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DUST AND DIRT IN JOB 42:6

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I

Job 42:6 reads as follows:

עַל־כֵּן אֶמְאַס וְנִחַמְתִּי עַל עָפָר וָאֵפֶר

Even a cursory survey of modern Bible translations and scholarly commentaries readily indicates that interpretive difficulties are attached to this verse. (1) Both of the verbs exhibit anomalous features. (a) *'em'as* looks like a transitive verb (<*m's* I, "to reject"), but no direct object is named. This leads either to reading *'em'as* as a reflexive (RSV, NIV, NEB's alternate reading) or to taking the whole of Job's prior remarks as an understood object (JB, NAB, JPSV, AB, *Good News Bible*).[1] (b) *nihamtî* is occasionally taken as a piel form of the root *nḥm*, though most translations read it as a niphal.[2] (2) The precise function of the *'al* preceding the *'āpār wā'ēper* has been questioned. Although conventionally translated as the familiar spatio-locative preposition "upon," it could also be read as the second element of the well-attested idiom *nḥm 'l*.[3] If read thus, the preposition would function referentially ("about, concerning"), and the ensuing *'āpār wā'ēper* would identify that concerning which the action of the *niḥamtî* is taking place.

The ancient versions also tend to mirror the confusion regarding the root *m's*, and there is even the suggestion that some other verb once occupied the place of MT's *niḥamtî*. (1) The LXX at Job 42:6a reads διὸ ἐφαύλισα ἐμαυτὸν καὶ ἐτάκην ("wherefore I consider myself vile and I melt"), which basically seems to reflect indecision as to whether the *'em'as* is to be derived from *m's* I or *m's* II. 11QtgJob at 42:6a reads על כן אתנסך ואתמהא ("wherefore I am poured out and dissolved"), which is probably nothing more

[1] Some interpreters arrive at an intransitive reading by deriving *'em'as* from *m's* II, "to melt," a sparsely attested variant of the more familiar *mss* (NEB's preferred reading, following esp S Terrien in both *IB* and *Job* [CAT, Neuchâtel Delachaux et Niestlé, 1963])

[2] Even at that, the customary rendering, "I repent," is apparently one that leaves many translators dissatisfied and searching for alternatives, see, e g , J Janzen's "I change my mind" (*Job* [Interpretation, Atlanta John Knox, 1985])

[3] See D Patrick, "The Translation of Job 42 6," *VT* 26 [1976] 24-26 Several recent commentators have adopted Patrick's suggestion (e g , N Habel, Janzen)

than a double translation of *'em 'as* read as derived from *m's* II. (2) The LXX at Job 42:6b reads ἥγημαι δὲ ἐμαυτὸν γῆν καὶ σποδόν ("and I regard myself as dirt and ashes"), which may reflect some verb other than the MT's *niḥamtî* in the LXX's Hebrew *Vorlage* (*neḥšabtî*?).[4] At Job 42:6b, 11QtgJob reads אהוי לעפר וקתם ("I am become dust and ashes"), which appears simply to gloss over whatever verb appeared in its *Vorlage.*

A thorough survey of the ambiguities inherent in the verse under consideration was published in this journal several years ago.[5] In essence, that article offered an apology for being able to read Job 42:6 in *all three* of the following ways: (1) "Wherefore I retract (*or* I submit) and I repent on (*or* on account of) dust and ashes." (2) "Wherefore I reject *it* (implied object in v. 5), and I am consoled for dust and ashes." (3) "Wherefore I reject and forswear dust and ashes." Indeed, so inextricably woven into the very fabric of Job 42:6 are its philological difficulties that the author of the study just mentioned is led to hypothesize that this verse's ambiguities were *intentionally* crafted into it.[6]

The suggestion of an originally deliberate polysemy here cannot help but give pause. In the presence of such a suggestion it is imperative to recall that any communicative event takes place within a context of broadly shared assumptions. That is, any writer or speaker is connected to his or her contemporary audience by more than the particular words that the writer or speaker composes on any given occasion. The two are also tied together by a whole array of assumptions engendered by the societal and cultural environment within which they both live, and these commonly shared assumptions restrict the scope of potential misunderstandings or ambiguities in actual acts of communication.[7] The distinct sociocultural matrix within which a communicative event transpires, in other words, sets certain limits on the possibilities for perception of ambiguity. Moreover, the sociocultural matrix in question is at least somewhat amenable to analysis and explication. Thus, it remains a matter of investigation to determine the likelihood of any actually experienced ambiguity for the initial hearers/readers of Job 42:6. Furthermore, such an investigation can and must proceed precisely from an analysis of the sociocultural matrix within which the author of the book of Job attempted to communicate with the original audience, with an eye to determining assumptions and predispositions common to both. In sum, the delimiting

[4] See A. de Wilde, *Das Buch Hiob* (OTS 22; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 399–400.

[5] W. Morrow, "Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42:6," *JBL* 105 (1986) 211–25.

[6] Ibid., 233: "Job 42:6 is difficult because its language is vague—and, I suggest, deliberately vague. . . . Job 42:6 is a [deliberately] polysemous construction, which even its original readers would have heard differently, depending on their evaluation of the meaning of Yahweh's address to Job."

