meaning with every occurrence, but the meaning is often contextually undecidable'.³⁵

In his instructive essay on **ברך**, Linafelt argues against the 'standard euphemism theory' according to which **ברך** is to be understood as 'curse' instead of 'bless'. Linafelt examines the adverb that introduces Job's concerns in 1.5, and points out that, when used by itself to introduce a phrase, **אולי** usually expresses some kind of hope, with the exception of Gen. 27.12 where it expresses fear or doubt.³⁶ Linafelt then argues that Job's statement may very well be an expression of hope: that 'even though his otherwise observant children may have engaged in some inadvertent minor transgression, they have nevertheless continued

34. Cheney, *Dust*, p. 67.

35. Carol A. Newsom, 'Re-Considering Job', *Currents in Biblical Research* 5.2 (2007), pp. 155-82 (158).

36. Linafelt, 'The Undecidability', p. 163, citing BDB, p. 19.

to “bless” God in their hearts’. Accordingly, Job’s sacrifice was ‘simply a safeguard, an act in keeping with his scrupulously pious nature’.³⁷ Linafelt’s overall conclusion is worth citing: ‘Each time the reader comes across the word בָּרַךְ in Job, she or he must decide whether to read it as “bless” or “curse”... [E]ither rendering will “make sense”.’³⁸ One can only add that the negotiation of the meaning of בָּרַךְ has to be done not just in each isolated literary context, but also ultimately in conjunction with its usage elsewhere.

Religious Theory before Attack

How does בָּרַךְ function in the lead up to the attack on Job? Of the seven times that the word is used in the prose section, three appear before the first round of attack. In Job 1.5, as part of his turning away from disaster, Job thought: ‘it might be that my children have sinned and בָּרַךְ-ed God in their hearts’.³⁹ As a result of that concern, Job worked to protect his family; he got them involved in the ritual of sanctification.⁴⁰ In Job 1.10 the Satan says to God, challenging the very basis of Job’s piety, ‘You have בָּרַךְ-ed the work of his hands, and his possessions have burst out in/against the land’. Once again, Job’s righteousness is situated within a larger social context, with Job’s blessing bursting out in/against the land.⁴¹ Then comes a theory about suffering, framed as a test in 1.11:

37. Linafelt, ‘The Undecidability’, p. 163.

38. Linafelt, ‘The Undecidability’, p. 168.

39. Edwin M. Good, *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job with a Translation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 192, translates the phrase as follows: ‘perhaps my children have blessed Elohim sinfully in their hearts’. Later on (p. 202), Good argues that the association of ‘sin’ with בָּרַךְ should be viewed as a hendiadys, hence ‘sinful blessing’. Good then translates: ‘perhaps my children have missed blessing (failed to bless) Elohim in their hearts’.

40. My literary and thematic tools for negotiating the meaning of בָּרַךְ here are as follows: (1) Gen. 27.12 does show that אֵלִי can indeed introduce a situation of ethical uncertainty; (2) in his editorial note in 1.22, the narrator dissociates בָּרַךְ as ‘bless’ (which Job used in 1.21) from sinning, suggesting that בָּרַךְ in 1.5 should indeed mean ‘to curse’; and (3) the burnt offering is used elsewhere in the prose to expiate real wrongdoing (42.8). Its use in 1.5 therefore further underscores the meaning of בָּרַךְ there as ‘curse’.

41. It is possible that the Hebrew expression פָּרַץ בָּאֲדָמָה (‘burst out in/against the land’) may suggest some kind of danger to the land, given the use of פָּרַץ to describe Yahweh’s sudden bursting out against people (Exod. 19.22, 24; 2 Sam. 6.8). Accordingly, Yahweh’s act of בָּרַךְ-ing (understood as ‘blessing’) Job would be considered a problem—the accumulation of wealth by an individual.

‘Stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, if he will not בִּרְךְּ you to your face’.

From these verses, the following preliminary remarks are worth noting. First, Job, God and the Satan see the divine-human relationship as dynamic and interactive, touching on multiple levels of social and religious existence. Second, however, Job and the Satan disagree on the role that well-being as opposed to disaster play in that relationship. For Job, well-being could cause humans to בִּרְךְּ God, hence his frequent rituals to purify his children. For the Satan, the reverse was exactly the case: it is not material prosperity but rather the loss of material possession that could cause Job to בִּרְךְּ God.

