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God-talk in the Book of Job

A Biblical Theological and Systematic Theological Study into
the Book of Job and Its Relevance for the Issue of Theodicy

Proefschrift

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Emke Jelmer Keulen
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Promotores: Prof. dr. L.J. van den Brom
Prof. dr. E. Noort

Beoordelingscommissie: Prof. dr. B.E.J.H. Becking
Prof. dr. M. Sarot
Prof. dr. E.J. van Wolde

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Preface

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Emke Jelmer Keulen
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Abbreviations

The abbreviations in this study correspond to S. Schwertner (ed.), *Abkürzungsverzeichnis*, TRE, 2nd rev. ed., Berlin-New York 1994. The references to biblical texts correspond to P.H. Alexander, J.F. Kutsko, J.D. Ernest, S. Decker-Lucke, D.L. Petersen (eds.), *The SBL Handbook of Style. For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*, Peabody 1999.

Chapter 1

Introduction: the Book of Job and the Issue of Theodicy

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Introduction

The Christian community of faith uses the bible in order to give state of affairs in the world and events in people's lives a context. In biblical texts, the very language used helps people to make sense of existence and to orientate themselves in their lives. The bible provides the community of faith with material which helps them to react to existential questions. It is for this reason that this present study consults a biblical text –the book of Job– in order to explore the issue of how to deal with the presence of evil in this world.

The presence of evil in the world is a mystery for many human beings. It represents the hard reality of existence and appears to lack any sense. *Evil* can be defined as harm that is caused to sentient beings without justification.¹ The fact that a specific, painful, horrifying, or distressful event can not be justified by an obvious reason makes this event evil. Two broad categories of evil can be distinguished. On the one hand, we speak of *natural evil* if the evil is caused by natural processes or impersonal forces; incurable diseases, death, and becoming the victim of a natural disaster are examples of natural evil. On the other hand, the category of *moral evil* contains evil which is the result of wrong or hurtful actions performed by free human beings. People can be held morally accountable for these things.² For example, atrocities in World War II belong to this category. Those who suffered in concentration camps were the victims of morally wrong actions by free human beings. Awareness of such evil in this world or actually experiencing evil in one's personal life is frequently disconcerting to people. It makes them question how it should be dealt with.

At the same time, the existence of evil may challenge a person's relationship with God. Theism, for instance, says that God is almighty, omniscient and perfectly good. It describes God as the Creator of this world.³ If someone is faced with evil,

¹ See also §8.4.2.

² M. Peterson-W. Hasker-B. Reichenbach-D. Basinger (eds.), *Reason and Religious Belief. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 3rd ed., Oxford 2003, 129.

³ See also §8.2.1.

the question arises of whether a God with these divine attributes should have prevented the existence of evil; is it not morally reprehensible that God permits the possibility that human beings might suffer innocently? Furthermore, to what extent is such a God still reliable or worth worshipping if a legitimate reason justifying the existence of natural or moral evil can not be formulated?⁴ So, God becomes the subject of debate because of the phenomenon of the apparently unjustified suffering of sentient beings. This debate centres around the question of how God's involvement in the existence of evil should be understood. This is what I call the *issue of theodicy*. A *theodicy* is a specific kind of answer to this question. It is a defence of God's justice in spite of the existence of evil in his Creation.⁵ The issue of theodicy more generally asks which role God plays in relation to evil.

Reading the book of Job makes one recognise several elements in it which are also matters in the issue of theodicy. The leading character, Job, suffers innocently. He wrestles with his miserable fate, questions God's righteousness and looks for reasons which can explain God's role with regard to his blameless misery. The book as a whole casts doubt on a specific form of theodicy, which was broadly found in the Ancient Near East. This is the view that God acts according to a strict relation between a person's actions and what befalls them. According to this theodicy, God rewards upright behaviour with prosperity and punishes wickedness with misery. Furthermore, the prologue of the book suggests the alternative that suffering might serve in order to test one's loyalty to God. Some of Job's friends suggest that evil has a pedagogical or warning function. Among other things these clues indicate that the book of Job somehow deals with aspects of the issue of theodicy.⁶

This impression is confirmed by a survey of theological as well as non-theological literature. When authors deal with the topic of (innocent) suffering, they frequently refer to the book of Job. Obviously the debate between Job and his friends, God's words from the whirlwind, and the scenes of the framework of the book have inspired them. However, their way of dealing with the book of Job, the topics to which the authors refer or which they use, and the interpretation of particular passages, differ considerably. Here are some examples which

⁴ If one draws the conclusion that this God is indeed not perfectly good, this frequently leads to the inference that God does not exist at all (see §8.2.2).

⁵ According to Sarot, the term 'theodicy' has been given three different meanings in the course of the history of research: 1. philosophical study of the relation of God and evil; 2. the defence of the justice of God in spite of the evils in God's creation; 3. rational theology (M. Sarot, "Theodicy and Modernity. An Inquiry into the History of Theodicy", in: A. Laato-J.C. de Moor (eds.), *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, Leiden-Boston 2003, 2-4). This study uses the term in the second way.

⁶ Müller also points out several clues in: H.P. Müller, "Theodizee? Anschlußerörterungen zum Buch Hiob", *ZThK* 89 (1992) 249-279.

demonstrate the diverse uses of the book and the different interpretations of particular passages⁷:

- 1 The view that an individual's sufferings are a divine punishment for his sins is repudiated in the book of Job.⁸
- 2 God's answer makes it clear that God's omnipotence is restricted. According to Kushner, God admits that he does not have absolute power and that therefore he is not always able to prevent bad things happening to good people.⁹
- 3 God's answer argues that God's ways are unobservable for human beings and that it is therefore impossible to formulate a theodicy.¹⁰ For example, Miskotte says that God's answer particularly manifests that God is the hidden one who reveals himself as the very powerful one, who can be trusted. From this, he concludes that each attempt to formulate a theodicy ignores God's elusiveness.¹¹
- 4 God acknowledges in the epilogue that he has acted unjustly in the case of Job.¹²
- 5 God's actions as depicted in the prologue are seen as demonic and amoral and as the actions of someone without any conscious reflection.¹³
- 6 The ordeal is a key for explaining Job's position in relation to God.¹⁴
- 7 The book of Job serves to show how one should behave in times of suffering.¹⁵

⁷ See, for example, A. de Wilde, *Das Buch Hiob. Eingeleitet, Übersetzt und Erläutert* (OTS XXII), Leiden 1981, 32-37.

⁸ J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, London-Melbourne-Toronto 1966, 179.

⁹ H.S. Kushner, *Als 't kwaad goede mensen treft*, Baarn 1983, 44-47 [= *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, New York, 1981; transl. by R. Vink]. Kushner bases this view particularly on 40,9-14. In several translations of Job 38-41, the numbers of the verses differ from the numbering of the Masoretic text in the BHS. In this study, I use the numbering of the BHS.

¹⁰ So for example D.Z. Phillips, "On not Understanding God", in: D.Z. Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion*, New York 1993, 154-159 [originally published in AF 56]. Phillips here deals with reflections of Tennessen on the book of Job. He also refers to 9,32 as a key text for this view.

¹¹ K.H. Miskotte, *Antwoord uit het onweer* (Verzameld werk 10), Kampen 1984 [1935], 182-209.252-281.

¹² A. van de Beek, *Rechtvaardiger dan Job. Gedachten bij het boek Job*, Nijkerk 1992, 91-92.

¹³ C.G. Jung, *Antwort auf Hiob*, Zürich 1952, 13.39. Bloch also characterizes the God of the prologue as demonic and holds that Job accomplishes an exodus from this God (E. Bloch, "Grenze der Geduld, Hiob oder Exodus nicht in, sondern aus der Jachwevorstellung selber, schärfe des Messianismus", in: E. Bloch, *Atheismus im Christentum. Zur Religion des Exodus und des Reichs* (Gesamtausgabe Band 14), Frankfurt am Main 1968, 148-166.

¹⁴ S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling; Repetition*, ed. and transl. by H.V. Hong-E.H. Hong, Princeton 1983, 209-210 [*Repetition*: 1843].

¹⁵ This is the basic thought in the commentary of Fohrer: "Wie zu Verhalten im Leiden" (G. Fohrer, *Hiob* (KAT 16), Gütersloh 1963, 549). Clines also points to this aspect, although it dominates his commentary less (D.A.J. Clines, *Job 1-20* (WBC 17), Dallas 1989, 53.66).

8 Some reflect on the book of Job from a specific point of view. For example, Gutiérrez interprets the book from the perspective of what it means with regard to talking about God in the context of the suffering poor in Latin America.¹⁶ Girard understands Job as the scapegoat of his community. According to him, the scapegoat represents the innocent who take the hatred of the community upon themselves.¹⁷

While, for instance, one thinks that God particularly demonstrates the elusiveness of his actions with regard to evil in his answer, another reads God's answer as God's acknowledgement that he lacks omnipotence and is, therefore, unable to prevent cruel events. While on the one hand the book offers valuable clues for theological thinking in the eyes of various scholars, its concept of God evokes some very critical reactions on the other. So, the book of Job plays a considerable role in people's reflections on God's involvement in the existence of evil and suffering. Several aspects of the issue of theodicy are recognised in it. But the understanding and the use of the book differ substantially. Sometimes they even oppose each other. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine how the book of Job can be understood and what it could contribute to the current debate on the issue of theodicy.¹⁸

1.1.2 Purpose of this Study

This present study intends to examine what the book of Job could contribute to systematic theology with regard to the debate on the issue of theodicy.¹⁹ Which useful language does the book provide for bringing up the issue of God's

However, in a more recent article, Clines says that he has come to doubt his support to this position (D.A.J. Clines, "Does the Book of Job Suggest that Suffering is Not a Problem?", in: E. Blumenthal-D.J.A. Clines-H. Lichtenberger (eds.), *Weisheit in Israel. Beiträge des Symposiums "Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne" anlässlich des 100. Geburtstag Gerhard von Rads (1901-1971) Heidelberg 18-21 Oktober 2001*, Münster 2003, 95). Noort similarly states that the book of Job asks the question of *dealing* [Noort's italics] with suffering that suddenly happens to a human being without a clear reason for it. From this experience, it is further questioned, but according to him the centre is here (E. Noort, "Job en zijn uitleggers. Het boek Job in de spiegel van de oudtestamentische exegeese", in: B. Siertsema (ed.), *Job: Steen des aanstoets?*, Kampen 1996, 12). Rather comparably Steinmann says that the central concern is how a righteous person maintains faith and how integrity comes in a crisis (A.E. Steinmann, "The Structure and Message of the Book of Job", *VT* 46 (1996) 95-100).

¹⁶ G. Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, New York 1987, xviii-xix [translation of *Hablar de Dios desde el sufrimiento del inocente*, Lima 1986; transl. by M.J. O'Connell].

¹⁷ R. Girard, *Hiob. Ein Weg aus der Gewalt*, Zürich-Düsseldorf 1990 [translation of *La Route antique des hommes pervers*, Paris 1985; transl. by E. Mainberg-Ruh].

¹⁸ An impetus for such an undertaking is e.g. given in: H.P. Müller, "Die Theodizee und das Buch Hiob", *NZStThR* 39 (1997), 140-156.

¹⁹ For a definition of 'systematic theology', see §1.2.1.

involvement in situations of unjustified suffering of sentient beings in our contemporary world? What does the book of Job have to offer and to ask of systematic theology with regard to the problem of innocent suffering? For this purpose, it is necessary first to investigate how the book of Job can be understood. As this study restricts itself to the value of the book of Job for systematic theology, it does not reflect on the hermeneutical process that lies at the basis of specific interpretations or use of some material from the book of Job.²⁰ I only deal with these regarding their exegetical or systematic theological claims. Also, since I look at the value of a biblical book for systematic theological thinking, the question arises of how these two are related to and interact with each other and I examine this topic in more detail in the next section.

1.2 The Relation between Scripture and Systematic Theology

1.2.1 Biblical Theology

Scripture has been constitutive for the Christian community of faith throughout the centuries and the community has based its belief and practice on it. However, this basis is not self-evident. Because of changing contexts and worldviews, the community must rephrase again and again how God and human beings living in a relationship with God should be spoken about. Dogma and theology have been formulated in order to indicate how God and human beings living in a relationship with God should be spoken about in a particular context. The discipline of *systematic theology* is concerned with this process of formulating the community's belief. It critically reflects on how Christian belief raises the issues of God, human beings, the world and the interaction between them within the context of our contemporary world. With this, systematic theology concentrates on what is meant when God is mentioned as well as on what living a life *coram Deo* implies. Since the Christian community of faith values the biblical writings as relevant for its belief and daily practice, Scripture is also an important source for systematic theology.²¹ It inspires systematic theological thinking. The questions now are; in what way can systematic theology appeal to Scripture for its reflections? How do Scripture and systematic theology communicate with each other? What status does biblical material have for systematic theology?

In the main, the bible does not contain theological expositions in the sense that it can directly be transferred into *systematic* theological tracts. Whereas a certain

²⁰ For a reflection on the hermeneutical process of some interpretations of the book of Job, see M. Wisse, *Scripture between Identity and Creativity. A Hermeneutical Theory Building upon Four Interpretations of Job* (ADSS 1), Utrecht 2003 [<http://adss.library.uu.nl/index.html>].

²¹ Systematic theology also has other sources such as the Christian tradition and insights from modern times.

level of reflection in some biblical texts can be found²², these texts mostly do not have the character of explicit reflection on or discussion about specific beliefs. This is also demonstrated by the fact that systematic theology often refers to biblical texts as a ‘proof’ text instead of taking biblical passages themselves as systematic theological expositions. However, the question now arises of how the community of faith and particularly systematic theology can make an appeal to these texts in order to support or inspire their theological claims. Even though biblical texts do not generally include systematic theological expositions, they do nevertheless often have –what we would label as– theological implications. Take, for example, the deuteronomistic work. This work deals with the community of faith’s burning question of how the traumatic devastation of Jerusalem and the deportation to Babylon could happen. Whereas the composers²³ do not elaborate their theological view on this event explicitly, a pattern of thought can be found in these texts that reveals how they explain God’s involvement in this event and answer this question. Repeatedly straying from God and showing devotion for other gods were the reasons for this catastrophe, which could be interpreted as a divine punishment according to them. With this, God’s actions are understood according to a relation between a person’s actions and what befalls them. This pattern of thought, which occurs in the deuteronomistic work again and again, can be characterized as the implicit or implied theology of these texts. This implicit theology is a pattern that underlies or is behind the text, but is not stated by the text itself. It is theology in a person’s mind –perhaps not even consciously–.²⁴ These theological implications can only be revealed by means of reconstruction.

It is the task of *biblical theology* to explicate theological implications of biblical texts.²⁵ The implicit theological insights in biblical texts are made explicit by biblical theologians. This discipline is inspired by the significance of biblical texts for the community of faith and systematic theology. They recognise clues in these texts which can be of importance for or play a role in their own theological thinking. Biblical texts have theological implications because the community of faith presupposes that their concepts, ideas, and images are relevant for contemporary discussion about God, human beings, and the interaction between them. This implies that biblical theology raises an external question within the biblical texts and interprets them with a specific interest. The leading question in the *Theology of the Old Testament* of Brueggemann is: “how does ancient Israel, in this text, speak about God?”²⁶ However, this is too limited because biblical

²² E.g. the Pauline letters.

²³ The authors/collectors/redactors.

²⁴ J. Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology. An Old Testament Perspective*, London 1999, 248.

²⁵ Barr, *Biblical Theology*, 248.

²⁶ W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament. Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, Minneapolis 1996, 117. In addition, he also includes in this question how God speaks.

theology also deals with the issue of what it means to live a life *coram Deo*. Therefore, biblical theology reconstructs and maps out how God, human beings, and the interaction between them in biblical texts are spoken about. Its result is an external construction which the scholar brings into the text.²⁷ Nevertheless, biblical theology is still an exegetical discipline. But it distinguishes itself from ‘non-theological’ approaches like, for instance, historical or literary readings that it reconstructs and arranges the exegetical results from the perspective of a theological interest. The discipline of biblical theology presupposes that the biblical texts are also relevant for the community of belief now.²⁸

The reconstruction of the implicit theology of a biblical text can result in the material sometimes being rendered into (theological) concepts and categories which would not always have been understood by ancient Israelites. This happens because theological implications are not explicitly put into words by the text itself. Moreover, theological concepts and modes of thought stem from later periods or are developed throughout periods. Barton’s example of God’s omnipotence illustrates this. He points out how Jews and Christians often read the Old Testament in the light of their understanding of omnipotence, that God is able to do everything, and has complete control of the universe and the history of human beings. While in classical theism God’s plans can never be frustrated, God’s power, however, consists of the ability and willingness to be prepared for specific circumstances and situations in the perspective of the Old Testament, according to Barton.²⁹ In this way, there is a considerable difference between views on God’s power in the Old Testament and in later theology. This example demonstrates the area of tension in which a biblical theologian operates. On the one hand, the interpreter’s own theological concepts and views might influence the explanation of a text and the reconstruction of its theological implications. Biblical theologians have to be aware of this risk. They should try to do justice to the supposed authentic meaning of the text in its historical context(s) as much as possible in order to give it a fair chance to speak. This view is embedded in the conviction that Scripture has an independent position over and above the community of faith.³⁰ This independence is best guaranteed, if one first tries to retrieve what the author(s) of a text wanted to communicate in their own context; this prevents the explanation

²⁷ See also L.J. van den Brom, “Systematische theologie en het publieke oordeel. Religie en het patatpantheon”, in: E. Noort-H. Zock (eds.), *Trends in de Groninger Theologie. ‘You Need a Busload of Faith to Get by’*, Delft 2002, 76. L.J. van den Brom, *Theoloog als jongleur. Positionering van de Christelijke geloofsleer* (Utrechtse Theologische Reeks 50), Utrecht 2006, 28. Barr describes this process as an imaginative one, which involves an imaginative construction (Barr, *Biblical Theology*, 204).

²⁸ Van den Brom, *Theoloog als jongleur*, 29.

²⁹ J. Barton, “Alttestamentliche Theologie nach Albertz?”, in: *Religionsgeschichte Israels oder Theologie des Alten Testaments?* (JBTh 10), Neukirchen 1995, 29-34.

³⁰ See also §1.2.2.

of a text favouring specific views of the community, although it is of course true that one's frame of reference affects one's understanding of a text. On the other hand, the community of faith and systematic theology consider biblical texts as relevant for their thinking. Therefore, theological implications of biblical texts have to be reconstructed. This calls for a space within which the encounter between Scripture and theology can take place. In this space, the religious categories of ancient Israel are expressed and reconstructed in contemporary categories. The discipline of biblical theology is the space for this encounter.³¹ "Biblical theology may thus have a sort of mediating function between critical biblical study and theology in the stricter sense", as Barr says.³²

There is some debate on the issue of the extent to which biblical theology should take the historical critical study of the bible into account. For example, Brueggemann is of the opinion that questions of historicity do not belong to the work of Old Testament theology. According to him, the speech of the community which can be found in the biblical texts is the proper object of study for Old Testament theology.³³ However, with this Brueggemann ignores the fact that this speech or text has functioned within a specific community. It put the community's belief into words and answered questions which were asked by the community. The texts were embedded in a religious, cultural, political, and economic situation. It seems to me that biblical theology should take these historical factors into account, because the awareness that biblical texts are determined by their situations has considerable impact. On the one hand, it opens one's eyes to the diversity of traditions in the bible. Groups have been arguing about how God could and should be spoken of in specific situations.³⁴ At the same time, Israel has confessed the different forms, names, and places of God as a continuum.³⁵ Biblical theology operates in the area of tension between this diversity and believed continuity. On the other hand, the processes of modification in biblical texts teach that God-talk is context related and has to be reinterpreted and adapted in changing circumstances in order to be able to mention God satisfactorily time and again. If we acknowledge this fact and realize that we also theologize within a specific situation, it leaves systematic theology room to modify existing concepts of God and to develop new, creative, and actual God-talk in order to formulate adequate God-talk for this moment.³⁶

³¹ Barton, "Alttestamentliche Theologie", 29.

³² Barr, *Biblical Theology*, 83.

³³ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 118.

³⁴ See E. Noort, "Tussen geschiedenis en theologie. Over valkuilen en mogelijkheden in de bijbelse theologie", *KeTh* 53 (2002) 214-215.

³⁵ E. Noort, "Teksten van toen voor lezers van nu? Het Oude Testament in de theologie", in: Noort-Zock (eds.), *Trends*, 129.

³⁶ See Noort, "Teksten van toen voor lezers van nu", 132. He remarks that we do not theologize for eternity nor describe truth apart from time and space.

1.2.2 The Interaction between Scripture and Systematic Theology

Gabler can be seen as the founder of biblical theology as an independent discipline outside the sphere of influence of dogmatic theology. In a well-known speech from 1787, he argues that biblical theology and dogmatic theology are two distinct disciplines. Gabler characterizes their distinct tasks as follows. Biblical theology has a historical character and hands down what the holy authors thought about divine matters. Dogmatic theology has a didactic character and teaches what each theologian thought about the divine matters from his own skill or according to, among others, influences of school, time, and place.³⁷ In my view, such a distinction between biblical theology and systematic theology is fundamental. On the one hand, it safeguards Scripture as an independent source for systematic theology which can surprise and offer new insights, or conflicts with theological views due to its independence. On the other hand, it leaves room for systematic theology's own creative process in order to find language by means of which God can be spoken of satisfactorily in conversation with the modern age. The relation between Scripture and systematic theology can then be described as an interaction. On the one hand, systematic theology appeals to Scripture as one of the sources for its thinking. On the other hand, biblical theology offers systematic theology insights from Scripture. The material from Scripture is accessible and applicable thanks to the fact that biblical theology maps out theological implications of biblical texts. This biblical theological exposition is descriptive. Systematic theology takes a critical stand towards the biblical material and evaluates its utility and relevance for speaking about God and human beings in relation to God in our contemporary context³⁸ and is thus prescriptive.

The basis of Gabler's thinking is that dogmatics should depend on exegeses instead of the reverse.³⁹ Gabler describes this path from Scripture to dogmatic

³⁷ J.P. Gabler, "Von der richtigen Unterscheidung der biblischen und der dogmatischen Theologie und der rechten Bestimmung ihrer beider Ziele", in: O. Merk, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments in ihrer Anfangszeit* (MThSt 9), Marburg 1972, 275-276 (For a shortened version: G. Strecker (ed.), *Das Problem der Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (WdF 367), Darmstadt 1975, 32-44. The original Latin text can be found in: J.P. Gabler, *Kleinere Theologische Schriften* II, eds. Th.A. Gabler-J.G. Gabler, Ulm 1831, 179-198).

³⁸ Compare Van den Brom, "Systematische theologie", 73. In an article, Clines mentions some ethical problems which he sees in different passages of the book of Job. Among others, he refers to the imposition of Job's suffering in the prologue and the fact that Job is kept in ignorance of the reason for his suffering (D.A.J. Clines, "Job's Fifth Friend: An Ethical Critique of the Book of Job", *Biblical Interpretation* 12 (2004) 233-250). One could say that these comments are systematic theological reflections on the biblical material.

³⁹ R. Smend, "Johann Philipp Gablers Begründung der Biblischen Theologie", in: R. Smend, *Epochen der Bibelkritik* (Gesammelte Studien. Band 3), München 1991, 104 [originally published in *EvTh* 22 (1962) 345-357].

theology as gradual one-way traffic. He thinks that biblical theology starts collecting the ideas of the various biblical authors by first interpreting the places and subsequently comparing them with each other.⁴⁰ Then dogmatic theology finally translates these ideas to today and questions their validity in Gabler's view.⁴¹ However, the idea that biblical theology first supplies the scriptural building blocks upon which the construction of systematic theology can subsequently be built is a simplification of the rather complex interaction between Scripture and systematic theology. The relation between both can be characterized as an interaction between two relatively independent entities in which they affect each other mutually.

On the one hand, there is a movement from systematic theology to Scripture. Since the Christian community of faith regards Scripture as guidance for its thinking and practice, systematic theology confronts the biblical texts with the question of what their theological implications are. This approach influences the way in which the biblical material is expressed and reconstructed because biblical theologians themselves also have certain theological views. Therefore, they operate in an area of tension. They try to do justice to the supposed authentic meaning of the text on the one hand, but their own frame of reference also impacts on the articulation of a text's implicit theology on the other.⁴² Either way, these preconceived ideas can have a heuristic function for exegesis. They can draw attention to specific facets and challenge the exegete to investigate how exactly to deal with this element in the text. For example, the dogmatic opinion that nobody is blameless before God can challenge an exegete to examine more closely the exact implications of Job's claim that he is blameless.

On the other hand, there is a movement from Scripture to systematic theology. Scripture provides systematic theology with insights, ideas, and concepts which can be useful for systematic theological thinking. This biblical material is somehow authoritative for systematic theology. However, it is a question of how systematic theologians attach authority to biblical texts and in what way they take them as a source. In a study on the uses of Scripture in modern theology, Kelsey analyses the different ways in which theologians appeal to Scripture. He suggests that "scripture may properly be said to be 'authority' for a theological proposal when appeal is

⁴⁰ Gabler makes a distinction in his work between *true* biblical theology, which is historical, and *pure* biblical theology, which isolates basic biblical concepts from the modifications of age by means of philosophical critique (Smend, "Gablers Begründung", 107; R. Smend, "Universalismus und Partikularismus in der Alttestamentlichen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts", in: Smend, *Epochen*, 118 [originally published in *EvTh* 22 (1962) 169-179]; see also Gabler, "Biblischen und dogmatischen Theologie", 276). However, such a distinction does not take into account that the supposition of timeless basic concepts ignores the historical aspect (compare Smend, "Gablers Begründung", 114). Moreover, God-talk or language more generally is always bound to the form of life in which it is used.

⁴¹ Gabler, "Biblischen und dogmatischen Theologie", 277-280.

⁴² See also §1.2.1.

made to it in the course of making a *case* for a proposal”.⁴³ Kelsey mentions Toulmin’s analysis of an informal argument’s pattern when an attempt is made to make a case for the conclusion (C) by appealing to data (D). Toulmin sums up different elements which can play a role in order to make a case for the move from (D) to (C). He mentions warrants (W), qualifiers (Q), rebuttals (R), and backings (B).⁴⁴ Kelsey’s point is that a passage or passages from Scripture might be entered as data or as one of these elements –(W), (Q), (R), or (Q)–, if we take theological proposal itself as the conclusion (C) of an argument. This means that Scripture may play somewhat different roles in an argument and it therefore lends authority in quite different senses, according to him.⁴⁵ These reflections give insight into the various ways in which systematic theology appeals to biblical material. Scripture does not only produce concepts or models, but also functions as a support for systematic theological arguments. So, its authoritative working is more complex and varied than is often assumed.

Even though there is more clarity now about the various ways in which biblical material can be authoritative in systematic theological argument, the question remains as to what extent it is authoritative or decisive. Kelsey suggests that a theologian’s decision to use the Scripture in a particular role in a theological argument is shaped by a theologian’s prior judgement about how best to construe the mode in which God’s presence among the faithful correlates with the use of Scripture in the common life of the church.⁴⁶ I would put this as follows; opinion about the authority of a scriptural argument depends on a person’s view of how God reveals himself in this world and how Scripture is related to this revelation. Whereas it is not my intention to deal with the issue of scriptural authority extensively in this study, I outline some presuppositions. In my view, human experience of God’s presence and actions in history finds its expression in Scripture. When the community of faith reads Scripture it also recognizes God’s own speaking in this expression of human observations. On the one hand, the diversity of how God is spoken of in Scripture is striking. This shows that these texts are situationally bound and make the community of faith aware that these texts are speaking in a human way about God’s presence and actions in this

⁴³ D.H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine. The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology*, Harrisburg 1999, 125 [= *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, Philadelphia 1975]. Kelsey considers it more illuminating to consider theologian’s appeal to Scripture as part of an *argument* rather than characterising the relation between Scripture and theology by means of what is in his eyes a misleading picture ‘translation’ (122-124).

⁴⁴ Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 125-129. A warrant is a general, hypothetical statement that authorizes the move from (D) to (C). A qualifier indicates that the move from (D) to (C) can only be made tentatively. Rebuttals indicate the circumstances in which the authority of a warrant would have to be set aside. A backing is an assurance behind the warrant, without which the warrant would have neither authority nor currency (126-127).

⁴⁵ Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 144.

⁴⁶ Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 167-170.

world.⁴⁷ Because of this, systematic theology evaluates biblical material and wonders to what extent it is useful for contemporary conversations about God and human beings living in relation to God. The implication of this is that systematic theology can give rise to arguments that criticize a biblical picture or even see it as inadequate for contemporary theological speaking.⁴⁸ This also means that, in comparison to those from Scripture, other arguments from traditional and modern thinking are somehow seen as authoritative for systematic theology.⁴⁹ On the other hand, theological thinking can not be detached from how God is mentioned in Scripture, because the community of faith has in one way or another experienced continuity in the diversity of how God is spoken of. The community has also determined a canon of texts which function as a form of guidance for its thinking and practice.⁵⁰ Therefore, the collective diversity somehow provides the community of faith with boundaries for how God might be spoken of within its daily practice.⁵¹ Scriptural authority operates within this area of tension where Scripture has a guiding role but is not infallible.

The concept 'Scripture' suggests a kind of wholeness or unity. At the same time, biblical material displays diversity within its believed continuity. This raises the question of exactly what systematic theology refers to in Scripture. According to Kelsey, theologians do not appeal to Scripture as such to help authorize their theological proposals, rather they decide on some aspect or some pattern in Scripture to which they appeal. He states that the 'text-construed-as-a-certain-kind-of-whole' is appealed to.⁵² I think that systematic theology indeed refers to some pattern in Scripture, but the extent of such a pattern can differ considerably. While it might be a broad line of thought in some bible book, a singular image can also be

⁴⁷ See also §1.2.1.

⁴⁸ A similar process has already been found in the bible itself. I mention two examples. First, Jehu was originally praised by the Lord for his total extermination of the Baal cult in Israel (2 Kgs.10,30). Since the reason for the Babylonian exile is that each king has sinned to some extent in the eyes of the deuteronomistic redactors, they added the editorial remark that Jehu did not carefully follow the law of the Lord by omitting to destroy the golden calves in Bethel and Dan (2 Kgs.10,29.31). Secondly, the books of Job and Qohelet can be seen as critical reflections on theology of the relation between a person's actions and what befalls them that is supposed in a considerable part of the Hebrew bible (e.g. in Proverbs and the deuteronomistic work). So, a process of criticizing and reformulating specific views on God and human beings living in relation to God in the light of new events or experiences has already been found within the bible itself.

⁴⁹ Kelsey suggests saying that theological criticism is guided by a *discrimen* instead of a 'norm' or 'criterion'. A *discrimen* designates a configuration of criteria that are in some way organically related to one another as reciprocal coefficients, according to him. Kelsey refers to J.C. Roberts with this description (Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 160).

⁵⁰ Although I do not intend to say that this canon excludes the possibility that there can also be other writings which can be valuable for the community of faith.

⁵¹ See also Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 196-197.

⁵² Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 103.

useful as a systematic theological model or argument. While an interrelated structure between bible books or even testaments may be helpful, the value of some biblical material can also be found in debate between two characters in a particular passage. In this way, the authority of Scripture takes different shapes. The nature of some biblical material which is appealed to as well as the way in which it is used in systematic theological thinking differs from case to case.

1.3 Outline of this Study

This study examines what the book of Job has to offer and ask of systematic theology with regard to the issue of theodicy.⁵³ This means that I approach the book with an external question. The community of faith considers biblical texts as relevant for its thinking and it has the impression that the book of Job somehow deals with the problem of innocent suffering. Therefore, it consults the book of Job and investigates which possible contribution this book might have to systematic theological thinking on this burning topic. The explanation of the interaction between Scripture and systematic theology in the preceding section showed that two steps are to be made in order to achieve this goal.⁵⁴ First, theological implications of a biblical text have to be reconstructed. This is the task of the discipline of biblical theology. Secondly, systematic theology evaluates the value and usefulness of this biblical material for its thinking. These two stages are successively undertaken in Part 1 and Part 2 of this study.

Part 1 is the biblical theological division of this study. In it, I map out theological implications of the different parts of the book of Job and offer a reconstruction of the frame of thought behind the passages of the different characters in the book of Job.⁵⁵ In my opinion, the book of Job as a whole wants to question some consequences of a theology that understands God's actions according to a relation between a person's actions and what befalls them.⁵⁶ As Job

⁵³ See also §1.1.2.

⁵⁴ §1.2.2.

⁵⁵ I take the all-knowing narrator as one of the characters.

⁵⁶ I do not fully deny that the book of Job also deals with the question of how to deal with situations of unmerited suffering (as several scholars do; see note 15 in this chapter). But I am convinced that the heart of this book is a theological problem. This is already highlighted by the satan in the prologue. His question of whether or not Job fears God for nothing (1,9) not only denounces Job's motives, but also questions the way in which God gains worship (see §6.2.2). The debate in the dialogue reveals some problematic consequences if God's actions are understood according to a relation between a person's actions and what befalls them. In the case of innocent suffering, God's righteousness is at stake. God's answer makes clear that God's actions in this world can not simply be indicated by a retributive scheme because human beings lack insight into God's counsel. It becomes clear from these different elements that the book of Job deals with the debate on how God's involvement in the occurrence of innocent suffering should be understood. Thus, it touches on a theological issue. Compare among others the following views on what the book of Job is about: 1. The nature/character of God (N. Whybray, "Wisdom, Suffering

9 is the heart of this questioning, the biblical theological part begins with an examination of the specific role that Job 9 plays in the book of Job (Ch.2). Later, it elaborates upon how Job's friends (Ch.3), Job (Ch.4), God (Ch.5)⁵⁷, and the all-knowing narrator (Ch.6) deal with God's involvement in the occurrence of evil and particularly in Job's miserable fate. In this way, Part 1 expounds how in the various passages of the book of Job, God is spoken of in relation to the existence of evil on the basis of a detailed exegesis.