[7] Although the principle here being advocated appears self-evident, one could nonetheless note in support the comments of, *inter alia*, F. G. Bailey on pp. 10–13 of *Gifts and Poison: The Politics of Reputation* (ed. F. G. Bailey; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971).

function of conjoint attitudes and ideals rooted in the culture common to both the Joban author and the audience means that the polysemy now discernible in Job 42:6 need not originally have yielded any perception of ambiguity

The aim of this present study, then, is to attain some tighter historical control over the ambiguities now perceivable in Job 42:6 by paying as much attention to the sociocultural milieu in which the book of Job was written as to its philological peculiarities. In pursuit of this aim the focus will be shifted, for a time, away from the text itself to a description of some key aspects of that sociocultural milieu which appears to have encompassed both the author and the initial hearers of the book of Job.[8] The thesis to be defended is that the polarity of honor and shame was a central feature of the sociocultural setting in which the book of Job was produced and, as such, set certain boundaries on the ways in which that writing would have been heard. Focusing on the dynamics of honor and shame, and realizing the importance of this paired set of values in the sociocultural matrix of the author and initial hearers/readers of the book of Job, thus promises to yield some welcome control over the abundance of interpretive possibilities which modern philological investigations have been able to generate for Job 42:6.

II

The concept of the *agonistic* society provides our starting point. This term is employed by anthropologists to describe a constitutive feature of the traditional societies located in the Mediterranean basin.[9] Specifically, and as anthropologists have widely noted, the peoples of this region characteristically display a highly competitive mode of personal interaction in their public exchanges[10] A strong sensitivity to notions of public propriety and widespread agreement regarding the proper social boundaries generally keep

[8] As for the contents of the "original" book of Job, I am following the scholarly consensus which holds that an early folktale (=1 1–2 10[13?] and 42 7[10?]-17) was taken up as the framework for the edifice consisting of chaps 3–27, 29–31, and 38 1–42 6 and which regards chaps 28 (perhaps) and 32–37 (quite likely) as subsequent insertions into this initial composition It is perhaps redundant to add that my understanding of the interrelationship of the various parts of the book of Job has been deeply influenced by Claus Westermann's *The Structure of the Book of Job* (Philadelphia Fortress, 1981), since I served as its translator

[9] Julian Pitt-Rivers, a leading Mediterranean ethnographer, frequently refers to Mediterranean societies as agonistic, see, e g , his *The Fate of Shechem, or the Politics of Sex Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (New York Cambridge University Press, 1977) 69, 92, 124, 165 The basic terminology here being utilized appears, however, to have been borrowed from the classicists, note, e g , H D F Kitto's description of ancient Greek society as resembling an *agon* (*The Greeks* [Harmondsworth Penguin, 1951], 247–48)

[10] The pervasive reality of interpersonal competition as a distinctive trait of societies in the Mediterranean basin is frequently mentioned by anthropologist D Gilmore in his survey article "Anthropology of the Mediterranean Area," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11 (1982) 175–205 (note esp his remarks concerning "social atomism" on pp 189–190)

such basic competitiveness from developing into destructive hostilities (viz., feuds), but underlying many of the routine, face-to-face encounters which make up public life for the typical member of a traditional Mediterranean society remains a fundamental and pervasive competitiveness. In short, basic social interactions here often have a challenge–response quality to them.

In the agonistic societies of the Mediterranean basin, this basic competitiveness tends to be focused on honor.[11] Instrumental to the proper understanding of honor in the present context is the realization that honor is not primarily a personal virtue. Rather, honor resides in a claim to precedence of one sort or another, *coupled with* the recognition of such a claim on the part of one's fellows Honor is thus a social phenomenon. Moreover, because honor is based on a claim to precedence, it is closely intertwined with issues of power and authority. The honored man is one to whom deference is owed, and paid. This does not mean, however, that honor is simply the by-product of a brute struggle for power. Because there are different kinds of precedence, one may acquire or increase one's honor by laying claim to any or all such traits as are valued by one's culture as a whole (e.g., wisdom, courage, or sexual prowess). All of the various channels through which one may acquire prestige in the eyes of one's fellows are channels through which honor may be acquired. In terms of its content, then, honor comes to reflect the dominant ideals of a given culture; the honored man is one who is publicly acknowledged as embodying his culture's idealized self-image.[12] Put another way, the honored man displays integrity—he is a "whole" man when measured against the chief values of his society.[13] These elaborations on the concept of honor must not detract us from the main insight to be derived from the anthropological studies of honor, however. The main insight is this: rather than being a private personality trait or an aspect of individual character, honor is rooted in the dynamics of interpersonal relationship. Honor is based on a claim to precedence, in either power or virtue. Honor is won insofar as this claim is accepted and approved by others; honor persists only

[11] Social- and cultural-anthropological studies of the notion and function of honor in traditional societies of the Mediterranean area are considerable in number Good introductions are to be found in Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem*, 1–17 ("The Anthropology of Honour"), J G Peristiany's "Introduction" to *Honour and Shame The Values of Mediterranean Society* (ed J G Peristiany [Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1966]), and esp P Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960* (Cambridge University Press, 1979) 95–132 ("The Sense of Honour")

[12] In his study of the Fulani, a central sub-Sahara people, anthropologist P Riseman has shown how honor can be understood as essentially the reflection of a people's composite, idealized self-image, see his *Freedom in Fulani Social Life* (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1971) 116–41 ("*Pulaaku* and *Semteende* Fulaniness and Shame")

[13] " it does seem to be characteristic of honour that it is associated with integrity the whole man is contemplated' (J Davis, *People of the Mediterranean* [London Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977] 98)

so long as the claim continues to be openly acknowledged by one's circle of others.[14] Honor, in sum, is a product of culturally shaped social interaction which leads to public recognition and esteem.