At the center of this dilemma stands God who has the power to give (that is, בִּרְךְּ Job’s work [1.10] and thereby ironically create the potential for people to בִּרְךְּ God [1.5]) and to take/touch (and thereby also create a new possibility for Job to בִּרְךְּ God [1.11]). Whether or not Job’s children actually בִּרְךְּ-ed God is a part of the issue, but the answer to that question remains unknown. What is pertinent is how Job integrated בִּרְךְּ into his theology and economics, in the context of his ethical uncertainty. Job’s initial integrity may have consisted of his ability to refrain from cursing God in the time of his prosperity, and working to address a situation in which his material prosperity could lead people to curse God (1.5). Whereas Job saw material prosperity as a real but manageable challenge, the Satan saw material prosperity as the root cause of false piety, hence the need to rob Job of such prosperity in order presumably to create true piety. How are we to evaluate Job’s response to his suffering? Should such evaluation be based on Job’s beliefs, or on the ruling council’s assumptions? In other words, are we to read in conjunction with Job who turned away from evil, or with the divine council that used disaster as its litmus test for true virtue, a test that ended up deconstructing Job’s virtue?

Job’s Reaction: Theory after Attack

In the midst of his suffering, Job rose, tore his clothes, shaved his hair and fell to the ground where he bowed down (1.20). The act of tearing one’s garment and shaving one’s head was an act of mourning (Gen. 37.34; 2 Sam. 1.11; 3.13; Jer. 7.29; Isa. 22.12), but shaving of one’s beard following death was also prohibited (Lev. 19.27-28; Deut. 14.1). Thus, Job’s ethical response could be interpreted either as consistent with social and religious practice or as contrary to divine injunction.

Job's double action of rising and falling in 1.20, in response to his suffering, is paralleled in 1.21 by the double divine action of giving and taking. Job says, 'The Lord gives and the Lord takes, בָּרַךְ be the name of the Lord'. Having lost not just his well-being, family and resources, but also his ability to manage his religious, ethical and social experience, Job did what is quite natural to many persons in that state of utter vulnerability: he 'bow[ed] down'. There is nothing in Job's post-disaster worship suggesting that he became purer or better in his piety. These are the words of a man who is accepting his lot, not necessarily because he wants to, but because his overpowering ruling council has rendered him vulnerable, nothing. Job was suffering for nothing.

In conjunction with his act of rising and falling, Job also refers to the narrative keyword, בָּרַךְ. Although not specifically stated to God's face, Job has בָּרַךְ-ed God as the Satan predicted, and as he himself initially thought humans could do. In this confession of faith and doubt, Job combines his piety and uncertainty about humankind at the time of prosperity (1.5) with the Satan's certainty about humankind's impiety at the time of poverty (1.11). Again, Job's response is ambiguous, once more rendering the experiment futile. Furthermore, precisely because the reader is likely to interpret בָּרַךְ here as 'curse', the narrator states that Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing (1.22). Job is distanced from the ethical and religious uncertainty that he had with the association of 'sinning' and 'בָּרַךְ-ing' God in 1.5. From the narrator's perspective, Job bowed down in the face of suffering, but rejected the theoretical assumptions associated with it by the Satan. The economic and social hardship that Job faced triggered a response that did not reflect or jive with the presuppositions of the divine council.

The reconvening of the divine council in ch. 2 echoes the meeting of the first council, both in rhetorical formulations and in overall plot. Yahweh's question to the Satan (הֲשָׂמַתָּ לִבְךָ אֶל-עַבְדִּי, 'have you committed your heart to my servant Job?') in 2.3 echoes a similar expression in 1.8 (הֲשָׂמַתָּ לִבְךָ עַל-עַבְדִּי, 'Have you set your heart on my servant?'). In the same way that Job wondered about his children's hearts, so too Yahweh wonders about the heart of one of God's 'sons'—the Satan.⁴² It is remarkable that in a story whose central plot turns on the issue of the characters' assumptions about others, Yahweh is questioning the Satan's 'heart-attitudes' towards someone that is 'upright and blameless, fearing

42. Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p. 194

God and turning away from evil'. The questions that the narrator pursues are not simply anthropological questions that can be resolved by invoking divine omniscience. In the end, the book is not about individual piety but rather about ethical uncertainty, both human and divine, and how such uncertainty may indeed cause people to suffer for nothing.