Part 2 offers some systematic theological reflections concerning the issue of theodicy. These reflections are inspired by the biblical material from the book of Job. Here, I evaluate the results of Part 1 and examine what the biblical material has to offer and to ask systematic theology with regard to the issue of theodicy (Ch.8). I emphatically speak about *some* reflections because I am aware of the fact that the issue of theodicy is an extensive field which can not easily be grasped. Nevertheless, I hope to give some useful clues. In short, these systematic theological reflections consist of two aspects. On the one hand, the biblical material is challenged by systematic theological questions in order to investigate what the implications of its implicit theology are. This is a necessary step in order to evaluate whether or to what extent some material can be useful for systematic theological thinking. I wonder, for instance, whether the prologue's representation that Job's suffering is meant to be a test of Job's loyalty is not too problematic for understanding God's involvement in evil today.⁵⁸ On the other hand, some contemporary theological views and models are confronted with topics that the book of Job mentions. It has become clear how systematic theology appeals to biblical material in various ways.⁵⁹ This is also the case in the systematic theological part of this study. The book of Job will not only offer data for how God can be mentioned when evil happens, but also serve as, among other things, warrant and rebuttal in critical reflections on existing theological models.

and the Freedom of God in the Book of Job", in: K.J. Dell –M. Barker (eds.), *Wisdom. The Collected Articles of Norman Whybray* (MSSOTS), Ashgate 2005, 195-196.199-200; D. Cox, "A Rational Inquiry into God: Chapters 4-27 of the Book of Job", *Gr* 67 (1986) 624-625; see also the dissertation D.W. Nam, *Job 42: 7-9 and the Nature of God in the Book of Job* (Studies in Biblical Literature 49), New York e.a. 2003); 2. The suffering of the innocent (M. Tsevat, "The Meaning of the Book of Job", *HUCA* 37 (1966) 96. He remarks in opposition to Fohrer that there is a theoretical treatise in the book of Job); 3. The issue of God –God in his relation to evil and suffering (T.N.D. Mettinger, "The God of Job: Avenger, Tyrant, or Victor?", in: L.G. Perdue –W.C. Gilpin (eds.), *The Voice from the Whirlwind. Interpreting the Book of Job*, Nashville 1992, 39); 4. How to speak about God (Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 12.16-17: in the midst of poverty and suffering); 5. The conflict between God and Job, between the integrity of the Creator and the integrity of a particular mortal (N.C. Habel, *The Book of Job. A Commentary* (OTL), London 1985, 60).

⁵⁷ This chapter also includes Job's response to God's words.

⁵⁸ §8.5.5.

⁵⁹ §1.2.2.

The content of Part 2 illustrates this diverse use of the biblical material. On the one hand, elements from the book of Job serve as rebuttal and warrant in the evaluation of some systematic theological perspectives. I argue on the basis of God's exposition on Job's lack of insight into God's counsel that theological realism and theological idealism are both not tenable.⁶⁰ The book of Job serves here as a rebuttal. Thesis of this study is subsequently that theological relationism very closely meets the point of God's answer.⁶¹ Thus, God's answer provides systematic theology with a warrant that supports theologizing from the perspective of theological relationism. On the other hand, the book of Job also supplies data. For example, I propose that the book of Job demonstrates which different roles God fulfils or, in the eyes of a victim of evil appears to fulfil, in times of innocent suffering.⁶² In this way, the book provides systematic theology with language for speaking about God when evil happens. These different kinds of appeal to the book of Job by the systematic theological reflections in this study confirm that scriptural authority functions in diverse ways.

1.4 The Book of Job in Its Broader Setting

A text has functioned within a certain group or community. Insight into the form of life of this group can help to understand a text because the historical setting of a text has determined its opinions and concepts. A biblical theological approach also has takes note of this aspect.⁶³ However, one is directly faced with the limits of the preceding statement if one tries to place the book of Job in its historical context because this book hardly offers any decisive clue for dating it. It has a rather universal atmosphere and the leading character is a non-Israelite. Egyptian as well as Mesopotamian elements occur. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the time and place of its origin.⁶⁴

It becomes even more complex if one also takes the unity of the book of Job itself into account. For example, a considerable number of scholars agree that it is clear that the book itself also does not stem from one hand. Firstly, there is debate about the relation between the framework and the dialogue of book.⁶⁵ If one reads the prose of the prologue and epilogue together, it appears to give a reasonable

⁶⁰ §8.2 and §8.3.

⁶¹ §8.4.

⁶² §8.5.

⁶³ See §1.2.1.

⁶⁴ See also Clines' conclusion that 'the author has succeeded well in disguising his own age and background in his creation of the character of the hero' (Clines, *Job*, lvii). The proposals for dating differ from seventh to fourth century. There is further debate on which kind of group should be thought to be behind this book. For instance, is it a professional class of sages and if so, to which group in society was it related? Or is it the work of an individual?

⁶⁵ The framework consists of the prosaic prologue (Job 1-2) and epilogue (42,7-15). The dialogue contains the intervening poetic speeches (Job 3-42,6).

story. Here, Job is depicted as a kind of wealthy patriarch of high regard. The dialogue, on the other hand, consists of poetic speeches and depicts a rebellious Job in debate with his friends and is addressed by God at the end. These differences have led to the suggestion that two independent literary sources may lie at the basis of these two parts. Secondly, it is quite generally held that the ‘Song of Wisdom’ (Job 28) and the speeches of Elihu (Job 32-37) are later additions to the dialogue. The message of the Song of Wisdom, that wisdom is hidden and that fear of the Lord is wisdom, is strange in the mouth of the rebellious Job, who considers himself as blameless and charges God with unjust actions. It is likely that the speeches of Elihu are later added; he is not mentioned in the framework, he refers to several elements from the dialogue as well as God’s answer in his speeches, he stresses a pedagogical view on evil, his speeches strangely interrupt Job and God, and the language of these speeches differs from the other speeches.⁶⁶ So, the internal complexity of the book of Job increases the difficulty of embedding it in a historical setting.

It is not my intention here to deal extensively with all possible arguments for one or another particular setting.⁶⁷ I only mention some general considerations which lead to my opinion that it is most likely that the origin of the book of Job is in the fifth century BCA (maybe the end of it). Whereas an earlier folktale about Job may lie at the basis of the story of the framework⁶⁸, I am of the opinion that framework and dialogue in their current form are constructed with reference to each other. The dialogue assumes the scene in heaven in order to confirm Job’s innocence.⁶⁹ Furthermore, it would not have been necessary to mention the arrival of Job’s friends (2,11-13) and God’s address to the friends (42,8-9), if they had not spoken in between. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that the framework and the dialogue stem from one hand.⁷⁰ The deviating views of the Song of Wisdom and the speeches of Elihu make it probable that these parts are later additions.⁷¹ What is striking is the rather monotheistic concept of God. God operates outside

⁶⁶ See for an overview of the different arguments for this position during the research history: H.M. Wahl, *Der Gerechte Schöpfer. Eine redaktions- und theologiegeschichtliche Untersuchung der Elihureden -Hiob 32-37* (BZAW 207), Berlin-New York 1993, 8-14. Wahl’s own arguments for this view: 172-175. Clines proposes that the Elihu speeches originally followed Job 27 and were concluded with Job 28 (D.A.J. Clines, “Putting Elihu in his Place: A Proposal for the Relocating of Job 32-37”, *JSOT* 29 (2004) 243-253).

⁶⁷ See for an overview of different arguments and views e.g. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 29-43; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 51-60; Habel, *Job*, 35-42 (he defends the integrity of the book); Clines, *Job*, lvi-lix.

⁶⁸ The reference to Job in Ezek.14,14.20 could be an indication for this.

⁶⁹ See §2.2.2.3 and §2.2.3.

⁷⁰ Compare Clines, *Job*, lvii-lviii.

⁷¹ There are some other smaller passages in the dialogue which are probably later additions (e.g. the passage about the Behemoth and the Leviathan (40,15-41,26)). I will indicate this when I deal with such particular passages.

the borders of Israel and is also the God of the non-Israelite Job, although Job does not mention his particular name.⁷² This observation makes dating the text after the Babylonian exile all the more likely. The representation of ‘the satan’ in the prologue supports this view. It is related to the representation in Zech.3,1 where ‘the satan’ is also a kind of opponent.⁷³ This can be dated around 500 BCA. Two hundred years later, Satan becomes a proper name and represents an entity who accomplishes evil on his own initiative (1 Chron.21,1). This last observation can be taken as a further development and therefore as a *terminus ad quem*.⁷⁴ It is on the basis of these observations that I assume that the book of Job came into being in the course of the fifth century.

It is unclear whether the author either belonged to a group of sages or was a rather independent individual. However, the high artistic level of the book’s composition and the apparent familiarity with inner and outer biblical traditions indicate that he was a learned person who was familiar with topics and literature from Wisdom circles. In these circles, it was generally held that there is a relation between a person’s actions and what befalls them. There is debate as to whether God is particularly the preserver of such a rather independently operating order or God’s actions themselves are understood according to this relationship.⁷⁵ In the book of Job, the latter is the case.⁷⁶ The book of Job appears to be a critical reaction to an all too strict application of the relation between a person’s actions and what befalls them. Some have depicted this as a crisis in Wisdom thinking.⁷⁷ This is a rather strong characterization if it is applied to the book of Job. This book questions some aspects of the relation between a person’s actions and what befalls them but it does not fully reject it. The younger book Qohelet is more sceptical. That has the impression that this relationship is no longer adequate for understanding God’s actions with regard to human beings. The book of Job can be placed within this development of exploring the limits of ‘traditional’ Wisdom. At the same time, it has to be said that the problem of innocent suffering does not completely come out of the blue. Several writings from the broader surroundings in

⁷² The fact that Job is an Edomite has led to the suggestion that this might be a protest against the exclusivist politics of Ezra around 400 BCA (see e.g. De Wilde, *Hiob*, 54).

⁷³ See §6.2.2.

⁷⁴ Cf. De Wilde, *Hiob*, 55. See also Fohrer, *Hiob*, 83.

⁷⁵ See e.g. K. Koch, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?“, in: K. Koch (ed.), *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments* (WdF 125), Darmstadt 1972, 130-180 [originally published in *ZThK* 52 (1955), 1-42]; N.A. Schuman, *Gelijk om gelijk. Verslag en balans over goddelijke vergelding in het Oude Testament*, Amsterdam 1993.

⁷⁶ See §3.2.1.

⁷⁷ E.g. H.D. Preuß, *Einführung in die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur*, Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln-Mainz 1987, 69-70. He states that theological objections by the book of Job and Qohelet make clear that Wisdom was and is falsely orientated with its basic view (185).

the Ancient Near East have also touched on the relation between innocent suffering and the involvement of the divine being in it.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ E.g. “Dialogue between a Man and his God”; “A Sufferer’s Salvation”; “The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer”; “The Babylonian Theodicy”; “Dialogue of Pessimism”. For a translation, see W.H.Ph. Römer-W. von Soden (eds.), *Weisheitstexte, Mythen und Epen: Weisheitstexte I* (TUAT III/1), Gütersloh 1990, 110-163. See also Laato-De Moor, *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*.

Part 1

Chapter 2

The Central Position of Job 9 in the Book of Job

2.1 Introduction

It is the assumption of this study that an important purpose of the book of Job is to question the ‘theology’ that understands God’s actions according to a relation between a person’s actions and what befalls them. This view on God’s actions has been indicated as *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang* and was widely spread in Wisdom literature.¹ It supposes that human acts and their consequences are closely related. Koch is of the opinion that in Wisdom literature this relationship is an inner worldly mechanism where a person’s action brings their fate about without the intervention of God.² According to him, the poet of the dialogue of the book of Job also supposes such an inner worldly mechanism.³ However, this is not the case. Job and his friends consider God as the acting agent.⁴ In their eyes, God rewards the righteous with prosperity and punishes the wicked with misfortune.⁵ The book of Job forcefully questions this concept of retribution. Firstly, the prologue casts doubt on it by pointing out some possible –undesirable– side effects. The motive for devotion could be the reward with prosperity instead of fear of God. At the same time, one could get the impression that God enforces devotion because of the threat of misfortune if one sins.⁶ Secondly, the dialogue demonstrates the limits of the concept of retribution in the case of innocent suffering. This concept becomes problematic in cases where a miserable fate can not be explained by previous wrong behaviour. Then either the righteousness of God’s actions or the tenability of the concept of retribution comes under attack. This happens in the course of the dialogue because, as Job holds to his innocence, he can only draw the conclusion that God perverts justice (i.e. the concept of retribution) by punishing instead of rewarding him. The author of the book of Job questions the concept of retribution by depicting this impasse in the dialogue.

¹ See e.g. the book of Proverbs. In the text I use *the concept of retribution* to mean *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*.

² Koch, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma”, 131-140. He speaks of a ‘schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre’.

³ Koch, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma”, 172.

⁴ See §3.2.1.

⁵ See also Fohrer, *Hiob*, 140.

⁶ See §6.2.2.

In order to come to grips with the book of Job and its leading topic(s), it may be helpful to determine which part(s) of the book play a crucial role. By this, I mean passages which express an important or decisive idea or argument in expounding the leading topic in the course of the book. Different passages have been labelled as a culmination or crucial part of the dialogue or the book as a whole. Job's proclamation that he is sure that God will act as his lawyer at the final decisive moment and thereby bring about the decisive turn in process (19,25-27) is regarded by Hesse as one of the central parts of the dialogue.⁷ According to him, the dialogue's culmination and aim are reached with Job's declaration of innocence (Job 31), since this speech once again serves Job's innocence and demands God to answer.⁸ Laurin attributes a rather central function to the Song of Wisdom (Job 28). According to him, it summarizes what Job had heard –the traditional wisdom doctrine– and prepares the insight that faith finds its basic ground only in a personal encounter with God.⁹ Several other scholars call God's answer the culmination and decisive point of the book of Job.¹⁰ For instance, Weiser regards it as theologically relevant that it is God who finally takes the decision. Here it becomes clear that the solution to Job's question does not occur through some intellectual insight, but through an event in which God takes Job out, according to Weiser.¹¹ Van Wolde calls God's speech a climax because of its poetic beauty and since its poetry is so strongly connected with the preceding speeches that it is a fulfilment of several key passages of the book of Job.¹²

The Song of Wisdom takes a rather deviant stand in comparison with the rest of the book of Job. What is more, the opinion that wisdom is hidden and that fear of the Lord is wisdom does not summarize Job's preceding rebellion and charges against God at all. Therefore, it is not a central moment in the book. Job's final declaration of innocence (Job 31) is an important speech because it confirms that Job has not lost his conviction that he is blameless despite the arguments of his friends. With this, Job's charge that God has been acting unjustly persists. However, Job's innocence is one of the building blocks of the more drastic inference that God is guilty. This charge is decisively brought against God in Job 9. In it, Job draws the conclusion from his innocent suffering that God has been treating him unjustly. This inference questions the concept of retribution

⁷ F. Hesse, *Hiob* (ZBK 14.AT), Zürich 1978, 127-128.

⁸ Hesse, *Hiob*, 170. Clines calls Job 29-31 "the climax to Job's defence of his own innocence and his demand upon God that he explain for what reason he has been tormenting Job" (Clines, *Job*, xlv).

⁹ R. Laurin, "Theological Structure of Job", *ZAW* 84 (1972) 86-89.

¹⁰ E.g. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 536 (he includes Job's turn).

¹¹ A. Weiser, *Das Buch Hiob* (ATD 13) (2th rev. ed.) Göttingen 1956, 241 [1951].

¹² E. van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job. Job in gesprek met zijn vrouw, zijn vrienden en God*, Baarn 1991(2nd ed.: 1995), 121 [also available in English translation by J. Bowden: *Mr and Mrs Job*, London 1997].

inescapably. For, Job's innocence leads to the observation that God is not fully righteous, if God's actions are understood to be in accordance with the concept of retribution. This conclusion in Job 9 overshadows the further continuation of the dialogue. The situation does not change until God himself takes the floor. He replies to Job's accusation and places Job's observations and conclusions in a different perspective. Since the concept of retribution is decisively questioned in Job 9, this chapter holds a central position in the book of Job.

Job 9 introduces the image of the lawsuit in the book. It calls the concept of retribution into question by means of a reasoning *ad absurdum*.¹³ Job points out his impotent position before God, but holds to his conviction that he is blameless at the same time. Reasoning that according to the concept of retribution, Job can only draw the conclusion that God perverts justice because of his undeserved misery. The tragedy of Job's situation is that he is unable to challenge this injustice after all because he lacks strength before the powerful God. While Job 9 plays a central role in questioning the concept of retribution, it also connects the dialogue with the prologue and forms a bridge to God's answer and Job's reply at the end of the book.¹⁴ The relationship with the prologue intensifies Job's accusation. For, Job's conviction that he is blameless is confirmed by the prologue in which the narrator and God both mention Job's innocence.¹⁵ Different elements from Job 9 return in both God's answer and Job's reply. In each part, God's power as Creator is an important motif. The legal terms of Job 9 return in God's answer. Furthermore, Job foresees his final reply to God (40,4-5) in Job 9. He has already stated in Job 9 that he is unable to answer God because of God's superior power.¹⁶ In this way, Job 9 takes up a key position in the book of Job.¹⁷ It decisively questions the concept of

¹³ Compare H. Richter, *Studien zu Hiob. Der Aufbau de Hiobbuches, dargestellt an den Gattungen des Rechtslebens* (ThA XI), Berlin 1959, 127.

¹⁴ God's answer: 38,1-40,2; 40,6-41,26. Job's reply: 40,3-5; 42,1-6. See Ch.5

¹⁵ Compare E. Noort, *Een duister duel -Over de theologie van het boek Job* (Serie Kamper Cahiers 59), Kampen 1986, 17.

¹⁶ Cf. Noort, *Duister duel*, 15.

¹⁷ Cf. Noort, *Duister duel*, 14-15. See also K. Fullerton, "On Job, Chapters 9 and 10", *JBL* 53 (1934) 344-345. Egger-Wenzel considers Job 9-10 as the central chapters of the book of Job in a similar way (R. Egger-Wenzel, *Von der Freiheit Gottes, anders zu sein. Die zentrale Rolle der Kapitel 9 und 10 für das Ijobbuch* (FzB 83), Würzburg 1998). She mentions the following two elements. First, 9,19-24 is the first culmination in the dialogue, since Job declares God guilty there (the second culmination is in 27,2). Legal terms, which play an important role throughout the book, can be found here in high concentration (7-8). 9,20-24 forms a bridge between prologue and epilogue, since God's opinion about Job corresponds with Job's claim to be righteous and is indirectly confirmed by the denomination 'servant' in the epilogue (292). In 40,8, God adopts these same legal key words and answers Job's charges (117). Secondly, there is a thematic culmination of terms of light and darkness and their interrelated word fields in Job 9-10. These words point out Job's personal life-situation and support the friend's exposition of the 'Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang' in the book of Job (120.149). However, in my opinion, Egger-Wenzel

retribution and connects the debate between Job and his friends with the prologue on the one hand and God's answer and Job's reply on the other.

This second chapter deals with the central position of Job 9 in the book of Job. Firstly, I offer a detailed exegesis of this speech (2.2). Secondly, I indicate how Job 9 connects the dialogue with the prologue (2.3). The relation of Job 9 with God's answer and Job's reply is considered later in this study after I have further elaborated God's answer and Job's reply in Ch.5 (5.4.2).

2.2 Exegesis of Job 9

2.2.1 Translation

- I¹⁸ 9,2 Indeed, I know that this is so,
 but how can a human being be righteous before God?
 9,3 If He¹⁹ wished to contend with him,
 he would not be able to answer Him one in a thousand.
 9,4 Even a wise one of heart and a mighty one in strength²⁰,

does not make clear exactly how Job 9-10 plays 'a bearing role in the book of Job (117)'. Her study does not prove in what way the legal terms constitute the book and how Job 9-10 functions in questioning the concept of retribution. Furthermore, it is unclear why the symbolism of light and darkness is a leading image in the book. Egger-Wenzel, for example, only mentions two words (יָמִים (day) in 9,25; בֵּית עֵינַי (pit) in 9,31) for Job 9 in her survey (125). Such a limited number is not really convincing for being a leading image in the book. Köhlmoos calls Job 9 the culmination of the part Job 3-14 and later states that both Job 9 and Job 4-5 are decisive for the whole book of Job (M. Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes. Textstrategie im Hiobbuch* (FAT 25), Tübingen 1999, 150.181). See also C. Westermann, *Der Aufbau des Hiob Buches* (CTM 6), Stuttgart 1977 (2nd ext. ed.) [1956], 75-76; Cox, *Rational Inquiry*, 628.

¹⁸ In a study on the poetic structure of the book of Job, Van der Lugt takes the overall structure of the composition as a starting point. He proceeds from the overall structure to the lower levels of structuring, the strophes, and lines. Van der Lugt distinguishes strophes, canticles, and cantos (P. van der Lugt, *Rhetorical Criticism & the Poetry of the Book of Job* (OTS XXXII), Leiden-New York-Köln 1995, 33-35). However, starting from the overall structure can lead to forced structures. Therefore, I take the smallest unit –the colon– as the starting point. Several lines together form a strophe. Several strophes *can* form a larger unit, mainly based on a relationship with respect to the content (compare the arrangement in larger units of Job 9 by S.L. Terrien, *Job* (CAT 13), Neuchâtel 1963, 93-101; A. van Selms, *Job I* (POT), Nijkerk 1982, 82; Habel, *Job*, 178-180). These larger units are called 'stanzas'. In Job 9, I distinguish three stanzas: 9,2-13, 9,14-24 and 9,25-35. On the poetic structure of Job 9, see also J.P. Fokkerman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible. At the Interface of Prosody and Structural Analysis. Volume II: 85 Psalms and Job 4-14* (SSN), Assen 2000, 346-352.

¹⁹ The personal pronoun refers to God in this translation if it is written with capital letter.

²⁰ Many scholars read 9,4a as a *casus pendens* to לַיְהוָה (to him) (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 204; F. Horst, *Hiob I* (BKAT 16/1), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1968, 145; Hesse, *Hiob*, 82; Van Selms, *Job I*, 83; Habel, *Job*, 190; Clines, *Job*, 216; C.A. Newsom, *The Book of Job. A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, Oxford 2003, 152). Fullerton is of the opinion that the description of

who resisted Him and remained undamaged²¹?

- 9,5 Who moves mountains and they do not know it,
He overturns them in his anger.
- 9,6 Who shakes the earth from its place,
and its pillars tremble.
- 9,7 Who speaks²² to the sun and it does not rise,
He seals the stars.
- 9,8 Who alone stretched out the heavens,
and treads on the heights of the sea²³.
- 9,9 Who made the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the chambers of the south.²⁴
- 9,10 Who does great things that can not be fathomed,
and marvellous things that can not be counted.
- 9,11 If He passes by me, I do not see Him,
and He moves on, I do not perceive Him.

God's omnipotence in 9,5-10 attaches most naturally to 9,4a, if that clause refers to God (K. Fullerton, "Job, Chapters 9 and 10", *AJSL* 55 (1938) 238). However, Job would not call God wise of heart if the first half of the hymn (9,5-7) was taken into account. It is described there that God can act destructively in his anger. This reference to God's power explains why nobody remains undamaged before him (9,4b) and is not an elaboration of a 'wise' action of God. Therefore, 9,4a is a compound modifier of מִי (who) in 9,4b with concessive force (so R. Gordis, *The Book of Job. Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* (MorS), New York 1978, 102; Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 180; Terrien, *Job*, 93-94: he also mentions some formal reasons: 9,2-4 and 9,5-7 are two different strophes and חָכִים (wise) and גִּבּוֹרִים (mighty) are not participles with a definite article, which is a formal characteristic of a doxology).

²¹ Cf. LXX.

²² דַּבֵּר (to speak) reminds of the creative power in Gen.1 (same use of דַּבֵּר in Isa.44,26-27; Lam.3,37; Ps.33,4,6; 105,31.34; 107,25).

²³ Some commentaries change יָם (sea) into עָב (cloud) following some Hebrew manuscripts which is reminiscent of Baal who rides on the clouds (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 206; Hesse, *Hiob*, 78; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 141-142). In גִּבּוֹרֵי (height), others see a reference to mythic images in which the back of the god of the sea Yam is trampled by El as a victory against chaos (so M.H. Pope, *Job. Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 15), (3rd rev. ed.), Garden City-New York 1973 [1965], 70; Gordis, *Job*, 103; Habel, *Job*, 191; Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 207). However, the mythological notions are being divested in this context of concrete mountains, earthquakes, darkened stars, and a stretched out heaven (cf. J.L. Crenshaw, "W^odōrēk `al-bāmōtê `āreṣ", *CQB* 34 (1972) 47.52).

²⁴ For identification of the stars, see G. Schiaparelli, *Die Astronomie im Alten Testament*, Gießen 1904, 51-55; G.R. Driver, "Two Astronomical Passages in the Old Testament", *JThS NS* 7 (1956) 1-11; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 142-147.

- 9,12 If He snatches away, who can resist Him?
Who will say to Him: “what are You doing?”
- 9,13 God does not withdraw²⁵ his anger,
the helpers of Rahab bowed beneath Him.
- II²⁶9,14 How much less will I answer Him,
will I choose my words before Him,
9,15 if I were right, I would not be able to answer Him;
I can plead for mercy to my adversary²⁷.
- 9,16 If I called and He answered me,
I would not believe that He listened to my voice.
- 9,17 Who crushes me in a tempest²⁸,

²⁵ Fohrer translates ‘does not have to turn his anger’. He thinks that God can freely display his anger because he is so mighty and that he already conquered the forces of chaos at the time of the Creation (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 206-207). However, 9,13 does not express that God can choose whether or not he wants to display his anger, but describes the divine characteristic that God continues his plans.

²⁶ There is debate on the issue of where the first part of the poem ends and the second part begins. For example, Van der Lugt sees a division between 9,12 and 9,13. According to him, there is a parallel construction between 9,13-18 and 9,19-24: (a) 9,13 and 9,19 deal with God’s power; (b) 9,14 and 9,20 contain a statement about Job’s weakness and innocence respectively; (b’) these second themes are elaborated upon in the following lines (9,15-16; 9,21-22); (a’) God’s power is elaborated upon in the final strophes (Van der Lugt, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 121-122). Fokkelman also sees the division in stanzas between 9,12 and 9,13 (Fokkelman, *Major Poems*, 346-349). However, Van der Lugt’s construction b-b’ is artificial. 9,14-16 is a unity around the topic עָנָה. Furthermore, 9,22 is a statement about God and thus should earlier be counted as a’. While 9,13 is formulated in the third person and is a general statement about God, the first person is used from 9,14. Therefore, it is likely that 9,13 belongs to the first stanza and the fourth strophe. In response to 9,12, 9,13 states that God does not turn (שׁוּב). The more general statements of 9,2-13 are applied to Job from 9,14 (so also Van Selms, *Job I*, 82-83).

²⁷ מְשֹׁפֵטִי means in this legal situation ‘adversary’. God is Job’s adversary at law in this context and not his judge (cf. Habel, *Job*, 182; Van Selms, *Job I*, 86; see also the translations of Pope, Clines, Horst, Fohrer, and Gordis).

²⁸ שַׁעֲרָה is related to סַעֲרָה (tempest) and means ‘tempest’. Changing שׁ into ס is not necessary (see Nah.1,3). Several scholars change the vocalization into בְּשַׁעֲרָה (hair) and take it as a ‘trifle’ parallel to לָמָּה (for no reason) in 9,17b (so Terrien, *Job*, 97; Gordis, *Job*, 106; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 148; Pope, *Job*, 72; Clines, *Job*, 235). Tg. translates with בִּינְהָרָה חֹרְטִי (for a hair/trifle). However, the meaning ‘tempest’ does not cause any tension in the context and can therefore be rendered. Some scholars interpret ‘tempest’ as an instrument with which God wounds (Horst, *Hiob*, 148; Habel, *Job*, 179). But in correspondence with 38,1 and 40,6, the tempest is the place in which God acts (cf. Van Selms, *Job I*, 86). Job feels personally attacked by God. Taking the tempest as an instrument makes God too detached.

- and He multiplies my wounds for no reason.
- 9,18 He does not let me take my breath,
for He satisfies me with bitternesses.
- 9,19 If it is a matter of strength, behold Him²⁹,
if it is a matter of justice: “who can summon Me?”³⁰
- 9,20 If I were right, my mouth³¹ would condemn me,
if I were blameless, it would prove me guilty.
- 9,21 I am blameless; I do not know my soul,
I despise my life.
- 9,22 It is all one; therefore I say:
He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.
- 9,23 When a flood³² brings sudden death,
He mocks at the despair³³ of the innocent.
- 9,24 The earth is given into the hand of the wicked,
He covers the faces of its judges.
If it is not He, who then is it?³⁴
- III 9,25 My days are swifter than a courier,
they flee away without seeing good.
- 9,26 They go by like skiffs of reed³⁵,
like a vulture³⁶ fluttering³⁷ for his prey.

²⁹ Reading *הנהו* (see him) cf. Tg. because *הנה* (see) does not make much sense without a reference (cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 199).

³⁰ This verse contains an ellipse. ‘Then he says’ must be thought after *אם־למשפט* (if it is a matter of justice) (cf. Van Selms, *Job I*, 87). So, there is no need to change the suffix of *יִעֲיִדְנִי* (summon me) into *נֶ-* (him) (so Pope, *Job*, 72; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 199; Terrien, *Job*, 96; Hesse, *Hiob*, 79; Gordis, *Job*, 107; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 148; Clines, *Job*, 218). Nor does *יִעֲיִדְנִי* refer to Job (so Horst, *Hiob*, 149; Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 224), since this strophe (9,17-19) deals with God.

³¹ It is not necessary to change *פִּי* (my mouth) into *פִּי* (his mouth) (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 199; Hesse, *Hiob*, 79; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 148), since Job expresses his own impotence in answering God in this chapter (9,3.14-15).

³² *שׁוּט* means ‘flood’ cf. Isa.28,15.18. Fohrer and De Wilde point out that a suffix (ל-) is required for the meaning ‘scourge’ (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 199; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 148). Compare 22,11.

³³ *מַסָּת* can be derived from *מָסַס* (to melt). It expresses the despair of the innocent. See also 42,6 (§5.3).

³⁴ LXX reads *אם לא הוא מי אפוא*. The words *אפוא* (then) and *הוא* (he) seem to be confused in MT from a dogmatic point of view in order to tone down a direct accusation against God. I follow the reading of LXX.

³⁵ *אבה* is probably related to the Akkadian *apu* and the Arabic ‘aba which means ‘reed’.

- 9,27 If I say³⁸: “I forget my lament,
I restore³⁹ my face and am cheerful”,
- 9,28 I am afraid of all my sufferings,
I know that You do acquit me.
- 9,29 I have to be guilty⁴⁰,
why then do I labour in vain?
- 9,30 If I washed myself with snow⁴¹ water,
and cleansed my hands with ley,
- 9,31 You would plunge me into a pit⁴²,
and my clothes would abhor me.
- 9,32 For⁴³, He is not a human being like me; I could answer Him⁴⁴;

³⁶ According to Keel, the bold place on his head mentioned in Mic.1,16 and the attribute of feeding himself with bait (39,29-30) characterizes the נשר as a ‘vulture’ and not as an ‘eagle’. (O. Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob –Eine Deutung von Ijob 38-41 vor dem Hintergrund der zeitgenössischen Bildkunst* (FRLANT 121), Göttingen 1978, 69, note 234).

³⁷ Parallel to הלף (to go by) in 9,26a, the verb טוש expresses a fluttering around looking for food.

³⁸ Reading אמרתִי cf.7,13 instead of אמרי.

³⁹ Dahood reads עזב II (to restore) here, which he derives from the Ugaritic ‘db (arrange) (M. Dahood, “The Root עזב II in Job”, *JBL* 78 (1959) 304). HAL also reads עזב II. However, Williamson doubts whether a derivation from the Ugaritic ‘db is possible (H.G.M. Williamson, “A Reconsideration of ‘zb II in Biblical Hebrew”, *ZAW* 97 (1985) 77). Parallel to שכח (to forget), restoring Job’s face expresses leaving behind his worries.

⁴⁰ The imperfect ארשע (I am guilty) expresses a necessity according to the judgement of another person (E. Kautsch (ed.), *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (transl. and rev. by A.E. Cowley), 2nd ed., Oxford 1910, §107n). Egger-Wenzel states that Job declares himself guilty (Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 235). But Job, on the contrary, is convinced that he is blameless (9,21). He argues in Job 9 that he has to be guilty beyond his influence. See also the interpretation (§2.2.2.3).

⁴¹ Preuß reads שלג as an equivalent of the Mishnaic אשלג and the Talmudic שלג, which means ‘soap’ (J. Preuß, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Heilkunde und der Kultur überhaupt*, Berlin 1921, 431). Clines, Fohrer, Gordis and De Wilde follow him. They read שלג parallel to בבר (with ley) as ‘soap’. However, snow can be an image for cleanness (Isa.1,18; Ps.51,9; Lam.4,7). Since cleansing is the topic here, ‘snow’ is preferable.

⁴² A pit filled with water and mud is the most likely interpretation of שחת (cf. Van Selms, *Job I*, 89; Clines, *Job*, 220; Gordis, *Job*, 110). Other proposals: 1. The loathsome waters of the netherworld (Pope, *Job*, 75); 2. The netherworld (Habel, *Job*, 196); 3. Changing שחת into שחת, which is equal to סחת (Isa.5,25) and means ‘filth’ (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 200; Horst, *Hiob*, 141).

- we could come to a lawsuit together.
 9,33 There is no⁴⁵ arbitrator between us,
 who could lay his hand on us both.
- 9,34 That He removed his rod from me,
 and his terror did not terrify me,
 9,35 I would speak without fear of Him,
 for I⁴⁶ am not so in myself.

2.2.2 Interpretation of Job 9

2.2.2.1 Introduction

The general issue of Job 9 is brought up by means of two central lines interacting with one another. On the one hand, Job mentions his own situation. He assumes that he suffers unjustly because his righteousness should have been rewarded with prosperity according to the concept of retribution. Job introduces the image of the lawsuit. He considers his misfortune as God's charge against him and wonders how a human being can be righteous before God. Job determines that he can not be proved right before God despite his innocence because he is unable to respond God adequately in a legal case. Job has the feeling that he is in the hands of God's

⁴³ Clines reads 9,32-33 as a third attempt to become righteous before God after 9,27-28 and 9,31-32. He translates כִּי (for) with 'if' (Clines, *Job*, 242). But כִּי in 9,32 expresses the reason why any effort to find justification can not succeed. Moreover, while the condition begins with אִם (if) in 9,27 and 9,30 and God is addressed in the second person in 9,28 and 9,31, 9,32 begins with כִּי and God is not addressed in the second person in 9,33. Therefore, 9,32-33 is not a third attempt.