In an agonistic society, where honor is the reward for a publicly sustained claim to some sort of precedence, shame is correspondingly the penalty that must be paid for a claim to precedence that has been rebuffed.[15] The key point here is that shame is no more exclusively a private sentiment than honor is a strictly individual trait. Shame is much more than just the feeling of acute embarrassment. The anthropological studies clearly demonstrate that shame arises as a response to a public rejection of one's claim to honor.[16] The total phenomenon of shame thus consists of both a personal, emotional aspect and a public, relational aspect.

When viewed as a phenomenon affecting the solitary individual, shame can be seen to consist of both a fundamental sensitivity to the way one is evaluated by one's fellows or superiors (= modesty, or a sense of shame) and a pained awareness of having been rebuffed by the same (= embarrassment, or the sensation of being ashamed)[17] When viewed as a phenomenon of the public life, shame is the rendering of a negative judgment upon someone's pretensions (= a shaming, a putting to shame).[18] Such a judgment can be rendered indirectly by all those bystanders who serve as spokesmen for the court of public opinion, or it can be pronounced directly by the shamed one's superiors. The category of the reproving other, however, is an indispensable element within the total phenomenology of shame.[19]

Although the particulars of any given culture will exert a shaping

[14] The interplay between honor as social precedence and honor as personal virtue—with insight into the mechanism by which the former can get translated into the latter—is a theme in Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem*, 18–47 ("Honour and Social Status in Andalusia")

[15] "Honour and shame are two poles of an evaluation They are the reflection of the social personality in the mirror of social ideals" (Peristiany, *Honour and Shame*, 9)

[16] "In accordance with the general structure of the notion of honour [one is] shamed only at the point when he is forced to recognize he has accepted humiliation In this sense, as that which is not inherent in the person but is imposed from outside, shame is the equivalent to dishonour" (Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem*, 43)

[17] To some extent at least, the necessity of pointing out this distinction between shame as modesty and shame as embarrassment is necessitated by the fact that the English language is less precise in this area than are some other language systems, note, for example, how German distinguishes between *Scham* and *Schande*, French between *pudeur* and *honte*, and Greek between *aidos* and *aischyne*

[18] Cf C Schneider, *Shame, Exposure, and Privacy* (Boston Beacon, 1977) 18–28 ("The Two Faces of Shame") Note also M Klopfenstein, *Scham und Schande nach dem Alten Testament* (ATANT 62, Zurich Theologischer Verlag, 1972) Since Klopfenstein's study is focused on the occurrences of the roots *bôš*, *klm*, and *hpr* in the MT, he does not deal directly with Job 42 6 However, Klopfenstein frequently notes that shame is a relational concept (*ein Verhaltnisbegriff*), which is to say it is not primarily a subjective experience

[19] "Shame requires an audience" (Gilmore, "Anthropology of the Mediterranean Area," 198)

influence on just how and when shame will be experienced in that culture, nonetheless there is a basic transcultural uniformity exhibited with regard to the experiencing of shame. In other words, manifestations of the experience of being shamed exhibit such similar traits across cultural boundaries that the feeling of being shamed must be viewed as one of the primal human affects.[20] Everywhere the core of the shame response is the urge to hide or to be hidden.[21] This motif is at the very heart of the probable etymology of the English "shame," which is thought to go back to an Indo-European root *kam/kem* ("to cover") with the reflexive prefix *s-* (thus, "to cover oneself").[22] Visible manifestations of the shame response include blushing, casting the gaze downward or askance, hanging the head, and hunching the shoulders. Along with these observable manifestations of the shame response goes a generalized feeling of being suddenly immobilized—which is what lies behind the frequently associated themes of confusion, consternation, and dismay falling upon the shamed. The feeling of being shamed is also frequently described as a desire to fall through the floor or to sink out of sight beneath the earth.[23] All of these are immediate reactions when one has been put to shame, and taken collectively they graphically illustrate the basic nature of the shame response: the urge to hide oneself from the gaze of another/others.[24]

The foregoing descriptions of the agonistic society and the fundamental characteristics of honor and shame have been derived primarily from studies by twentieth-century anthropologists investigating those traditional societies in the Mediterranean basin that are still available for direct observation. However, the picture of honor and shame thus developed holds real promise as a model against which to analyze aspects of Mediterranean society in antiquity as well. For instance, Bruce Malina has already devoted careful attention to honor and shame along lines such as those outlined above and has suggested a number of cases where sensitivity to these realities aids in

[20] A key treatment of shame as a fundamental human emotion remains Helen Merrell Lynd, *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (New York: Science Editions, 1958). For a more recent treatment, see A. Heller, "The Power of Shame," *Dialectical Anthropology* 6 (1982) 215–28.