Yahweh's partial response to such uncertainty is to repeat God's high praise of Job's virtue and piety. But then comes a stunning admission about the moral flaw in the causal theory of suffering resulting from such uncertainty. Speaking about Job, and challenging the theoretical rationale for 'striking/touching' Job, God says: 'He still holds on to his integrity, although you incited me against him to swallow him for nothing' (2.3).⁴³ What is more, it is not just that Yahweh now views Job's suffering as being for nothing, but also that Yahweh, the moral agency associated with such suffering, is now compared with mythical Sheol, which swallows innocent persons. To read the story as though this shift in thinking did not occur would be to miss a crucial part of the narrative twist and development. The hermeneutical lens through which one reads the story has been dramatically changed by this admission on the part of Yahweh. It is about this God that Job would later ask: 'Should we receive the disaster?'

In his analysis of this conversation between Yahweh and the Satan, David Clines argues that if Job still held onto his integrity, it means that Job had proven that there is indeed such a thing as disinterested piety, and hence the experiment was not in vain. It is fortuitous that Job, the most righteous man, suffered, but it

is not meaningless nor gratuitous. His suffering has not been decreed to satisfy a divine wager, or to provide an object lesson for some second-rank heavenly being—but in order to lay bare a truth that lies at the heart of the moral universe (a truth that has been badly misconstrued by popular religion and professional wisdom alike), and even more perhaps (to put the matter in the frankly anthropomorphic language that suits the narrative) in order to lay to rest the doubt in the mind of God.⁴⁴

43. The verb used to describe Yahweh's actions against Job here is בָּלַע ('to swallow'). It is reflective of the actions of mythical Sheol that threatened to capture and swallow innocent persons (cf. Prov. 1.11-12). Yahweh has been incited to behave like Sheol.

44. David J.A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC, 17; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), p. 42. Clines, however, also argues that Job suffered in vain because, as observant readers realize, the law of retribution had been broken (p. 43).

And yet, it is Yahweh who declares the whole experiment futile. Job's religious, social and cultural personality has been violated, for nothing. That is why the Satan, just like insatiable Sheol, must come up with a new rationale for continuing to inflict Job with suffering. The Satan moves the central issue away from the self-critical evaluative statement of Yahweh back to the theoretical formulations about Job. Clines argues that 'once the question of the causal nexus between piety and prosperity has been raised, it must be probed to the utmost extent'.⁴⁵ The result of this continuing 'probing' is a proverb: 'Skin on behalf of skin', says the Satan. As Good explains, this is not merely a matter of equal exchange. Rather, 'the limit on what Job can give in exchange for his life is his life... [T]he point at which you stop paying for skin is the point at which the price demanded is skin'.⁴⁶

Such is the Satan's explanation: a person will give all that they have on behalf of their existence (נפש), but if Job were to be touched in his 'bones' and 'flesh' he would ברח Yahweh to God's face (2.4-5). On the basis of the creation narrative in Genesis 2, Janzen argues that since Job's wife was Job's bone and flesh, by touching Job's bones, the Satan would also touch Job's wife.⁴⁷ Once again, in the ruling council's divine-and-conquer/divide-and-conquer mentality, the assumption is that one 'skin' is more important than or replaceable by another 'skin'. In order for the Satan's rationale for attack to be true, one must assume that one life (נפש) is more important than or replaceable by another נפש. A similar assumption was made in 1.10-11, and Job lost not just his material possession, but also some of his servant workers and presumably his children. Maybe Job's wife is now in danger. The major flaw with this renewed and slightly modified assumption is that, contrary to its belief that Job would welcome or 'receive' disaster on his family for the sake of his own life/faith, we know that Job would act exactly to protect his family members from such disaster (1.5).

Ironically, Yahweh approves of this thinking, demanding that Job's נפש be kept/watched (2.6)—responsibility that elsewhere falls squarely on Yahweh (Ps. 121). Job is going to be severely attacked, but he needs to stay alive, just enough to respond to the 'test'. Job's existence has been reduced to an experiment to satisfy the ruling council's ethical

45. Clines, *Job*, p. 42.

46. Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p. 198.

