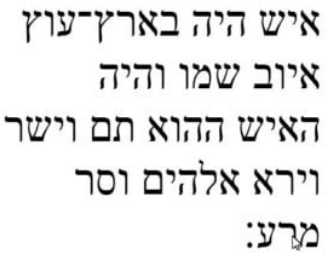
Story of Job

Everyone knows the story of Job. A righteous man is tested by God. All that Job owns is taken away, all his children are killed, and he is struck down by disease. Job's friends advise him to seek God's forgiveness since he must have somehow offended Him. However, Job insists on his own righteousness. He does not repent. He demands an explanation for why he is being unjustly punished. An angry God appears unto Job in a whirlwind. He proclaims His workings to be far beyond the understanding of Job. He talks of Behemoth and Leviathan. He castigates Job's friends. He grants Job happiness and prosperity. He neither explains nor justifies what happened.

Everyone knows the story of Job. No one fully understands its meaning.

The Land of Uz


איש היה בארץ־עוץ
איוב שמו והיה
האיש ההוא תם וישר
וירא אלהים וסר
מרע׃

There was a man in the land
of Uz, whose name was Job;
and that man was perfect
and upright, and one that feared
God, and eschewed evil.

(Job 1:1)

Thus begins the story of Job. The text was likely written in the 6th or 5th Century BCE (Crenshaw, 2011; Pope, 1965). Job was

a righteous man who worshipped God. The God he worshipped went by the name “Elohim” (□□□□□). Job was not Jewish; his god was not Yahweh (Sawyer, 2011). Job made all of the appropriate sacrifices. A Byzantine illumination from the 11th Century CE (Papadaki-Oekland, 2009) shows him making a sacrifice and receiving a blessing from the hand of God.

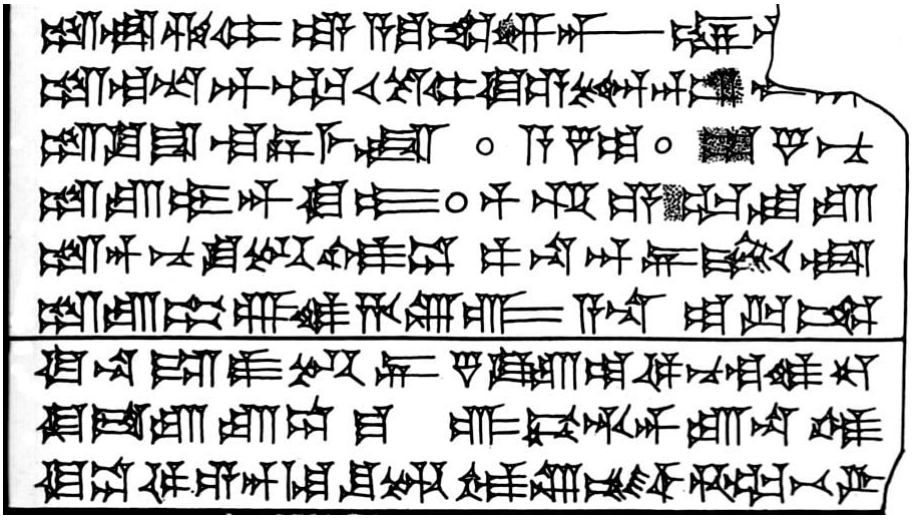


No one is sure about the Land of Uz (Pope, 1965). Some have suggested that it is equivalent to the land of Edom to the south and east of Israel. This fits with the idea voiced in the later *Testament of Job* written in the 1st Century BCE (James, 1897) that Job was descended from Esau, the son of Isaac who ceded his birthright to his brother Jacob, and left to found the nation of Edom. Others have suggested that Uz is located in the Hauran district of Southern Syria. Arabic traditions consider the town of Sheikh Saad (also called Karnaim or Dair Ayyub – “monastery of Job”) as the home of Job and site of his tribulations. A third possibility is raised in one of the Dead Sea scrolls called the *War Scroll*, which mentions Uz as one of the lands “beyond the Euphrates” (Vermes, 2000, p. 124).