[21] See Schneider, *Shame, Exposure, and Privacy*, 29–31 ("Covering and Exposure"). Biblical expressions of this motif can be found, e.g., in Jer 3:25 (lying down to be covered by shame/dishonor [= lying in the dust?]), and in Jer 2:37 and 14:3–4 (covering the head as a gesture of shame).

[22] Following *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) 9. 618. The same etymology is suggested for the German *Scham;* see Klopfenstein, *Scham und Schande*, 207.

[23] A comprehensive survey of the manifestations of shame as an emotion, as reflected in major literary works including the Bible, is to be found in Lynd, *On Shame*, 27–71.

[24] Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod succinctly describes shame as that experience which "arises in interpersonal interactions between social unequals or strangers, is conceptualized in the idiom of exposure, and manifests itself through a language of formality, self-effacement, and the cloaking of the 'natural' weaknesses or sources of dependency" ("Honor and the Sentiments of Loss in a Bedouin Society," *American Ethnologist* 12 [1985] 252).

our understanding of the NT.[25] Several considerations lead one to suspect that a similar model would also contribute to our historical understanding of the OT. First of all, the basic features by means of which modern anthropologists define the Mediterranean basin as a discrete ethnographic area were operative in and for ancient Israel as well.[26] Second, the basic vocabulary of honor and shame is widely attested in the pages of the OT.[27] Third, from quite a different angle of approach, B. Gemser has already drawn our attention to the competitive (agonistic) quality of life in ancient Israel.[28] Thus there is ample warrant for testing to see if the concept of the agonistic society, with its constitutive dynamic of competition to achieve honor and/or avoid shame, might not prove fruitful as a model against which to read parts of the OT.[29] To the extent that this interpretive model succeeds in generating new insights into that ancient text, the model's applicability will have been confirmed.

To summarize: Contemporary anthropologists speak of the Mediterranean basin as a distinctive cultural area. Mediterranean societies are characteristically agonistic in character, with the polarity of honor and shame being the central axis along which their characteristic interpersonal competitiveness is conducted. Both honor and shame are essentially social phenomena. Honor, at its core, is precedence claimed and acknowledged; shame is rejection of a claim to precedence. The individual's response to being shamed is, in itself, a basic human affect whose defining characteristic is the urge to hide. Finally, there are indications that ancient Israel can also be categorized

[25] Malina, *The New Testament World Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta John Knox, 1981) 25–50

[26] See Gilmore, "Anthropology of the Mediterranean Area," 176–84 ("Rethinking the Mediterranean Construct"), who identifies the features constitutive of the Mediterranean basin as an ethnographic unit to be its distinctive climate and topography, both of which have prompted the development of a particular assortment of cultural practices of which most would be immediately familiar to any careful reader of the OT A more explicitly sociological approach is reflected in the work of J G Peristiany, who suggests that competition along the honor–shame axis will be found wherever there are "small scale, exclusive societies where face-to-face personal, as opposed to anonymous, relations are of paramount importance and where the social personality of the actor is as significant as his office" (*Honour and Shame*, 11)

[27] Statistical totals for the vocabulary items which designate shame in the OT are as follows (a) the root *bôš*, in all its forms, occurs 167 times, (b) *klm*, in all its forms, 69 times, (c) *hpr* II, in all its forms, 17 times, and (d) *qlh* II and its derivatives, 24 times, for more information, see Klopfenstein, *Scham und Schande* For a survey of references to honor in the OT, see the entry *kbd* in *Theologisches Handworterbuch zum Alten Testament* (Bd 1, esp cols 797–802)

[28] Gemser, "The *RÎB*- or Controversy-Pattern in Hebrew Mentality," in *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed M Noth and D W Thomas, VTSup 3, Leiden Brill, 1960) 120–37

[29] Although he disclaims any expertise in OT studies as such, anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers has nonetheless amply demonstrated—at least in the opinion of this writer—the applicability of basic Mediterranean ethnographic categories to ancient Israel, see esp his insightful study of Genesis 34, the essay from which the title of his book on honor in Mediterranean societies (viz , *Fate of Shechem*) is derived

as an agonistic society. Thus, the concept of the agonistic society presents itself as a potentially fruitful model to employ in the ongoing task of OT interpretation. This paper will present an initial test of that model by showing what help it can offer in the analysis of Job 42:6.

III

Several probes into the text of the book of Job will now be conducted in order to demonstrate the basic congruity between the phenomenon of shame as described above and the reaction of Job as depicted in and around 42:6.

The first probe starts from a consideration of the function of chaps. 29–31 within the overall structure of the book of Job. As is widely recognized, the drama that unfolds in the book of Job reaches its turning point in these chapters, with chap. 31 being the pivot. Having definitively rejected the futile ministrations of his friends only a short time before,[30] in chap. 31 Job emphatically affirms his integrity by means of an oath.[31] In terms of its content, this oath catalogues the traits of the ideal Israelite. In voicing his oath, Job intends to claim that these traits are genuinely descriptive of himself. In the idiom of honor and shame, Job is here attempting to reestablish his status as the noble individual he was widely recognized as being before the onset of his tragedies (29:7–15), when he was accustomed to receiving such gestures of respect as youths deferentially withdrawing from his presence, elders arising to stand before him, and others of high rank respectfully maintaining silence in his presence (vv. 7–10). Job clearly was a publicly honored individual before the onset of his misfortunes. Since his sudden and calamitous reversal, however, he has become the object of scorn and ridicule (30:1–15); the jury of public opinion has, in short, stripped him of his honor (v. 15b!). Since the court of public opinion has clearly decided against Job (accorded him a dishonored status in the wake of his material and physical collapse), he has no recourse but to seek restoration of his honor from some higher court, one whose judgment can override the decision of the court of public opinion. Overall, then, in chaps. 29–31 Job bemoans his lost honor and initiates a last-ditch effort to recapture it.