47. Janzen, *Job*, p. 49. See also David Shepherd, "'Strike His Bone and His Flesh": Reading Job from the Beginning', *JSOT* 33 (2008), pp. 81-97.

uncertainties. It is in the context of this renewed causal theory and horrific manifestation of disaster that Job's wife would speak—soon.

The discussions in the council demonstrate that the attacks on Job were not random or thoughtless. And in the second round of theoretical (re)formulation among the council members, we have a heightened dose of moral talk overlaying the reality of disaster. Job, we know, is a man of integrity who turns away from trouble/evil (רע). Yet, he was inflicted with a disastrous plague that has moral overtones (שחן רע, 2.7). It is not just that Job suffered, bad as that is, but also that his suffering was deliberately bound up with negative, disastrous moral overtones, the very evil he sought to avoid all along. In response to his wife, Job continued to overlay the narrative with moral language (saying she speaks folly). This moral coating of the story is complete when Job argued that there is a certain distinction (of good and evil, טוב and רע) that ought to be made when speaking of Yahweh (2.10). Finally, his friends came to comfort and console him because they heard of all the evil/trouble (רע) that came on him (2.11). The cumulative effect of this repetitive usage of רע in this section is that Job's words took on added weight, as did those of his wife. And the rhetorical and ethical effect of such repetitive language is that Job's suffering was indeed wrapped up in unethical language of evil. The story has almost completely deconstructed the Job of 1.1 who turned away from disaster/evil. The causal theory that was intended to unveil a presupposed pure virtue in Job ended up creating unwarranted, immoral suffering against Job's initial virtue.

Now, Job's wife speaks for the first and only time in the narrative: 'You still hold on to your integrity. בריך God and die', she says (2.9). Her words directly echo God's words to the Satan after the first round of attack. God had said to the Satan: 'he still holds on to his integrity, although you incited me against him to swallow him for nothing' (2.3). In the intertextuality of the narrative, 'He still holds onto his integrity' parallels 'you still hold onto your integrity'. Accordingly, if one reads Yahweh's words in 2.3a as praise for Job, then there is no reason to read the first part of 2.9 as a challenge on Job by his wife.⁴⁸ It follows that the

48. There is no reason to translate the text as an interrogative, 'Do you still hold onto your integrity?' Although the marker of the interrogative is not always used, the narrator has used it in 1.8, 10; 2.3. Its absence here should caution against translating the text as an interrogative. The Jewish Study Bible has 'you still keep your integrity'. See also Leong Seow, 'Job's Wife, with Due Respect', in Krüger *et al.* (eds.), *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen*, pp. 371-73; Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p. 200.

second part of the divine speech in 2.3 also parallels the second part of what Job's wife says in 2.9. That is, 'although you incited me against him to swallow him for nothing' parallels 'בָּרַךְ God and die'. Both statements express a reality that is diametrically opposed to the underlying assumptions of the testing attacks on Job.

After approving of Job's integrity, Yahweh challenged the pre-/pro-test assumption, and evaluated it as futile. Similarly, although unaware of the council's assumptions, Job's wife also approved of Job's integrity before challenging the *quid pro quo*, 'skin for skin', assumptions of the pro-test causal theory of suffering. After all, she had (presumably) heard Job say, after the first round of attack: 'the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. בָּרַךְ be the name of the Lord.' Accordingly, the proper understanding of Job's wife here would be: 'bless God and die', an idea that (1) runs counter to what the Satan had presumed; (2) is consistent with Job's association of בָּרַךְ with God giving and taking; and (3) further suggests that the second round of attack was for nothing. Job's experience has become so ethically counter-productive and so theologically counter-intuitive that the language used to address him and his situation has to be reconstructed; it is a situation that requires new theological and ethical language. Job's wife begins to provide just such a rhetorical and moral framework in her words to Job.

In response to his wife, Job says that she spoke like a foolish woman. In the context of the narrative, and understanding her words to have been 'bless God and die', Job's response to his wife takes on a different meaning. The idiomatic expression that Job uses here ('to speak a folly') echoes another such idiom in 42.8, where Yahweh threatens to 'do an outrage/do a folly' to the friends because they failed to speak correctly to/concerning God. Although we have 'to speak an outrage' in 2.10 as opposed to 'do an outrage' in 42.8, we find that in Jer. 29.23 the idea of 'doing an outrage' is associated with verbal discourse. The basic sense of the expression is to do or say something that is outside of the expected norm, something that is unconventional. So one must ask: What is so unconventional and outrageous about what Job's wife says? The answer to this question may indicate what Job understood her to be saying, and what Job's next words about receiving disaster from God probably mean.