I prefer the third explanation since stories similar to that of Job existed in the ancient literature of Mesopotamia – the land between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. The oldest story, written in cuneiform on clay tablets, comes from Sumer and may date from 2500-2000 BCE (Pritchard, 2011, pp 352-357; Kramer, 1956/81, Chapter 15). In this story the author laments his undeserved suffering. Ultimately, God hears his cries and turns "the man's suffering into joy." A later story, the *Babylonian Theodicy*, dated to 1500-1000 BCE is even more similar to the Hebrew story (Lambert, 1960, pp 63-91; Pritchard, 2011, pp 374-379). In it the persecuted man tells his troubles to a friend who, rather than offering comfort, accuses him of blasphemy. The following is an excerpt (Lambert, 1960, ll 72-80) in translation and in cuneiform:

Sufferer: In my youth I sought the will of my god;
With prostration and prayer I followed my goddess
But I was bearing a profitless corvée as a yoke
My god decreed instead of wealth destitution
A cripple is my superior, a lunatic outstrips me
The rogue has been promoted, but I have been brought low.

Friend My reliable fellow, holder of knowledge, your thoughts are perverse
You have forsaken right and blaspheme against your god's designs.
In your mind you have an urge to disregard the divine ordinances.



The Hebrew *Book of Job* is a far more complex and poetic creation than these Mesopotamian stories. The writer of Job may have heard these tales during the period of the Babylonian Captivity (597-539 BCE), and worked them into a poetic whole then or on his or her return to Jerusalem. The *Book of Job* does not directly mention the exile of the Jews. However, it might subtly reflect the idea that the people of Israel were for a while completely forsaken by their God.

Maimonides (1190, Chapter 22) considers the Land of Uz a fantasy. He points out that "uz" is the Hebrew verb "take counsel." The name Uz is therefore an exhortation to study well this story.

> … its basis is a fiction, conceived for the purpose of explaining the different opinions which people hold on Divine Providence.

Job's name is as ambiguous as the land he lived in. On the one hand, it might derive from the root *'yb* meaning "enmity"; on the other hand, it might come from the root *'ab* indicating "repentence" (Pope, 1965). Is Job the enemy of God, or His repentant servant?

The Council of the Gods

After introducing us to its main character, the *Book of Job* takes us to Heaven where God has called a council. Amongst

those gathered is one they call the “Adversary” (Alter, 2010) or the Satan, someone who is part the Lucifer of Isaiah, and part the Devil of later scriptures. The following is an illustration of the council from a Byzantine manuscript of the 11th century CE. God is represented only by his hand; the Adversary is dark and has been defaced.



God indicates his servant Job to the Adversary:

> Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? (Job 1:8)

The Adversary claims that Job is only good because God treats him well. If he were not so well taken care of, he would curse God to his face. God refuses to believe this, and allows the Adversary to take away all that Job has, and ultimately to strike Job himself.

The Ruination of Job

The Adversary arranges for all Job’s holdings to be stolen or killed and for his children to die. Job is bereft but curses not God. He accepts his fate in a verse that has become the focus of the Judeo-Christian funeral rites (Eisenberg & Wiesel, 1987, p 13).

> Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. (Job 1: 21).

Although Job is not Jewish, this verse comes from the Jewish tradition. The Lord whose name is blessed is Yahweh.

Ultimately the Adversary strikes Job with a terrible disease. Job’s wife urges him to curse God, but he rebukes her. Covered with boils he sits disconsolately “among the ashes” (Job 2:8).

The Greek Septuagint and the 14th Century Wycliff Bible translate this as a “upon a dunghill,” but this appears poetic license.

From ancient times human beings in mourning have covered themselves with ashes to signify bereavement and repentance. Ashes are particularly significant in Jewish history – the ashes of the first temple destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, the ashes of the second temple destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, and the ashes of the millions of Jews murdered and cremated by the Nazis in the 20th Century CE. Dust and ashes go back to Genesis. Adam is expelled from Eden with the words “dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19), and Abraham admits to God that he is “but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27). Dust and ashes return later as the final words of Job.