⁴⁴ אֶעֱנֶנּוּ (I could answer him) is not restricted to a prelude for 9,32b, in which 9,32b is the content of the answer and is understood as a challenge to God (so Pope, *Job*, 70; Clines, *Job*, 215.242). It stands parallel to 9,32b. Both express the possibility of answering God in a lawsuit.

⁴⁵ Several scholars read לֹא (would that there were...) instead of אֵין (not). They consider 9,34-35 as a continuation of this wish (so Terrien, *Job*, 99; Pope, *Job*, 76; Gordis, *Job*, 111; Van Selms, *Job I*, 90; Clines, *Job*, 220). Different Hebrew manuscripts also read לֹא and LXX reads ε⇒ψε ±ν. However, 9,33a stands parallel to 9,32a. In both parts, an attribute of God is formulated by means of a negation. Because of this parallelism MT can be maintained. Either way, the argument that the combination אֵין אֵין is not found elsewhere in the Hebrew bible is not really tenable for a poetic text in which a *hapax legoumena* more often appears.

⁴⁶ Fohrer and Gordis change אֵין אֵין (I) into אֵין אֵין (he) and translate כִּי (so) with 'just': 'for he is not honourable/just with me'. According to them, Job concludes that God lets power come first before justice, through which the innocent are treated unjustly (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 200.213; Gordis, *Job*, 111). However, such a correction is radical and the meaning 'just' of כִּי is improbable because there is an inclusion with 9,2 where כִּי means 'so'.

power. Any attempt to evade his misery will not succeed. It seems that he has to be guilty before God beyond his guilt. On the other hand, Job describes God. He depicts God's superior power and sovereignty and describes God's actions as inscrutable. From this, Job infers that God has the opportunity to abuse his sovereign position. The accusation that God indeed does so follows in the course of the speech. God increases wounds for no reason and treats the righteous and the wicked equally. At the same time, God can not be called to account for this injustice because of his sovereignty.

These two lines –Job's own situation and the description of God– expound the main topic of Job 9. Job's innocence and impotence are opposed to God's power and sovereign position. Facing God's power Job is unable to be proved right in a lawsuit with God despite his innocence. This implies that he can not challenge God's unjust treatment of him. As God's actions are inscrutable and because God holds a position in which he has the freedom to abuse his power at the same time as Job is convinced that he is blameless, Job can only conclude one thing. God must be the one who perverts justice. Considering Job's misfortune, God treats Job as a wicked, even though Job is blameless.

2.2.2.2 *Stanza I*

Job's impotent position before God is directly brought up at the beginning of this speech. In 9,2, Job refers to his friends' preceding speeches. כִּי (so) refers the previous speech of Bildad (Job 8). There, Bildad guarantees that God does not pervert justice (8,3) and does not reject the blameless (צַדִּיק) (8,20). The word 'justice' here refers to the concept of retribution.⁴⁷ Job knows this guarantee but doubts whether it is viable. A reference to words of Eliphaz serves to express this doubt. In 4,17, Eliphaz tells of a night vision which asks *whether* a human being can be righteous before God. The further course of the night vision makes clear that this is impossible.⁴⁸ Job addresses this same question in 9,2b, but changes it somewhat and wonders *how* a human being can be righteous before God. The night vision's negative answer can also be heard in Job 9. For, in the course of this chapter, Job draws the conclusion that being righteous before God is impossible despite one's innocence. Even though Job is familiar with Bildad's assurance in 8,3, he will conclude that as a blameless person he can not be righteous before God. Therefore, 9,2a has to be read ironically.⁴⁹ The nature of this 'being righteous' is forensic under the influence of the following verse. In 9,3, the image of the lawsuit is introduced in the book of Job by the word בָּרַח (to contend). The verb עָנָה (to answer) in 9,3b has a juridical meaning in this forensic

⁴⁷ See §3.2.1.

⁴⁸ 4,18-21. For the explanation of this night vision, see §3.4.

⁴⁹ Fullerton, "Job" (1938), 244. Compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 203: he also refers to the ironic tone of אִינֶנֶן (indeed) in 12,2.

context and is the opponent's charge or defence.⁵⁰ Whereas, צַדִּיק (to be righteous) has an ethico-religious meaning in 4,17 and expresses a moral and religious state of human beings, next to טָהוֹר (to be pure), this verb means 'to be proved right in a lawsuit' in 9,2.⁵¹ A human being can not be proved right before God because he will not succeed in defending his case in the front of God.

It is unclear who are the subjects in 9,3. Several arguments are in favour of taking a human being as the one who wishes to contend with God (9,3a); just as in 13,3 where Job wants to plead (רָחַם) with God, it could be that a human being is also the subject of יִפְתָּח (to wish) in 9,3.⁵² Furthermore, עִמּוֹ (with him) in 9,3a can be read as עִמ־אֱלֹהִים (before God) in 9,2b, so that 'him' refers to the same person in both 9,3a and 9,2b, namely God.⁵³ Finally, Elihu takes Job as the subject when he asks why Job contends with God, whereas God will not answer (33,13). It could therefore be that in 9,3, God would not answer Job if God was brought to trial by him.⁵⁴ However, the verb רָחַם is used each time for another person contending with Job in Job 3-31. In 13,19 and 23,6, רָחַם is used for the reaction of the other at Job's attempt to be proved right. Job reproaches his friends for contending with him in the name of God (13,8) and in 10,2, Job asks God why God is contending with him. Correspondingly, the other –God– is also the subject of רָחַם in 9,3.⁵⁵ Within the image of the lawsuit, Job understands his suffering as God's charge against

⁵⁰ Cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 204.

⁵¹ Cf. Fullerton, "Job" (1938), 250. Fullerton distinguishes between a forensic and an ethico-religious meaning of the verb צַדִּיק, although there is not a strict distinction between both meanings. According to him, they sometimes merge into each other (244-254). See also Habel, *Job*, 189; K. Budde, *Das Buch Hiob übersetzt und erklärt* (HK II/1), Göttingen 1896, 40; B. Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob* (KHC), Freiburg-Leipzig-Tübingen 1897, 50; Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 151. Some think that this shift into a forensic meaning in 9,2 is meant to be ironic (so Fullerton, "Job" (1938), 254; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 203-204. They read the author's ironic intention up to and including 9,4). However, this is not the case because that would ignore the sharpness of Job's complaint in this speech. For similar reasons, I would not call Job 9 a *parody* on a trial with God (so Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 153ff). Job bitterly establishes that each attempt to enter into a lawsuit with God will fail.

⁵² So Budde, *Job*, 40; Horst, *Hiob*, 144-145; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 141. They also read a human being as the subject of אָנַח (to answer) in 9,3b because he is not able to object to God.

⁵³ So Fullerton, "Job" (1938), 232. He also points to 9,14, where Job can not answer God. In this way, no change in subject is required in 9,2b and 9,3a.

⁵⁴ So Habel, *Job*, 189. Most scholars read 'human being' as the subject of 9,3a: e.g. Fohrer, Hesse, Gordis, Clines, Egger-Wenzel.

⁵⁵ So also Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes*, 205.207 (note 1). Van Selms reads God as subject of יִפְתָּח too. He mentions Gen.3,9-13 as an example for a disputation of God with a creature. Van Selms also points to Job 38-39 where God puts a 'thousand' questions to Job, but Job is unable to answer them (Van Selms, *Job I*, 83). The Dutch bible translation of 1951 (NBG) also takes God as the subject of 9,3a, but regretfully the new Dutch translation of 2004 (NBV) has not maintained this.

him.⁵⁶ Egger-Wenzel argues that for God there is no advantage in beginning to contest with a creature. Therefore, she reads human being as the subject of **גִּבּוֹר**.⁵⁷ However, being proved right against the satan could be to God's advantage. While God is the one who is contending with Job in Job 9-10, Job will later also express his intention to bring God to court. In this way, the image of the lawsuit does not work one-way, from Job to God. Both God and human being can be plaintiff as well as defendant in the book of Job.⁵⁸

A human being is the subject of **עֲנֵה** (to answer) in 9,3b. For, the impossibility of answering God in a lawsuit is elaborated upon in the course of this speech.⁵⁹ This impotence has already been expressed in 9,3. A human being is unable to answer one in a thousand questions of God. This statement gives a first answer to Job's question of how a human being can be righteous before God (9,2). It is impossible because he is unable to reply to God in a lawsuit. This tenor is continued in 9,4. Even a wise and strong human being will not remain undamaged in an attempt to oppose God.

The rather ambivalent character of this God is described in the following hymn (9,5-10). The hymn elaborates upon why a human being does not remain undamaged before God (9,4). The first half of the hymn (9,5-7) shows how God can act destructively in his anger. This anger is explicitly mentioned in 9,5. God's **אַף** (anger) is a reaction against injustice and wickedness and results in punishment and destruction by God.⁶⁰ Outbursts of anger is a divine characteristic (40,11) and God's actions in 9,5 are examples of this. Moving away (**עָרַק**) a rock is used as an image of God's destruction of hope (14,18-19) and is connected with Job acting in anger (18,4). Furthermore, the verb **הִפְּךָ** (to overturn) expresses God's destructive action. The waters overwhelm the earth through the agency of God (12,15) and God overturns the mighty in the night (34,25). In this way, 9,5 describes violent and destructive actions which are performed by God in his anger. **לֹא יָדְעוּ** (they do not know it) points out their unexpected and obscure nature.⁶¹ These wrathful actions demonstrate God's power and sovereignty. This demonstration continues in 9,6-7. The earth and the heavenly bodies also belong to God's dominion. God can

⁵⁶ Elihu and God subsequently turn this view around. They accuse Job of being the one who is contending with God (33,13; 40,2).

⁵⁷ Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 178-179.

⁵⁸ Cf. M.B. Dick, "The Legal Metaphor in Job 31", *CQB* 41 (1979), 38-40. Dick points out that Job's lamentable state is evidence that God has initiated legal action against him (40). Job's request in 13,23 implies that he is the victim of a prior juridical action (38). In his defence against Eloah's judgement Job becomes a plaintiff (40, note 17). Pace Many, who argues that only Job is contending in the book of Job because a charge by God or by his friends is lacking. The speeches of God are only God's self-defence according to him (G. Many, *Der Rechtsstreit mit Gott (RIB) im Hiobbuch*, München 1970, 217).

⁵⁹ 9,14-16.20.

⁶⁰ The evildoers perish by the breath of God's anger (4,9). See also 16,9; 20,23.27-28.

⁶¹ Here, Habel refers to the ignorance of Job in 9,11 (Habel, *Job*, 190).

prevent the sun from rising to its common place and cover the stars so that they do not shine. With this, 9,7 mentions God's control of day and night.⁶² Human beings are subordinated to this superior power with which God can act destructively and because of this they do not remain undamaged if they resist God (9,4).

The second half of the hymn (9,8-10) depicts God's creative power. God stretches out the heavens like the canvas of a tent (9,8a).⁶³ Here, the modifier לְבַדּוֹ (alone) emphasizes God's power as Creator in this.⁶⁴ The stars are also made by God (9,9) in which the notion of God as the Creator of the seasons plays a role.⁶⁵ However, God also has the strength to act in the Creation. In God's answer, God asks Job whether he has penetrated the sources of the sea (38,16), while in Job's speech God is walking on the crests of the waves (9,8b). The hymn ends with a characterization of the nature of God's violent and creative actions (9,10). These actions are unfathomable, marvellous, and uncountable. The word אִקְרָא (unfathomable) is used for God's inscrutability for human beings.⁶⁶ It also expresses the fact that God fathoms Creation (28,27), unlike Job who is unable to do this (38,16). נִפְלְאוֹתָ (marvellous) returns in 42,3, where Job admits that he has spoken about things without understanding them. Eliphaz interprets God's unfathomable and marvellous actions as righteous and beneficial. According to him, God saves the humble and catches the wise in their craftiness (5,9ff). However, Job describes God's unfathomable and marvellous actions as powerful and wrathful.⁶⁷ He also counts God's unforeseeable and violent actions among them. With this, a first trace of Job's accusation against God appears in Job 9. The impossibility of being righteous before God is apparently connected with God's inscrutability.

The consequences of God's powerful and unfathomable actions are elaborated upon in 9,11-13. In 9,11, Job applies God's inscrutability to his own experience. If God passes by, Job does not observe him.⁶⁸ This physical experience bears a deeper meaning. The verb בִּיַּן (to perceive) in 9,11b sometimes occurs parallel to the verb

⁶² Compare Isa.13,10-13.

⁶³ Compare Isa.40,22.

⁶⁴ See also Isa.44,24. Gordis thinks that the poet stresses the monotheistic theme by לְבַדּוֹ (Gordis, *Job*, 103). So also Egger-Wenzel, who states that the Creation hymn shows that God will carry through his claim to the absolute power against the polytheistic pantheon (Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 209). However, it is out of the question that the author of the book of Job would be interested in a polemic against polytheism. God's dominion is clear from the prologue, where the satan and the heavenly council fall within the control of God.

⁶⁵ Cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 206; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 144-146.

⁶⁶ 11,7; 36,26.

⁶⁷ Compare Habel, *Job*, 191; Clines, *Job*, 232; H.J. Hermisson, "Notizen zu Hiob", *ZThK* 86 (1989) 131.

⁶⁸ This seems to allude to Exod.33,18-23, where Moses sees God from behind when God passes by. Elisha covers his face and hears God when God passes by (1 Kgs.19,11-13).

יָדַע (to know).⁶⁹ Job states that he does not perceive God, if he is looking for him (23,8). He also uses the verb when he admits that he has spoken without understanding (42,3). So, not seeing God points to Job's inability to see through God's ways. The implication of this observation is that nobody is able to stop God or call him to account (9,12). Zophar mentions a similar view in 11,7-10 when he states that Job can not find the unfathomable things of God and asks who can restrain God (מִי שׁוֹב), if he passes by (וְהִלָּךְ⁷⁰) 'and captures'. In 9,12, Job draws the conclusion that God is able to misuse his position and act in a morally reprehensible way. For, 'who can resist God, if he snatches away?' There is a fundamental difference between God and human beings. Therefore, God's actions can not be fathomed or stopped nor can God be called to account.

The absence of human influence on God's actions is further illustrated by 9,13. God continues his plans and does not change his mind because of human requests or protests.⁷¹ The verb שׁוֹב (to withdraw) refers to שׁוֹב in 9,12. The question of who can resist God (9,12) is responded to with the statement that God does not let himself resist and thereby does not withdraw his anger. אַף (anger) refers to God's violent actions due to his anger in 9,5ff. The remaining submission of the forces of chaos in 9,13b illustrates that this anger is irreversible.⁷² The helpers of Rahab seem to be related to the helpers of the monster Tiamat in *Enuma Elish*. רַהַב (Rahab) expresses that what opposes to order. The remaining submission of the forces of chaos is the result of God's permanent anger. It indicates his strength and shows that God operates imperturbably in his anger.⁷³

2.2.2.3 Stanza II

The second stanza applies the impotent position of human beings before God as mentioned in the first stanza to Job. Thanks to the opening כִּי אַף כִּי (how much less) in 9,14, the question of how to be righteous, the image of the lawsuit, and the impossibility of responding adequately to God responding now apply to Job. If a wise and strong person and even the forces of chaos remain submissive to God, how much less will Job be able to formulate an adequate answer in a lawsuit with God while facing God's superior power? On the one hand, even if Job was right, he would not be able to answer God because impressed by his superior power (9,15). Pleading for mercy seems the only solution in this case. Bildad mentions the verb נִגַּן (to plead for mercy) as a condition for restoring Job's righteous abode (8,5).⁷⁴

⁶⁹ 14,21; 15,9; 42,3.

⁷⁰ הִלָּךְ also alludes to 4,15, where רַחַק (wind) passes by the face of Eliphaz.

⁷¹ Compare 23,13-14.

⁷² Van Selms points to the perfect of נָשָׂא (to bow). According to him, this indicates that the helpers have to submit beneath God's feet once and for all (Van Selms, *Job I*, 85).

⁷³ See also 26,12; Ps.89,11; Isa.51,9.

⁷⁴ In 19,16, Job has to plead for mercy from his servant.

It is unclear whether Bildad supposes that Job is wicked to some extent, when he gives this advice.⁷⁵ In 9,15, pleading for mercy opposes the attempt to be proved right by means of answering God in a lawsuit. But pleading for mercy seems insufficient for Job. He can not do this without losing his integrity.⁷⁶ On the other hand, Job would not believe that God had listened to his voice if God did answer his call in a lawsuit (9,16).⁷⁷ Eliphaz advised Job to place his cause before God (5,1).⁷⁸ However, Job does not believe that God would incorporate Job's complaint in his response. Instead, God would ignore what Job had said and overpower him.⁷⁹ In this way, it is impossible to be righteous before God, even if someone is right.

Job accentuates the imputative character of God's treatment of him.⁸⁰ God crushes him in a tempest and multiplies his wounds for no reason (9,17). The tempest refers to the whirlwind, in which God speaks to Job.⁸¹ Job feels hurt by God in the tempest but he will come to experience that God speaks to him from it.⁸² The charge of 9,17b is even more serious. Job states that God improperly inflicts harm. He refers to his blamelessness. God does not have a reason for letting Job suffer because Job has not sinned. The word **למה** (for no reason) refers to the prologue⁸³ in which God states that the satan incited God against Job for no reason.⁸⁴ In this way, the reader knows that Job speaks the truth in his charge without being aware of it. God indeed increased wounds for no reason by letting

⁷⁵ See §3.2.2.

⁷⁶ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 234.

⁷⁷ In 13,22 and 14,15, **קרא** (to call) and **ענה** (to answer) are used for the possibility that God calls and Job answers.

⁷⁸ **דבר** (cause) does not have juridical meaning here. See also his question in 5,1.

⁷⁹ Cf. Habel, *Job*, 193. Compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 208; Clines, *Job*, 234. Jepsen points to the fact that the verb **אמן** (to believe) occurs with a negation nine times in the book of Job. According to him, the verb seems to be accompanied with some extent of scepticism in Wisdom literature (A. Jepsen, art. **אמן**, in: ThWAT I, 322-324).

⁸⁰ Newsom takes this violent action by God as a description of Job's imagined encounter with God in a trial (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 144). However, I take these verses as a depiction of God's current behaviour towards Job. For, Job's wounds have already been multiplied for no reason.

⁸¹ 38,1; 40,6.

⁸² Compare A. Luc, "Storm and the Message of Job", *JSOT* 87 (2000) 111-123. He thinks that the use of 'storm' in 9,17 carries a forward looking function, providing an ironic foreshadowing of God's speaking to Job from 'the whirlwind'. Then Job will see that God does not crush him with a whirlwind, but appears in it (112-113.120). Habel points to the fact that Job had already experienced the terror of a 'mighty wind' wrecking his abode (1,19) (Habel, *Job*, 193). Luc thinks in this case that the storm image serves as a bridge between the prologue and the speeches (Luc, "Storm", 115).

⁸³ Hermisson, "Notizen", 129.

⁸⁴ 2,3. See also §6.2.2.

the satan hurting the righteous Job.⁸⁵ This awareness intensifies Job's complaint because God confirms that Job's claim is true.⁸⁶ Job continues his complaint in 9,18. God does not give Job opportunity to breathe (9,18a) where רִיחַ (breath) refers to the spirit and the breath by which God gives life.⁸⁷ Job accuses God of depriving him of his ability to live his life and instead God satisfies him with bitternesses.⁸⁸ Therefore, Job does not believe that God would answer him (9,16). It seems unlikely that a God who increases wounds for no reason would seriously respond a human being in a lawsuit.⁸⁹

These injuring actions by God are connected with God's power. In 9,19a, כֹּחַ אֱמִצָּה (strength) is ascribed to God. Job depicts God's strength in a bad light. He expresses the suspicion that God misuses his strength by multiplying wounds for no reason. A quotation of God's words increases this suspicion (9,19b). The question 'Who can summon me?' is reminiscent of some challenging words from God in Jer.49,19; 50,44. In it, God announces a devastating action against his opponents and challenges: "For who is like me and who can summon me?" This appeal to God's sovereign position can also be heard in 9,19. It intensifies the foregoing accusation because it provocatively confirms that nobody can call God to account when he multiplies wounds for no reason. With this, Job slowly works around to his ultimate charge that God abuses his position and acts unjustly (9,22-24). Again Job's impotence in relation to God emerges. God can not be called to account because of the inequality between God and human beings.

The seventh strophe (9,20-21) mentions another important ingredient for Job's argument besides Job's innocence. In 9,21, Job frankly claims that he is blameless. This conviction questions God's actions. For, according to the concept of retribution, Job's suffering would be unjust if Job was innocent. The conclusion that any attempt to answer God adequately in a lawsuit will not succeed precedes this statement. In 9,20, Job maintains that he would condemn himself, even if he was innocent. The divine sovereignty as described in the preceding verses impresses Job to such a large extent that his mouth would condemn him, even though he is in the right.⁹⁰ Horst thinks that Job can not defend himself in this situation because at the moment of God's anger justice is withdrawn.⁹¹ However, Job does not mean that God's emotion overrules God's reasonableness. On the

⁸⁵ פְּצָעִים (wounds) sometimes serve to change people and bring them into a good way of life (Isa.1,6; Prov.20,30; 27,6).

⁸⁶ Noort, *Duister duel*, 17-18.

⁸⁷ 27,3; 33,4.

⁸⁸ See also 13,26 and 27,2.

⁸⁹ Compare Clines, *Job*, 235.

⁹⁰ Compare Clines, *Job*, 235.

⁹¹ Horst, *Hiob*, 150. Van Selms is of the opinion that Job condemns himself by only daring to charge God (Van Selms, *Job I*, 87). However, this is more a dogmatic than a clearly exegetical statement.

contrary, he suggests a conscious perversion of justice by God in Job 9. If it was possible to defend his case before God, Job would say the wrong things because he is overwhelmed by God's appearance and actions. It is striking that Job's ultimate conclusion that he is unable to answer God (40,4) has already been mentioned here in Job 9. Job now foresees that he will not be able to answer God impressed as he is by God's powerful appearance.

While Job presents the possibility of his innocence in 9,20, he explicitly claims that he is 'blameless' in 9,21. The word **צַדִּיק** (blameless) refers to the words of the narrator and God in the prologue. They state that Job is a blameless (**צַדִּיק**) and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.⁹² In this way, Job's conviction is confirmed by God in the prologue. Eliphaz asks Job whether the integrity (**צִדְקָה**) of his ways is not his hope (4,6). Bildad guarantees that God does not reject a blameless person (8,20). However, Job points out his integrity, but concludes that it is to no avail. The relation of the dialogue to the prologue increases this contrast; whereas God himself calls Job a blameless man, Job suffers heavily in spite of his integrity. From Job's point of view, this suffering is unjust because he ought to be blessed according to the standard of the concept of retribution. The relation with the prologue intensifies Job's charge because the readers know that Job's conviction that he is blameless is not unfounded.⁹³ This hopeless situation of being subject to God's caprices despite his innocence makes Job desperate. **לֹא-אֵדָע נַפְשִׁי** (I do not know my soul) in 9,21b expresses a mental confusion in which a person feels beside themselves.⁹⁴ Job distances himself from his life as it is now. Several scholars think that Job states that his integrity is more important to him than his life.⁹⁵ But this view idealizes Job more than the text permits. Job articulates his despair and wonders whether his life has any sense yet. For, there is no way out of his unjust misery.

A heavy charge follows. The implicit feeling during the previous part of Job 9 is now clearly articulated.⁹⁶ God acts unjustly in Job's eyes treating the blameless (**צַדִּיק**) and the wicked (**רָשָׁע**) equally: God destroys them both (9,22).⁹⁷ The perfect

⁹² 1,1.8; 2,3.

⁹³ Noort, *Duister duel*, 17. This relation is further elaborated in §2.2.3.

⁹⁴ S.M. Paul, "An Unrecognized Medical Idiom in Canticles 6,12 and Job 9,21", *Biblica* 59 (1978) 545-547. In Cant.6,12 this confusion is because of the ecstasy of love. See also Gordis, *Job*, 107.

⁹⁵ Pope, *Job*, 73; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 148; Van Selms, *Job I*, 87; Terrien, *Job*, 97; Habel, *Job*, 194. According to Habel, Job has nothing to lose and is therefore ready to risk his life by preparing charges against God (9,22-24).

⁹⁶ He hinted to it in e.g. 9,12.17-18.

⁹⁷ Abandoning God or practising injustice can cause God to **כָּלָה** (to destroy). Then, it sometimes serves to bring about a turn in the way of life of human beings (e.g. Deut.28,21; Jer.5,3; 14,12; Ezek.22,31; 43,8-9). However, in 9,22 the blameless undergo equal treatment. The book of Qohelet knows a similar line of thought. It states that the same fate

אָמַרְתִּי (I say) in 9,22a expresses an action in direct narration which, although really only in process of accomplishment, is nevertheless meant to be represented as already accomplished in the conception of the speaker.⁹⁸ According to Job, God abuses his sovereign position and allows the righteous to suffer. This is injustice according to the concept of retribution. The word אֶחָד (one) refers to Job's charge that the blameless and the wicked are as one. Clines thinks that it refers to the man Job in his contrasting states: he is 'blameless' on the one hand, while he despises his life on the other.⁹⁹ However, this is not the case because the equal treatment of the righteous and the wicked is the central issue of this verse. So, Job denies that the view, by which his friends confronted him, is true. They proclaimed a distinct treatment of the wicked and the righteous and stated that God does not reject the blameless (8,20). However, Job charges God with rejecting the blameless for no reason and treating the wicked and the righteous equally. With this, God's actions are morally wrong if God's actions are understood to be in accordance with the concept of retribution.

Job's charge is continued in 9,23. God mocks at the despair of the innocent when a flood brings death and destruction. In the Psalms, God mocks his opponents and the wicked because they will get their deserved punishment.¹⁰⁰ But in 9,23, the despair of the innocent is subject to God's mockery. This implies that God treats them as he would the wicked. Eliphaz asked the rhetorical question who ever perished innocently (4,7). Job now describes a God who does not intervene but only mocks at the despair of the innocent. There is a considerable chance that the righteous perish according to Job. Clines thinks that God's response forms the gravamen of Job's charge in 9,22-24. According to him, it is not primarily God's justice which is on trial in this speech, but his sympathy and aloofness.¹⁰¹ However, this view does not do justice to the heart of Job's accusation. Job's charge is more than a complaint about God's sympathy. In light of the concept of retribution, God's righteousness is on trial. For, God denies the blameless their legitimate share by treating them equally with the wicked.

The charge against God comes to a climax in 9,24. While the wicked and the blameless were treated equally in 9,22-23, Job now states that God favours the wicked above the blameless. Receiving land expresses a reward for the righteous because of their upright way of life.¹⁰² However, in 9,24a Job charges God with offering the wicked this recompense. Although God is not directly the subject of the passive נִתְּנָה (is given), this unjust situation can only serve as an accusation

comes to the righteous (צַדִּיק) and the wicked (רָשָׁע). Qohelet calls this an evil (רָע) in all that happens under the sun (Qoh.9,2-3).

⁹⁸ Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Grammar*, §106 i.

⁹⁹ Clines, *Job*, 236.

¹⁰⁰ Ps.2,4; 37,13; 59,9.

¹⁰¹ Clines, *Job*, 237-238.

¹⁰² Prov.2,21; 10,30; Ps.37,9; Matt.5,5.

against God. God is the one who gives and takes. Job's charge is further continued in 9,24b. Gordis proposes to read the רשע (wicked) as subject of כסה (to cover) there. He thinks that the faces are covered by bribing the judges.¹⁰³ However, the subject of 9,24a is also the subject in 9,24b. Job charges God with causing injustice on earth. God clouds the judgement of judges and gives land to the wicked instead of the blameless. Whereas Bildad stated that God does not pervert justice (8,3), Job charges God with that very thing. In Job's eyes, God rewards the wicked with prosperity and sabotages justice on earth. The rhetorical question in 9,24c makes the reader face the seriousness of this charge. אלהים (he) refers to אלהים in 9,22b, where it refers to God, who destroys. So, the question of 9,24c is: if God is not the one, who destroys and perverts justice; who else is it? The reader realizes that it can only be God.

2.2.2.4 Stanza III

The third stanza focuses on Job's situation. Job complains about his miserable state. His days pass by without prosperity or any prospect.¹⁰⁴ Job compares this with couriers rushing along, the sliding by of skiffs of reed, and vultures fluttering for their prey.¹⁰⁵ This passage does not deal with the brevity of life as such, but with the misery of life that is in no way relieved by the progression of the days.¹⁰⁶ In his speeches, Job mentions several times that his days are aimless and without hope¹⁰⁷, while the wicked spend their days in prosperity (טוב) (21,13). Whereas in the prologue, Job has admonished his wife to accept both good (טוב) and evil from God (2,10), some opposition and despair appear here in the dialogue. A life without seeing any good does not seem to have much sense for Job.

It is impossible to evade this miserable situation. Job considers two possibilities to escape from his misery, but he draws the conclusion that these attempts would fail.¹⁰⁸ This emphasizes the hopeless situation in which Job is caught. First, Job imagines leaving his struggle and worries behind him and becoming happy (9,27). Zophar states that Job will become happy if he throws away his wrongdoing (11,14-16). But Job is convinced that he would not succeed, since God does not

¹⁰³ Gordis, *Job*, 108.

¹⁰⁴ 9,25-26. Compare a similar kind of complaint in 7,6-7.

¹⁰⁵ Gordis thinks that each image represents a certain nuance: the runner speed, the papyrus skiff the idea of fragility, and the vulture theme of cruelty (Gordis, *Job*, 109). Egger-Wenzel sees an analogy between God and the vulture and Job and the prey (Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 233). However, such aspects are not clear. The point of comparison is the movement. Moreover, if the image of the fluttering vulture was meant to express cruelty, the image would have been formulated more explicitly.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 240.

¹⁰⁷ 3,3-6; 7,6-7.16; 17,1.11; 30,16.27.

¹⁰⁸ 9,27-28 and 9,30-31.

acquit him (9,28).¹⁰⁹ Therefore, he fears his grievance. The image of the lawsuit appears again. Job interprets his grievance as God's sentence. Since Job is not able to answer God adequately in a lawsuit and therefore can not be proved right before God, he remains guilty before God and can not escape his misery. From this observation, Job draws the conclusion that he has to be guilty beyond his influence (9,29). This conclusion straddles both attempts. Whereas earlier Job's own words declared him guilty in light of God's superior power (9,20), Job now states that his behaviour and his actions do not matter at all. His guilt is certain beyond his influence. Therefore, attempts to bring out Job's innocence are in vain (9,29b). Such exhausting efforts would not change anything.

The second attempt is expressed by means of a more cultic image (9,30-31). Job imagines becoming righteous by purifying himself. Washing the body can serve to become pure.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, the parallel verbs *יָרַח* (to wash) and *יָכַח* (to clean) articulate an image for doing away wrongdoing and evil (Isa.1,16). The cleanness of one's hands matches the extent of one's guilt.¹¹¹ However, an attempt to become pure is doomed to fail from the very start since even the heavens and the stars are not pure (*יָכַח*) before God.¹¹² Bildad says that God will restore Job's righteous abode if he is pure (*יָיִן*) (8,6) but Job is of the opinion that he has to be guilty beyond his influence (9,29). Therefore, he would never succeed in becoming pure. Whereas Job tries to clean himself, God prevents it and makes him impure by immersing him in dirt (9,31). This image supports Job's statement that he has to be guilty beyond his influence and that God deliberately causes despair among the innocent; as Job attempts to become righteous, God makes him guilty. The image describes that God would plunge Job's nude body into a pit. Since his body becomes dirty and unclean in this way, his clothes would loathe plunged body.¹¹³

One of the basic themes in Job 9 is clearly expressed by the concluding image of the arbitrator in 9,32-33. Here is the fundamental difference between God and human beings. This is the reason for Job's inability to be proved right before God. If God were equal to human beings, it would have been possible to have a fair case with God. Then it could have been determined whether or not Job was right. The verb *עָנָה* (to answer) in 9,32a refers to 9,3.14-16. There Job also uses the verb

¹⁰⁹ The verb *יָגַר* (to fear) in 9,28 expresses the fear for an imminent calamity (see Deut.9,19; 28,60; Ps.119,39).

¹¹⁰ See e.g. Lev.17,15-16.

¹¹¹ 2 Sam.22,21; Ps.18,25; Job 16,17; 22,30; 31,7.

¹¹² 15,15; 25,5.

¹¹³ Compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 212; Hesse, *Job*, 84; Van Selms, *Job I*, 89; Clines, *Job*, 242. Pope sees in 9,31b an allusion to Zech.3,3-5, where Joshua has to take off his filthy clothes and God takes his guilt away and gives him new clothes. According to Pope, Job means that even if he were clean (innocent), God would dunk him in muck so that he would be unfit for the clean garments given to the acquitted (Pope, *Job*, 76). However, this allusion is not clear, since it is not a matter of changing clothes, but the state of Job changes in relation to the same clothes.

within the context of the image of the lawsuit and says that he is unable to answer God. In 9,32-33, Job clearly explains why this is the case. Whereas the description of God's superior power has already pointed out the difference of character between God and human beings, it now becomes clear that a lawsuit with God is impossible because God is not a human being like Job. There is a fundamental difference between God and human beings. The image of the arbitrator in 9,33a explicates this inequality. There is no independent arbitrator between God and Job controlling a fair progress of the trial. The *מוֹכִיחַ* (arbitrator) refers to an arbitrator above both parties.¹¹⁴ Laying his hand on both expresses his power to protect a fair court procedure. However, there is no such independent person between God and human beings. Ultimately, God himself is the judge who judges what is just. With this, 9,32-33 responds to the challenging question 'Who can summon me?' in 9,19b: 'nobody can.' Nobody is able to control God or call him to account. This makes it impossible for Job to get his supposed right.