[30] Following Westermann's analysis of the structure of the book of Job, Job breaks off discourse with his friends in chap. 23; chaps. 24–27 are too fragmentarily preserved to allow meaningful analysis; chap. 28 (poem on inaccessibility of wisdom) is an interlude in the action. Thus, with chaps. 29–31, the culminating scene of the drama is inaugurated (the Elihu speeches being a later insertion).

[31] Westermann labels Job 31 an "asseveration of innocence" and associates it with the corresponding element familiar from the psalms of lamentation. Most modern OT scholars see instead in Job 31 a form of speech derived from the realm of jurisprudence and variously label it an "oath of purity/innocence/clearance"; see, e.g., N. Habel, *The Book of Job* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985) 30–31 and 423–40.

That honor is the underlying issue at stake in the course of the action reflected in Job 29–31 is evident in 31:35–37.[32] To recognize this, however, one must pause briefly to consider the dynamics of honor and shame in relation to the courtroom. As many commentators note, legal language both permeates the book of Job and reaches a crescendo in these central chapters.[33] Job apparently here wants the equivalent of legal satisfaction in his dispute with Yahweh. In an honor–shame society, however, taking a matter to court involves particular risks, since the ethics of honor and the ethics of law do not precisely coincide.[34] One can lose one's honor even while juridically winning one's case.[35] Seeking redress through the courts publicly exposes one's vulnerability; it amounts to a confession that one has insufficient strength to resolve one's conflicts by direct means. Usually, "honor demands restoration or satisfaction by oneself or extended self."[36] In order to avoid being shamed in the very process of seeking redress through the courts, then, it is imperative that the plaintiff appear before the court in as strong a stance as possible—both literally and figuratively. This means, where possible, being surrounded by a circle of allies (cf. Ps 127:3–5[1]); at the very least it means casting the dispute in terms such that the real issue at stake is recognized as being not a demand for legal compensation but simply the recognition by the defendant of the plaintiff's basic integrity.[37] For an inferior to involve a

[32] It is widely recognized that vv 35–37 constitute the climax of chap 31, despite the presence of the ensuing vv 38–40. Most commentators simply transpose vv 38–40 elsewhere in the chapter, while a few preserve MT's arrangement but argue for the climactic quality of vv 35–37 on stylistic grounds; see, e.g., A. Ceresko, *Job 29–31 in the Light of Northwest Semitic* (BibOr 36; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1980) 187.

[33] While the thesis is very widespread that legal imagery sets the tone for Job 29–31, two cautionary voices are worthy of a hearing. (1) Georg Fohrer draws attention to the fact that the legal language here is after all only figurative, since there is no "real" courtroom to which Yahweh can be summoned ("The Righteous Man in Job 31," in *Studien zum Buche Hiob [1956–1979]* [Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1983] 81 [whole article, 78–91]). This is a reminder not to expect perfect congruency between all aspects of an Israelite lawsuit and the flow of the events in the Job drama. (2) Michael De Roche, addressing the concept of the prophetic *rîb*, urges a careful distinction between grievances and lawsuits ("Yahweh's *rîb* Against Israel: A Reassessment of the So-Called 'Prophetic Lawsuit' in the Preexilic Prophets," *JBL* 102 [1983] 563–74). Adopting De Roche's criterion that the prerequisite for a "lawsuit" is the presence of some third party who acts as umpire and issues a final decision about a dispute between two parties who present their respective cases before him, it would follow that Job is more properly voicing a grievance against Yahweh than he is instigating a lawsuit against him. Part of Job's predicament is, of course, precisely that there is no third party who can adjudicate.

[34] The conflict between honor and legality is discussed by Pitt-Rivers (*Fate of Shechem*, 9–10); see also his entry "Honour" in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (ed. David L. Sills; New York: Macmillan, 1968) 6: 503–11.

[35] This was the bitter lesson learned by the overbearing landlord who was first wronged by one of his tenant farmers and then outwitted by the same in the presence of the village assembly which was meeting to hear his grievance against his tenant, as described by Bourdieu (*Algeria 1960*, 97–98).

[36] Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960*, 97–98.

[37] Malina, *New Testament World*, 31.

superior in a judicial dispute thus amounts to a gamble on the part of the inferior party: the inferior seeks to acquire honor through the respect conveyed by mere recognition of his right to take a stand, while at the same time he hopes to avoid being shamed by conveying the impression of being overly weak or mainly interested in profiting from whatever legal penalties might be imposed on his opponent. These are the dynamics which explain the real issue at stake in Job 31:35–37. Following out the lines of the legal metaphor as it has been operative in the book of Job, in v. 35 Job formally appeals for judicial intervention.[38] In terms of the game of honor, however, what Job concurrently seeks from Yahweh is simple but demonstrable recognition of his right to grievance; the real issue is simply getting a response. Should his superior opponent respond (provide the written indictment that is being requested, v. 35c),[39] then Job will have succeeded, *ipso facto,* in his effort to be recognized as honorable. Response itself is recognition, and recognition is the *sine qua non* of honor. Thus it is that Job can envision triumphantly parading about and publicly displaying his opponent's document of indictment against him, well in advance of the rendering of any verdict. Such a document of indictment would alone be sufficient for Job's purposes; by means of it he will have reacquired his honor, and wearing it he will thus be able to approach the very throne of Shaddai, his status as a nobleman regained (*kĕmô nāgîd,* v. 37b).