The peace and prosperity of Job and his family at the beginning of the story is well characterized in the first of William Blake’s illustrations for the *Book of Job* (Blake, 1821/1995). The cataclysm leading to the death of his children is the subject of his third illustration:





Job’s Comforters

Three friends of Job – Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar – come to comfort him in his grief. They spend seven days and seven nights in silence with him. Only when Job finally speaks do they say anything. This is the way that those in mourning should be comforted: visitors should allow the bereaved to be quiet, and only speak when he or she initiates conversation.

After Job begins to talk, however, multiple debates follow. These form the bulk of the Book of Job – Chapters 3 to 27. Job describes the injustice of his situation. His friends attempt to show that it must in some way be his own fault. Job and his friends go through multiple exchanges, which are portrayed in exquisite Hebrew poetry, quite unlike the prose that describes the story of Job’s downfall.

Job begins by cursing the day of his birth. For this I shall use the translation of Stephen Mitchell (1987), which is more colloquial than the King James Version:

> God damn the day I was born
> and the night that forced me from the womb.
> On that day–let there be darkness;
> let it never have been created;

let it sink back into the void.
Let chaos overpower it;
let black clouds overwhelm it;
let the sun be plucked from its sky.
Let oblivion overshadow it;
let the other days disown it;
let the aeons swallow it up.
On that night—let no child be born,
no mother cry out with joy.
Let sorcerers wake the Serpent
to blast it with eternal blight.
Let its last stars be extinguished;
let it wait in terror for daylight;
let its dawn never arrive.
For it did not shut the womb's doors
to shelter me from this sorrow.

Job's curse is remarkably similar to that of Jeremiah the prophet who lamented the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian Captivity (Eisenberg & Wiesel, 1987, p 60).

> Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed.
> Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad. (Jeremiah 20:14-15)

Job's friends attempt to demonstrate to Job that what has happened to him is just. He must have sinned in some way to warrant his misfortune. The illustration below shows Blake's view of Job's comforters casting accusing fingers at their friend. In the background is a large stone monument. Blake placed his land of Uz on the Salisbury plain.



Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar believe firmly in the idea that God rewards the good and punishes the evil. Job must therefore have sinned in some way. Their belief in Divine Providence is clearly expressed in the first of the *Psalms*:

> Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.
> But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.
> And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.
> The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.
> Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor

> sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
> For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Eliphaz' first reply to Job restates this idea of divine justice:

> Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?
> Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.
> By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed. (Job 4:7-9)

Eliphaz then recounts a dream (Job 4:12-21) that warns us not to question the justice of God (Blakes illustration is shown on the right. In 1815 Lord Byron wrote some lyrics for *Hebrew Melodies* that were composed by Isaac Nathan (Byron, 1815; Cochran, 2015). One of these lyrics was a translation of the dream of Eliphaz:

The face of immortality unveiled—
Deep sleep came down on every eye save mine—
And there it stood,—all formless—but divine;
Along my bones the creeping flesh did quake;
And as my damp hair stiffened, thus it spake:

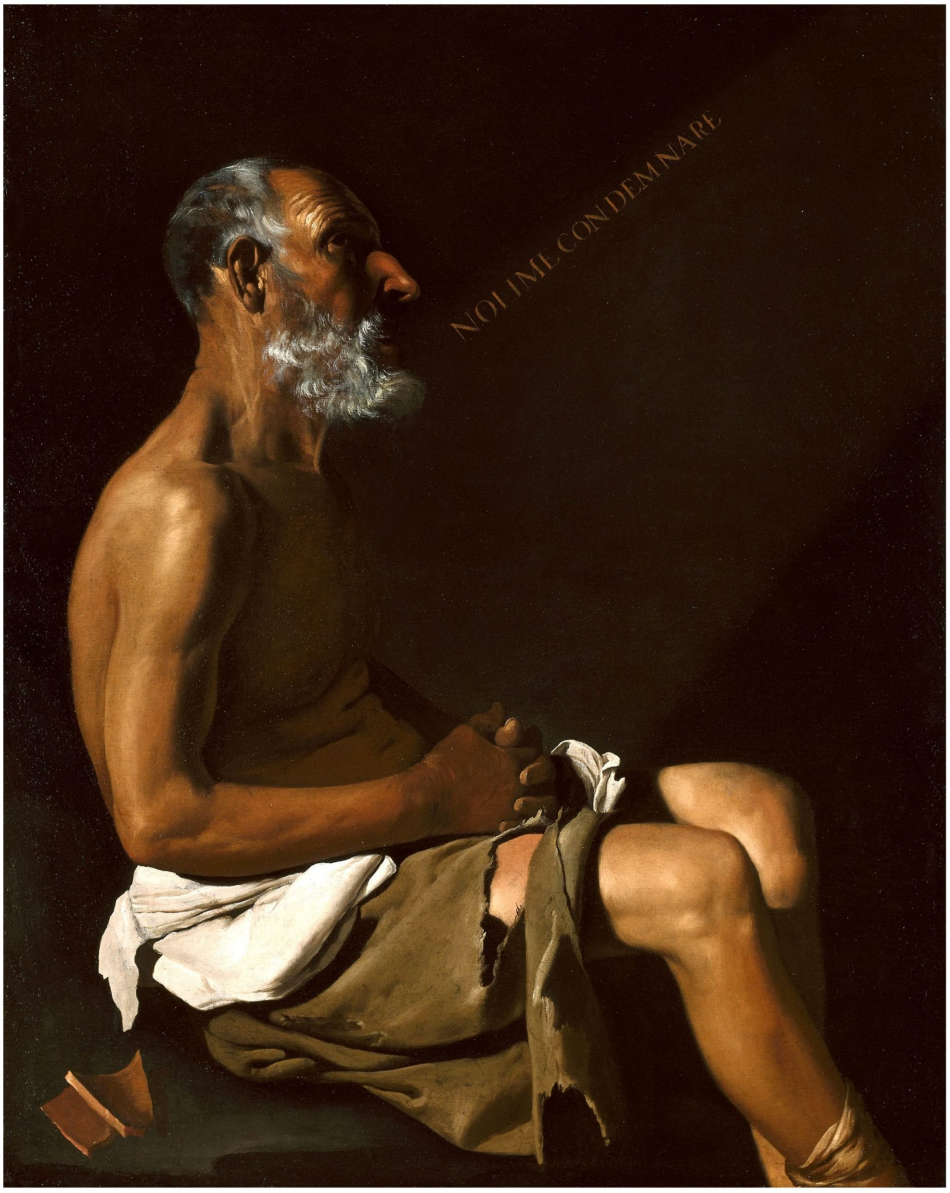


'Is man more just than God? Is man more pure
Than He who deems even seraphs insecure?
Creatures of clay—vain dwellers in the dust!
The moth survives you, and are ye more just?
Things of a day! you wither ere the night,
Heedless and blind to wisdom's wasted light!'

Nathan’s music is not memorable. In 1854 the violinist Joseph Joachim wrote *Hebrew Melodies for Viola and Piano.* His music presents an impression rather than a setting of Byron’s poems. The sound of the viola suits the pathos of Job. The following is the ending to the second movement played by Anna Barbara Dütschler and Marc Pantillon:

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Hebrew-Melodies-II-Grave-ending.mp3

Job insists that he has done no wrong and that his suffering is therefore unjust. He demands that God confront him with his sin. The illustration below shows a representation of Job attributed to an unknown Spanish painter from the early 17th Century. Some have suggested that the painter might actually have been the young Velasquez (Terrien, 1996). Job says unto God “Noli me condemnare” – “Do not condemn me” (Job 10:2).