Job ends the first half of his answer to Bildad with a plea. He begs God to take away the misery that hurts and frightens him. Several scholars think that he addresses his plea to the independent arbitrator to remove God's rod, so that there could be a fair controversy between God and Job.¹¹⁵ But Job has just established in 9,33 that such an arbitrator between Job and God does not exist. Therefore, he addresses God in these two verses. In the dialogue, the verb *סִוַּר* (to remove; 9,34) expresses God's power to withhold things from people.¹¹⁶ The *שֵׁבֶט* (rod) can serve as an instrument of God to 'hit' his opponents and is regularly an effect of his anger.¹¹⁷ Job interprets his miserable situation as the result of being hit by God's rod. He is treated by God as an opponent. Job is only able to speak to God again if God removes his frightening rod from him¹¹⁸ because now the situation prevents Job from being himself (9,35b). De Wilde means that *כִּן* (so) in 9,35b refers to 9,29, where Job talks of being guilty beyond his influence. According to De Wilde, Job states that he is not guilty.¹¹⁹ However, *כִּי* (for) connects 9,35b with 9,35a. Therefore, *כִּן* refers to the situation as it is now. Job can not be himself and speak adequately to God without fear as long as God's terror and rod affect him.¹²⁰ With this, Job's words of 9,15 appear to be true. In his current miserable situation, Job can only plead to God for mercy.

¹¹⁴ See also Gen.31,37. *מוֹכִיחַ* returns in 40,2 where it refers to one of the parties in a lawsuit. There, it is the person who demands justice: an accuser or lawyer (see for this meaning of *כִּחַ* also Isa.29,21; Ezek.3,26; Amos 5,10).

¹¹⁵ Terrien, *Job*, 100; Gordis, *Job*, 98; Habel, *Job*, 197; Clines, *Job*, 243.

¹¹⁶ 12,20,24; 19,9; 27,2. Except 27,5.

¹¹⁷ Ps.2,9; 89,33; Isa.10,5; 11,4; Lam.3,1.

¹¹⁸ Compare 13,21.

¹¹⁹ De Wilde, *Hiob*, 151. See also Van Selms, *Job I*, 90.

¹²⁰ See also 9,20.

2.2.2.5 Conclusions

Job 9 questions the concept of retribution in an indirect way. Job does not question this concept as such but interpreting God's involvement in Job's innocent suffering on the basis of this concept causes a conflict between the concept of God and his situation.¹²¹ It leads to the conclusion that God apparently perverts justice and consciously causes injustice on earth.¹²² This conclusion serves to question the theological concept that brought Job to it. A theological concept in which God can be thought as unrighteous is as such untenable.¹²³ The image of the lawsuit is the leading figure in this process. After the question of whether a human being can be righteous before God was put in a moral-ethical sense in 4,17, it is placed within a forensic context in Job 9. Job puts the issue of his righteousness into words with the question of how he can be proved right before God in a legal case. Habel sees the futility of litigation as a central notion of Job 9.¹²⁴ However, although the futility of litigation plays an important role in the course of Job 9, it is not the central issue of this chapter as such. The inability to answer God adequately in a lawsuit and the impossibility of having a fair case with God are 'only' building blocks of the more general issue that God's righteousness comes under discussion in Job's case if God's actions are understood according to the concept of retribution.

Job contrasts his impotence with God's superior power. He describes God's power in the Creation, in which God can act destructively in his anger. This divine action is marvellous and unfathomable for human beings at the same time. Job concludes from these attributes that God has the ability to abuse his divine position; nobody can stop him or call him to account. God does not allow his actions be affected by human beings. After Job perceived God's ability to abuse his position due to God's superior power and inscrutability, he introduces his own innocence. According to the concept of retribution, God rewards an innocent person with prosperity and punishes a wicked one with misfortune. Since Job is convinced that he is blameless, the implication is that he suffers unjustly. The only conclusion must be that God is acting unjustly. God misuses his sovereign position.¹²⁵ Clines is more reserved and thinks that the speech is best read as a protest that it is hopeless for a person to seek vindication from God.¹²⁶ However,

¹²¹ Compare Von Rad, who states that ultimately God has become problematic (G. von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1970, 286).

¹²² See also T.N.D. Mettinger, *In Search of God. The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* [=Gudsbeteckningar och gudsbild i Gamla Testament, Örebro 1987, transl. by F.H. Cryer], Philadelphia 1988, 181-183.

¹²³ Compare Fullerton, "On Job" (1934), 333: "...he (Job) attacks the current dogma of penal suffering *through* his attack upon the justice of God."

¹²⁴ Habel, *Job*, 185.

¹²⁵ Compare Cox, *Rational Inquiry*, 632.

¹²⁶ Clines, *Job*, 225-226.

Job's charge extends further and questions God's righteousness. Treating the righteous and the wicked equally is a perversion of the concept of retribution and so God does not act justly from Job's point of view. Hesse says that Job is powerlessly turned over to God's arbitrary actions.¹²⁷ However, Job's charge goes one step further. Job suggests a conscious perversion of justice and misuse of divine power by God.

The image of the lawsuit emphasizes Job's impotence in this situation. Job is turned over to God's superior power. Even if he is right, he will be unable to answer God adequately in a lawsuit because he is overwhelmed by God's strength. This difference between Job and God ends in the concluding image of the arbitrator. Having a legal case with God is impossible because of the fundamental difference between God and human beings. Therefore, God's actions can not be stopped, nor can God be called to account. Fohrer states that Job depicts a situation in which a human being is never right and in which God is always right because justice equates to power for God; God is able to enforce his will as his justice and nobody can resist because he possess all might.¹²⁸ Job's attempts to be proved right do not succeed because of this sovereign position of God. Job is in the hands of God's power because God is also the judge who passes judgement. This fundamental difference between God and human beings is a basic idea of Job 9. Job encounters God's sovereign position in the course of this speech again and again. It is the reason for his inability to contend with God in a fair way and to challenge God's treatment of him. It is because of this that Job can not be proved right before God according to his innocence.

With this, Job 9 causes a decisive turn in the dialogue. It brings clarity to Job's accusations in the course of the dialogue. Job can not avoid the sharp charge that God perverts justice when considering Job's innocence. So, the reader can not ignore any longer that the concept of retribution is problematic. Job holds God responsible for his misfortune. He understands his misery as God's accusation against him.¹²⁹ Since Job is convinced that he is blameless, God must be wicked. With this, the concept of retribution is called into question because it leads to the conclusion that God has to be seen as wicked. This impasse –the possibility that God is wicked– is not surpassed in subsequent dialogue; but it does require a response. Thus, Job 9 overshadows the continuation of the dialogue. On the one hand, it questions the concept of retribution so that the reader requires a result. On the other hand, Job 9 demonstrates Job's impotence by means of the image of the lawsuit. In the dialogue, each attempt by Job to get justice before God is overcome by the awareness that it will not succeed. Also, each complaint about Job's miserable situation stands in the light of Job's impression that God perverts justice.

¹²⁷ Hesse, *Hiob*, 81.

¹²⁸ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 201.

¹²⁹ Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes*, 134.

2.2.3 The Relation of Job 9 with the Prologue

The relation of Job 9 with the prologue intensifies Job's charge. The narrator and God characterize Job as a blameless and upright man.¹³⁰ This confirms Job's claim that he is innocent. Furthermore, God admits that Job is wounded for no reason when he reproaches the satan for inciting God against Job in order to destroy him for no reason (2,3). Thus, God's words in the prologue legitimate Job's charge. Whereas a person's conviction that they are blameless is normally unverifiable, thanks to the prologue the reader knows that Job rightly mentions his innocence.¹³¹ Job's struggle to be proved right is appropriate. So, the relation between Job 9 and the prologue strengthens the questioning of the concept of retribution. This issue can not be brushed aside by doubting the legitimacy of Job's claim that he is blameless.¹³² Actually, it is only thanks to the relation with the prologue that the questioning of the concept of retribution succeeds.¹³³ The reader can not ignore any longer that innocent suffering forms a problem for understanding God's actions according to this concept. The connection between Job 9 and the prologue also sharpens Job's charge against God because God himself admits that Job is blameless and is wounded for no reason.¹³⁴ This implies that God confirms the legitimacy of Job's charge against him from Job's point of view. It is this necessary dependence of the dialogue on the prologue that makes it likely that each is construed with a view to each other. The whole issue of the book of Job would fade away without the scenes of the prologue.

¹³⁰ 1,1.8; 2,3.

¹³¹ Fox also points to the two dimensions of reality in the book of Job; the world of Job (the world within the narration) and the world above the narration, in which the author communicates to the reader. The book's teaching lies in the interplay between these two lines of communication according to him (M.V. Fox, "Job the Pious", ZAW 117 (2005) 351-366 (here 351)).

¹³² This is actually done by the motif of human imperfection in the speeches of the friends (4,17-21; 15,14-16; 25,4-6). See §3.4.

¹³³ Compare Fullerton, "On Job" (1934), 340.

¹³⁴ Noort, *Duister duel*, 17.

Chapter 3

God, Suffering, and the Human Condition in the Eyes of the Friends

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Introduction

The speeches by Job's friends introduce the concept of retribution in the dialogue. For the friends, this concept is the basic model for explaining God's involvement in a person's misery.¹ The friends back this 'theoretical concept' by extensive lists of examples of miserable fates that befall the wicked. These observable cases prove the right of this theoretical model and at the same time they also serve as a warning for Job. The friends explain Job's misfortune by means of the concept of retribution. They hold to God's righteousness. God's actions do not deviate from this concept according to them. Therefore, they can only deduce from Job's suffering that Job must have sinned before. Even though the concept of retribution is the basic model with which the friends perceive God's involvement in human misery, some modifications to or some stretching of this model appear in their speeches. Suffering a miserable fate because of wickedness is not irreversible. Changing one's behaviour might accomplish a turn in one's destiny. Even forgiveness of sins is once mentioned, although it is used in a negative way and serves to show that Job would have suffered even more if God had blamed him for all his setbacks. The motif of human imperfection sheds a different light on the concept of retribution. It expresses the opinion that nobody can be righteous before God. Finally, Elihu in particular also emphasizes the pedagogical function that suffering might perform. These somewhat distinctive elements are different aspects of the occurrence of suffering in the eyes of the friends. With these different facets, they try to get a hold on the function of suffering in the Creation and on God's relation to it.

This third chapter deals with the view of Job's friends of the function of suffering and God's involvement in it. It successively elaborates upon the concept of retribution (3.2), the possibility of change and forgiveness (3.3), the motif of

¹ Job does the same anyway.

human imperfection (3.4), and suffering as a pedagogical instrument (3.5). One might argue that the friends do not distinguish these different elements to this extent but consider them as different aspects of the same case. However, it is the aim of a biblical-theological study to reconstruct theological implications of a text. As a result, such a reconstruction implies a certain amount of systematization which the text itself might not contain to this extent. However, the aim of reconstructing theological implications of the speeches of Job's friends in order to make them applicable for current debate on the issue of theodicy justifies such an exercise.²

3.1.2 The Approach of the Speeches of the Friends

Job's friends are presented as three individuals.³ They successively enter into conversation with Job. The question is, to what extent can they be treated as three different characters? For instance, Kuhl states that the poet has somewhat differentiated the characters of the friends even though they basically represent the same type. According to him, Eliphaz is depicted as an old sage with sensibility and experience; Bildad represents tradition and has a somewhat more aggressive attitude; as the first of the friends, Zophar is the youngest, he is blunt and sharpens the situation because he brings a charge against Job and utters the gravest charge.⁴ Clines points out some differences with regard to the content of the friends' arguments. According to him, Eliphaz argues from the piety of Job in order to offer consolation. His intention is to encourage Job to patience and hope; Bildad argues from the contrast between the fates of Job and his children in order to offer warning. Bildad's intention is to urge Job to search his heart before God; Zophar argues from the suffering of Job in order to denounce Job. His intention is to summon Job to repentance for his sins.⁵ Whereas somewhat distinct interests could be pointed out in the individual speeches of the friends, the problem is that this difference actually only occurs in the first cycle.⁶ Moreover, Bildad expresses a view –the motif of human imperfection– that was previously raised twice by Eliphaz.⁷ As a result, this particular motif does not indicate a characteristic that distinguishes one from the other. These considerations call into question whether it is possible to attribute a specific character to each individual friend.

² See also §1.2.1.

³ Elihu is a fourth friend. His speeches are later added to the book of Job. See also §1.4.

⁴ C. Kuhl, "Neuere Literarkritik des Buches Hiob", *ThR* N.F. 21 (1953) 272.

⁵ D.A.J. Clines, "The Arguments of Job's Three Friends", in: D.A.J. Clines, *On the Way to the Postmodern. Old Testament Essays, 1967-1998. Vol. II* (JSOT.SS 293), Sheffield 1998, 730-731 [earlier published in D.A.J. Clines-D.M. Gunn-A.J. Hauser (eds.), *Art and Meaning. Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* (JSOT.SS 19, Sheffield 1982, 199-214)].

⁶ Therefore, Clines argues that the first speech of each friend serves as a hermeneutic key for their following speeches (Clines, "Arguments", 732).

⁷ Eliphaz: 4,17-21; 15,14-16; Bildad: 25,4-6.

Since, in my view, distinct positions between the three friends can not be distinguished clearly enough, I treat their speeches as one voice in the debate with Job. They basically represent the same view. However, if one takes the interaction with Job's speeches into account, a different phenomenon may be seen. The speeches of the friends develop somewhat and work toward a climax in cooperation with each other, particularly in the first cycle, but also in the course of the main part of the dialogue. While Eliphaz introduces the concept of retribution (Job 4-5), Bildad assures that God does not deviate from this concept (Job 8). This provokes Job's charge that God does pervert justice (Job 9-10), which subsequently makes Zophar react, saying that Job is the one who is guilty (Job 11). Eliphaz takes up this suggestion and expresses clearly that Job's arguing is inspired by guilt (Job 15). After some extensive lists of the fates of the wicked (Job 18 and 20), Eliphaz finally concludes that Job must be wicked. He proves this by means of citing some sins which Job would have committed (Job 22). Job counters this definitive accusation with his oath of innocence (Job 31). Although the dialogue does not have a strict linear structure toward a climax at the end⁸, this progress can be found in the course of the dialogue in my view. This cooperation between the speeches of the friends in order to accomplish progress in thinking during the course of the dialogue backs up the view that the speeches of Job's friends should be approached as representing one voice.

3.2 The Concept of Retribution and Its Implications

3.2.1 The Concept of Retribution

The first speech of Eliphaz introduces the concept of retribution in the dialogue.⁹ In the preceding speech, Job wonders why God gives life to the troublesome (3,20). Eliphaz now proposes an explanation of the origin of trouble. He divides human beings into two groups. There are upright and wicked. The difference between them is the fate which they meet. While those who sow iniquity and trouble perish, those who fear God do not. The blameless prosper as Bildad makes clear (8,20-21).

Eliphaz tackles Job about his righteous way of life. He wonders why Job's piety does not give him confidence, now that he has suffered this miserable fate.

4,6 Is not your fear of God¹⁰ your confidence,
and¹¹ is not the perfection of your ways your hope?

⁸ I have e.g. already argued that Job 9 contains an accusation against God that is not surpassed in the rest of the dialogue (Ch.2).

⁹ Job 4-5. This concept has already been supposed in the prologue (see §6.2.1).

¹⁰ יראת אלֹהִים refers to 'fear of God'. See also the prologue, where Job is called יראת אלֹהִים (1,1.8; 2,3). The word returns in both other speeches of Eliphaz (15,4; 22,4).

¹¹ The ך of ׀ה has to be read before תְּקוּמָתְךָ.

- 4,7 Remember: who ever perished innocently,
and where were the upright annihilated?
- 4,8 As I have seen: those who plough iniquity,
and those who sow trouble, reap it.
- 4,9 By God's breath they perish,
by the breath of his anger they vanish.

Eliphaz explains his appeal to Job's righteousness by a reference to the concept of retribution. This concept shows that Job does not have to fear for his future if he is upright. In 4,8, the concept of retribution is summarized. Those who plough iniquity and sow trouble, reap it. There is a close connection between the actions of human beings and what befalls them. The suffix of **קִצְרָהוּ** (reap it) refers to the preceding iniquity and trouble. Evildoers encounter the trouble and misery¹² which they caused before. Although 4,9 expresses a new image, it does not articulate a different element of the concept of retribution.¹³ It offers a metaphor of God's execution of this concept.¹⁴ God is clearly mentioned as the actor here.¹⁵ The verb **אָבַד** (to perish) is a typical verb to describe the fate of the wicked in Wisdom literature. Wicked persons perish like their dung (20,7). Furthermore, their hope (8,13), refuge (11,20), and memory (18,17) perish. Perishing does not only refer to a physical death; Barth has shown that someone in trouble can also feel that they are in the realm of death.¹⁶ In this way, perishing can also refer to the trouble in 4,8. God's **אָפַק** (anger) in 4,9 is a reaction against injustice and wickedness and results in punishment and destruction by God.¹⁷ It hits those who have committed iniquities. Eliphaz is convinced that human beings do not perish innocently (4,7). Misery only touches evildoers. Therefore, he appeals to Job's supposed fear of God and perfection of his ways of life (4,6).¹⁸ These attributes characterize an upright

¹² **אָפַק** can be the act of wrongdoing: **פְּעֹלֵי אָוֶן** (those who commit iniquity: 31,3; 34,8.22) and occurs parallel to **עוֹלָה** (iniquity: 11,14). But it can also be the misery that someone encounters (18,12; 21,19). See also Clines, *Job*, 126.

¹³ Pace Clines, *Job*, 127.

¹⁴ Compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 139; S.R. Driver-G.B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job together with a New Translation* (ICC), Edinburgh 1921, 43.

¹⁵ Pace Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma", 172.

¹⁶ C. Barth, *Die Errettung vom Tode. Leben in den Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testaments* (newly published by B. Janowski), Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln 1997 [1947], 72-97.

¹⁷ See §2.2.2.2. According to several scholars, Eliphaz alludes to the death of Job's sons and daughters here and attributes their death to former sinfulness (so e.g. Clines, *Job*, 124; D.W. Cotter, *A Study of Job 4-5 in the Light of Contemporary Literary Theory* (SBL DS 124), Atlanta 1992, 165-172).

¹⁸ The words 'fear of God' and 'upright' remind of the characterization of Job's righteousness in the prologue (1,1.8; 2,3). As in Job 9, the link to the prologue here also intensifies Job's charge. The friends will conclude that Job is wicked. However, the reader

and innocent person.¹⁹ According to Eliphaz, if Job is upright he will certainly survive his suffering. Thus, the positive side of the concept of retribution is also assumed. God will turn Job's fate around and offer him prosperity if, indeed, Job is righteous.

The origin of affliction and trouble is explicitly attributed to human beings in the second half of the first speech of Eliphaz. Eliphaz prepares a general statement in 5,6-7 with a concrete example from daily life about the fate of a fool. He has noticed how a fool lost his possessions and how his children became victims of his misfortune too (5,3-5). Then Eliphaz explains:

5,6 For affliction does not²⁰ spring from the dust
and trouble does not sprout from the soil,
5,7 but a human being begets²¹ trouble
and the sparks²² fly high.

In 5,6, Eliphaz repeats that there is a relation between a person's actions and what befalls them. Misfortune has a specific source. It does not spring from the soil as vegetation does (Gen.2,5). The words און and עמל from 4,8 return in 5,6. They are now used in the sense of the consequence of wrongdoing. The example of the fool's fate (5,3-5) makes clear that trouble and affliction do not spring from sources other than human behaviour itself. A human being reaps the און (iniquity-affliction) and the עמל (trouble) that he has sown (4,8). There is debate about the

knows that Job is upright. See also K. Fullerton, "Double Entendre in the First Speech of Eliphaz", *JBL* 49 (1930) 342-343, who remarks that the words 'thy religion', 'blameless', 'innocent', and 'upright' in 4,6-7 are intended to remind of 1,1.8; 2,3.

¹⁹ נקי (innocent) stands parallel to צדיק (a righteous) in 22,19 and 27,17. It describes a righteous way of life.

²⁰ Habel changes the vocalization of אל both times into אל (surely). According to him, suffering can be interpreted as the work of the invading powers arising from the depths of the accursed earth as well as the result of overt human actions (Habel, *Job*, 117.132; Pope, *Job*, 42). However, the example of the destiny of the fool simply shows that suffering stems from the behaviour of human beings themselves. Therefore, the vocalization of אל does not have to be changed.

²¹ The vocalization of אולד has to be changed into יולד cf. LXX (for explanation, see main text).

²² There is considerable debate on this word. Several scholars see a mythological background here and think that it refers to a bird (vulture), which transmits a disease (Hölscher, *Das Buch Hiob* (HAT 17), 2nd rev. ed., Tübingen 1952, 19; Van Selms, *Job I*, 55), or to the god Resheph, who is the god of pestilence and the netherworld (Pope, *Job*, 42-43; Habel, *Job*, 132). According to Habel, this verse means to disclose a chthonic dimension to human misfortunes: suffering can be interpreted as the work of invading powers as well as the result of overt human actions (Habel, *Job*, 132). However, in 5,7b, the only fact established is that the בני־רשף fly high, but they are not explicitly identified as a source of misfortune. Therefore, I prefer to take the בני־רשף as sparks.

vocalization of יִלְדָּ (is born) in 5,7. This line means ‘for a human being is born for trouble’ if the Masoretic text is maintained. However, this meaning is inconsistent with the preceding context because it implies that trouble has another origin than human action. Some scholars think that 5,7a refers to the night vision of Eliphaz in 4,17-21, where an apparition states that human beings can not be righteous before God.²³ In this view, it would be natural for human beings to experience some misfortune and human beings would be born to it.²⁴ Then human beings would be determined to sin to a certain extent beyond their own influence. However, it does not seem plausible that Eliphaz adopts the view of the night vision in this part of his speech because he has just presented the voice of the night vision as having a different opinion independent of himself. Moreover, the word עַמַּל connects 5,7 with 5,6. It would take the edge off the previous argument that the destiny of human beings depends on their behaviour, if the vocalization of the Masoretic text was maintained. Because of the continuity of the elaboration of the concept of retribution (5,2-7), it is preferable to change the vocalization of יִלְדָּ into יִלְדָּ.²⁵ Trouble does not spring from the soil, but human beings beget it. As much it is natural for a fire to cause sparks and some high sparks may cause danger (5,7b), so the chance that human beings beget trouble and suffer a bad fate is considerable, maybe even natural.²⁶

The first speech of Eliphaz introduces in the dialogue the concept of retribution. This concept describes how God acts towards human beings. God rewards or punishes human behaviour. So, human beings actually have their fate under their own control. Bildad calls this concept ‘justice’. He is convinced that God does not deviate from it.

- 8,3 Does God pervert justice?
or does the Almighty one pervert right?
- 8,4 If your children sinned against him,
he handed them over into the power of their transgression.

In 8,3, the words מִשְׁפָּט (justice) and צֶדֶק (right) refer to the concept of retribution as brought up in Job 4-5. They refer here to the order which describes

²³ For the explanation of the night vision, see §3.4.1.

²⁴ So Driver-Gray, *Job*, 51. According to Fohrer, 5,6-7 does not contain the concept of retribution as in 5,1-5, but returns to the basic idea of 4,17ff that weak human nature is the origin of an unfortunate destiny. Misery springs from human beings themselves who are born for it as weak, mortal and inadequate beings (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 148).

²⁵ See also 15,35: they conceive trouble and bring forth iniquity (יִלְדָּ אִשָּׁרָה). Many scholars change it. For an overview of positions see: De Wilde, *Hiob*, 111; Clines, *Job*, 116.

²⁶ Compare H.H. Rowley (ed.), *Job* (The Century Bible. New Series), London e.a. 1970, 61.

how God acts in his righteousness.²⁷ Bildad safeguards God's position in advance after Job's first complaints about his miserable situation and some questions on God's treatment of him (Job 5-6). In his view, the answer to the rhetorical question of 8,3 can only be: 'No, God does not pervert justice'.²⁸ God acts justly, if he treats human beings according to the concept of retribution. God does not deviate from this concept. This assurance makes it possible to establish a person's previous behaviour based on their fate because it is certain that misery is punishment for sins and prosperity reward for righteousness. This mechanism also counts for the situation of Job's sons (8,4).²⁹ There can not be another reason for their death other than their own transgressions according to Bildad. The statement in 8,3 puts a lot of pressure on the rest of the dialogue. Here, Bildad determines God's immunity for the rest of the dialogue. This is the basis for further arguing by the friends. According to them, God can not have done something wrong in Job's case. At the same, it provokes Job's opposite conclusion in Job 9. Because of his innocence, Job can no longer hold to God's righteousness.

The subsequent speeches of the friends particularly illustrate the working of the concept of retribution by depicting the fate of the wicked. Security and freedom from concerns cease³⁰ and terrors frighten them³¹. They come to a premature end.³² Different aspects of the downfall of the wicked can be found. They lose their property³³, that which was sometimes obtained illegally³⁴. Their memory passes away.³⁵ Their house or tent vanishes or is destroyed³⁶ and they do not have offspring or their progeny perishes³⁷. The prosperity and the security of the wicked are only on the surface and temporal.³⁸ According to Eliphaz, the wicked live their life in constant fear of their approaching fate.³⁹

It is striking that God is hardly mentioned in these depictions. Witnessing the concept of retribution in action is the starting point.⁴⁰ Thus, the mechanism can be

²⁷ מִשְׁפָּט bears a similar meaning in 40,8 where justice refers to the order or patterns behind God's actions. The point there is that Job's understanding of justice –the concept of retribution– is assessed as frustration of God's justice (see §5.2.6).

²⁸ See 8,20. Elihu repeats this claim in 34,12.

²⁹ This remark seems to be a reference to the prologue (1,18-19).

³⁰ 11,20; 15,21; 18,14.

³¹ 18,11; 27,20. It is not clear whether 27,7-23 can be attributed to Job, since it describes the fate of the wicked as Job's friends do in their speeches.

³² 8,11-13; 15,32; 20,5-7.11.

³³ 15,29; 20,15.18; 27,16-17.19.

³⁴ 20,19.

³⁵ 8,18; 18,17.

³⁶ 8,22; 15,34; 18,15.

³⁷ 15,34; 18,19; 27,14.

³⁸ 8,16-19; 20,5.

³⁹ 15,20-25.

⁴⁰ Job's friends refer to their own observations and to insights, which they received from wise people and former generations (8,8; 15,17-18).

verified in the experience of daily life.⁴¹ Nevertheless, God is supposed as actor in the illustrations of the fate of the wicked. He brings the destiny of the wicked about. In Job 20, God is explicitly mentioned twice as the subject of an action. God drives the possessions that the wicked swallowed away from their belly (20,15) and he sends his burning anger (20,23).⁴² Furthermore, the fate of the wicked is called their ‘inheritance on the part of God’.⁴³ So, the concept of retribution is not an inner worldly mechanism beyond the active working of God in the book of Job.

The emphasis on the miserable fate of the wicked might suggest that the concept of retribution is one-sided and only refers to evildoers. For, only the negative outcome seems to be mentioned. However, the friends’ speeches also assume the positive side of this concept. The mere fact that a change for the better in Job’s fate is possible, if he is upright (8,6) or if he throws away his iniquities⁴⁴, departs from the idea that a righteous way of life is rewarded.⁴⁵ Eliphaz says that the righteous will rejoice about the fate of the wicked.⁴⁶ A realization of retribution appears in 27,17, where the righteous receive and divide the possessions of the wicked. Whereas Eliphaz hinted at the positive side of the concept of retribution by urging Job to have confidence in his righteousness (4,6-7), both outcomes explicitly occur at the end of Bildad’s first speech.

8,20 Behold, God does not reject a blameless person,
nor does he grasp the hand of evildoers.

This statement refers to the rhetorical question ‘does God pervert justice?’ (8,3). It confirms that evildoers as well as the blameless receive their legitimate share according to the concept of retribution. The word צַדִּיק (blameless) is used in order to express Job’s righteousness in the prologue.⁴⁷ Job expresses his conviction that he is innocent by it and states that God treats the blameless and the wicked equally.⁴⁸ Bildad holds that God’s actions do not deviate from the concept of retribution. ‘To grasp the hand’ (8,20b) means to receive God’s help and solidarity.⁴⁹ This belongs to the blameless, while God rejects the evildoers.⁵⁰ In this

⁴¹ It is also because of this perceptibility that Eliphaz lists some of Job’s iniquities (22,6-9) in order to offer convincing proof for Job’s guilt (see §3.2.2).

⁴² Compare with 4,9, where the evildoer vanishes by the breath of God’s anger. In 8,18, both God or an indefinite person can be subject: ‘when he destroys him from his place...’. According to Job, God destroys (also בִּלְעָד) him (10,8). In the same way, God might be subject in 8,18, but this remains unclear.

⁴³ 20,29; 27,13.

⁴⁴ 11,13-16; 22,23.26.

⁴⁵ This is elaborated upon in more detail in the next section (§3.3).

⁴⁶ 22,19. See also Ps.58,11. On the contrary, Job complains that the wicked rejoice (21,12).

⁴⁷ 1,1.8; 2,3.

⁴⁸ 9,21-22. See §2.2.2.3.

⁴⁹ Isa.41,13; 42,6; Ps.73,23.

way, Bildad lays down God's two-sided retributive action for the rest of the dialogue. His statement implies that God helps the righteous and rejects the wicked. While the friends will hold to this point of view further, Job directly rejects it after he hears this first speech of Bildad in Job 9.

3.2.2 Job's Wickedness

In the course of the dialogue, the friends come to the conclusion that Job must have sinned. On the basis of the concept of retribution, they can only interpret Job's misery as a result of earlier wicked deeds. Zophar as first one explicitly attributes iniquities to Job. After Job's claim that he is blameless (9,21), Zophar rejects this possibility and declares that God even forgets parts of Job's sin (עוֹן) (11,6). The subsequent speeches of Job's friends then assume Job's wickedness. Eliphaz sees Job's rebellious words as proof of Job's guilt. He states that Job's sin (עוֹן) instructs his mouth (15,5-6).⁵¹ The culmination of the verdict of guilty is found in the final speech of Eliphaz. Here, Eliphaz mentions clear transgressions which Job would have committed. These transgressions particularly concern the social sphere.

- 22,6 For you took a pledge from your brothers for no reason
and stripped the naked of their clothing.
- 22,7 You did not give water to the weary
and you withheld bread from the hungry.
- 22,8 But the powerful possessed the land
and the honourable lived on it.
- 22,9 You sent widows away empty-handed
and you crushed⁵² the arms of orphans.

This list of transgressions demonstrates that being righteous emphatically bears a social dimension. The legal and prophetic call to care for the weak and to stop exploiting them can be heard here.⁵³ Job's wealth is assumed here but he has failed to apply it for feeding the hungry. What is more, the suggestion is made that Job has enriched himself at the cost of the weak. Job took a pledge, exploited people so that they did not have enough money to live, and occupied an unnecessarily large expanse of land. With this, Eliphaz reproaches Job for a lack of loyalty to the community and his fellow human beings. Clines characterizes these sins as sins of omission rather than sins of commission.⁵⁴ However, taking pledges and sending widows away gives the impression of rather active and deliberate actions. Several

⁵⁰ Ps.53,6.

⁵¹ Compare 9,20, where Job states that his mouth would condemn him, even if he was right.

⁵² Rendering עָרַף as עָרַף (cf. LXX).

⁵³ E.g. Deut.24,12-13.17-22; Isa.5,8; 58,7.10; Ezek.18,7.16; Mic.2,1-2.9.

⁵⁴ Clines, "Arguments", 733.

scholars call this list of transgressions a postulate of the concept of retribution, which requires that Job must have acted in this way.⁵⁵ Since the legitimacy of Job's misfortune has not been proved by the friends until now, Eliphaz has to suppose that Job has committed these severe sins. The friends have made it clear by means of extensive lists which misfortunes the wicked meet. These expositions act to emphasize the visibility of the working of their theological scheme. Since it is beyond question that Job's misfortune is the result of former sins, the friends have to find out which transgressions Job has committed in the past time. These transgressions have to be generally observable in order to be verifiable. Their severity has to correspond somehow to the misery that the evildoer has met. Even though Job will claim that he has not done any wrong against the slave, the widow, the orphan, and the poor (31,13-23), Eliphaz boldly states the opposite in Job 22. He is familiar with different transgressions which the wealthy and supposedly pious Job has committed. This concrete and grave accusation is needed in order to construct the impasse with which the dialogue ends. This is the conviction of the friends that Job has sinned as opposed to Job's conviction that he is innocent (Job 31). This impasse can only be overcome, if a third party –God– enters the stage and offers a new perspective.

It is unclear to what extent Eliphaz and Bildad suppose that Job is guilty in their first speech. Zophar mentions it explicitly as the first of the friends. The first speech of Eliphaz is ambivalent. On the one hand, the appeal to Job's fear of God (4,6) might imply that Eliphaz sees Job as a righteous person.⁵⁶ Then it would express an encouragement for the future. On the other hand, it could also be that it already presupposes that Job has given up his fear of God because Job's misfortune indicates wrong behaviour.⁵⁷ Clines argues that Eliphaz does not for a moment mean to imply that Job is in the company of the wicked, since Job has not perished.⁵⁸ But actually, Job's miserable fate is already a form of perishing.⁵⁹ This would indicate that Job is wicked. In his first speech, Eliphaz leaves open the question of whether or not Job is wicked, although some indication for his opinion

⁵⁵ Hölscher, *Hiob*, 57; Weiser, *Hiob*, 173; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 356.

⁵⁶ Fullerton e.g. thinks that Job is not included with the sinners here. According to him, the formulation is purposely ambiguous, so that Job would misunderstand it as a warning (K. Fullerton, "Double Entendre", 330-332).

⁵⁷ So Hesse, *Hiob*, 55. Noort points out that the clause 'from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head' (2,7) is a quotation of Deut.28,35 where it is a consequence of not observing God's commands (E. Noort, "UNDE MALUM. The Relation between YHWH and Evil in the Old Testament", in: A. Amaladass (ed.), *The Problem of Evil. Essays on Cross-Cultural Perspectives. Proceedings of the Symposium Held in January 1996 at Satya Nilayam Research Institute, Madras, India*, Thiruvanmiyur-Madras 1997, 64-65). This would imply that Job's appearances are against him and his miserable condition conveys the impression that he has sinned.

⁵⁸ Clines, *Job*, 124-125: "the righteous do not die prematurely".

⁵⁹ See §3.2.1.

may be found. The night vision, which Eliphaz mentions, expresses the opinion that nobody can be righteous before God (4,17). This is the first step towards the view that it is impossible that Job would be righteous.⁶⁰ Whereas Eliphaz expresses no opinion on Job's righteousness explicitly in this stage of the dialogue, the reference to the night vision might indicate that Eliphaz has already suspected that Job is somehow guilty of sinning in Job 4-5.