A second probe focuses on chaps. 38–41 as a whole. Three basic features of these chapters need to be considered only briefly in the present context: unity, genre, and content.

The question of unity arises from the fact that Yahweh twice addresses Job from the whirlwind (38:1–40:2 and 40:6–41:26 [41:34 Eng.]). This dual pattern to the Yahweh speech has prompted many suggested emendations or excisions in order to achieve a unified speech. However, the tendency in more recent scholarship appears to be that of defending the integrity of the speech as it stands.[40] This current emphasis on the essential unity of the Yahweh speech has an important corollary: "Just as the speech of God, in keeping with its nature as theophany, can only be *one* [italics in original], so also Job's final utterance in answer to this speech of God can only be one."[41] In short, any evaluation of Job's response to the speeches of Yahweh must be based equally on a consideration of 40:3–5 and 42:1–6. These two passages depicting Job's response stand in parallel relationship much like the stichoi of a bicolon.

[38] See M. Dick, "The Legal Metaphor in Job 31," *CBQ* 41 (1979) 37–50.

[39] Thus, there is no need to argue that the "document" (*sēper*) referred to in 31:35c needs to be read as "acquittal" (as, e.g., M. Pope, *Job* [AB 15; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973]).

[40] See Habel, *Job,* 526–30; note also V. Kubina, *Die Gottesreden im Buche Hiob: Ein Beitrag zur Diskussion um die Einheit von Hiob 38,1–42,6* (Freiburger Theologische Studien 115; Freiburg: Herder, 1979).

[41] Westermann, *Structure,* 125.

Regarding the issue of the genre of the Yahweh speech, it is sufficient here simply to refer to the recent study of H. Rowold, who draws particular attention to the nature of the questions that Yahweh directs to Job.[42] These questions are not catechetic in nature; their aim is not to instruct. Rather, these questions are challenges; their aim is to rebuff and rebuke.[43] The results of Rowold's study merge nicely with our reading of the book of Job as a competition to win honor and avoid shame. The ground rules for the game of honor remain the same despite the setting—even when the setting is a law-court.[44] The style of speech employed in Yahweh's response indicates that Yahweh has correctly perceived in Job's appeal for juridical intervention an undertone of direct challenge. Yahweh has seen through Job's lawsuit ploy and has immediately understood that the real issue between the two of them must be joined on the more personal level of challenge to precedence and integrity. Yahweh wastes no time in responding to the underlying challenge which Job has issued.

The recognition of the genre of the Yahweh speech (challenge to rival) and its immediate context (competition for honor) thus directly explains a feature that has sometimes seemed incongruous, namely, the particular content of this speech. Yahweh does not respond to Job in the terms that Job has been using; Yahweh does not speak at all of justice and retribution. Instead, Yahweh speaks generally of his governance of the cosmos. Directing attention away from Job's concerns as he has been articulating them and focusing instead on the divine power and wisdom are not, however, an evasion of the primary issue (viz., theodicy). Rather, this brings the real issue into focus. Beneath the veneer of Job's searching questions and affirmations of his own integrity has unavoidably been a challenge directed at the integrity of Yahweh. This follows from the interactional nature of the game of honor. In raising the issue of his own fate as a case of cosmic mismanagement, Job has placed a question mark behind the quality of the divine governance of all affairs. Thus Yahweh's own honor is at stake. (Honor, let it be recalled, resides not only in superior power but also in behavior consonant with the values basic to the society in question—in this case, justice.) Given these underlying factors, Yahweh understandably ignores the particulars of the lawsuit ploy and directly addresses the fundamental issue at hand, namely, the grounds for his own most highly honored status.[45] The overriding concern of Yahweh

[42] H. Rowold, "Yahweh's Challenge to Rival: The Form and Function of the Yahweh-Speech in Job 38–39," *CBQ* 47 (1985) 199–211.

[43] Ibid., 207: ". . . the challenge-question of the Yahweh speeches is a question by Yahweh in which . . . Yahweh challenges Job's right to assume a posture of rivalry."

[44] Cf. Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960*, 99–117.

[45] The notion that Yahweh is a deity concerned about his own honor is also central to a proper understanding of the parable of the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5–8), on which see K. F. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 119–33. (I thank my senior colleague, John F. Priest, for drawing my attention to this reference.)

in his whirlwind speech is thus to defend his honor in the face of the challenge to it which Job has raised.