> Only do not two things unto me: then will I not hide myself from thee.
> Withdraw thine hand far from me: and let not thy dread make me afraid.
> Then call thou, and I will answer: or let me speak, and answer thou me.
> How many are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin. (Job 13: 20-23)

Job describes the transience of human life in verses that recall *Ecclesiastes*, and remonstrates that God should judge him rather than pity him:

> Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble.
> He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.
> And doth thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? (Job 14:1-3)

Then he asks God not to deprive him so much during his brief time on earth that he not be able to accomplish something:

> Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;
> Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.
> For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease.
> Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground;
> Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. (Job 14:5-9)

Sins of Omission

After a while Job's insistence on his own innocence becomes tiresome. No one is perfect. Indeed, as Wiesel points out a true *Tzadik* ("righteous one") would never proclaim his own goodness (Wiesel & Eisenberg, 1987, p 32). Even if he has done no wrong, he may not have done sufficient good. In one of his speeches (Job 22), Eliphaz accuses Job of not giving water to the weary or bread to the hungry. Job does not immediately reply to this rebuke. Later (Job 29-31) he insists that he always helped the poor and the orphans. But was this sufficient? Job remained rich and the poor remained poor.

Wiesel retells a story from the Midrash that attempts to explain why Job's appeals to God are initially met with

silence (Wiesel & Eisenberg, 1987, p 22-23). When asked by Moses to “let my people go,” the Pharaoh consulted three counselors: Jethro, Billam and Job. Jethro urged the Pharaoh to agree, Billam rejected the proposal, and Job stayed silent. The Midrash insists that when faced with the suffering of others one must not remain neutral. Not to attempt to prevent evil is as great a sin as the evil itself.

The Redeemer

The debates continue between Job and his friends. At one point, Job calls upon a redeemer or a “vindicator” to bear witness to his righteousness.

> Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh?
> Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book!
> That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!
> For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:
> And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God (Job 19: 22-26)

Christians have taken this passage as a prophecy of Christ. George Frideric Handel set the last two of these verses for soprano in his *Messiah* of 1741. The Christian interpretation does not make sense. According to Christian teachings, Christ came to save the sinners not to vindicate the righteous.

Who then is this “vindicator”? Job is appealing to someone in God’s entourage to serve as his advocate. In his *Answer to Job*, Jung (1956/2010) suggests that Job’s god has many aspects. The very name of God – Elohim – is in the plural. God is both good and evil – Satan is as much a part of him as Christ. God is both knowing and unknowing. According to Hebrew traditions, Wisdom or Sophia was part of God from the

beginning. In the Proverbs Wisdom describes herself as being with God from before the creation of the universe:

> The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.
> I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.
> When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water.
> Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:
> While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world.
> When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth:
> When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep:
> When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth (Proverbs 8:22-29)

Christians often take this as indicating that God the Father and God the Son were together from the beginning. This fits with the idea that Christ was the word or *logos,* a concept similar to wisdom. However, this is not the meaning of the idea in the Hebrew bible and Christ is not the advocate to whom Job calls.

The *Book of Job* also contains a full chapter devoted to Wisdom (Job 28). Many commentators believe it to be a later interpolation. However, it fits nicely at the end of the disputation between Job and his comforters:

> Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding?
> Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air.
> Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof

with our ears.
God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof.
For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven;
To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure.
When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder:
Then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out.
And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.(Job 28 :20-28)

After Job makes his final statement of innocence, he is rudely interrupted by Elihu, a brash young man who cannot understand why foolish old Job does not recognize the justice of God. Most commentators consider this section of the book (Chapters 32-37) to be a later interpolation. One possibility is that it is the work of a young scribe who, when copying the initial version of book, became frustrated with Job's refusal to acknowledge justice and inserted more argument for the benefit of the reader. Wiesel (p 390) remarks that some Talmudists have suggested that Elihu might be Satan in disguise, muddying the waters of the argument.

Yahweh's Response to Job

After Elihu's diatribe, God suddenly appears to Job. Yahweh – this is indeed the one true God – describes the creation and maintenance of the universe. This exuberant paean to the wonders of the world is expressed in some of the most beautiful poetry in the Bible.

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,
Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?

> Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.
> Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.
> Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?
> Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;
> When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
> Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb?
> When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddlingband for it,
> And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors,
> And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed? (Job 38:1-11)

On the left below is William Blake's illustration of the appearance of God in the whirlwind, and on the right is his image of the sons of God. In 1930 Ralph Vaughan Williams set this latter image to music as part of his *Job, a Masque for Dancing.* This particular piece is called *Pavane for the Sons of Morning*, a slow and stately dance appropriate to the majesty of creation.





https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/vaughan_williams_job_pavane_sons_morning2020.mp3

The Patience of Job

Many different interpretations have been provided for the story of Job. The most common focuses on the patience of Job. In the Epistle of James (5:11) we have

> Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

The idea is that if we are patient everything will turn out fine. In the 2011 movie *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* the hotel manager Sonny (Dev Patel) claims “Everything will be all right in the end and if it’s not all right, then it’s not yet the end.” This saying has been attributed to John Lennon, but it is probably just

an old Indian proverb, similar to the thought of *Ecclesiastes* 7:8:

> Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than
> the proud in spirit.

The *Testament of Job* and the mention of Job in the *Qur'an* (sura 21:83) both stress the idea of Job's patience and God's mercy in his time of adversity. Joseph Roth's novel *Job* (1931) tells the story of a good and pious Jew from the Pale of Settlement who undergoes much suffering but is finally rewarded in his old age.

The Justice of God

The interpretation of Job as a man who patiently awaits the mercy of God misses the great poetic center of the book. The debates between Job and his friends deal with theodicy – the justice (*dike*) of God (*theos*). If God is just then righteousness should be rewarded and evil should be punished. This is not the case. Suffering occurs without regard to innocence or guilt.

The term "theodicy" originated with Leibniz's book *Theodicy* (1710), based on his discussion of the problem of suffering with Queen Sophie of Prussia. The understanding of suffering for those who live in comfort differs from the experience of those who survive in poverty (Guttierrez, 1987). Leibniz argued that God chose to create a world with as much good in it as possible. Though this entailed some concurrent evil, the optimal world contained much more good than world completely devoid of evil. Leibniz' idea that this is the "best of all possible worlds" was ridiculed by Voltaire in *Candide* (1759).

The philosophical problems concerning God and justice have been discussed for centuries (Draper, 1989; Laato & de Moor, 2003; Hume, 1799; Illman, 2003; Larrimore, 2013, Chapter 4; Sarot, 2003; Surin, 1986; Tooley, 2015), and are beyond the scope of this posting. The main problem of theodicy has to do with the concept of God as an omnipotent and omnibenevolent entity. In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1799), David Hume states the basic trilemma of theodicy, attributing it to Epicurus:

> Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil? (Section X)

Whence then is evil? The question of evil became acute during the 20th Century with the Holocaust (Wollaston, 2011). How could God have allowed this to occur? In his memoir *La Nuit* (1958), Elie Wiesel recounts how in Auschwitz he took Job's part and railed against God. He later described how certain great Talmudic masters convened a rabbinic court in Auschwitz to indict the Almighty for failing to protect His people (Wiesel, 1980). After hearing witnesses, and following due deliberation, the court pronounced a verdict of guilty. After a brief but profound silence, the judges moved on to evening prayer. Wiesel (1978) later wrote a play about *The Trial of God* (1979), though he distanced it from his experience by placing it in the fictional Ukrainian village of Shamgorod in the immediate aftermath of a pogrom that happened there three centuries before.



MacLeish's 1958 play *J.B.* tells the story of the complete ruin and ultimate redemption of a successful American businessman. In a framing story, two out-of-work actors using masks play the parts of God ("Mr. Suss" from Zeus) and Satan ("Nickles" from "Old Nick", an ancient name for the Devil, perhaps coming from "Old Iniquity"). In the Broadway debut these roles were played by Raymond Massey and Christopher Plummer (illustrated on the right). Hume's question about the omnipotence and omnibenevolence of God is presented in in Nickles' song

> I heard upon his dry dung heap
> That man cry out who cannot sleep:
> "If God is God He is not good,
> If God is good He is not God;
> Take the even, take the odd,
> I would not sleep here if I could
> Except for the little green leaves in the wood
> And the wind on the water."