Bildad also remains silent on this point. On the one hand, his advice to seek God and implore mercy (8,5) might indicate that Bildad suspects wickedness in Job's case. But the verb יִתְחַנֵּן (to implore mercy) does not necessarily suppose some amount of wrongdoing.⁶¹ On the other hand, the end of Bildad's first speech gives the impression that Bildad trusts that a good outcome is possible. He thinks that God will fill Job's mouth with laughter (8,21-22). Hence, Bildad keeps both options –righteous or wicked– open.

3.2.3 The Benefit of Being Righteous

In the dialogue, the friends and Job touch several times on the issue of how human behaviour affects God. For example, Job wonders what he does to God if he sins (7,20). He seems to suppose that human behaviour does not affect God. The suggestion is that God might cease punishing if wrong behaviour does not affect him at all. Later on in the dialogue this issue further concentrates on the effect of a person's righteousness. Does it make any difference for God if one is faithful to him or not? Job doubts this. He asks what profit we get for praying to God (21,15). Eliphaz replies that only human beings themselves profit by their righteousness. It does not affect God.

- 22,2 Can a mortal be of use to God?
 Can even a wise be of service to him?
- 22,3 Is it any delight for the Almighty that you are righteous,
 or is it gain for him that your ways are perfect?

Eliphaz mentions the purpose of an upright way of life by means of several rhetorical questions. Does it benefit God anyhow? In 35,3, the verb יִסְכֵּן (be of use) is used parallel to the verb יִעֲלֶה (to get profit). Here, Elihu refers to a question of Job and paraphrases 'how am I better off than if I sin?'. In 22,2, Eliphaz wonders whether a human being can be useful to God or whether God profits from them. Some scholars read כִּי in 22,2b as a denial: 'no, on the contrary'.⁶² This would mean that Eliphaz explicitly answers the question of 22,2a negatively. However,

⁶⁰ See §3.4.

⁶¹ See §3.3.

⁶² In this case 'him' refers to the wise one. Driver-Gray, *Job*, 192; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 349; H.J. Hermisson, "Von Gottes und Hiobs Nutzen. Zur Auslegung von Hiob 22", *ZThK* 93 (1996) 333.

since 22,2-5 is constructed by a successive row of questions, it is unlikely that 22,2b breaks through this pattern. Therefore, 'כ can better be read emphatically.⁶³ In 22,2b, the reference to the wise serves to strengthen Eliphaz' point. Even a wise person can not mean anything to God.

In 22,3, the general question of whether God would have any benefit from human beings is focused on Job's righteousness in particular. Eliphaz suggests that there is no joy in heaven when someone is righteous. It does not provide God with delight or gain. With this, Eliphaz counters Job's suggestion that human beings do not profit from their piety (21,15). On the contrary, he suggests that a righteous way of life is particularly of use to human beings themselves. Their fate depends on it. It is interesting to note that this question touches on the issue that the satan brings up in the prologue. The satan wonders whether Job's real intention for living a pious life is devotion or self-interest.⁶⁴ If someone's behaviour does not affect God, the danger of self-interest as motive for being righteous increases. Then the question arises of what kind of relationship God has with human beings if their ways of acting do not make any difference to God. The personal aspect in the God-talk would fade into the background. God becomes more of a mechanism that rewards and punishes according to a person's deeds.⁶⁵ But there is more. The irony is that the readers know that God has a very specific interest.⁶⁶ His gain is namely being proved to be right against the satan. So, Eliphaz' case is not as strong as the force of his speech might imply.

Elihu connects Job's remark about the use of being righteous (21,15) and Eliphaz' reply that it does not affect God (22,2-3) in his third speech (35,3-8).⁶⁷ This serves to counter Job's suggestion that it does not make any difference to God whether one is righteous or not because God treats the righteous and the wicked equally. Elihu now emphasizes that human behaviour influences their state of life.

- 35,6 If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against him,
if your transgressions multiply, what do you do to him?
- 35,7 If you are righteous, what do you give to him,
or what does he receive from your hand?
- 35,8 Your wickedness affects people like you
and your righteousness human beings.

In comparison to Eliphaz, Elihu extends the field of human actions which affect God. While human beings do not benefit God in any way with their uprightness,

⁶³ De Wilde, *Hiob*, 233.

⁶⁴ 1,9. See §6.2.2.

⁶⁵ See also Fohrer, *Hiob*, 355.

⁶⁶ See also Hermisson, "Von Gottes und Hiobs Nutzen", 337-338.

⁶⁷ Most scholars assume that the speeches of Elihu are inserted at a later time into the book of Job. See §1.4.

their criminal or wrong behaviour does not touch God either. God's greatness is the reason for this. The clouds and the heavens are already higher than Job (35,5). God is exalted above human beings. Therefore, God is not dependent upon human actions for his well-being. There is nothing that he could receive from their hand. The conclusion is that human behaviour only affects human beings. It looks as though Elihu has an eye for the result of human action. Its effect touches fellow human beings for good or bad. It has already been mentioned that righteous or wicked behaviour includes a person's actions towards others.⁶⁸ Job's actions have consequences for fellow human beings instead of God. In this way, Elihu does not hint at the consequences of human actions for themselves according to the concept of retribution in the first instance. Whereas the expression כַּמֹּךָ (like you) includes Job, the statement makes a particular contrast between God and fellow human beings. While human beings can be victimised by or benefit from the deeds of fellow human beings, these deeds do not affect God.

3.3 Change and Forgiveness

3.3.1 The Possibility of Change in One's Fate

The consequences of the concept of retribution are not irreversible or definite in the eyes of the friends. A change in one's fate is possible if one alters one's behaviour. This process of change occurs within the sphere of the concept of retribution. Changing the causes of a miserable fate brings about an alteration in one's destiny. All three friends leave open the possibility that Job's fate will change for the better. They connect this possibility to the condition that Job direct himself toward God again and remove his iniquities. Job's miserable circumstances will improve if Job mends his ways.

Even though Zophar is the first of Job's friends to declare that Job has sinned (11,6), he is not pessimistic about Job's future. Zophar thinks that a good outcome is possible, if Job gives up his sinful actions.

- 11,13 If you direct your heart
and stretch out your hands towards him.
- 11,14 If there is iniquity in your hand, remove it
and let no injustice dwell in your tent.
- 11,15 Then you will lift up your face without blemish
and you will firmly stand without fear.

The two conditions for a change in Job's fate are differently formulated. While the first one (11,13) is constructed with אִם (if), the second one (11,14) includes an imperative (הֲרַחֵק יָקָרוֹ: remove it). The first condition deals with Job's attitude.

⁶⁸ E.g. 22,6-9; Job 31.

The combination of כוֹן (hifil; to direct) with לֵב (heart) can be found with the word דַּרַשׁ (to seek): to direct one's heart to seek the Lord.⁶⁹ It expresses devotion to God and contrasts with doing evil (2 Chr.12,14). Directing one's heart to God indicates loyalty.⁷⁰ It is used in the context of leaving other deities behind and converting to God (1 Sam.7,3). Zophar calls on Job to dedicate himself to God again. He supposes that Job has drifted apart from God by committing sins (11,6). Therefore, only a renewed dedication to God may bring a change in Job's miserable fate. The second half of 11,13 cements this dedication. Spreading one's hands describes the position of prayer.⁷¹ In this way, Zophar asks for a renewed concentration on God.

The second condition is concerned with Job's injustice (11,14). Some scholars take this verse as a parenthesis because of its construction by means of an imperative.⁷² However, this verse introduces a rather independent second element in the *protasis* because it now explicitly mentions iniquity and injustice as obstacles that have to be removed in order to accomplish a change in Job's life. The emphasis here shifts to Job's actions. The significance of this second condition is that it explicitly places the possibility of a change in one's fate within the sphere of the concept of retribution. The mention of removing iniquity makes it clear that an alteration in Job's miserable state can only be realized by an alteration of his wicked way of life. So, here it also applies that Job reaps what he has sown. A renewed dedication to God and a pure way of life will give him a happy and untroubled life again.

After Eliphaz listed several sins which Job would have committed according to him (22,6-9), he ends his speech by showing Job a way out of his misery (22,21-30). This concluding part of the final speech of Eliphaz begins with a general appeal. Eliphaz urges Job to be familiar with God⁷³ and to accept God's instruction. By doing so, Job will encounter prosperity (22,21-22). Then some concrete conditions for a change in Job's destiny follow:

22,23 If you return to the Almighty and bow⁷⁴,

⁶⁹ 2 Chr.12,14; 19,3; 30,19.

⁷⁰ Ps.78,37; 112,7.

⁷¹ 1 Kgs.8,22.38; Isa.1,15; Ezra 9,5. Newsom points out how rituals can provide human beings with real power in order to cope with their situation. According to her, the friends urge Job to make use of the resources of power embodied in the ritual of prayer. She concludes that in this way the friends do not offer Job an illusion that overlooks his 'true' situation, but offer him access to power, the opportunity to take action to influence his situation (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 106-115).

⁷² Budde, *Hiob*, 56; Clines, *Job*, 256.

⁷³ See for the verb סָכַן (hifil) also Ps.139,3 and Num.22,30. In Ps.139,3, the verb describes God's familiarity with the poet's life. In 22,21, it refers to Job's familiarity with God.

⁷⁴ הָעִנָּה has to be read instead of הִבְנֶה cf. LXX (for explanation, see the main text).

(if) you remove injustice from your tent,
⁷⁵
 22,26 Then, you will take your delight in the Almighty
 and lift up your face to God.

The conditions in 22,23 correspond to those in 11,13-14. The two elements –Job’s attitude and removing injustice– return here. The verb **תִּבְנֶה** (you will be built) seems to break through the *protasis* of 22,23 because it already expresses the result of returning to God. However, this result only occurs in 22,26. This interruption also makes it more difficult to suppose **אִם** in the second half of 22,23. Therefore, it is preferable to read **תִּעֲנֶה** (you bow) for **תִּבְנֶה** in accordance with the LXX.⁷⁶ The verb **שׁוּב** (to return) carries an appeal for conversion and introduces an almost prophetic sound in the dialogue.⁷⁷ After Eliphaz has openly declared Job guilty by pointing out some concrete social iniquities, only renewed submission to God and removing Job’s iniquities will change Job’s situation. Within the context of this speech, the word **עוֹלָה** (injustice) refers to the question of whether Job’s wickedness is not great (22,5) and to the examples of Job’s iniquities, which then follow (22,6-9). According to Eliphaz, a change for the better in Job’s situation is possible only if Job mends his ways and abandons his sins.

Bildad mentions the possibility of restoration in Job 8. The context of Job 8 differs from the two preceding passages because it is unclear whether Bildad has already assumed that Job is guilty here.⁷⁸ In this speech, Bildad safeguards God’s righteousness and assures that God does not deviate from the concept of retribution (8,3.20). At the same time, he reckons with the possibility of a good outcome with regard to Job’s fate: “God will yet again fill your mouth with laughter” (8,21). Within this context, Bildad states:

⁷⁵ 22,24-25 brings up a different theme with its references to precious metals. Furthermore, its is constructed with an imperative. This makes it likely that 22,24-25 is an independent unit which disturbs the coherence of 22,23 and 22,26 (cf. Hölscher, *Hiob*, 56; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 351; Hesse, *Hiob*, 141). In this way, the same construction with **אִם...אָז** (if...then) as in 11,13-15 can be found here, if 22,24-25 is left aside. Gordis considers 22,23a as an independent and complete condition. He takes 22,23b as the *protasis* of a new condition, of which the *apodosis* is to be found in 22,24-25. According to Gordis, God promises Job security, when he has made peace with God, and will be able to leave his gold unregarded in his tent (Gordis, *Job*, 249-250. Habel also reads 22,23-25 together (Habel, *Job*, 342-343)). However, it is not clear how 22,23 is related to 22,24-25 with regard to the content. It is questionable whether security is the topic of 22,24-25. Job has to put gold aside in these verses. Strauß considers 22,25 as the *apodosis* of 22,23 and 22,24 as a glossarial extension (H. Strauß, *Hiob 19,1-42,17* (BKAT XVI/2), Neukirchen-Vluyn 2000, 67-68).

⁷⁶ Budde, *Hiob*, 127; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 198; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 56; Weiser, *Hiob*, 171; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 351; Hesse, *Hiob*, 141.

⁷⁷ Compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 190. He states that in 22,23, the prophetic turn is inserted in the belief of retribution, after Job was accused of real, serious sins.

⁷⁸ See §3.2.2.

- 8,5 If you seek God,
and implore the Almighty for mercy,
8,6 if you are pure and upright,
then he will rouse himself for you
and will restore your righteous abode.

Since Bildad does not say explicitly that Job has sinned, there remains the question of how the first condition in 8,5 should be understood. Does the verb ׁננן (to implore mercy) imply that Job has sinned to some degree? Some scholars think that Bildad supposes here that Job has sinned, even though he does not say so.⁷⁹ However, the verb ׁננן does not necessarily imply that Job is wicked to some extent. This verb ׁננן (hitp.)— occurs in the context of forgiveness and conversion from wickedness. At these points, imploring mercy means asking God to forgive.⁸⁰ But the verb also appears as an appeal for a change for the better in a distressing situation. In these cases, it is not directly assumed that someone has sinned or is guilty.⁸¹ Hence, the verb ׁננן does not always presuppose that someone has sinned. It is striking that ‘removing injustice’ is not mentioned as a condition in 8,5-6 as it is in 11,14 and 22,23. Bildad is silent upon the issue of Job’s guilt.⁸² The conditions in 8,5-6 do not express which change Job should make in his life because Job’s guilt has not been mentioned yet. Instead, Bildad offers more general advice and characterizes the true nature of a righteous person. If Job meets these characteristics, God will restore his former life.

Such righteous persons direct themselves to God. In 8,5a, the verb ׁשׁחך (to seek) expresses ‘addressing oneself to’. It describes the attitude of those who address themselves to God after they have converted⁸³ or who are righteous and expect their salvation from the Lord⁸⁴. Righteous persons address themselves to the Almighty and implore God for mercy because they expect that God achieves an outcome in miserable situations. The favour in this case consists of being recompensed for right behaviour.⁸⁵ Several scholars delete 8,6a, since they consider

⁷⁹ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 189; Hesse, *Hiob*, 75; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 76.

⁸⁰ 1 Kgs.8,33.47; 2 Chr.6,24; Hos.12,5.

⁸¹ Ps.30,9; 142,2; Esth.4,8; 8,3. In Ps.26,11, the poet asks God to be gracious (ׁננן qal), since he is blameless. In 9,15, Job considers imploring mercy as the only way to become righteous before God because he will not be proved right in a legal case with God. Asking God for a favour seems the only chance. See also the use of ׁננן (hitp.) in 19,16.

⁸² See also Clines, *Job*, 204.

⁸³ Hos.5,15; Ps.78,34.

⁸⁴ Isa.26,9; Ps.63,2. In 5,8, Eliphaz advises Job to seek (ׁשׁחך) God.

⁸⁵ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 190; Clines, *Job*, 204.

it as a moralising gloss to 8,5.⁸⁶ However, it can be read as a further depiction of the righteous person; they are pure and upright. This characterization places the possibility of restoration within the sphere the concept of retribution. יָשָׁר (upright) refers to 4,7, where Eliphaz asks where the upright were annihilated. At the same time, the author calls to mind the words of the narrator and God in the prologue. They state that nobody is as upright as Job.⁸⁷ In Job 8, Bildad introduces into the dialogue the possibility of a change in Job's fate. God will restore his righteous abode, if Job is righteous. Whereas Bildad does not give his opinion on whether or not Job is righteous, he makes clear what is required for a prosperous life. If Job is wicked, it is clear how he can bring about a change in his fate. For, God does not reject the blameless (8,20).

3.3.2 Forgiveness

Whereas the possibility of a change for the better falls within the sphere of the concept of retribution, Zophar once mentions the possibility that this concept is broken. Reacting to Job's conviction that he is innocent (Job 9), Zophar states that Job would draw a different conclusion if God spoke to him and told him the secrets of wisdom (11,5-6). Then Job would learn the following:

11,6c then you would know⁸⁸ that God forgets some of your sin.

While Job wonders why God does not overlook his sin (7,21),⁸⁹ Zophar states that God does forget some of his sin. This view of forgiveness in the sense that God does not punish someone for some sins is rather unique in Wisdom literature.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Hölscher, *Hiob*, 26; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 184; Horst, *Hiob*, 126.129; Hesse, *Hiob*, 73. De Wilde moves 8,6a behind 8,20 (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 134).

⁸⁷ 1,1.8; 2,3.

⁸⁸ An imperative can also express a consequence which is to be expected with certainty (Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley §110i).

⁸⁹ On the relation of this question with Job's conviction that he is innocent, see §4.3.2.2.

⁹⁰ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 226; Clines, *Job*, 262. 22,30 could be a second place with a notion of forgiveness. There Eliphaz states: 'He will deliver who is not innocent; he will escape by the cleanness of your hands.' If God is taken as the subject in 22,30a, this statement would be inconsistent with the opinion of Eliphaz in the foregoing part that God rewards and punishes according to someone's behaviour. Therefore, many scholars propose to change the reading of יָשָׁר (not). Habel, on the contrary, takes the יָשָׁר (the guilty one) as subject of 22,30a. He thinks that the restitution of Job includes Job's elevation to the status of a mediator. According to Habel, Job's superior purity would provide the ransom for delivering someone who is guilty (see 42,7-9) (Habel, *Job*, 343-344). But 22,29-30 can best be read as an explanation of God's actions. It makes clear why Job will be restored (22,26-28), if he has removed his injustice (22,23). In this case, God is the subject of 22,29-30. He delivers the innocent and helps the humble, but humiliates the arrogant. So, different changes in the reading of 22,29-30 have to be made. In that case, יָשָׁר can best be rendered as אָדָם (man) (so Driver-Gray, *Job*, 199; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 56; Weiser, *Hiob*, 171; Fohrer,

From a systematic point of view, it seems to be in contrast with the common concept of retribution. How does this notion relate to that concept?⁹¹ 11,6c functions as an argument against Job's conviction that he is blameless (9,21). This conviction leads to the conclusion that God perverts justice (9,22-24). Zophar calls this conviction idle talk (11,3-4) and contrasts it with the secrets of wisdom in order to reject it (11,6a). 11,6c apparently elaborates upon the content of these secrets. It belongs to God's secrets of wisdom that God sometimes breaks the concept of retribution in his mercy and does not always punish human beings for all the sins that they have committed.⁹² This is a mystery in the sense that human beings are unable to notice whether or to what extent God applies this freedom. Although God's forgiveness is beneficial for human beings, it serves a negative purpose here. In opposition to Job's accusation that God punishes him unjustly, Zophar holds that God does not punish Job for all of his sins. In this way, the notion of forgiveness serves to support Zophar's conviction that Job is guilty. Even though God may break the concept of retribution, Job's iniquities are still so many that he has to suffer some extent of misery.⁹³

3.4 The Motif of Human Imperfection

3.4.1 The Night Vision

Whereas the concept of retribution is the dominant pattern in the thinking of Job's friends, they also approach Job's case from a different angle. In the friends' speeches it is mentioned three times that human beings are unable to be righteous before God at all.⁹⁴ These passages present a fundamental opposition between God and the Creation. God is of a different order and soars above everything. The whole

Hiob, 352; Terrien, *Job*, 170; Rowley, *Job*, 199; Hesse, *Hiob*, 143; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 238-239). Then Eliphaz ends his call for Job to remove his injustice and to turn to God again with his opinion that God delivers the innocent human being. This means that forgiveness is not mentioned in this verse.

⁹¹ Several scholars have difficulties with this sentence and make proposals for changing the reading of ׀׀ (to forget): for an overview, see the textual notes of Clines (Clines, *Job*, 254-255, note 6d). Hölscher deletes this sentence (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 32) and De Wilde reads it before 11,18 (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 156-157).

⁹² Fohrer, *Hiob*, 226; Clines, *Job*, 261-262.

⁹³ Fohrer and Hesse think that Zophar wants to express that Job owes the fact that he is still alive and has not yet perished like his children to God's clemency (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 226; Hesse, *Hiob*, 90). However, this is not clear because Zophar does not state that Job would already have died if God had not forgotten some of his sin.

⁹⁴ 4,17-21; 15,14-16; 25,4-6. Witte attributes these passages to a redaction, which he calls the 'Niedrigkeitsredaktion'. According to him, this redaction contains the passages 4,12-21, 15,11-16, 25,1-6, 40,3-5 and 42,2.3aβb.5-6 (M. Witte, *Vom Leiden zur Lehre -Der dritte Redegang (Hiob 21-27) und die Redaktionsgeschichte des Hiobbuches* (BZAW 230), Berlin-New York 1994).

of Creation is of a lower state than its Creator; therefore, no creature can be righteous in the eyes of God. I call this view the motif of human imperfection.

Eliphaz introduces the motif of human imperfection in the dialogue. In his first speech, he presents it as the content of a night vision. After the exposition of the concept of retribution (4,7-9), Eliphaz speaks of a night vision. He describes that a form appeared to him in nocturnal hours and that he heard a voice (4,12-16). Then the content of this vision follows:

- 4,17 Can a mortal be righteous before⁹⁵ God,
or can a man be pure before his Maker?
4,18 Behold⁹⁶, he does not trust his servants
and he charges his angels with folly,
4,19 how much less those who dwell in houses of clay,
with their foundation in dust,
they are crushed before⁹⁷ the moth.
4,20 From the morning till the evening they are smashed
and they perish forever without being noticed⁹⁸.

⁹⁵ ׀ can specify the point of view of the person who is passing judgement (art. ׀, HAL II, 598, 5a). See also 32,2; Gen.38,26; Num.32,22; Jer.51,5. The night vision deals with the comparison between the being of God and human beings. Mortals can not be righteous or pure *in relation to or over against* God (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 140). Fohrer also translates ׀ as ‘gegenüber’ (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 128). See also LXX. Some wonder whether or suggest that the author expresses a deliberate ambiguity with ׀ (before/ comparative: more than) (e.g. Habel, *Job*, 129; J.E. Harding, “A Spirit of Deception in Job 4:15? Interpretive Indeterminacy and Eliphaz’s Vision”, *Biblical Interpretation* 13 (2005) 152-153.158-159.163-165). However, this is unlikely because it does not belong to the range of thought of Eliphaz at all that human beings can be more righteous than God. Moreover, it is unlikely that Eliphaz hints to Job’s claim that he is innocent and God acts unjustly with a comparison here, since Job has not mentioned this conviction yet.

⁹⁶ Some think that ׀ (behold) states a premise (‘if’; so Clines, *Job*, 112; Habel, *Job*, 113). But it stresses what follows.

⁹⁷ Some take ׀ as ‘in the way of’ (see also 3,24; e.g. Clines, *Job*, 113.135; LXX). Other scholars consider 4,19c as a gloss (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 18 (4,19c-20 as a gloss); Fohrer, *Hiob*, 131; Hesse, *Hiob*, 51). However, a temporal use of ׀ is most likely (‘before’; so Driver-Gray, *Job*, 47; Habel, *Job*, 113). Elsewhere the moth is the subject that destructs (13,28; Isa.50,9; 51,8; Hos.5,12; Ps.39,12). This makes it less likely that the moth is used here as an image of vulnerability, with which human beings are compared. The night vision states that those who dwell in houses of clay will be crushed before the slow destructive work of the moth can reach its culmination (cf. Cotter, *Study of Job 4-5*, 194-196). Thus, the vulnerability of human beings is emphasized.

⁹⁸ The hifil of ׀ does not occur elsewhere. It is rendered as ׀ (name; so Pope, *Job*, 38; Habel, *Job*, 116), as a substantive (attention; so Horst, *Hiob*, 61), as ׀ (helper; so De Wilde, *Hiob*, 109; Rowley, *Job*, 56; cf. LXX) or as ׀ (ptc. qal; so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 131). I read the latter as an abbreviated form of ׀ (to pay attention) cf. 23,6.

4,21 Is not their tent-cord pulled out?
They die without wisdom.

The question of whether a mortal can be righteous before God (4,17) as such could be a neutral question. However, the continuation of the night vision shows that the answer to this question is negative. Reasoning *a maiore ad minus*, the night vision makes clear that human beings are lower creatures than angels. Since God does not trust his own servants, how much less are human beings able to be righteous before their Creator.⁹⁹ So, the night vision indicates a fundamental difference between God and creatures. The nature of human beings is depicted from 4,19. Most scholars regard the ‘houses of clay’ as an image of the human body.¹⁰⁰ חמר (clay) is the material from which a human being is formed.¹⁰¹ The image refers to the Creation story, where God forms the human being from dust (עפר) (Gen.2,7). The flood washes the foundation (יסוד) of the wicked away (22,16), but the foundation of the righteous is for ever (Prov.10,25). Since this verse deals with the weakness and mortality of human beings, it is likely that the houses of clay refer to the human body. A strong foundation on rock is lacking. So, human existence is vulnerable. Human beings are perishable like the material they are made from. The fact that they are vulnerable and perishable indicates their low state. These dwellings of clay are crushed before a moth is able to eat them up.

The depiction of the human state is continued in 4,20-21. Whereas evildoers perish (אבד; 4,9) but the innocent do not (4,7), perishing is a characteristic of all human beings in 4,20; they pass away during the day. When they die, nobody takes any notice of it.¹⁰² So, it appears that an individual human life is rather insignificant. Pulling out their tent-cord (4,21) is an image of a person’s death (cf. Isa.38,12). Death often comes suddenly and unexpectedly. People die without wisdom. The word חכמה (wisdom) can refer to God’s inscrutable wisdom or to human understanding in the book of Job.¹⁰³ Van Hecke demonstrates, by means of a semantic study of חכמה that it expresses the regular amount of educational knowledge a person is supposed to acquire during his lifetime. Dying an untimely death deprives man of the possibility of ever acquiring חכמה, since it comes with

⁹⁹ Weiser and Clines restrict the content of the night vision to 4,17. They consider 4,18-21 as Wisdom’s extensions to it (Weiser, *Hiob*, 50; Clines, *Job*, 133-134). However, the night vision would not make much sense if it only poses a question without showing the implications of it. Furthermore, the same content and structure return in 15,14-16 and 25,4-6. This makes the unity of 4,17-21 plausible (compare Horst, *Hiob*, 78).

¹⁰⁰ De Wilde, however, thinks that dwellings are meant instead of bodies. According to him, these are symbolically used for the occupants (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 109).

¹⁰¹ 10,9; 33,6.

¹⁰² Cf. Clines, *Job*, 136.

¹⁰³ E.g. 11,6; 12,2.12-13; 15,8. Wisdom is the central topic in the later added Job 28.

age (e.g. 12,12) according to Van Hecke.¹⁰⁴ The limited length of life hinders access to full wisdom. This distinguishes human beings from God and demonstrates their subordinate position in relation to him. It is because of this subordinate position of human beings in relation to God that human beings can never be righteous before God.

The motif of human imperfection sheds a somewhat different light on human existence in comparison to the concept of retribution.¹⁰⁵ While humankind is divided into the righteous and the wicked according to the relation between a person's actions and what befalls them (4,6-9), the night vision seems to remove this distinction. For, it holds that nobody can be righteous before God. This distinction can be illustrated by means of the verb **אָבַד** (to perish). While the verb describes the fate of the wicked in 4,6-9, it is the destiny of each human being in the night vision (4,20). This perishing in the night vision indicates that all human beings are wicked.¹⁰⁶ In particular, a systematic point of view raises the question of how these two distinct aspects, which occur together in one speech, relate to each other. For, they seem to conflict to some extent, if they are compared to each other systematically.

Fohrer solves this issue by supposing that both views are concerned with different fields of human life. He makes a distinction between the area of retribution and the infinite subordination of all creatures before God. He thinks that the night vision does not deal with the retribution of good or bad people, but with the impotence of creatures beyond the doctrine of retribution. Even a human being

¹⁰⁴ P. van Hecke, *Job 12-14. A Functional-Grammatical and Cognitive-Semantic Approach*, Melle 2005, 338-339. He reads this verse as a possibility instead of a sketch of human fate in general.

¹⁰⁵ Compare Hesse, *Hiob*, 56; Witte, *Leiden*, 74. Witte sees 4,12-21 as a part of a redaction (*Niedrigkeitsredaktion*). Würthwein describes it as a piece of traditional theology which can hardly be explained in the context; a "Fremdkörper im Denken der Freunde" (E. Würthwein, "Gott und Mensch in Dialog und Gottesreden des Buches Hiob" [1938], in: E. Würthwein, *Wort und Existenz – Studien zum Alten Testament*, Göttingen 1970, 239). According to Tur-Sinai, Eliphaz quotes Job to refute this argument. Tur-Sinai is of the opinion that Job has experienced the night vision (N.H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job. A New Commentary*, Jerusalem 1957, 90-91; G.V. Smith also defends this opinion: G.V. Smith, "Job IV 12-21: Is It Eliphaz's Vision?", *VT* 40 (1990) 453-463). However, it does not become clear that Eliphaz quotes Job. Moreover, the fact that the view of the night vision returns in the second speech of Eliphaz (15,14-16) and the third one of Bildad (25,4-6) makes it even more likely that it is a topic of Job's friends.

¹⁰⁶ See also Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 140. Since Clines regards 4,18-21 as the words of Eliphaz, it becomes even more problematic to him. For, Eliphaz would contradict his former words. Therefore, Clines distinguishes 4,19a-b as a universal truth about mankind from 4,19c-21 as particular possibilities. He translates the verbs in 4,19c-21 as modal verbs (D.A.J. Clines, "Verb Modality and the Interpretation of Job IV 20-21", *VT* 30 (1980) 355-356; Clines, *Job*, 135). Van Hecke adopts this view (Van Hecke, *Job 12-14*, 338). However, 4,19c-21 belong to the general the description of the state and unavoidable fate of mortals within the content of the night vision).

who lives a perfect life according to the doctrine of Wisdom is not pure before God according to Fohrer.¹⁰⁷ He concludes from the image of the house of clay (4,19) that infinite subordination to God is not due to a religious or ethical base, but stems from the perishable nature of humankind.¹⁰⁸ So, the concept of retribution as described in 4,6-9 would deal with the religious and ethical behaviour of human beings, while the night vision expresses the absolutely imperfect state of human beings beyond the area of retribution, according to Fohrer.

In the opinion of Witte, the night vision serves to offer a modification to retributive thinking. He takes this vision as an interpolation that makes it clear that suffering does not have to be considered any longer as a punishment of immediate transgressions, but can be understood as an always righteous destiny of the, as such, naturally¹⁰⁹ and morally (15,16) unworthy human being. The connection of this opinion of the night vision with the concept of retribution means that a human being is absolutely corrupt, but can be relatively righteous according to Witte.¹¹⁰ The views of Fohrer and Witte correspond with each other in the sense that both assume that the concept of retribution (4,6-9) and the night vision (4,17-21) refer to different fields of human life. The night vision points out the absolutely imperfect state of human beings or absolute corruption on the one hand, while the retributive logic of 4,6-9 is concerned with the possibility of relative righteousness or ethical and religiously correct behaviour on the other. However, the nature of absolute imperfection in the night vision differs in both views. Fohrer places the innate impotence of human beings beyond the area of retribution.¹¹¹ Witte, on the other hand, is of the opinion that the night vision refers to the area of retribution. In his view, the night vision regards each human being as essentially רשע (wicked), but denies that suffering always stems from immediate transgressions. Sin is an integral part of human nature according to Witte.¹¹²

Both of the above views suppose that the first part of Job 4 refers to the area of retribution, in which people can be righteous or wicked. Then it deals with ethical or religious behaviour. Subsequently they argue that the night vision refers to a different field and expresses the absolute imperfection of human beings in relation

¹⁰⁷ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 144.

¹⁰⁸ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 145. Cf. Hölscher, *Hiob*, 21.

¹⁰⁹ 4,19-21 and 25,6.

¹¹⁰ Witte, *Leiden*, 225. Remus makes a similar distinction: from the perspective of human beings, a human being can be characterized as righteous when he behaves loyally in his many relationships in the communion. But nobody is righteous from the perspective of God (M. Remus, *Menschenbildvorstellungen im Ijob-Buch. Ein Beitrag zur alttestamentlichen Anthropologie* (BEATAJ 21), Frankfurt am Main e.a. 1993, 21, note 73). Also, Hesse thinks of a modification to retributive thinking, so that Job's misfortune does not necessarily have to be caused by his wickedness (Hesse, *Hiob*, 56).

¹¹¹ Hesse similarly considers the night vision as an attempt to explain Job's misery beyond the area of retribution: caused by another reason than wickedness (Hesse, *Hiob*, 56).

¹¹² Witte, *Leiden*, 225-226.

to God. However, two problems arise with regard to this distinction. First, Fohrer bases this distinction mainly on the description ‘houses of clay’ (4,19). From this image of the perishable human body, he deduces the distinction between a lapse, which stems from the natural weakness of human beings and falls beyond the area of retribution, and iniquities in an ethical sense that fall within the area of retribution and point to wickedness. Fohrer argues that the depiction of the human body in 4,19 demonstrates that the night vision wants to base Job’s suffering on his human nature beyond the area of retribution instead of on sins committed.¹¹³ However, it is questionable whether the depiction of human bodies as houses of clay can also serve as an explanation for which of the two is the origin of a sin. This image indicates the low state of human beings. The perishable materials represent their subordinate position to God’s servants and angels. But it does not express a source of sins due to the natural weakness of human beings beyond the area of retribution.

Secondly, this distinction would imply that the verb צדק (to be righteous) in 4,17 would refer to the area of imperfection beyond the area of retribution.¹¹⁴ In 22,3, Eliphaz asks Job whether it is any delight for God that he is righteous. Here, the verb צדק stands parallel to תתם דרכיך (make your ways perfect). דרך (way) refers to a person’s way of living.¹¹⁵ After this question, Eliphaz describes some concrete transgressions which Job would have committed (22,5-9). So, the verb צדק refers to the area of retribution in Job 22. It would be strange if the verb צדק referred to the area of retribution in 22,3 although it would point out some imperfection beyond the area of retribution in 4,17. Moreover, when the content of the night vision returns in the second speech of Eliphaz (15,14-16), it is explicitly placed within the area of retribution. In this speech human beings are characterized as those who drink injustice like water (15,16).¹¹⁶ This makes it plausible that צדק in 4,17 also refers to the area of retribution. In this way, it becomes clear that a

¹¹³ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 145.181.271. Fohrer distinguishes the opinion of the night vision from 15,16, where Eliphaz attributes Job’s suffering to his sins and so places the motif of imperfection within the area of retribution there (271). Furthermore, 7,21 plays a role, where Job asks why God does not overlook his iniquities. According to Fohrer, Job can only refer here to the iniquities which stem from natural human weakness (cf. 4,17-21) (181). Because of among others 7,21 and 13,26, Scherer distinguishes between sins that stem from the natural weakness which fall beyond the area of retribution and sins that are committed consciously and deliberately, which fall within the area of retribution (A. Scherer, “Relative Gerechtigkeit und absolute Vollkommenheit bei Hiob. Überlegungen zu Spannungsmomenten im Hiobbuch”, *Biblische Notizen* 101 (2000) 90-91.95-97). Compare also V. Maag, *Hiob. Wandlung und Verarbeitung des Problems in Novelle, Dialogdichtung und Spätfassungen* (FRLANT 128), Göttingen 1982, 158-165. According to Maag, Job charges God with blaming him for sins that stem from the natural weakness of humankind (159).