The outrage in the words of Job's wife, it seems, does not reside in uttering the word בָּרַךְ with respect to God. Job's wife is not saying anything that Job has not said. Perhaps, the outrage has to do with the association of בָּרַךְ with death ('בָּרַךְ God and die'). But then again, this is

not something totally farfetched for Job, who had equally associated בָּרַךְ with the idea of birth and death (1.21). In the narrative flow, the Satan had argued that destruction would lead humans to בָּרַךְ God, and that has in some sense come true (1.11, 21; 2.5). But in Job's wife, the order of the causal relationship between suffering and blessing/cursing God is reversed.

Having affirmed her husband for holding onto his integrity, she then said: 'bless God and die'.⁴⁹ To curse God and die may be undesirable, but certainly not morally self-contradictory. Similarly, to bless God and live is not unconventional. But to bless God and die is certainly an unconventional, outrageous thought. As readers, we know that this reversal of thought is consonant with what has happened in the dialogues preceding the attacks. Job has been inflicted with an evil disease, although he turns away from evil. In a few words, Job's wife has captured and articulated the complexity of Job's experience. In doing so, she has undermined the theory of suffering that warrants the keeping of Job's נַפֶּשׁ for the purpose of an experiment (2.6).

In his response, Job appropriately calls such words 'outrageous'. For how can one bless God and die? God may indeed give and take as God pleases (1.21), but one should not then expect to die for blessing God, or after blessing God. To further elaborate on his own response, Job then argues that: 'indeed, we shall receive the good from God, but the evil we shall not receive' (2.10). It is worth noting that although this phrase can be translated as an interrogative (as many translations and commentaries indeed do), there is no marker of the interrogative in the Hebrew.⁵⁰ Just as in 2.9, the absence of such a marker here should at the very least cause the reader to pause, especially since the narrator has used the marker before. As it stands, it is a statement of theoretical belief, of conventional belief, which stands in contradistinction to the unconventional statement of Job's wife.

Through the paradoxical expression 'bless God and die' Job's wife proposes a major response that undercuts the initial assumptions of the testy attacks on Job. By introducing the reality of death in the response ('בָּרַךְ God and die'), Job's wife finally highlights the social dimensions of Job's experience as a relevant issue; it is not just about Job's reactionary theological thinking or words (assumed by the council), as though the deaths of humans in the process are expendable. The story is also

49. See Linafelt, 'The Undecidability', p. 167.

50. Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p. 200.

about endangered humanity. Job's family members (including his workers) are not foils or pawns in the plot. In Job's religious and social world before the attack, Job's destiny is tied to that of his family (1.5). In the vision of the 'test' motif, Job's entire family is marked for destruction, in the vain hopes that such destruction would either show Job to be passionately loyal or else a religious fraud. By proposing a response that reunites and re-emphasizes Job's destiny with that of his family, Job's wife undercuts the divine-and-conquer/divide-and-conquer tactics of the (ruling) heavenly council. While Yahweh's statement in 2.3 provides the moral antithesis of the testy attacks on Job, Job's wife provides the strategic counteractive to the divide-and-conquer strategy of the council.

Conclusion

In two instances, the story suggests that Job suffered for nothing. God explicitly states it in 2.3 and Job himself later emphasizes it in 9.17. In light of such an admission on the part of God and eventually Job, one ought to consider how such statements impact the reading and interpretation of the story. I have argued that such statements about Job's suffering, along with the words of Job's wife, provide the moral and rhetorical force for challenging any attempts to attribute unqualified moral value to suffering. It is this divine admission about the futility of Job's suffering that becomes the impetus for working to redress the suffering of masses across the world. It is with this God that we are in a better position to begin working for restoration. The hermeneutical key to redressing innocent suffering lies with Job's wife. In her ethic ('bless God and die'), the *quid pro quo* philosophy is abandoned in favor of a paradox. Such a paradox does two things: (1) it challenges the ideology behind the power dynamics in the text, where the divine council inflicts well thought out suffering on its subjects; and (2) it inspires the 'suffering servant' to begin articulating her/his own faith-response, rather than adopt one that is assumed from 'above'.