The final probe focuses on Job's response to the Yahweh speech. As just noted, Job's response is depicted jointly by 40:3–5 and 42:1–6. The first of the two passages needs limited comment. The unmistakable gist of 40:3–5 is that Job is silenced. This silence is the silence of one who has just been shamed (29:9–10, and cf. 11:3!). Because Job's questioning of Yahweh's ways has touched on a point of honor, Job's reaction to Yahweh's overwhelming demonstration of his lordly priority can only be one in which Job admits his own lowly status over against this Yahweh. At this culminating point in the contest, Job must acknowledge Yahweh's precedence. This he quickly proceeds to do in both word and gesture. Job's *hēn qallōtî* (v. 4a) bespeaks his awareness of having just been humiliated.[46] Job underlines the totality of his reduction to silence by employing a transparent gesture: he places his hand over his mouth.

A continuation of Job's response is depicted in 42:1–6.[47] Verse 2 is a straightforward acknowledgment on Job's part of the power of Yahweh, and v. 3b is a confession of Job's inability to match Yahweh in the realm of wisdom. In the contest for honor, Job is here acknowledging Yahweh's precedence. Job's reaction to Yahweh's demonstration of his superiority culminates in vv. 5 and 6. In these verses, especially, Job recognizes Yahweh's honor by giving graphic expression to his own awareness of having been shamed. This is the understanding of the climax of the book of Job which results when the book is read against the background of the agonistic society.

But where in the text itself does one find a depiction of Job's shame? It is mirrored in the concluding phrase of v. 6: *'al 'āpār wā'ēper.* Several lines of inquiry lead in this direction. First of all, the common translation of this phrase as "upon dust and *ashes*" is inaccurate and misleading.[48] The Hebrew *'ēper,* widely understood as referring to the by-product of burning ever since the LXX consistently rendered this term by *spodos,* is actually but a by-form of *'āpār* ("dust, dirt").[49] In and of itself this is a modest point. It becomes valuable, however, in the way it opens up new possibilities for understanding

[46] On the use of the root *qlh* II in the vocabulary expressing shame, see Klopfenstein, *Scham und Schande,* 184–95.

[47] Some have questioned the authenticity of vv. 3a and 4 (see the commentaries), but it seems more likely that Job is deliberately citing prior words of Yahweh here. Doing so keeps the underlying issue of the challenge to rival fresh in the reader's mind.

[48] On this point see, most recently, Delbert R. Hillers, "Dust: Some Aspects of Old Testament Imagery," in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope* (ed. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good; Guilford, CT: Four Quarters, 1987) 105.

[49] For detailed argumentation on this point, see M. Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* (Studia Pohl 12/II; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980) 457–58. Gruber notes how the proto-Semitic *'pr* entered Hebrew twice—once directly as *'pr* (cf. Ug. *'pr*) and once via Akkadian *eperu* as *'pr.* Among the modern commentators A. de Wilde also recognizes the mistranslation of *'ēper* and renders it as *Staub* rather than as *Asche.*

the thrust of v. 6. It has long been conventional to read 42:6 along with 2:8 and to see in both a reference to Job's location during the course of the drama: Job is seated throughout his ordeal on the ash-strewn *mazbalah,* or rubbish heap, typically found near the entrance to Palestinian villages.[50] In fact, however, the immediate referent of 42:6's *'āpār wā'ēper* is nothing other than the ground underneath Job, the "dust and dirt" upon which he is positioned.

The full connotation of the *'al 'āpār wā'ēper* of 42:6 still waits to be grasped, however. As a fixed word pair, *'āpār wā'ēper* occurs only twice in MT apart from Job 42:6—at Gen 18:27 and Job 30:19.[51] It is also found in the Hebrew text of Ben Sira (40:3). In Gen 18:27 this word pair is used as a metaphor to describe Abraham's humble status over against God; in Job 30:19 it is employed in a simile describing Job's abased and demeaned state in the wake of his treatment at the hands of the deity. In Sir 40:3 the words describe the status of someone at the opposite extreme from a monarch seated upon his throne Apart from Job 42:6, then, the nuance being expressed by the conjunctively joined terms *'āpār* and *'ēper* is that of diminished or demeaned status. One is thus led to expect a similar overtone in Job 42:6.

If one now recalls the substantive unity of 40:3–5 with 42:1–6, one is led to make the decisive connection. The crucial point is that Job's response in 40:3–5 centers on a gesture: Job places his hand over his mouth as a visible expression of his readiness to leave off questioning the ways of Yahweh (40:4b). Correspondingly, the *'al 'āpār wā'ēper* of v. 6 is also most naturally to be taken as reflecting a gesture on the part of Job.[52] That is, in v. 6 Job does not just happen to be positioned "upon dust and dirt." Rather, at this point he sinks down to the ground, and his doing so is a meaningful gesture.[53]

[50] On the *mazbalah,* see, e g , M Pope, *Job,* 349 N Habel maintains the traditional rendering of *'ēper* as "ashes" but sees in 2 8 no indication that Job is in effect being quarantined outside the city, rather, 2 8 simply means that Job adopts the mourner's position of sitting on the ground, much as does David in 2 Sam 12 16 (*Job,* 96)

[51] *'āpār* and *'ēper* appear in synonymous poetic parallelism, not as a conjunctively united word pair, in Ezek 27 30, where the reference is to the familiar use of dust/dirt in expressions of mourning