¹¹⁴ This verb also occurs in the two other passages on the human imperfection (15,14; 25,4).

¹¹⁵ See e.g. 4,6.

¹¹⁶ For the description of 15,14-16, see §3.4.2.

distinction between an area of retribution (4,6-9) and an imperfect state of human beings beyond the area of retribution (4,17-21) is not tenable.¹¹⁷

Since it is not possible to distinguish between a source of sin within the area of retribution and one beyond it in Job 4 and since קָדַשׁ functions within the area of retribution at the other places in the speeches of the friends, the concept of retribution also counts for the content of the night vision. Thus, Witte is right to a certain extent when he says that the night vision considers each human being as being essentially wicked. However, this view of the night vision does not speak about a level other than the concept of retribution as described in the first half of Job 4. On the contrary, the night vision offers some modification to the retributive thinking of 4,6-9. Whereas the concept of retribution assumes that somebody can be wicked or righteous, the night vision argues that being fully righteous is only a theoretical possibility. However, practically speaking, it is impossible to be fully righteous before God, according to the night vision.¹¹⁸

The presentation of the night vision puts pressure on the further continuation of the dialogue. It prepares Job and the reader for the view that will develop in the course of the speeches of the friends: Job can not be righteous because of his suffering. The argument of the night vision intensifies this view. Since no human being can be righteous before God, a person's conviction that he is blameless can not be true.¹¹⁹ By introducing it as a night vision, the argument of human imperfection is somewhat distanced from Eliphaz. So, Eliphaz leaves the question of whether or not Job is guilty open at this stage of the dialogue. But the night vision has already rejected the possibility of being righteous. Hence, Job's conviction that he is blameless (Job 9) has already been refuted by the night vision in Job 4. In this way, the night vision provides an important argument in the attempts of Job's friends to safeguard God's righteousness and theology that understands God's actions according to the concept of retribution. It backs the conviction of Job's friends in the course of the dialogue that Job must have sinned.

¹¹⁷ A similar kind of problem arises when Witte makes a distinction between relative righteousness and absolute corruption. It would mean that קָדַשׁ refers to the absolute corruption in 4,17, while it concerns the area of relative righteousness in Job 22. For, the mentioned sins in 22,5-9 belong to the area of the possibility of being relatively righteous in his way of reasoning.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Clines. He thinks that the night vision makes Eliphaz aware that terms like 'righteous' and 'innocent' are simply rule-of-thumb designations that do not correspond to the reality of a universe where only God is truly 'righteous'. Therefore, according to Clines, Job has to expect some degree of suffering as a less than perfectly righteous person (Clines, *Job*, 132-133; also 128: "...the righteous can never be perfectly righteous...").

¹¹⁹ Compare Hermisson, "Notizen", 133.

3.4.2 Further References to the Motif of Human Imperfection

While Eliphaz introduces the motif of human imperfection by quoting a night vision (4,12-21), he uses this motif by himself in Job 15. The situation has now changed. While Eliphaz asked the question of Job's guilt aside in Job 4-5, he now explicitly declares that Job is guilty. Eliphaz reacts against Job's rebellious behaviour and his claim that he is blameless. From this, he concludes that sin is at the root of what Job says (15,5). The motif of human imperfection now serves as an argument to support Eliphaz' impression that Job is guilty.

- 15,14 What is a mortal that he can be pure,
and that one born of woman can be righteous?
15,15 Behold, he does not put trust in his holy ones¹²⁰,
and the heavens are not pure in his eyes.
15,16 How much less one who is abominable and corrupt,
a human being who drinks injustice like water.

While the night vision in particular depicted the perishable nature of human beings (4,19), 15,16 emphasizes their sinful character. Here, corruption is connected with the nature of humankind.¹²¹ Sinning is as natural for human beings as drinking water.¹²² The characterization of humankind as sinners is chosen in view of the specific function of the motif of human imperfection in this second speech of Eliphaz. Here, it serves to support the open declaration that Job is not blameless (15,5). Since all human beings are corrupt, it is impossible that Job's plea in Job 9 is true. The word **שְׁדָיִם** (holy one) can refer to a specific group of human beings¹²³ as well as to angels or beings who dwell in the realm of God¹²⁴. Because of the parallel with heaven (15,15b) and because God's servants and angels are mentioned in 4,18, the holy ones are heavenly beings here.¹²⁵ God does not even trust the heavenly beings that dwell in his realm, how much less, then, does he trust human beings who are used to sin. In Job 15, Eliphaz mentions several 'arguments' in order to demonstrate Job's wrongdoing. He wonders whether Job has the wisdom to see through God's actions (15,7-9) and whether the God's consolations are too small (15,11). Then the motif of human imperfection is introduced as the decisive argument. Job's conviction that he is blameless is incorrect because a human being can simply not be righteous before God.

¹²⁰ Reading **בְּקִדְשׁוֹ** as a plural.

¹²¹ Compare Ps.14,3; 53,4, where the verb **אָלַף** (to be corrupt) is used to describe all human beings who turned away from God and no one does good.

¹²² Cf. Pope, *Job*, 116; Clines, *Job*, 353.

¹²³ E.g. Ps.16,3; 34,10.

¹²⁴ E.g. Ps.89,6.8; Zech.14,5.

¹²⁵ See also the representation of the heavenly court in the prologue.

One could argue that in Job 15 the motif of human imperfection does not refer to a general characteristic of humankind, but is used with an eye on the particular case of Job. In this way, Hesse thinks that Eliphaz refers directly to Job because otherwise there would be a discrepancy between the general world view of the wise, which is exposed in 15,20ff, and the motif of human imperfection, if it regarded all human beings.¹²⁶ However, the general formulation by means of אָנוּשׁ (mortal) and יָלֵדָה אִשָּׁה (born of woman) in 15,14 implies that this statement points to a general characterization of humankind. If this is the case, the question arises of how the exposition of the fate of the wicked (15,20-35)¹²⁷ relates to the first part of Job 15. For, each human being would suffer this fate to some extent, if nobody is fully perfect. One has to establish that Eliphaz describes different aspects of the phenomenon suffering here. While suffering is a consequence for wrong behaviour on the one hand, Eliphaz can not imagine that people never do something wrong on the other hand. The implication of this observation, then, is that human beings are incited to limit wrong behaviour. For, the more one sins, the more one suffers. Because of this, the depiction of the fate of the wicked (15,20-35) bears a double function. On the one hand, it serves as a warning.¹²⁸ Job's suffering might increase with more of these elements if he keeps sinning. On the other hand, some elements of this list seem to correspond to Job's situation.¹²⁹ For instance, the wealth of the wicked will not endure (15,29). Hence, the depiction of the miserable fate of the wicked also serves to prove that Job is wicked to a certain extent. In the eyes of Eliphaz, Job can not be an exception to how humankind generally is. Therefore, he rejects Job's claim that he is innocent. Thus, Job's accusation against God also lacks foundation according to Eliphaz.

The last mention of the motif of human imperfection occurs in Bildad's final speech (Job 25).¹³⁰ This speech starts with a depiction of God's majesty. This majesty is characterized by the words 'dominion' and 'fear' (25,2). According to Bildad, God has an untraceable number of armies (25,3). Bildad contrasts the human state with this mighty God.

¹²⁶ Hesse, *Hiob*, 109. Also Pope, *Job*, 116.

¹²⁷ Horst thinks that 15,20 shows that it is not a general description of the wicked but regards a particular type, namely the עָרִיץ (the ruthless) (Horst, *Hiob*, 228). However, the word עָרִיץ occurs parallel to רָשָׁע (wicked) and is, therefore, meant as a general characterization of the wicked. So, 15,20-35 deals with the fate of all wicked.

¹²⁸ Cf. Driver-Gray, *Job*, 132; Weiser, *Hiob*, 116; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 272; Horst, *Hiob*, 227; Habel, *Job*, 251. Driver-Gray and Fohrer also see a terrifying element in it. Pace Clines, who thinks that Eliphaz wants to encourage Job by an account of what his life-history will not be (Clines, *Job*, 354).

¹²⁹ Cf. Weiser, *Hiob*, 116; Habel, *Job*, 251.

¹³⁰ This speech is remarkably short. For example, it has been proposed that 25,1-6 and 26,5-14 should be read as one speech of Bildad (Pope, *Job*, 180-181; Habel, *Job*, 366-368; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 246; Strauß, *Hiob*, 103-105; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 62-63; the whole of Ch.26). For an overview of the different proposals in the research history, see: Witte, *Leiden*, 1-55.

- 25,4 How can a mortal be righteous before God
and how can one born of woman be pure?
25,5 Behold, even the moon is not bright
and the stars are not pure in his eyes.
25,6 How much less a mortal, a maggot,
a human being, a worm.

After Eliphaz declared Job guilty because of concrete iniquities (22,5-9), the motif of human imperfection in Job 25 ensures Job's wicked state. Whereas the imputation of concrete iniquities may be called into question –Eliphaz may have given wrong information–, this motif guarantees that Job's conviction of his blamelessness can not be true. In Job 23, Job considers the possibility of having a lawsuit with God. He states that an upright person (יָשָׁר) would argue with God, if he had a case (23,7).¹³¹ Bildad opposes the impossibility of being righteous before God to this claim. A reference to the concept of retribution is lacking in this speech. Here, the insignificance of human beings is contrasted with the majesty of the Creator. Human beings are like a maggot or a worm. The word רִמָּה (maggot) refers to the death and to the underworld.¹³² The designation תולעה (worm) is used in Ps.22,7 to disqualify the poet as a human being. This third mention of the motif of human imperfection concentrates on the position of a mortal in relation to the Creator. Because of a fundamental difference between the Creator and creatures, a human being is not able to be righteous before God. In this way, the motif of human imperfection expresses the awareness that God's greatness surpasses all creatures.

3.5 Misery as a Pedagogical Instrument

3.5.1 A Pedagogical Twist in the First Speech of Eliphaz

Even though the concept of retribution is the basic pattern of thought in the friends' speeches, a somewhat different perception of the function of evil also appears. Human beings should understand their misery as a correction or warning from God's side. This is an expression of God's engagement with the well-being of human beings. Eliphaz ends his first speech with such a pedagogical twist. After the exposition of the concept of retribution (4,2-11) and the motif of human imperfection (4,17-21), he mentions a more positive aspect of suffering. It can be understood as a correcting intervention by God.

¹³¹ The word יָשָׁר refers to the characterization of Job by the narrator and God in the prologue (1,1.8; 2,3). A similar claim is made in 23,10: if he tested, I would come out like gold.

¹³² 17,14; 21,26; Isa.14,11.

- 5,17 Behold¹³³, happy is the human being whom God reproves,
do not reject the discipline of the Almighty.
- 5,18 For, he causes pain and binds up,
he wounds, but his hands¹³⁴ heal.

After Eliphaz has depicted God's marvellous deeds in which God rescues the lowly and frustrates the devices of the crafty (5,9-16), he mentions a pedagogical view on misery. The verb כָּחַל (to reprove) in 5,17a gets a pedagogical meaning because it stands parallel to מוֹסֵר (discipline) in 5,17b.¹³⁵ The statement that God causes pain (5,18) makes it clear that, to some extent, this reproach consists of suffering. Job should understand his misery as a warning from God. 5,17-18 refers to Prov.3,11-13, where God's reproof is connected to his love for someone; he calls those who find wisdom happy.¹³⁶ Human beings consider receiving God's reproof as a privilege because it is an expression of God's concern with them. If Job appreciated the trouble, which God takes in favour of him, and took God's discipline into account by changing his wrong way of doing, a prosperous life would be in store. However, how can Job accept God's discipline if he is truly blameless when a reason for God's reproof is lacking?¹³⁷ Either way, this discipline is not applied in a vacuum. In 5,18, Eliphaz makes clear that God not only hurts people in order to correct their way of life, but also heals them, if they accept his discipline.¹³⁸ This topic is formulated by means of a merism. A merism is a figure of speech that expresses a single thing by referring to more (sometimes opposite) parts.¹³⁹ This means that the aim of God's actions is not one-sidedly to punish or to correct someone. God's causing of pain is always connected to the goal of letting a person better their life and them being able to heal themselves because of the change in behaviour as a result of this discipline. Eliphaz subsequently depicts the following prospect; if Job accepts God's reproof and draws the obvious conclusion from it, a bright future lies ahead of him (5,19-26).

¹³³ Several scholars delete הִנֵּה (behold) (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 20; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 133; Hesse, *Hiob*, 52; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 114).

¹³⁴ Reading the Qere וַיִּדְרֹךְ.

¹³⁵ Pace Horst, who states that כָּחַל has a forensic meaning in 5,17, so that suffering is to be received from God as a forensic as well as pedagogical measure according to this verse (Horst, *Hiob*, 86). The verb כָּחַל also has a pedagogical meaning in e.g. 2 Sam.7,14; Ps.6,2; 38,2.

¹³⁶ If וַיִּבְרָא (like a father) in Prov.3,12b is rendered as וַיִּבְרָא (he causes pain), 5,18a refers also to this part. Compare also Ps.94,12.

¹³⁷ Compare Clines, *Job*, 147.

¹³⁸ Compare Hos.6,1, where it is connected with returning to the Lord.

¹³⁹ E.g. in Gen.1,1, 'heaven and earth' refer to the universe.

This pedagogical turn offers a rather new view of suffering in comparison to the concept of retribution. One could wonder how these two different aspects are related to each other. The specific issue, then, is whether God also wounds people in order to reprove them beyond the area of retribution. This would imply that Eliphaz holds it possible that human beings can also suffer more than they deserve in retributive proportions. Hesse thinks that the concept of retribution retreats to the background in this passage. According to Hesse, any embarrassment caused by the concept of retribution affecting the innocent is prevented if one understands that suffering is a possible chastisement of God.¹⁴⁰ However, the pain and wounds which are caused by God refer to the trouble that stems from one's own behaviour, as Eliphaz argued in the preceding part of his first speech. The pedagogical twist sheds light on an additional aspect of being punished by means of a miserable fate. Whereas suffering is a consequence of committed injustice, the pedagogical view also urges us to understand this misery as an encouragement to remove injustice and turn towards God. Suffering will be temporal for those who accept God's discipline (cf. 5,18ff). So, the pedagogical view does not go beyond the area of retribution here. Only the perspectives on suffering differ in both cases.¹⁴¹

3.5.2 The Emphasis on the Pedagogical Function of Suffering in the Speeches of Elihu

Elihu in particular defends God's righteousness. He subscribes to the concept of retribution. God repays the deeds of human beings, rewarding or punishing them according to their ways. The Almighty would not pervert this justice.¹⁴² Therefore, Elihu strongly attacks Job's claim that he is blameless. Considering his misery, Job must have sinned.¹⁴³ Although Elihu adopts the basic theological structure of the other three friends with this, some modification appears. In the speeches of Elihu, the pedagogical aspect of suffering gets more emphasis. Elihu takes up the pedagogical view of Eliphaz (5,17-18) but elaborates more extensively. He attributes an explicitly pedagogical sense to one's punishment.

After Elihu's statement that Job is not right when he claims that he is blameless (33,12), he refutes Job's complaint that God refuses to answer him.¹⁴⁴ According to Elihu, God answers human beings in several ways (33,14):

33,15 In a dream, in a vision of the night,

¹⁴⁰ Hesse, *Hiob*, 58-59. Fohrer also places this passage outside the area of retribution. According to him, Eliphaz has the misfortune which stems from the natural weakness in mind (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 152).

¹⁴¹ Compare Clines, *Job*, 148.

¹⁴² 34,11-12. See e.g. also 36,6.

¹⁴³ 33,9,12; 34,5-7.

¹⁴⁴ This claim can be found in 19,7; 30,20. In 13,22, Job invites God to communicate with him and in 23,4-5.8-9, Job wants to contend with God, but God is untraceable.

- when deep sleep falls on human beings,¹⁴⁵
while they slumber in bed.
- 33,16 Then he opens ears of human beings,
and terrifies them¹⁴⁶ with warnings¹⁴⁷,
- 33,17 to turn a human being from his doing¹⁴⁸,
and to cut away¹⁴⁹ pride from man.

Elihu confronts Job with his impression that God communicates with human beings during sleep. God reveals himself in dreams and visions. While Job complained that God terrifies him with dreams and visions (7,14), Elihu points out that they had a specific purpose. Dreams and visions serve to warn people. In 5,17, the word **נִסְרָה** bears the meaning ‘discipline’ because it is used in the context of misery. However, this word means ‘warning’ in 33,16, since discipline in the sense of experiencing suffering occurs as a second way in which God speaks in 33,19ff.¹⁵⁰ This warning is concerned with a person’s behaviour. The actions of a human being in 33,17a refer to reprehensible actions due to the parallel with **גָּדָל** (pride) in 33,17b. In Jer.13,17, **גָּדָל** refers to the refusal to listen to God. God warns human beings about wrong ways of life in order to make them remove their pride and rescue their lives (33,18). This warning does not precede possible lapses in order to withhold people from them, but happens because of the injustice which someone has committed. For, the pride in 33,17 refers to wickedness. It is this wickedness that Elihu has also determined in Job’s life (33,12). So, wickedness is the starting point for the description of God’s speaking by means of dreams (33,15-16) and pain (33,19ff). God’s pedagogical action concerns the wicked in the speeches of Elihu.¹⁵¹

Physical suffering is a second way by means of which God communicates with (wicked) human beings in the view of Elihu. God reproves them by pain:

- 33,19 Or he is reproved by pain on his bed,
with a continual strife¹⁵² in his bones.

¹⁴⁵ Many scholars consider this line as an addition, since it is a literal inserted quotation of 4,13 (Wahl, *Gerechte Schöpfer*, 60 (note 46); Budde, *Hiob*, 196; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 287; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 80; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 454; Hesse, *Hiob*, 179; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 313).

¹⁴⁶ Reading **יְהַיֵּאֱרָב** (cf. LXX).

¹⁴⁷ Reading **וַיְהַיֵּאֱרָב**.

¹⁴⁸ Reading **וַיְהַיֵּאֱרָב** (cf. LXX, Tg.).

¹⁴⁹ Reading **וַיְהַיֵּאֱרָב**.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Budde, *Hiob*, 196; Habel, *Job*, 468.

¹⁵¹ So also Wahl, *Gerechte Schöpfer*, 69.

¹⁵² Reading the Kethib.

Severe physical pain can be a way of God correcting the wrong way of life of human beings. This divine communication is more intensive. The verb **נָכַח** (to reprove) refers to 5,17, where Eliphaz states that a person can be referred to as happy, when God reproves him. As in 5,17-18, suffering also has a reproving and disciplinary function in 33,19ff. The further description in 33,20-22 indicates that Elihu is talking about serious and life-threatening physical diseases. However, a person in these circumstances does not stand alone. Elihu introduces the figure of a mediator in this life-threatening situation (33,23). This mediator informs the sick person how to turn to a righteous way of life on the one hand and intercedes with God on the other hand. If sick and reprovved persons decide to do their duty as an upright person again, God will consider this decision a ransom by which he delivers them from going down into the pit (33,24).¹⁵³ In this way, Elihu emphasizes God's efforts to save people from a miserable fate and to return them to a righteous way of life.¹⁵⁴ The misery of the wicked is a pedagogical measure in the first instance from Elihu's point of view. However, it does not mean that he rules out the function of punishment. For, those who do not pay attention to God's warnings and reprovvements, will not be rescued from going into the pit and will perish.¹⁵⁵

The pedagogical perspective returns in Job 36. The retributive context is clear in this chapter. Elihu states that God does not keep the wicked alive (36,6). God declares their transgressions against those who are chained or caught in cords of affliction (36,8-9). Subsequently Elihu summarizes the main line of thought of the pedagogical perspective on suffering.

- 36,10 He opens their ears for a warning
and says that they return from iniquity.
36,11 If they listen and serve,
they complete their days in prosperity,
and their years in happiness.¹⁵⁶
36,12 But if they do not listen, they perish by a spear¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Cf. G. Fohrer, "Die Weisheit des Elihu (Hi 32-37)", in: G. Fohrer, *Studien zum Buche Hiob (1956-1979)* (BZAW 159), (2nd) Berlin-New York 1983, 97 [=AfO 19 (1959/60) 83-94]; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 459-460.

¹⁵⁴ Compare Fohrer, "Elihu", 110. He points to the fact that Elihu puts less emphasis on human action and more on God's helpful and merciful action.

¹⁵⁵ E.g. 34,17-30.

¹⁵⁶ Several scholars delete this line (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 311; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 85; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 473; Hesse, *Hiob*, 187; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 336).

¹⁵⁷ Several scholars consider **בַּשֵּׁל** (by a spear) as a repeating gloss of 33,18 (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 473; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 311; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 85; Hesse, *Hiob*, 187; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 336). Others think that **בַּלְשָׁ** bears the meaning 'channel' and refers to the journey to the underworld across the 'channel' (Habel, *Job*, 508; Pope, *Job*, 266; Wahl, *Gerechte*

and they die without knowledge.

Returning from iniquity is the purpose of suffering that is received as consequence of committing transgressions. The verb שׁוּב (to return) in 36,10 refers to 22,23 where Eliphaz mentions returning to the Almighty as a condition for change in Job's miserable fate. God attempts to make the wicked see their wrong way of life. However, the decision to interpret their suffering as a warning and to change their way of life is left to the wicked themselves. They decide whether or not they listen to God's warning. The implications of such a decision are clear; those who take their punishment as a warning and change their way of life will be rewarded and end their days in prosperity. By contrast, those who ignore or miss this sign perish because of their wickedness. Thus, the pedagogical perspective does not break the concept of retribution. Elihu does not mention suffering as a means for testing human beings;¹⁵⁸ suffering is the result of human behaviour in his view. However, he modifies the view of the other three friends to the extent that he emphasizes the pedagogical function of misery more than the other friends do. Punishment for iniquities has to be taken as a warning and reprovment by God in first instance. It demonstrates God's concern for human welfare. In this way, the main issue in the speeches of Elihu is not why people have to suffer, but for what purpose they are suffering.¹⁵⁹

Schöpfer, 60 (note 53) and 107). HAL carefully prefers the meaning 'spear' (art. שׁוּב IV, HAL 4, 1518).

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Wahl, *Gerechte Schöpfer*, 112. Wahl contrasts this view with the opinion of Eliphaz in 5,17ff. According to him, Eliphaz mentions suffering as a test of human beings (112). However, in my opinion Eliphaz also refers to suffering which human beings encounter because of their sins (see §3.5.1).

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Weiser, *Hiob*, 223; Fohrer, "Elihu", 110; Hesse, *Hiob*, 181; Wahl, *Gerechte Schöpfer*, 72.

Chapter 4

Between Rebellion and Hope in the Speeches of Job

4.1 Introduction

The central charge in the dialogue is that God perverts justice. Job utters this grave and decisive accusation in Job 9.¹ Even though this allegation is one of the main points of the dialogue, Job's speeches also include other elements. Job holds on to his innocence, keeps his wish to enter into a lawsuit with God, and insists that God treats him unjustly. But he also explores his situation from different perspectives and looks at whether other insights could be helpful in explaining God's involvement in his current blameless suffering. Job considers several possible motives for God's intangible, unintelligible and unjust actions. However, at the same time he also places his hope in this same God. This ambivalent attitude towards God shows how complex the situation of a sufferer is. On the one hand, it looks as if God manifests himself as an opponent. God even brings upon himself the suspicion that he abuses his sovereign position as Creator. Job suggests that God had intentions other than partnership when creating human beings. On the other hand, sufferers can only place their hope in this same God because only God has the power to free them from his hand. Therefore, Job also cautiously hopes that God can force an opening in his immovable case as his witness and redeemer. In this way, Job moves between rebellion and hope in his speeches.

The doubt about God's righteousness remains an important topic in the course of Job's speeches. On the one hand, Job uses his own case in order to demonstrate the unjust nature of God's actions. He holds to his conviction that he is innocent and repeats that God's hand has wrongfully turned against him. After Job 9, Job's wish to plead with God and the impossibility of having a case with God return. On the other hand, Job also casts doubt on God's irreproachable actions by directing the attention to the fate of the wicked. Contrary to his friends, Job observes that the wicked live in prosperity. According to Job, they are not punished with misery as may be expected according to the concept of retribution. So, there are two lines of argument in order to prove that God's dealings are unsound, if it is understood according to this concept: Job's own innocent suffering and the apparent prosperity of the wicked.

¹ See Ch.2.

This fourth chapter explores the different aspects which Job mentions in order to understand his situation and to explain God's involvement in his misery outside Job 9. It elaborates upon how Job perceives God as his opponent and how he searches for motives for God's hostile treatment of him (4.2). Subsequently it maps out in the way in which Job applies the image of the lawsuit in his other speeches outside Job 9. The chapter depicts how Job holds to his conviction that he is blameless until the end and questions whether Job does, nevertheless, admit that he has sinned to some extent (4.3). In order to support his claim that God perverts justice, Job also draws attention to the fate of the wicked. They prosper instead of suffering misery (4.4). Another topic is the matter of why God gives life to those who meet trouble. Thus, the question of the sense of a life in suffering is raised (4.5). Finally, this chapter deals with Job's trust in God in God's role as heavenly witness and redeemer (4.6).

4.2 God as Job's Opponent

4.2.1 God's Hostility towards Job

Job considers his miserable fate to be the result of a hostile attack by God. In Job's eyes, God treats him as if he is God's enemy. God's hostile action towards human beings does not need to be controversial as such. According to the concept of retribution, God legitimately punishes the wicked because of their opposition against him. However, God's action becomes dubious in Job's case because Job insists that he is blameless. Therefore, Job does not deserve to be treated as an evildoer. In Job 9, Job makes it clear that he sees God's treatment of him as perversion of justice.² This implies that each depiction of God's hostility after Job 9 has even more impact; then it not only points out that God is the origin of Job's misfortune, it also has the connotation of unjust action. The images of attack and hostility emphasize the intensity of Job's suffering. This distress is all the more painful because, in Job's eyes, it affects him unjustly.

In the dialogue, Job identifies God as the origin of his misery for the first time in 6,4. Here, he uses the image of the archer in order to depict how God harasses him with trouble. Job reacts to Eliphaz' question of why Job is dejected so and does not trust his fear of God (4,2-6). Job tries to justify his outburst of words by pointing to the weight of his trouble (6,2-3).³ The reason for this intense reaction is that God has afflicted him with severe suffering.

² See Ch.2.

³ The verb *לעע* (to speak uncontrolled) in 6,3 does not mean that Job apologizes for untruthful speaking, since that would undermine his plea in the continuation of the dialogue (see also Van Selms, *Job I*, 63; Clines, *Job*, 170). It characterizes more the sometimes emotional and sharp nature of Job's words. Furthermore, in the words of Job in 6,2-4, a reference could be seen to the remark of Eliphaz in 5,2 that resentment kills the fool. For,

6,4 For the arrows of the Almighty are in me,
 my spirit drinks their poison.⁴
 The terrors of God line up against me.⁵

God's arrows, which have pierced Job, symbolize the anguish and misfortune (6,2) that God has sent to Job. Normally, God's arrows pierce evildoers or opponents and bring disaster.⁶ In Ps.38,2-3, the psalmist characterizes his illness as God's arrows that have stuck in him. He implores God not to discipline him for his iniquities in God's anger. In 6,4, the image of God's arrows similarly evokes the context of the concept of retribution, in which God punishes evildoers. Job attributes the origin of his misfortune to an aggressive act by God. He considers himself as a target of God's hostile actions, with which God normally treats his opponents. Within the image, Job's spirit drinks the poison of God's arrows (6,4b). This causes his illness and trouble.⁷ The word רוּחַ (spirit) can express the centre of someone's thinking and feeling. Several times it appears parallel with נֶפֶשׁ (breath of life/someone's inner centre) which indicates the centre of someone's life.⁸ Job indicates that his misfortune has affected his whole being. In the words of a dichotomy with which Job is not familiar: he suffers physically as well as mentally.⁹ A new image occurs in 6,4c. Here, the terrors of God represent Job's trouble. God lines up his terrors before his opponent like a general besieges and attacks an enemy.¹⁰ The images of God's arrows and terrors illustrate the origin of Job's distress, but they also underline the weight of his anguish. God afflicted Job with a miserable fate that God's opponents normally suffer.

One could wonder whether this depiction of God's hostile actions in 6,4 already suggests the feeling that God wrongfully acts in Job's case. This accusation is explicitly heard for the first time in Job 9. It is true that Job casts doubt on the

the word כַּעַשׁ (resentment) in 5,2 returns in 6,2. However, in 6,2, the word כַּעַשׁ has the broader meaning 'anguish' because of the parallel with הֲוֵהָיָה (Qere; my misfortune).

⁴ Hesse considers this line as an addition (Hesse, *Hiob*, 62).

⁵ Fohrer considers this line as a gloss (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 160). Several scholars change יַעֲרֹבוּנִי (are arrayed) into יַעֲבֹרוּנִי ('disrupt me') (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 160; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 20; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 121; Van Selms, *Job I*, 63). However, the meaning of the Masoretic text is clear and does not need to be changed (see art. עָרַךְ, HAL II, 885).

⁶ Num.24,8; Deut.32,23.42; 2 Sam.22,15; Ps.7,14; 18,15; 64,8; 77,18; 144,6; Zech.9,14.

⁷ The image of God as archer belongs to the category of God as 'divine warrior'. It can probably be more specifically traced back to the Syrian and Egyptian (18th dynasty) deity Resheph, who sends plagues to people by means of arrows.

⁸ 7,11. See also 16,13, where God affects Job's kidneys.

⁹ See also Fohrer, *Hiob*, 169; Van Selms, *Job I*, 63.

¹⁰ Compare Ps.88,16-18, where the psalmist understands his miserable and desperate situation as the result of God's terrors which surround and destroy him. He associates God's terrors with God's burning anger.

relation between the extent of his misery and his conviction that he has lived a righteous life in Job 6-7.¹¹ He does not understand why God pays such close attention to insignificant human beings and makes Job his target (Job 7). Job also mentions his righteous way of life.¹² However, Job does not draw any conclusion from these considerations and leaves the question of God's injustice open in Job 6-7. The images of God's arrows and terrors show the origin and severity of Job's anguish. They explain Job's tempestuous reaction. But Job has not yet suggested in Job 6-7 that divine injustice is at the basis of his fate.¹³

In the course of the dialogue, the images of archer and target return. Job then uses even more extensive military images in order to express his feeling that God harasses him. The image of God as archer returns in 16,12-14. Job complains that God afflicts and crushes him. God has set Job up as his target and his projectiles¹⁴ surround him (16,12c-13a). These projectiles hit the vital parts of a human being. God pierces Job's kidneys without pity (16,13b/c). The kidneys as well as the liver symbolize the vital core of human life.¹⁵ God's hostile attack affects Job's vigour and mental state. In Job 9, Job has charged God with unjust actions because he is convinced that he is blameless.¹⁶ In this light, the depictions of God's attack with a great display of power demonstrate the lack of proportion in God's actions in relation to Job's case.¹⁷ They now represent God's unjust actions in the Creation. Job is a defenceless victim of God's hostile and unjust show of strength towards him.

The depiction of God's hostility in 16,12-14 concludes with images from the battlefield. Job compares God's attack to a combatant who breaches through the wall of a besieged city.¹⁸ In Job's view, God acts like a warrior on the battlefield.

16,14 He breaches me breach after breach,
he rushes against me like a warrior.

¹¹ 6,30; 7,12.20-21.

¹² 6,10c (some scholars delete this line (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 161; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 22; Hesse, *Hiob*, 62) or are unsure of its originality (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 61; Pope, *Job*, 52)); 6,29b.

¹³ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 171.

¹⁴ In Jer.50,29, the word **קַשָּׁת** means 'archer' because of the parallel with **קַשָּׁת** (those who bend the bow). Therefore, several scholars also read 'archer' in 16,13. They see God as a commander directing his archers to the target (Clines, *Job*, 371; Pope, *Job*, 122; Habel, *Job*, 273). However, the meaning 'projectile' is more probable in 16,13 because God is the subject in 16,12-14. God personally attacks Job in these verses (so Hölscher, *Hiob*, 40; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 278; Horst, *Hiob*, 250; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 189.192; Hesse, *Hiob*, 113; Van Selms, *Job I*, 145).

¹⁵ Compare Lam.3,12-13 and Prov.7,23.

¹⁶ Job repeats this conviction in 16,17.

¹⁷ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 287; Clines, *Job*, 383-384.

¹⁸ See also 30,14.

These two images express the gravity of God's attack. According to Job, he has become an enemy in God's eyes. The image of God breaching walls suggests that God has turned away from a person or his people and left them in the hands of opponents. Normally, the reason for this attitude is God's disappointment in their way of life.¹⁹ Apparently, Job belongs to this category. The breaches in the wall could refer to the blows, which Job experiences in his life. These actions by God are compared to those of a warrior assaulting a city (16,14b). In Isa.42,13, God goes to war against his enemies as a warrior in order to bring deliverance to his own people.²⁰ This bellicose attitude has also turned against Job. While Eliphaz depicted the wicked as those who rush against God (15,26), Job now describes God as the one who rushes against him. God besieges Job like a warrior besieges a hostile city. In this way, Job attributes the initiative for hostility and attack solely to God.²¹

These military images are further extended in 19,8.12. There, God sends his troops like a commander would in order to besiege Job's tent (19,12). These more or less military images attribute Job's misfortune to violent characteristics of God. Job still supposes that God acts according to a close relation between a person's actions and what befalls them. Therefore, these aggressive measures against Job illustrate the disproportionate and unjust character of God's treatment of Job because Job is convinced that he is innocent. God treats Job unjustly as an evildoer or enemy. Job is obviously an opponent and an enemy in God's eyes.