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/nickles-song-x.mp3

In *A Masque of Reason* (1945), the American poet Robert Frost has God discuss with Job the meaning of his story. The portrait on the right shows the poet in full didactic mode as photographed by Yousef Karsh in 1958. As Frost points out, the story of Job brings to an end the idea that a Divine Justice rewards and punishes each individual based on his or her behavior. We are not guaranteed our just deserts:

> I've had you on my mind a thousand years
> To thank you someday for the way you helped me

Establish once for all the principle
There’s no connection man can reason out
Between his just deserts and what he gets.
Virtue may fail and wickedness succeed.
‘Twas a great demonstration we put on.
I should have spoken sooner had I found
The word I wanted. You would have supposed
One who in the beginning was the Word
Would be in a position to command it.
I have to wait for words like anyone.
Too long I’ve owed you this apology
For the apparently unmeaning sorrow
You were afflicted with in those old days.
But it was of the essence of the trial
You shouldn’t understand it at the time.
And it came out all right. I have no doubt
You realize by now the part you played
To stultify the Deuteronomist
And change the tenor of religious thought.
My thanks are to you for releasing me
From moral bondage to the human race.
The only free will there at first was man’s,
Who could do good or evil as he chose.
I had no choice but I must follow him
With forfeits and rewards he understood—
Unless I liked to suffer loss of worship.
I had to prosper good and punish evil.
You changed all that. You set me free to reign.
You are the Emancipator of your God,
And as such I promote you to a saint.

Job is indeed commemorated as a Christian Saint in the Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

A Scent of Water

In his discussion of theodicy in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1799), Hume concludes that the forces that

drive the universe are neither benevolent or malevolent. Rather the original source of all things is indifferent, and

> has no more regard to good above ill than to heat above cold, or to drought above moisture, or to light above heavy. (Section XI).

These thoughts are remarkably similar to those of Marvin Pope in the conclusion to his introduction to *Job* (1965, p lxxvii)

> Viewed as a whole, the book presents profundities surpassing those that may be found in any of its parts. The issues raised are crucial for all men and the answers attempted are as good as have ever been offered. The hard facts of life cannot be ignored or denied. All worldly hopes vanish in time. The values men cherish, the little gods they worship—family, home, nation, race, sex, wealth, fame—all fade away. The one final reality appears to be the process by which things come into being, exist, and pass away. This ultimate Force, the Source and End of all things, is inexorable. Against it there is no defense. Any hope a man may put in anything other than this First and Last One is vain. There is nothing else that abides. This is God. He gives and takes away. From Him we come and to Him we return. Confidence in this One is the only value not subject to time.
>
> But how can a man put his faith in such an One who is the Slayer of all? Faith in Him is not achieved without moral struggle and spiritual agony. The foundation of such a faith has to be laid in utter despair of reliance on any or all lesser causes and in resignation which has faced and accepted the worst and the best life can offer. Before this One no man is clean. To Him all human righteous-ness is as filthy rags. The transition from fear and hatred to trust and even love of this One—from God the Enemy to God the Friend and Companion—is the pilgrimage of every man of faith. Job’s journey from despair to faith is the way each mortal must go.

The description does not differ much from the scientific view of Nature (e.g. Williams, 1993). Is there anything beyond this view? Does God exist in any way other than as an impersonal force? Is there any reason for human beings to have faith in this God or in its goals? Does Nature have a goal toward which it is moving or does everything occur by chance? Can human beings significantly alter the course of Nature?

Perhaps in the poetry of Job we might find some inkling that the universe is proceeding towards something that is good rather than evil (Janzen, 2009). And that we can perhaps contribute in some way to this evolution. As we have already considered, at the center of his story, Job asked God to allow him time to accomplish something:

> Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;
> Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.
> For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease.
> Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground;
> Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant.(Job 14:5-9)

The idea of the rain bringing forth new life recurs throughout the *Book of Job*. Yahweh mentions it in his description of the thunder, and Nickles mentions the “little green leaves” in his song about the nature of God. This continual rebirth makes us wonder whether there is some mindfulness behind Nature’s apparent randomness. And makes us wonder whether we might somehow contribute to this purpose.

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