[52] In his *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication,* a study of gestures in the ancient Near East and of linguistic formulas derived from such gestures, Gruber advances the following as the basic criteria for determining whether references to gestures in a text are to be taken literally or metaphorically "The main criteria for determining that such expressions are employed in their primary sense are juxtaposition with verbum dicendi, synonymous parallelism, and juxtaposition with other words or expressions referring to specific gestures, postures, or symbolic acts" (p 20) When Job 42 1–6 is read in conjunction with 40 3–5, the strongest indication is that a literal sinking to the ground is envisioned in 42 6

[53] The understanding of *'al 'āpār wā'ēper* here being suggested obviously reads the preposition as functioning locatively The argument that the *'al* of this verse ought to be read referentially as part of the idiom *nhm 'l* flounders on the observation that everywhere where the idiom *nhm 'l* unambiguously occurs the object of the preposition is a noun denoting a mental construct (thought, plan, idea), never a physical object (even a physical object employed as a

As soon as one recognizes that a gesture is indicated by the *'al 'āpār wā'ēper* of Job 42:6, then immediately one is able to see the reflection of shame which is appropriately expected at this decisive juncture in the Job drama.[54] Gestures employing dust and dirt, either by sprinkling it upon oneself or by sinking down upon it or rolling around in it, are frequently mentioned in the OT. More than two decades ago Ernst Kutsch drew attention to the wide-ranging variety of such gestures in biblical Israel.[55] The common core of all such gestures, he pointed out, is the motif of self-diminution (*Selbstminderung*). The particular dynamics of each setting in which the gesture is employed then contribute a more precise nuance to the general feature of self-diminution which all of the gestures involving dust and dirt express. In a situation that calls for the expression of shame,[56] falling down upon the ground would give vivid demonstration of the essence of the shame response, namely, the desire to sink out of sight, to take cover beneath the very surface of the earth. This is what Job is doing in 42:6.[57]

IV

By way of conclusion, a few words regarding 42:5 are in order. This verse juxtaposes two types of understanding: that acquired by traditional learning, and that which results from immediate insight. Of the two, it is obviously the latter that is prompting Job's particular response of shame. The dynamics of the shame response are in tune with the priority that Job grants to the feature of immediate insight. The analyses of shame point out, on the one hand, how shame as a feeling strikes one suddenly and unexpectedly,[58] and on the other hand how the eye is generally regarded as the medium through which the

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metaphor). By placing the *athnach* where they did, the Masoretes clearly did not see in 42:6 an instance of the *nḥm 'l* idiom, and the judgment of the Masoretes on this point is sound.

[54] Note how Mic 7:16 associates the theme of shame with both a gesture of placing hands to the mouth and a lying prostrate in the dust. Shame is associated with not speaking in Mic 3:7, and also at Ps 31:18–19 and Ezek 16:63.

[55] E. Kutsch, "'Trauerbrauche' und 'Selbstminderungsriten' im Alten Testament," in Kurt Luthi et al., *Drei Wiener Antrittsreden* (Theologische Studien 78; Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1965) 25–37.

[56] That shame intrinsically involves a sense of diminution of the self is explicitly noted in Heller, "Power of Shame," 219.

[57] Cf. Jer 3:25. Falling prostrate as the stereotypical expression of obeisance also expresses shame. This is so because, as noted earlier, the phenomenon of shame is broader than just the feeling of being acutely embarrassed. The phenomenon of shame also encompasses a basic sensitivity to social status, role, and precedence. It is a recognition as legitimate of the relative distribution of power and privilege in a given society. It is this latter sense of shame which underlings express by grovelling before their overlords; see, e.g., the depictions of such expressions collected in O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World* (New York: Seabury, 1978) illus. 408 and 409.

[58] See, e.g., Lynd, *On Shame*, 34.

interactional contact is made that leads to a shaming.[59] In "seeing" Yahweh Job also knows undeniably that he himself has been seen for what he is and must now also admit to being—a mere creature of lowly status in the eyes of his lord.

And yet, as a final note, one must return to the fact that Yahweh has bothered with Job enough to shame him. Being shamed is not an intrinsically destructive experience. On the contrary, the experience of shame can have a therapeutic effect.[60] It can, among other things, lead to a revitalizing of a relationship. Shame structures relationships between individuals of unequal status. It maintains the basic inequality, to be sure, but it nonetheless serves to keep the bond intact.[61] There is thus a distinctly affirmative tone in the scene of Job's shaming. On his knees in the dust and dirt, Job nonetheless has been acknowledged and affirmed by his lord. In Yahweh's very acknowledgment of Job's lowliness, Job finds his derivative worthiness.[62]

[59] Cf., e.g., Gilmore, "Anthropology of the Mediterranean Area," 198; see also Heller, "Power of Shame," 215–16 and Schneider, *Shame, Exposure, and Privacy*, 32–34.

[60] This is the preponderant theme of Lynd's *On Shame*.

[61] "In contempt, the object—self or other—is simply rejected; in shame one still seeks a relationship. The underlying dynamic of shame, then, is a positive evaluation" (Schneider, *Shame, Exposure, and Privacy*, 27).

[62] The implications of this study of Job 42:6 for philological work upon the same verse are deserving of fuller and separate treatment. The clear suggestion, however, is that the historically most accurate translation of *'al-kēn 'em'as wĕniḥamtî 'al 'āpār wā'ēper* would be one which brings the theme of Job's shame unambiguously to the fore.