19,11 He has kindled²² his anger against me
and counts me as his enemy²³.

God's perception of Job has apparently changed in comparison to the beginning of the book of Job. Job's former prosperous state indicated that God considered Job to be a righteous man (1,1-5). His current misery can only be a sign that God has changed his mind. Job understands his fate as an outburst of God's anger.²⁴ This is usually turned on evildoers and opponents and brings calamity.²⁵ God only sends

¹⁹ Isa.5,5; Ps.80,13; 89,41.

²⁰ See also Jer.20,11; Sef.3,17; Ps.78,65. In Ps.24,8, God is called גִּבּוֹר מִלְחָמָה (mighty in battle).

²¹ Cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 288; Clines, *Job*, 385.

²² Changing the vocalization of קָרָה (to kindle) into qal (so Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 123; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 308; Strauß, *Hiob*, 3) is not necessary because the line expresses the active action of kindling God's anger (cf. Clines, *Job*, 429.444).

²³ Reading a singular כִּצְרוֹ (cf. LXX) is more probable because in 13,24 and 33,10, the comparison is also in singular. Moreover, the line refers to Job.

²⁴ See also 14,13; 16,9.

²⁵ 4,9; 20,23.28; 21,17.

such grave misery if he judges Job to be an evildoer. Therefore, Job can only derive from his misfortune that God now counts him as his enemy.

While God considers Job as his enemy, according to Job, there is the question of whether or not Job also sees God as his enemy because of his currently unjust miserable state. Job calls God his adversary in law (9,15) and depicts his suffering as hostile assaults by God. However, do these images suggest that God has become Job's enemy? Possible proof for the view that Job also calls God his enemy is 16,9c, in which Job states that his enemy sharpens his eyes against him. 16,9c would also refer to God and call God an enemy, if it is taken as a third colon parallel to 16,9ab, where Job describes that God has torn him in God's anger and gnashes his teeth at him like an animal.²⁶ However, it is preferable to read 16,9c parallel with 16,10a because of the parallelism between sharpening the eyes (16,9c) and opening the mouths wide (16,10a).²⁷ Thus, אֹיְבִי (my enemy) refers to the group of pursuers that is mentioned in 16,10a and not to God.²⁸ Whereas Job takes arms up against God, calls God his adversary in law, and charges God with perverting justice, he does not go to battle against God as if God is his enemy. Instead of a frontal counterattack, Job chooses the way of the lawsuit in order to denounce God's hostile attitude towards him.²⁹

Job also mentions other images in order to depict God's hostility. He characterizes his miserable state as a situation of captivity and persecution. God has put Job's feet in stocks (13,27),³⁰ has thrown his net over Job (19,6),³¹ breaks

²⁶ So Horst, *Hiob*, 248-249; Clines, *Job*, 382.

²⁷ In this way, a regularly composed poem by means of distiches comes into being (16,12-13 can also be read as three distiches).

²⁸ So Fohrer, *Hiob*, 280; Hesse, *Hiob*, 112.118; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 40; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 145; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 192; Pope, *Job*, 123. Except for Pope, these scholars consider 16,9c-11 as a later interpolation that interrupts the coherence of the speech, since 16,9ab and 16,12-14 deal with God, while 16,9c-11 deals with a group of human adversaries. Because of the relation with 16,10a, they mostly change the vocalization of אֹיְבִי into אֹיְבָי (my enemies), which has been changed in order to adapt 16,9c to 16,9ab.

²⁹ Within the context of Job 16, this keeps open the possibility of making an appeal to God as Job's witness. This would hardly have been possible if Job had called God his enemy.

³⁰ Elihu refers to this passage in 33,11. Fohrer changes בַּסֵּד (in the stocks) into בַּסִּיד (with lime) cf. Tg., since the footprints in 13,27c suppose freedom of movement and not being kept in stocks (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 238). However, the change is not necessary because the three cola in 13,27 can be read as separate depictions of God who is restricting Job's freedom of movement (compare Clines, *Job*, 321-323).

³¹ Some scholars derive מַצֹּדוֹ (his net) from מַצֹּדָה (fortress) because the image of laying siege to a city is more appropriate in the light of 19,7-12. They also take the verb חָקַר (to surround) as an indication of this interpretation (Clines, *Job*, 428; Gordis, *Job*, 201; Habel, *Job*, 291). However, the content of 19,7-12 is not exclusively military. Moreover, iconographic evidence shows that throwing a net can be a more or less military image. Enemies or prisoners are caught in a net (J.B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures. Relating to the Old Testament*, 2nd edition with supplements, Princeton 1969, 94.98).

him down on every site (19,10), and persecutes him (19,12). Job experiences God's hostility personally. God terrifies Job with dreams and visions (7,14) and Job has the feeling that God hides his face from him (13,24). Hiding God's face can be an expression of his anger³² which has been caused by transgressions, turning to other gods, or a lack of faithfulness.³³ It puts into words Job's feeling that God refuses to be concerned with somebody's distressing situation.³⁴ In Job's eyes, God has turned away from him and considers him as an opponent. This impression is summarized in 30,20-22 in which Job complains that God does not answer his cry for help and has become cruel.

4.2.2 The Hand of God and Its Effect

In an appeal to his friends for mercy, Job also expresses the origin of his misery in a different way. He describes his suffering as an action of the hand of God.

19,21 Have pity on me, have pity on me, you my friends,
for the hand of God has touched me.

The image of the hand of God touching Job attributes the origin of Job's trouble and disasters to actions by God. The hand of God (יָד) represents God's power over all living things.³⁵ The hand of God effectuates positive as well as negative things. It creates and it heals³⁶, but it can also cause calamity. Job identifies God's terrors with the working of the hand of God (יָדָא).³⁷ The words יָד and נָגַע (to touch) in 19,21b are also used by the satan in the prologue when he challenges God to stretch out his hand against Job in order to touch Job's wealth and body.³⁸ In this way, a bitter irony appears. For, the reader knows that Job's analysis is right but the reason for God's touch is something other than wickedness. The satan's challenge is at the basis of God's permission to touch the pious Job. In 30,21, Job mentions the activity of God's mighty hand parallel to God becoming cruel. So the touch of

Therefore, this image is not incongruous here (see also 18,8-10). Cf. C.L. Seow, "Job's *gō`ēl*, again", in: M. Witte (ed.), *Gott und Mensch im Dialog. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag II* (BZAW 345/II), Berlin-New York 2004, 692.

³² Deut.31,17; Isa.64,6; Ps.27,9.

³³ Deut.31,17-18; 32,20; Isa.59,2; 64,6; Jer.33,5; Ezek.39,23-24; Mic.3,4. See for the expression also 34,29.

³⁴ Ps.30,8; 69,18; 102,3. See also Fohrer, *Hiob*, 252; Clines, *Job*, 319.

³⁵ 10,7; 12,10.

³⁶ 5,18; 10,3 (יָדָא); 14,15.

³⁷ 13,21. See also 6,9.

³⁸ 1,11; 2,5. Compare e.g. Ruth 1,13.

God's hand not only expresses the origin of Job's fate, but also indicates some of the aggressive and hostile nature of God's actions.³⁹

The results of Job's afflictions affect Job in the social sphere. Job has lost his honourable state and has been an outcast from the moment his misfortune befell him. Job's former social status and prosperity were connected to his righteousness. His wealth showed that he was righteous in God's eyes because God blesses the righteous (1,1-3). Job's sensible and high moral behaviour demonstrated his upright nature and made him an esteemed person in society. Job helped the weak, people listened to his advice, he was respected (Job 29), and offered burning-offers for his children in case they had sinned (1,5). However, those around Job conclude from his current miserable state that Job must have sinned before. Apparently, such a conclusion is reason enough for placing someone in social isolation. Job has lost his prominent position and is cast out by his relatives. Young and humble people mock and reject him.⁴⁰ Job blames God for causing this alienation from his surroundings. God has stripped Job's honour from him (19,9) and has made him a byword of the people (17,6). In this way, Job's misfortune not only affects his own body and life, but also deprives him of his honour and places him in an isolated position in society.

4.2.3 The Search for Motives for God's (Unjust) Actions

The experience of such grave and unjust suffering makes Job wonder what motives could be at the bottom of God's hostile treatment of him. Since punishment for wickedness can not be the reason because of Job's innocence, Job has to explore other possible reasons for God's puzzling behaviour. Job first focuses on God's perception of human beings. In Job 7, he wonders whether God's hostile treatment of human beings and intensive concern with them maybe follows from an overestimation of the significance of human beings. The disproportion of God's suspicious treatment of humankind and the imbalance of God's grotesque measures against people with their actual offences and real threat are important issues in this speech. Job tries to find reasons for this divine behaviour towards human beings. Job complains that God even harasses him in his sleep (7,14). He appeals to God to

³⁹ In 12,9, Job also attributes his misery to an act of the hand of God. However, this verse is controversial. Several scholars consider it as part of a later insertion, partly because the divine name *יהוה* is used in this verse and does not occur in the rest of dialogue (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 114; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 33; Horst, *Hiob*, 184; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 166; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 244; Hesse, *Hiob*, 93). Clines reads 12,7-12 as Job paraphrasing the way in which the friends address him (Clines, *Job*, 292. Van Hecke adopts this view (Van Hecke, *Job 12-14*, 151)). Tur-Sinai thinks that here the writer gives the customary version of the story in Israel (Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 210-211).

⁴⁰ 19,13-19; 30,1.9-10

leave him alone (7,16). Then Job asks why God pays such close attention to human beings.

- 7,17 What is a human being that you make so much of him⁴¹
and that you fix your attention on him,
7,18 that you inspect him every morning
and test him every moment?

These verses are a parody on Ps.8,5ff.⁴² Job hints at the prominent position of human beings in the Creation and God's particular care for them of which the psalmist here sings. In Ps.8,5f, the psalmist is surprised at God's high esteem of human beings. God is well-disposed to humble mortals and looks after them according to the psalmist. However, this prominent position of human beings and God's care are placed in a bad light within the context of Job 7. The significant position of humankind seems to be a reason for continuously observing and harassing them. Whereas פקד (to be concerned with) has a positive meaning standing parallel to זכר (to be mindful) in Ps.8,5, this verb is coloured negatively because of its parallel to בחן (to test) in 7,18. God's attention now becomes an examining interest. God tests (בחן) the heart and the kidneys of people in order to evaluate their way of life.⁴³ He tests both righteous and wicked (Ps.11,5) and gives to them according to the result of this test (Jer.17,10). Job connects this privileged position with God's observing and suspicious attention. He bitterly wonders why God values mortals⁴⁴ so highly that God harasses them with his inspecting and testing attention each moment. Is such concern not disproportional and an overestimation of the real significance of perishable human beings in comparison to God?

This general question is applied to Job's own case in the rest of Job 7. The significance of human beings as well as the nature of God's attention is further specified. Job mentions the significance of human beings in two ways. On the one hand, he suggests that God considers him as a larger threat than he actually is. Job asks whether he is the sea or a sea-monster (7,12). The ים (sea) and the תנין (sea-monster) refer to powers of chaos which God has suppressed.⁴⁵ In 38,8, God shuts

⁴¹ Pope and Fohrer translate לולד (Pi) with 'to rear' or 'to bring up' (Pope, *Job*, 58; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 164. Horst gives this interpretation in his comment (Horst, *Hiob*, 120)). However, Job does not ask here why God creates human beings but why he attributes so much significance to them.

⁴² Compare also Ps.144,3.

⁴³ Jer.11,20; 17,10; 20,12; Ps.7,10; 17,3; 26,2; Prov.17,3; 1 Chr.29,17. In 23,10, Job states that he would be as good if God tested him.

⁴⁴ See the description in 7,1-10.

⁴⁵ תנין: 51,9 (parallel to Rahab); Ps.74,13. ים represents the mythological and dangerous sea-god Yam, who is the adversary of Baal.

the sea in with doors. God seems to treat Job as if he is a power of chaos that threatens God's order.⁴⁶ However, this would be an overestimation of the importance of the mortal Job and his threat to God. Job's suggestion is that God's measures against him which come up in his suffering are not in proportion with his position as a perishable mortal.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Job wonders to what extent God's 'well-being' depends on right behaviour by humble mortals.⁴⁸ He asks what he does to God if he has sinned (7,20a).⁴⁹ According to Clines, Job means that every sin he may have committed is hardly worth retribution since in any case he will be dead soon.⁵⁰ However, Job does not mention retribution in 7,20a, but suggests that the sin of a humble mortal does not harm the exalted God.⁵¹ Therefore, God's well-being can not be a reason for examining human behaviour so intensively. For, it does not depend on human actions.⁵² The following questions assume the same view: why does God make Job a target, why has Job become a burden to God, and why does God not overlook Job's sin?⁵³ Job plays with the significance of humble mortals in his search for a motive for God's treatment. Does God not overestimate the power of human beings if he considers Job as a threatening force of chaos? Moreover, is it not true that human behaviour does not affect God? God would undermine the fundamental difference between creatures and Creator if he considered Job as a serious threat.

The nature of God's attention is elaborated upon in different ways. First, Job describes the negative nature of God's attention as continuous harassment. Even when Job tries to find rest in his sleep, God terrifies him with dreams (7,14). Job is not able to swallow his spittle as long as God looks at him (7,19) and it is his express wish that God leave him alone (7,16). Secondly, Job uses the image of watcher in order to illustrate God's observing attitude. He calls God a נֹצֵר הָאָדָם (watcher of humanity; 7,20). Furthermore, he uses the root שָׁמַר (to watch over) in order to express that God set a guard over him (7,12) and watches him in order to punish any iniquity (10,14). Whereas the verbs נֹצֵר and שָׁמַר mostly express that

⁴⁶ Habel, *Job*, 162; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 179; Clines, *Job*, 188.

⁴⁷ Clines, *Job*, 188-189; Hesse, *Hiob*, 70-71.

⁴⁸ See also the remarks of Eliphaz and Elihu on this topic: §3.2.3.

⁴⁹ Several scholars consider 7,20ab as a gloss (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 164; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 24; Hesse, *Hiob*, 64). Pope only deletes הַטְּאִוְרִי (Pope, *Job*, 62). Even if 7,20ab is a gloss, the following questions bear the same view.

⁵⁰ Clines, *Job*, 194. He thinks that Elihu comes closer to the position that the sins of mere human beings are so trivial as to be unworthy of God's consideration (35,5-8).

⁵¹ Horst, *Hiob*, 121; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 130; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 74; Weiser, *Hiob*, 64. The same idea can be found in 22,2-3 and 35,6-8.

⁵² The question of whether God profits from having a case with Job (10,3) hints at the same idea that God's well-being or enjoyment does not depend on human behaviour.

⁵³ 7,20cd-21ab. עָלַי (to me) in 7,20d is one of the *tique sopherim* and has to be read as עָלְךָ (to you) (cf. LXX). On the relation between 7,21ab and Job's conviction that he is blameless, see §4.3.2.

God preserves people from evil or threats,⁵⁴ these verbs have an observing and examining meaning in Job's mouth. God's watching serves to inspect and test in the light of 7,18.⁵⁵ Thus, God's watching is a negative activity in Job's eyes. God pursues Job constantly in order to test and prosecute him.

After Job charged God with unjust actions in Job 9, the focus of Job's search for a motive for God's actions changes. While Job concentrated on God's perception on human beings in Job 7, he considers God's own nature and being in Job 10. Now the wicked nature of God's actions has been determined (Job 9), Job openly casts doubt on God's upright motivations and suggests that God had false intentions for creating human beings (Job 10). Several possible motives are considered. God might benefit from playing with human beings or he might lack some divine characteristics; what we would label omniscience and immortality. The second half of Job's first answer to Bildad (Job 9-10) opens with Job's question of why God contends with him (10,2). As in 9,3, Job understands his misfortune as God's charge against him.⁵⁶ While Job draws the conclusion that God treats him unjustly in Job 9, he asks for reasons for this hostile behaviour towards him in Job 10.

Three rhetorical questions place some possible motives before God (10,3-7). The questions are constructed with the interrogative particle **וְ** and followed by a conclusion introduced with **כִּי** (that). The first one concerns God's benefit.

10,3 Does it benefit you to oppress,
to reject the work of your hands,
and shine on the plan of the wicked?⁵⁷

While the dependence of God's 'well-being' on human actions has already been mentioned implicitly in 7,20, Job now explicitly wonders whether God's unjust treatment of him gives God any benefit.⁵⁸ The combination **טוֹב לְךָ** (good for you) expresses the benefit someone has from something.⁵⁹ Could it be that God oppresses human beings in order to obtain some advantage for himself instead of rewarding them for some wrong? This oppression and rejection refer to God's cruel treatment of Job. Whereas Bildad stated that God does not reject (**מֵאַסֵּה**) the upright (8,20), the innocently suffering Job now suggests that God rejects the work of his

⁵⁴ **שָׁמַר**: e.g. Ps.121,7; 140,5; 141,9; 145,20. **נִצַּח**: e.g. Deut.32,10; Isa.27,3; Ps.64,2; 140,2.

⁵⁵ See also 13,27; 14,16. Elihu refers to it in 33,11. In Prov.24,12, God is the one who keeps watch over (**נִצַּח**) the soul and examines the heart.

⁵⁶ See §2.2.2.2.

⁵⁷ Several scholars regard 10,3c as a gloss (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 200; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 30; Hesse, *Hiob*, 80; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 151; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 98 (maybe a gloss)).

⁵⁸ See also the remarks of Eliphaz and Elihu on this topic: §3.2.3.

⁵⁹ Pace HAL, who takes it as 'is it all right with you' (art. **טוֹב**, in: HAL II, 371, nr.4). Terrien explains the nature of the benefit as 'pleasure' (Terrien, *Job*, 101).

hands in general. The combination **יגיע כפיך** (the work of your hands) expresses the result of someone's labour which has been accomplished with effort.⁶⁰ It refers to Job within this context.⁶¹ This expression sharpens the poignant character of the question because it would be a harrowing conclusion that God rejects what he himself has created with labour and care.⁶² Does it offer God any pleasure or benefit when he harasses what he himself has created?

The status of 10,3c remains unclear because the verb **יפע** (to shine) can have a positive as well as a negative meaning. This verb describes God's manifestation among human beings. God appears in order to bless and deliver or in order to judge the wicked.⁶³ Negatively understood, 10,3c would mean that God critically stands in relation to the plan of the wicked and condemns their actions.⁶⁴ Understanding **יפע** positively, it would mean that God favours the plan of the wicked according to Job.⁶⁵ 10,3c only has sense in Job's mouth if it is understood in the latter way. For, then it fits with Job's charge that God perverts justice. 10,3c contrasts with 10,3b and serves as an illustration of the unjust character of God's actions.⁶⁶ While the righteous are rejected and oppressed by God, God benefits the wicked.⁶⁷ Does such perversion of justice benefit God in any way? Did God actually create human beings in order to have playthings which he can punish arbitrarily instead of having a relationship with them which is based on respect and care? However, it would be strange, if God benefited from 'playing' with his creation as he has everything at his disposal. It would be questionable whether God is worth worshipping any longer if this was the case.

Job further explores an example of a possible benefit in 10,8-17. Here, he contrasts God's meticulous creation of Job and his careful providence with God's hidden purpose to watch and persecute Job. God is confronted with the fact that he has created Job but now destroys him (10,8-9). Job expounds how God constructed his body and provided him with care and loyalty (10,10-12). But he must conclude

⁶⁰ Gen.31,42; Hag.1,11.

⁶¹ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 245.

⁶² See also 10,8-12. Terrien understands the benefit for God as 'pleasure' and states that God would be a kind of masochist if he enjoys damaging what he created (Terrien, *Job*, 101-102). However, this way of dealing does not necessarily suppose a masochistic nature. It can, in Job's eyes, also point to an evil purpose in creating human beings as is further explored in 10,8-17.

⁶³ Blessing and delivering: Deut.33,2; Ps.80,2. Judging: Ps.94,1.

⁶⁴ See also 5,13; 18,7. Obviously, Fohrer and Hesse understand 10,3c in this way since they think that 10,3c is a gloss that attempts to restrict God intervening with the wicked (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 200; Hesse, *Hiob*, 80). So, God's shining is an elaboration of God's oppression and rejection and is attributed only to the wicked in their view.

⁶⁵ So Clines, *Job*, 245; Habel, *Job*, 198; Horst, *Hiob*, 154.

⁶⁶ Although the lack of an introducing **כ** could be an argument for taking 10,3c as a gloss.

⁶⁷ Compare 9,23-24.

from his current miserable situation that God's motive for this concern was something other than a partnership between God and human beings.

10,13 But this you hid in your heart,
 I know that this was your purpose:
 10,14 if I sinned, you would watch me⁶⁸
 and would not acquit me from my iniquity.

Job suggests that God's hidden aim for creating human beings was apparently to raise them in order to be able to observe them intensively and to punish them if they make a slip. The words **לֹא** (this) and **אִם** (this) in 10,13 refer to 10,14, where the image of God as watcher (Job 7) returns. A wordplay with this root **שׁמַר** (to watch) makes clear the contrast between the expected and hidden real purpose of God's providence. Whereas in 10,12 God's watching is characterized as loyal and caring, it is understood as God hunting for sinning people in 10,14. God's seeming preservation now turns out to be an investigating and observing activity. The verb **אִשָּׂאתִי** (I sinned) expresses a hypothetical case because of the conjunction **אִם** (if). Therefore, Job does not admit that he has sinned. Also, he does not charge God with punishing slight sins either.⁶⁹ Nor does he restrict this hypothetical case to sins stemming from natural human weakness.⁷⁰ For, the verb **אָשָׂא** (to sin) is not restricted to a specific field of sins.⁷¹ In 10,13-14, Job denounces God's obsessive desire to catch Job out. Apparently, God created him in order to make him into a target which God could hunt. Thus, Job does not criticize the fact that God would discipline him if he sinned. However, he reproaches God for God's obsessive behaviour which goes beyond the limit of fair treatment. In Job's eyes, being righteous or guilty does not matter anymore: in both cases, Job is weighted down by his misery.⁷²

The second and third rhetorical questions that suggest a possible motive for God's current treatment of Job⁷³ compare God's being and actions with human being and actions. Job wonders whether a limited ability of perception or a restricted lifetime is the cause of God's hostile behaviour towards him. While

⁶⁸ Fohrer and Hesse translate the verb **שׁמַר** with 'to imprison' (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 218; Hesse, *Hiob*, 80). However, 10,14 refers to the image of God as watcher and therefore the verb has to be translated with 'to watch'.

⁶⁹ Pace Rowley, *Job*, 103.

⁷⁰ Pace Fohrer, *Hiob*, 218.

⁷¹ In the prologue as well as in Job 31, the verb **אָשָׂא** refers to conscious and rather serious sins. In the prologue, the narrator assures that Job does not sin (1,22; 2,10) and in 31,30, Job says that he did not permit his mouth to sin by wishing his enemies dead by a curse. In 7,20, such a hypothetical case is also supposed.

⁷² 10,15. Cf. 9,22.29.

⁷³ The first is 10,3.

God's answer will later confront Job with the fact that Job does not possess divine attributes (40,8-14), Job ponders whether God has human characteristics.

- 10,4 Do you have eyes of flesh
 or do you see as a human sees,
 10,5 are your days like the days of a mortal
 or your years like the years of a man,
 10,6 that you seek out my iniquity
 and search for my sin,
 10,7 although⁷⁴ you know that I am not guilty
 and nobody can deliver out of your hand?

Job's second question touches on –what we would call– God's omniscience (10,4).⁷⁵ Job considers the possibility that God's observation is limited. Could it be that God misjudges Job's way of life because he lacks the ability to oversee all Job has done? The word בָּשָׂר (flesh) refers to the human body. The eyes of flesh refer to human perception. Human beings are unable to survey the coherence of everything that happens in the world.⁷⁶ Does God's perception of what happens in the Creation go no further than that of human beings? In Isa.31,3, the divine is distinguished from creatures by the fact that the divine is spirit (רוּחַ) instead of flesh (בָּשָׂר). This makes it clear that this consideration can not be true. God is not flesh. His perception goes beyond a person's outward appearance and looks upon the heart.⁷⁷ Human ways are under his gaze and his eyes range throughout the entire earth.⁷⁸ Thus, God would deviate from his divine characteristics if he perceived in the same limited way as human beings do. The third question (10,5) proposes that a restricted lifetime forces God to act rashly and with such close attention.⁷⁹ This might harm the caution of God's judgement. However, God is everlasting (Ps.102,28). Therefore, he does not need to quicken the process of observation and examination by risking careless actions. In this way, Job confronts God with the possibility that he lacks some divine characteristics. Limited perception or inaccurate judgement might be the reason for the unjust treatment of Job. However, at the same time it is clear that these considerations are not correct.

The content of God's actions, for which Job is looking for explanations, is elaborated upon in 10,6-7. The conjunction כִּי (that) in 10,6 connects these verses with the two preceding ones. It is the paradox in God's dealings that puzzles Job.

⁷⁴ For the same meaning of עַל, see 16,7; 34,6.

⁷⁵ De Wilde, *Hiob*, 151.

⁷⁶ This will be an important argument in God's answer.

⁷⁷ 1 Sam.16,7. See also 31,4; 34,21.

⁷⁸ Prov.5,21; 2 Chr.16,9.

⁷⁹ Thus, 10,5 introduces a second element separate from 10,4. Pace Horst, who interprets 10,5 as a close parallel to 10,4 that reinforces 10,4 (Horst, *Hiob*, 155).

On the one hand, God closely examines Job in order to find sins (10,6). With the verbs **בִּקֵּשׁ** (to seek) and **דָּרַשׁ** (to search), the issue of intensive inspection (7,17-18) returns in 10,6. While Eliphaz incites Job to seek (**דָּרַשׁ**) God, here God is the one who searches for sins. On the other hand, God must be familiar with the fact that Job is innocent (10,7a). Therefore, such persistent and intensive observation seems a pointless undertaking. What is more, if God is inspecting Job so intensively, he must have noticed Job's integrity. The tragedy of Job's situation is that a human being is not able to escape from God's power or to prevent what God wants to do.⁸⁰ Nobody can deliver him from the misfortune with which God afflicts him (10,7b). Thus, two important elements from Job 9 return in 10,7: Job's conviction that he is blameless (10,7a) and his impotence to contest or evade his unjust suffering (10,7b). In this way, an accusation can be heard in 10,6-7. It smacks of abuse of power because God ceaselessly examines Job and looks for iniquities, even though he knows that Job is innocent and God's actions can not be stopped by human beings. It was this dubious and incomprehensible action by God that forced Job to examine what motives might be at the root of this.

4.2.4 The Irresistibility of God's Actions

There is a different notion in the speeches of Job that strengthens the impression that Job finds himself in strained circumstances. This is the awareness that human beings will not succeed in influencing God's actions. According to Job, God executes what he has planned to do. Human requests do not change these activities. This notion can be found in 9,12-13 where Job asks who can resist God, if he snatches away. He concludes that God's anger is fixed; God does not withdraw it.⁸¹ The idea that God's actions are irresistible returns in Job 23. Here, Job explores the possibility of bringing his case before God. He determines that God is untraceable (23,3.8-9) and assures that he kept God's way and did not turn aside (23,10-12). Then he says about God:

23,13 But he chooses⁸² and who can resist him?

⁸⁰ Deut.32.39; Isa.43.13.

⁸¹ See §2.2.2.2. In 10,7b, this notion returns in a veiled way; nobody can deliver out of the hand of God.

⁸² Reading **בָּחַר** (to choose) cf. LXX (Budde, *Hiob*, 132; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 363; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 203; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 58; Hesse, *Hiob*, 145; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 243; Pope, *Job*, 172-173). The verbs **בָּחַר** (to choose) and **יָשָׁה** (to wish) also occur parallel in Ps.132,13. Furthermore, the lack of a verb in the first half of 23,13a, also compared to 9,12 and 11,10, can be mentioned as an additional argument for changing (Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 162; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 363). Several scholars maintain **בָּחַר** (in one) and understand the **ב** as a beth-essentiae (Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Grammar*, §119i; Habel, *Job*, 346; Strauß, *Hiob*, 73; A. van Selms, *Job II* (POT), Nijkerk 1983, 24; Gordis, *Job*, 262). They explain it as an expression that God is unchangeable, sovereign or unique. However, changing **בָּחַר**

What he wishes, he does.

The notion that nobody can resist God or influence what he does is connected with Job's feeling of impotence. Challenging God's actions is as such already impossible because of God's superior power and because God is untraceable and imperceptible. However, it would not make any sense at all since nobody can change God's mind or influence his way of dealing. Job's question מִי יִשְׁבֹּנוּ (who can resist him) in 9,12 returns here. Job connects God's wish or choice to do something with human impotence to change this. The question מִי שׁוֹבֵנָה occurs elsewhere parallel to the question who can annul (פָּרַר) what God has planned and the statement that nobody can deliver from the hand of God.⁸³ God works and who can hinder it (Isa.43,13)? So no human being is able to change or resist what God is doing or what he has planned to do. In 23,13, God's decisions and wishes can not be influenced, therefore, each protest or attempt to challenge God's dealings in a lawsuit will not change God's treatment of Job. If God wanted to 'play' with his creatures or treat them unjustly, no human being would be able to stop God or alter his conduct towards them. Thus, the notion of the irresistible nature of God's actions underlines the fact that God has a powerful position which he could also misuse unhindered. It stresses Job's impotence to influence God's treatment of him or alter his miserable fate in any way.⁸⁴

The question מִי יִשְׁבֹּנוּ (who can resist him) is also asked by Zophar in his first speech (11,10). This speech takes up several elements from Job 9. Zophar explicitly declares Job guilty (11,6) and asks whether Job can find the depths (חֲקֵר) of God (11,7). With questions that call to mind God's answer, he confronts Job with his own lack of power and knowledge (11,8-9). Then Zophar asks who can resist God, if God passes through, imprisons, and summons (11,10). Job mentioned the inscrutability of God's ways and the irresistible nature of his actions as arguments for his charge that God misuses this sovereign position and perverts justice (Job 9). On the contrary, Zophar connects these elements with God's righteous actions. He explains the impossibility of resisting God's actions with the fact that God is aware of the worthless people and sees injustice (11,11).⁸⁵ Job referred to the notion of the irresistibility of God's actions in order to show that he powerless before God and can not influence any possible abuse of divine power by God. Zophar, on the other hand, makes it clear that nobody can resist God's dealings because they are righteous rather than arbitrary actions.⁸⁶ In other words, it is not necessary to affect

into בָּחַר is preferable since the sense of the idea that God is one remains unclear within the context. For, it is questionable to what extent this means that God is unchangeable or expresses sovereignty. Reading בָּחַר gives a better parallel with 23,13b and expresses the fact that God's plans can not be influenced in a clearer way.

⁸³ Isa.14,27 (compare with 40,8); Isa.43,13 (see also 10,7b).

⁸⁴ This notion of the irresistible nature of God's actions also occurs in 12,14-15.

⁸⁵ This statement also refers to 10,4, where Job wonders whether God has eyes of flesh.

⁸⁶ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 228. See also Clines, *Job*, 264.

God's actions since God is doing right according to Zophar. It would even be overconfident if human beings were to think that God's actions needed to be influenced or criticized.

4.3 The Image of the Lawsuit: Job's Innocence and God's Wickedness

4.3.1 The Lawsuit between Job and God

The image of the lawsuit plays an important role in the book of Job. It channels Job's struggle with God with regard to the issue of whether his misfortune is justified and it puts Job's charge against God into words.⁸⁷ This image is introduced in Job 9. There, the dispute between Job and God has a mutual character. On the one hand, Job understands his misfortune as God's trial with him.⁸⁸ On the other hand, Job wants to enter into a case with God in order to call God to account for what is, in Job's eyes, unjust suffering. Hence, God and Job are both plaintiff and defender in the book of Job. Job's wish for having a legal case with God is overshadowed by the awareness that litigation with God is impossible (9,32-33). Each time Job mentions his intention to challenge God's treatment of him and to defend his blameless way of life again, it echoes the fact that a proper case between God and human beings is impossible because of God's powerful position and the observation that God is untraceable. So, the image of the lawsuit expresses Job's impotence in relation to God but, at the same time, it also communicates that Job does not reconcile himself to his miserable destiny. Job perseveres in his attempts to be proved right on his conviction that he suffers unjustly. He holds on to his wish to bring his case before God. In this way, one could say that Job is moving between wish and awareness of real proportions during the dialogue.

Some scholars consider the image of the lawsuit as the basic and organizing image of the book of Job or even regard the genre of the book as such as a legal action.⁸⁹ However, the speeches of Job and his friends contain too diverse and too many non-legal elements to be characterized as speeches in a legal case, even

⁸⁷ Compare Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 151.155. She states that "the notion of the trial provides a powerful means by which Job can reconfigure the nature of his situation, including roles, norms, and values that govern his relationship with God. At the same time, it enables him to expose the problematic assumptions by which the friends have defined his situation." (155). In my opinion, the second element in particular takes place in Job 9. There, the understanding of God's actions according to the concept of retribution, which is also starting point of the thinking of the friends, leads to a concept in which God acts unjustly (see §2.2.2.5).

⁸⁸ Therefore, the subject of **יְהוָה** in 9,3 is God (see §2.2.2.2). See also a remark of Clines in his commentary on 13,22: "God has already effectively taken the plaintiff's role by initiating punishment against Job" (Clines, *Job*, 317).

⁸⁹ Habel, *Job*, 54-57; Richter, *Studien zu Hiob*, 17.59-132; B. Gemser, "The *RĪB*- or Controversy-Pattern in Hebrew Mentality" (SVT 3), Leiden 1955, 134-135.

though some parts do have formally legal elements (e.g. Job 29-31).⁹⁰ Therefore, the image of the lawsuit can better be described as a pattern within the book of Job through which Job's conviction that he is blameless and his charge that God perverts justice are brought up and elaborated upon. It puts into words Job's impotence as well as his drive to challenge his miserable fate.

After its introduction in Job 9, the image of the lawsuit returns in Job 13. In Job 9, Job particularly concentrates on the question of whether he would be able to answer God and to defend his case before God. This defensive position changes in Job 13 where he adopts the attitude of a plaintiff. He makes clear to his friends that he also knows the insights they presented him with (13,2). Job is familiar with their perception that misery generally points to wrongdoing in the past. Nevertheless, he wants to address God.

13,3 But I would speak to the Almighty
and I desire to argue with God.

Job utters his wish to call God to account. The verb **יָבִחַ** (to argue) with the preposition **אֵל** (with) in 13,3b refers to the dispute with God that Job wants to initiate. Some scholars think that Job wants to defend himself before God.⁹¹ However, the questions in 13,23-25 show that the nature of Job's arguing is rather accusative than defensive in this speech. Job challenges God to reveal reasons for God's hostile attitude towards him (13,24) and to list his sins (13,23). Therefore, the verb **יָבִחַ** articulates the act of denouncing God's attitude towards Job in 13,3.⁹² According to Van Hecke, "Job's aim is not primarily to engage in a lawsuit, but rather, in a reciprocal conversation with God, with the aim not of winning a dispute, but of restoring the relation between himself and God. According to him, a lawsuit is simply envisaged by Job as the best form to achieve the goal of such a conversation."⁹³ Although it is true that Job desires to enter into conversation with God, it is unclear whether or not conversation and a legal case can be thought separately in such a way in 13,3.⁹⁴ The fact that God has been declared guilty (Job

⁹⁰ See also Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 150-151.

⁹¹ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 247; H.J. Boecker, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens im Alten Testament* (WMANT 14), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1964, 46.

⁹² However, in 13,15 this same expression **אֵל יָבִחַ** has the meaning of defence due to the object **דַּרְכַּי** (my ways). Here, Job wants to defend his way of life.

⁹³ Van Hecke, *Job 12-14*, 410. He suggests that the preposition **אֵל** might indicate the directedness towards God of the conversation (410). In line with this, he understands **דַּבֵּר** in 13,3a as to speak or have a conversation with God (415). According to him, Job uses straightforward juridical language from 13,18 onwards (410). Van Hecke here refers to Clines, *Job*, 305 and Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 150-161.

⁹⁴ Van Hecke does admit that it is hard to imagine that the verb **יָבִחַ** hifil would not have any legal connotations in 13,3.15 (Van Hecke, *Job 12-14*, 410).

9) makes it likely that Job does not see normal conversation as an option anymore. While God apparently considers Job as guilty, Job has determined that God perverts justice. In order to solve this impasse, a legal case seems appropriate. The subsequent verses contain forensic terms. The roots יָכַח and רָיַב occur parallel in 13,6. In 13,7, the speaking (דַּבַּר) of the friends gets forensic connotations because in Job's eyes they plead (רָיַב) the case for God (13,8). This forensic context makes it reasonable to suppose that a legal case is unavoidable for Job at this stage of the dialogue. Job's aim is to denounce God's actions and to defend his way of life. Whereas Job is aware that doing this in a legal case with God is impossible (9,32), he does not give up and engages in 'battle' with God. This feeling is expressed in Job's desire to argue with God (13,3). Job does want to win the dispute at this stage of the dialogue because God has done wrong to him. Depicting Job's basic desire as 'conversation' does not do enough justice to the harm and anger that Job feels towards God at this moment. Being proved right is the only way to regain confidence in the goodness of God. Because of the parallelism with יָכַח, the verb דַּבַּר (to speak) means speaking within a legal context in 13,3a. This ultimate wish to call God to account in a legal case, despite the awareness that it is actually impossible, demonstrates the fact that Job is not going to reconcile himself to his unjust suffering. Job challenges God to specify the legitimate grounds for punishing him. Thus, the image of the lawsuit serves to portray Job's objection against to what is, in his eyes, unjust destiny. At this point, Job particularly takes the role of plaintiff. However, the mutual character of the image of the lawsuit also occurs in Job 13. For, Job leaves the possibility open that God opens a legal dispute and questions him (13,22).

This desire to enter into a legal case with God (Job 13) seems to contradict Job's earlier conclusion that this is impossible. Therefore, Horst thinks that Job's opinion in 13,3 differs from 9,32f. According to Horst, Job now considers it possible to bring his desire for justice before God.⁹⁵ However, the question remains to what extent Job's view on the feasibility of a lawsuit with God has changed in 13,3. It is possible that a person keeps arguing against their better judgement because of their own sense of justice or a final gleam of hope. Moreover, it would be understood as an admission of guilt if Job had resigned himself in his current misery. Therefore, Job pursues his efforts to bring his case before God although they are overshadowed by the awareness that it is impossible to bring a case with God or to be proved right before him. Job's attempts to be proved right before God

⁹⁵ Horst, *Hiob*, 198. Clines observes a different kind of shift. According to Clines, Job has now abandoned the idea of 'legally' compelling God to vindicate him and instead invites God to accuse him. Clines values this new position as less strident and thinks that it leads more naturally into a hope for a renewed dialogue with God (Clines, *Job*, 305). However, the questions in 13,23-25 still imply a charge against God's actions, even though the nature of Job's approach has changed. Job is now denouncing God's unjust treatment of him by asking for an explanation of God's behaviour.

serve to support the credibility of his claim that he is blameless in his debate with his friends. Job states that nobody will be able to refute his claim of being blameless.⁹⁶ The ceaseless wish to prove this innocence in a legal case supports the persuasiveness of this conviction.

Job's awareness that a legal case with God is impossible (Job 9) and his desire to enter into such a case (Job 13) are integrated into Job 23. Here, the wish for having a case with God goes together with doubts about whether it is possible to realize this. Job 23 objects to the accusation of Eliphaz that Job has committed serious sins and therefore suffers justly (22,5-9). Job replies that God would see and admit that Job is righteous, if he only found God in order to be able to expound his case.

- 23,3 Oh, if I only knew how to find him,
that I might come to his dwelling.
23,4 I would lay my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments...

The fact that Job is unable to find God is the obstacle for entering into a lawsuit with God. Job does not know where God resides. While Zophar uses the verb מֵצֵא (to find) in order to pose the rhetorical question of whether or not Job is able to find and see through the depths of God (11,7), Job utters the wish to find God in 23,3.⁹⁷ However, it appears that Zophar has been right until now. For, Job has not found God yet. This issue of discovering God is reminiscent of 9,11 in which Job states that he does not perceive God if God passes by. Since God is so intangible, Job is unable to grab God and call him to account. What is more, God has the possibility to abuse his intangible position.⁹⁸ In Job 23, Job connects God's intractability with his desire to lay his case before God. Breaking through God's intractability and entering into his dwelling place is the condition for making progress in Job's struggle to be proved right. In systematic theological terms, this means that the condition for a successful legal case with God is undoing God's transcendence. But as long as God's ways are hidden, a lawsuit with God will not take place.⁹⁹ So the elusiveness of God frustrates Job's attempts to prove his right before him.

⁹⁶ 13,18-19. Because of the consequences mentioned in 13,19b, the verb נִכַּח (to contend) in 13,19a refers to a successful disproof of Job's claim that he is right. If someone entered into a lawsuit with Job and was able to prove that Job had sinned, Job would stop objecting and die.

⁹⁷ Elihu will react in 37,23 that we can not find the Almighty. Zophar draws a similar conclusion (11,8ff).

⁹⁸ §2.2.2.2.

⁹⁹ The motif of 23,3 is further elaborated upon in 23,8-9. Job says that he does not perceive God in any of the four points of the compass. However, the originality of these two verses

From 23,4, the progress of a possible lawsuit with God is explored. Job would take the role of plaintiff and be anxious to learn what God would answer to his plea (23,5). The expression **עָרַכְתִּי מִשְׁפָּט** (to lay (my) case) in 23,4 can also be found in 13,18. Here, Job expresses his resolution to expose his case because he knows that he is right (**צָדִיק**). The same conviction lies at the basis of Job's wish to argue with God in Job 23.¹⁰⁰ Whereas Job earlier feared that his mouth would not be able to put his situation correctly into words (9,20), he now wants to fill his mouth with arguments (23,4). Job is confident that God would see his integrity, if God would only pay attention to his case. Job considers the consequences of such an encounter with God in 23,6.¹⁰¹ He wonders whether God would contend with him with superior power (23,6a), as he feared in Job 9.¹⁰² But relying on his integrity, Job thinks that God could not ignore his case any longer and would give heed to his situation (23,6b).¹⁰³ Nevertheless, such an encounter has not yet taken place since God has been untraceable until now.

is subject to debate and several scholars consider them as a gloss that interrupts the close connection between 23,7 and 23,10 (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 363; Budde, *Hiob*, 131; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 242-243; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 58; Hesse, *Hiob*, 145; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 202 (perhaps)). However, according to Gordis the argument of interruption (also) represents here an illegitimate application of Western standards of logical relevance to Oriental composition, which is based upon the association of ideas (Gordis, *Job*, 261; compare Strauß, *Hiob*, 74-75). However, it is not at all clear to what extent the interruption of the connection between 23,7 and 23,10 is insurmountable. If in 23,10, **כִּי** is read as expressing a contradiction with the preceding verses, 23,8-9 fits rather well within the context. Then the conviction that an upright person would plead with God (23,7) is followed by the rather leading issue of this speech that God's elusiveness hinders such a plea (see also Habel, *Job*, 349-350). Then Job's situation becomes even more harrowing because even God knows that Job has lived a blameless life (23,10).

¹⁰⁰ 23,7.10-12.

¹⁰¹ Gordis, *Job*, 260.

¹⁰² Some scholars take **רַב־כֹּחַ** in 23,6a as 'plenipotentiary' since, according to them, 23,6a does not fit into the response in 23,6b with the translation 'superior power' (Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 354; Pope, *Job*, 172; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 242). Others think that now Job again fears that God would not be willing to take notice of Job's evidence, even if Job appeared before him (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 365; Hesse, *Hiob*, 148). However, in 23,6, some confidence is apparent (compare 13,16). Job is convinced that God can not ignore him when God takes notice of his integrity. Therefore, God will heed him instead of overwhelming him with superior power and frustrating litigation. Compared to Job 9, where Job feared that God's power would obstruct his right, Job's confidence in being right and having integrity seems to dominate somewhat more in Job 23, though Job is not free of fear here either (23,13-17) (cf. Driver-Gray, *Job*, 201).

¹⁰³ The verb **שָׁמַע** is an ellipse of **שָׁמַע לְבָבָא** (pay attention to). Fohrer and Habel take the imperfect **שָׁמַע** as a necessity and translate with 'must heed' (Habel, *Job*, 344; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 362). However, Job expresses an expectation instead of a necessity.

The notion of being untraceable and hidden is applied to wisdom in the later-added Song of Wisdom in Job 28.¹⁰⁴ While valuable metals and stones can be found in and mined from deep in the earth (28,1-11), wisdom remains hidden to human beings (28,12-22). In Job 28, חכמה (wisdom) is an entity that is independent from God. God knows its dwelling place, established it, and fathoms it (28,23-27). In this Song, wisdom stands parallel to בינה (understanding; 28,12.20). Since this understanding goes beyond insights found by human observation, here wisdom refers to coherences or insights which only God observes. In 11,6, Zophar speaks of hidden wisdom where it is connected with God's dealings. On the one hand, in Job 28 wisdom is not divine thinking in itself, but on the other hand it is not beyond God's range of influence. For, God has established wisdom and fathoms it (28,27). Therefore, wisdom does somehow refer to the order in the Creation or the course of things which came into being with creating the earth. With the notion of being hidden, the Song of Wisdom anticipates what will be one of the central topics in God's answer. This is the idea that the order of the Creation and the considerations behind God's actions surpass human observation; Job lacks understanding of God's counsel (38,2). Whereas wisdom is something independent from God in Job 28, the similarity between Job 28 and God's answer is that both expound the view that human beings are unable to grasp completely how the Creation functions and in what way God exactly deals in it. Parts of this are hidden and can not be fathomed by human beings.¹⁰⁵

Job concludes his speeches in the dialogue with an urgent appeal to God in order to force God to respond to his questions and accusations. In a monologue, Job expresses his desire to return to his former prosperous state (29,2), depicts his current miserable state (Job 30), and exposes his blameless way of life in an oath of innocence (Job 31). This oath has the characteristics of a defence.¹⁰⁶ Job interprets his misfortune as God's accusation against him. Against this charge, he defends himself by swearing that he has lived a righteous life and has always kept sincere intentions. This oath is ended with an appeal to God to answer this defence:¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ For Job 28, see among others, E. van Wolde (ed.), *Job 28. Cognition in Context* (Biblical Interpretation Series 64), Leiden-Boston 2003.

¹⁰⁵ In 28,28, the content of wisdom is fear of the Lord. This is a different view in comparison to the preceding description of wisdom in Job 28. Therefore, 28,28 is regularly held as a later addition to the Song. For instance, Van Oorschot's contrary view does not see this tension as problematic. According to him, the reader is invited to grant a theocentrically founded scepticism and the fear of God is offered as 'his' wisdom to him (J. van Oorschot, "Hiob 28. Die verborgene Weisheit und die Furcht Gottes als Überwindung einer generalisierten חכמה", in: W.A.M. Beuken (ed.), *The Book of Job* (BETL CXIV), Leuven 1994, 200).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Dick, "Legal Metaphor", 45-49.

¹⁰⁷ 31,38-40 seems to be moved from another place or later added, since this last sin breaks through the conclusion with Job's final appeal in 38,35-37 (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 424-425.428; Hölscher, *Job*, 76; Pope, *Job*, 230; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 303; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 261; Van Selms, *Job II*, 98; Hesse, *Hiob*, 174; Gordis, *Job*, 354).

- 31,35 Oh, if only someone would listen to me!
 Here, is my sign¹⁰⁸! Let the Almighty answer me!
 And the document, which my adversary at law has written,¹⁰⁹
 31,36 truly, I would wear it on my shoulder,
 I would bind it to me as a crown....

The terms ענה (to answer) and אִישׁ רִיב (adversary at law) in 31,35 place the oath of innocence (Job 31) within a forensic context. Job challenges God to reply to the passionate defence of his integrity that he has expounded in this speech. Job opens this final section of his oath with the expression of his ultimate wish that someone will take notice of his plea (31,35a). Some scholars think that Job hopes that a third party like an arbiter or judge will listen (שמע) to him within this legal context.¹¹⁰ However, the participle שמע can only refer to God, who is incited to react in 31,35b because it is Job's first concern that God goes into his declaration of innocence and admits that Job is blameless.¹¹¹ For, God has caused his misery. A written dispute seems to be assumed because of the mention of a sign and the request for a counter document. The term תּוֹ is used for signs on the forehead of men in Ezek.9,4.6. Job uses this word in order to enforce the claims of his oath by subscribing it with a personal sign (31,35b). In Job 31, Job makes a final effort to confront God with the contradiction between his miserable fate and his blameless state. Job agrees that misfortune is the legitimate heritage of evildoers (31,2-3) but he argues that he does not belong to this group because of his blameless way of

¹⁰⁸ De Wilde reads תִּשְׁאֵלָה (this is my wish) cf. Vulg. (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 304).

¹⁰⁹ Several scholars assume that a line preceding this line got lost. According to them, 31,35c requires some kind of further demand because it now floats in the air (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 274; Hölscher, *Job*, 77; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 427; Hesse, *Hiob*, 170). Witte reads 31,35c parallel to 31,35b and identifies the sign (תּוֹ) of 31,35b with the סִפְרָה that Job's opponent has written. According to him, there is an amulet hidden with the Decalogue or a part of the Decalogue under the sign that expresses Job's loyalty to God (M. Witte, "Hiobs >>Zeichen<< (Hiob 31,35-37)", in: M. Witte (ed.), *Gott und Mensch im Dialog. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag II* (BZAW 345/II), Berlin-New York 2004, 727-737). While I am not sure whether a reference to the Decalogue would be so obvious here, the place of the call 'Let the Almighty answer me!' seems problematic to me in this interpretation. For, whereas the whole section deals with Job wearing this sign, this call is directed at God and summons God to answer in this explanation. In my view, it is more probable that this change of direction is continued in 31,35c. Then the document is related to God's answer. 31,35c can then be read with 31,36ab and forms a tricolon with them. So, it is not necessary to suppose something that is not available anymore. Habel translates the perfect כָּתַב (to write) as cohortative: 'let my adversary at law draft a document' (Habel, *Job*, 425). However, it is more likely that Job refers to a document that is available because earlier this perfect points to a result or something in the past.

¹¹⁰ Habel, *Job*, 438; Dick, "Legal Metaphor", 47-49.

¹¹¹ Cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 443.

living and his sincere intentions.¹¹² This plea ends in a final call on God to take notice of Job's situation and explain why he treats Job in such an obscure and unjust way. It is a final attempt to force God to react to Job's case and to give shape to any form of legal process with God.

Job considers the result of God's reaction in 31,35c-36. His adversary at law will reply in a written document. The expression אִישׁ רִיבִי (my adversary at law) refers to the one who contends with Job. It can only be God who is addressed here in 31,35b.¹¹³ The nature of this document is not fully clear. In 19,23, Job wishes that his words are recorded in a document (סֵפֶר) in order to prevent his complaint about his innocent suffering would getting lost if he passes away. Several scholars think that the document in 31,35c is the written accusation, on the basis of which God has judged Job and which Job has taken the edge off with his oath of innocence, but with which Job is not familiar. According to them, binding this document as a diadem (31,36) demonstrates Job's awareness that he is blameless and his feeling of triumph before God's charge.¹¹⁴ However, it is more probable that an acquittal is meant here because of Job's conviction that he is blameless and the public presentation of this document as a triumph.¹¹⁵ Job enforces his ultimate desire that God take notice of his declaration of innocence (31,35ab) by already anticipating what is, in his eyes, the inevitable result of such attention. If God faces up to the facts of this oath, he will not be able to ignore Job's blamelessness any longer. Therefore, God's response can only include an acquittal of guilt. So, Job concludes his speeches with a final call on God to react to the fact that he suffers innocently. He is prepared to give an account of his way of living (31,36) because he fully trusts his blameless state. After this final plea of innocence, it is now God's move.

4.3.2 Job's Innocence

4.3.2.1 Job's Conviction that He Is Innocent

The main pillar of Job's rebellion against God is his belief that he is blameless. Job is convinced that God's treatment of him is disproportionate, if God's dealings are

¹¹² 31,1.5-34.38-40.

¹¹³ In Judg.12,2, Jephthah and the people are those who have a conflict (אִישׁ רִיבִי) with the Ammonites. In the dialogue of the book of Job, God or Job's friends on behalf of God are each time those who contend (verb רִיב) with Job (§ 2.2.2.2).

¹¹⁴ So, Fohrer, *Hiob*, 443-444; Hesse, *Hiob*, 175; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 275-276; Van Selms, *Job II*, 97-98. Richter sees an allusion to Egyptian legal procedures where each process was introduced by a written charge (Richter, *Studien zu Hiob*, 109; so also Fohrer, *Hiob*, 443).

¹¹⁵ So Pope, *Job*, 238; Habel adopts a middle course by taking the document as the official written counterpart of the adversary at law to Job's oath. However, according to him Job is convinced that this document will mean his public vindication because the document will be a writ of release or because the charges will appear to be false (Habel, *Job*, 439).

directed by the concept of retribution. This belief in Job's integrity leads to doubts about God's righteousness. In Job's eyes, God is overreacting and treats him unjustly. This conclusion is uttered in Job 9. Here, Job sees only one way out. Since he is blameless, it can only be that God perverts justice. God has afflicted him with misery like a wicked person, but Job would have expected prosperity because of his blameless way of life. Thus, Job's case questions some implications of the concept of retribution. Job himself assumes this concept in his thinking. But the contrast between his severe suffering and his blameless way of life makes it hard to maintain that sinful behaviour is the reason for this fate. Readers can not ignore the legitimacy of Job's claim that he is blameless because of the relation between the dialogue and the prologue. They know that the narrator and God have already confirmed Job's conviction that he is righteous.¹¹⁶ So, it turns out that it becomes problematic when a person's previous behaviour is derived from one's fate according to the concept of retribution. There is no place for innocent suffering in this scheme. During the dialogue, Job maintains his righteousness. He is not prepared to let himself be convinced by the words of his friends.

Job mentions his integrity in the dialogue several times again as an argument in the presence of God or his friends. He mentions it for the first time in 6,29. In this speech, Job expresses the fact that the words of his friends are imputing and he blames them for reproaching him wrongfully (6,25-27). Then there follows an appeal to the friends to change their point of view. Job motivates this appeal with the argument that his integrity is still intact (6,29).¹¹⁷ Here, Job's integrity is expressed by the substantive צַדִּיק. This word is used in 29,14 in order to state that righteousness (צַדִּיק) clothed Job.¹¹⁸ Job rejects the reproaches of his friends by pointing out his conviction that he is blameless. This integrity is also raised in Job's debate with God from Job 9. In 9,21-24, the appeal to Job's integrity (אִם) leads to the charge that God perverts justice in his case. After this decisive charge, Job enforces his charge by the assurance that God is well acquainted with his innocence. In 10,7, he asks about God's motives for oppressing him even though God knows that Job is not wicked (רָשָׁע).¹¹⁹ While Job first concludes that he has

¹¹⁶ 1,1.8; 2,3. See §2.2.2.3 and §2.2.3.

¹¹⁷ Translation of 6,29 cf. Clines, *Job*, 156. In the context of Job 6, this appeal to Job's integrity is initially uttered in the presence of his friends. Here, אִם (in it) does not as much refer to Job's lament (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 174-175), but expresses the fact that Job still holds on to his own integrity (cf. Clines, *Job*, 182; Gordis, *Job*, 78). Even though his misery could point to a different conclusion because of the concept of retribution, Job makes clear that his friends should not reprove him, since he still believes in his innocence.

¹¹⁸ Here, it occurs parallel to מִשְׁפָּט (justice) (see also 8,3).

¹¹⁹ Clines thinks that a less strained reading can be gained by taking 10,7 as an independent sentence and rendering עַל as 'because' (Clines, *Job*, 246-247). But עַל expresses a contradiction between God's treatment of Job and his knowledge of Job's innocent state (cf. 16,17).

to be guilty (רשע) beyond his influence (9,29), he now points to the fact that God knows that he is not guilty.¹²⁰ This sharpens Job's accusation against God. God wilfully perverts justice. In this way, Job's friends as well as God are familiar with Job's conviction that he suffers innocently.

Job's belief in his integrity is an important motive in sustaining his wish to challenge God's treatment of him in a legal case. This motivation can be found in both speeches where the image of the lawsuit plays an important role.¹²¹ In 13,18, Job declares that he dares to lay his case before God because he knows that he is right. The verb צדק (to be right) has a forensic meaning because of the legal context here. Whereas Job earlier made it clear that he will not succeed in proving himself right before God¹²², his conviction that he is blameless forces him to go on making efforts to enter into a lawsuit with God.¹²³ The same basis for Job's striving for having a lawsuit with God can be found in Job 23. In 23,7, Job maintains that an upright person (ישר) would argue with God. Again the prologue supports this claim; nobody is as upright (ישר) as Job.¹²⁴ Job is convinced that he would be proved pure if God tested him. He guarantees that he has not departed from God's commandment.¹²⁵ Therefore, Job longs to discuss his situation in a legal case with God.

Elsewhere Job also mentions more concrete examples of his righteousness. He has not committed any violent deed and his prayer has been pure (16,17). He swears that he has not spoken any deceit or falsehood.¹²⁶ What is more, Job assures that he will not depart from his integrity.¹²⁷ So, integrity consists of an honest, devote, and non-violent way of life. Job assures that he will not alter this attitude to life.

Job's efforts to prove his innocence culminate in an oath of innocence with which he concludes his speaking for the time being (Job 31). Job tries to convince God of his innocence by showing his blameless way of acting in several areas of

¹²⁰ Clines calls this verse a milestone because for the first time Job now asserts that *God also* knows that he is innocent (Clines, *Job*, 247).

¹²¹ Job 13 and 23.

¹²² 9,2.15.20.

¹²³ In 13,18b, Job does not say that he will be acquitted if he has the opportunity to present his case (so Habel, *Job*, 231; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 124; Pope, *Job*, 97), but expresses his conviction that he is innocent (cf. Clines, *Job*, 315).

¹²⁴ 1,1.8; 2,3.

¹²⁵ 23,10-12. The same idea of testing can be found in 14,16.

¹²⁶ 27,4. Compare 13,7, where Job asks his friends whether they are willing to utter deceits (רמיה) and falsehoods (עולה) in favour of God. In 6,30 Job asks in a rhetorical question whether there is falsehood (עולה) on his tongue.

¹²⁷ 27,3-6. In the prologue, God uses the word רמה (integrity) when he points out to the satan that Job has persisted in his integrity after experiencing such extended misery (2,3). Job's wife asks whether Job still persists in his integrity (2,9). The reader realizes again that Job's claim of innocence has already been confirmed in the prologue. See also 31,6.

life. The oaths are formulated with **אִם** (if). Job accompanies them with a condemnation of himself if he were guilty of such an offence. God is challenged to prove that the opposite is true.¹²⁸ The concept of retribution is still the basis of Job's thinking in Job 31. For, the portion of the unrighteous is calamity (31,2-3). In Job's opinion, God has treated him wrongfully so long as no lapse in Job's life or thoughts can be identified.

Job opens his declaration of innocence with a covenant that he has entered into with his eyes. This verse deviates from the remainder of this chapter because the structure of an oath is lacking.

31,1 I have made a covenant with my eyes,
how then would I look out for a virgin?

Although this verse concentrates on a specific issue, it is an exemplary expression of Job's general attitude. Job has imposed restrictions on himself in order to avoid each possible temptation to lapse. In 31,1, the expression **כָּרַתְיָהּ בְּרִית** (make a covenant) refers to an obligation that is imposed one-sidedly. Job has restrained his eyes from watching other women. Because of this agreement, he excludes the option that he would look out for a virgin (31,1b). So, the oath of innocence starts with a depiction of Job's own conscious choice and his efforts to live a blameless way of life. Job subsequently lists a catalogue with oaths concerning different kinds of lapse in this speech (31,5ff). He mentions falsehood, adultery, ignoring the rights of slaves, heartlessness towards the poor, the widow, and the orphan, trust in riches, superstition, joy in the fall of one who hated him, being inhospitable, hiding sins, and exploitation of the land. Several oaths are accompanied by a sanction in case God observes a transgression at one of these fields. So, it appears that Job has placed high demands on his own integrity. He wants to force God to react to his reproach that God has punished him unjustly by means of this oath. The onus of proof of whether or not Job correctly claims that he is blameless falls now on God.

4.3.2.2 *Did Job Nevertheless Sin?*

Whereas Job maintains his belief that he is blameless, some sayings seem to undermine this conviction. In a few places, Job could give the impression that he has committed some iniquities. For he mentions forgiveness (7,21; 14,17) and sins of his youth (13,26b). Furthermore, Job's statement that nobody can be brought forward purely (14,4) seems to imply that Job is also blameworthy to a certain extent. A strict way of reasoning may raise the question of how these remarks are

¹²⁸ Fohrer and Dick point out that these elements stem from Wisdom teaching (G. Fohrer, "The Righteous Man in Job 31", in: J.L. Crenshaw-J.T. Willis (eds.), *Essays in Old Testament Ethics*, New York, 1974, 9-19; M.B. Dick, "The Oath of Innocence, and the Sage", *ZAW* 95 (1983) 50-52).

related to Job's conviction that he is innocent. Does Job nevertheless admit that he has sinned in some way? Job explores several possibilities. In his attempting to find an explanation for his suffering and to denounce God's treatment of him, he considers different aspects. There is no question that Job's misery is out of proportion to his way of life. Nevertheless, Job also explores a different side. Why is such punishment necessary and does God not simply forgive sin? Moreover, if God is rewarding possible transgressions of Job's youth, is he then not acting unreasonably?

In 7,21, Job mentions the issue of forgiveness and asks God:

- 7,21a Why do you not pardon my transgression
 b and do you not overlook my iniquity?
 ...

This question could suggest that Job has sinned because a blameless person does not need to ask for forgiveness. The verbs נָשָׂא and עָבַר are rather common terms for God removing someone's transgressions.¹²⁹ This notion of forgiveness in Job's mouth has been understood in two different ways. First, several scholars make a distinction in the character of transgressions. For instance, Fohrer distinguishes consciously committed sins from sins that stem from human weakness because of the fact that they are creatures. According to Fohrer, Job refers here to the second kind of sin which does not justify his suffering.¹³⁰ However, the problem of this view is that this distinction is not supported by the terms that are used for sin. It would, for example, mean that פָּשַׁע refers to a lapse stemming from the fact that human beings are imperfect creatures in 7,21, while it would refer to a consciously committed transgression in 8,4.¹³¹ The context of 7,21 does not provide any reason for such a distinction in meaning. Moreover, the different terms for iniquity – פָּשַׁע, עוֹן, and חַטָּאת – do not really differ in nature and weight in the book of Job because they are used parallel and alternately.¹³² Therefore, Job's question about forgiveness can not be reconciled with Job's conviction of innocence by letting it only refer to sins stemming from human nature.

¹²⁹ E.g. עָבַר עוֹן: 2 Sam.24,10; 1 Chr.21,8. נָשָׂא with פָּשַׁע, עוֹן, and/or חַטָּאת(ה): Exod.34,7; No.14,18; Ps.32,1.5; Mic.7,18.

¹³⁰ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 181-182. Scherer favours a similar kind of distinction and speaks of relative righteousness and absolute perfection (Scherer, "Relative Gerechtigkeit", 89-99). They apply the same distinction to the motif of human imperfection (see §3.4.1).

¹³¹ It seems reasonable to assume that there Bildad supposes consciously committed transgressions.

¹³² 7,21; 10,6; 13,23; 14,16-17; 33,9.

The second –in my opinion– preferable view takes 7,21 as a hypothetical consideration in the shadow of 7,20. In 7,20, Job assumes that he has sinned.¹³³ Job wonders how he would affect God if he committed an iniquity. This question is the background to Job’s request for forgiveness in 7,21. The thought is that it would not touch God himself, if God reacted to an evildoer with forgiveness instead of punishment. Therefore, Job wonders why God could not pardon his hypothetical lapses instead of besieging him as a target according to the concept of retribution. So, Job suggests that God would consider not deviating from this concept. Even if Job had committed a transgression, God could have pardoned this sin instead of punishing it with misery because it does not make any difference to God himself. God could have chosen this different approach. This suggestion also implies the request to be treated differently now. If God considers Job as wicked –as God apparently does considering Job’s misery–, why does God not choose to forgive his transgressions?¹³⁴ Here, Job mentions an unconditional forgiveness.¹³⁵ Even if God regards him as wicked, there is no need to punish him so severely.

The option of forgiveness returns in Job 14. Here, Job wonders whether God could hide him in the underworld for a while until God’s anger is past (14,13-14). In 14,15ff, Job imagines how the situation would be when God’s anger had ceased.¹³⁶ God would then call Job and not observe a single sin (14,15-16).

14,17 My transgression would be sealed in a bundle
and you would cover over my sin.

The act of sealing and covering has been understood in two different ways. On the one hand, it is explained as an act of keeping. According to Fohrer, God neither

¹³³ In 7,20, the perfect **חַטָּאתִי** (I have sinned) expresses an *irrealis* without a participle. Several scholars consider the first line of 7,20 (**חַטָּאתִי...הַאֲדָם**) as a gloss (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 164; Hölscher, *Job*, 24; Hesse, *Hiob*, 64) or delete **חַטָּאתִי** (I have sinned) in 7,20 (so Pope, *Job*, 62) because of *metri causa* or the content. However, these are not convincing grounds for deleting it. Considering the situation that Job would have sinned fits within the context of Job’s speeches, where on the one hand he defends his innocence and on the other hand explores several perspectives and options in order to understand God’s treatment of him. Therefore, taking 7,21 also as a hypothetical consideration is plausible.

¹³⁴ Compare Clines, *Job*, 194. According to Clines, Job means by ‘my sin’ my sin as God reckons it, for God must have something against Job to make him suffer as he does.

¹³⁵ See also 11,6 (§3.3.2).

¹³⁶ 14,16f refers to the future situation after God’s anger has ceased. For, the depiction that God sees that Job is blameless (14,16) contradicts Job’s current situation in which God apparently regards him as wicked considering his misery. Therefore, **כִּי־עֲתֵדָה** refers to the future situation and means ‘for then’ (cf. Clines, *Job*, 333; Habel, *Job*, 235; Horst, *Hiob*, 211; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 176-177. Pace Fohrer, *Hiob*, 259; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 130; Van Selms, *Job I*, 122; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 36. The last group reads 14,16f as a description of Job’s current situation (some of them change **הַזְמִינִי** in 14,16b into **הַעֲבִיר** (to pass)).

forgives Job's sins nor considers them as being reconciled by his suffering, but saves them in order to be able to let the suffering continue.¹³⁷ On the other hand, it is taken as removal of or hiding Job's sins, so that they can not be used as evidence against him.¹³⁸ Although the verb סָתַם (to seal) is used for sealing wrong behaviour in treasuries until the day of God's anger (Deut.32,34), this meaning of saving does not fit within the context of 14,17. Since God will not desecrate any sin in the future situation when God's anger has ceased (14,16), the verb סָתַם expresses an action through which Job's transgressions are no longer visible or existing.¹³⁹ The verb טָפַל (to cover) is used for plastering with lies (13,4), meaning covering the truth. In 14,17b, God covers over Job's sin. Job is imagining a situation, in which God's anger has ceased. Possible transgressions would not be effective anymore because they have been sealed in a bundle. God would remove possible sins. However, this does not directly imply that Job admits that he has sinned. Job reasons from God's point of view. God obviously considers him guilty. Now Job imagines how God would approach him differently in a situation where God's anger has come to an end. Then God would cover Job's hypothetical sins instead of punishing them.

Since Job can not recall any transgression in the past, he explores a different explanation of his misery. Perhaps God blames Job for possible sins of his youth. In 13,24-25, Job asks why God considers him as an enemy and wants to frighten him. He explains God's treatment by referring to lapses in his youth.

13,26b And you make me inherit the sins of my youth.

It might be possible that God punishes Job for the sins of his youth. In Ps.25,7, the psalmist prays for God not to remember the sins of his youth. Obviously, youthful naïveté can be put forward in mitigation for blaming somebody for sins that are committed in their youth. In 13,26b, Job mentions the possibility of youthful lapses. One could interpret this as a contradiction of Job's belief that he is blameless.¹⁴⁰ However, the main point here is not that Job admits a transgression, but the disproportion between a possible sin in Job's youth and his serious suffering now.¹⁴¹ The preceding verse supports this opinion because there Job characterizes God's treatment as frightening a windblown leaf (13,25). This comparison of Job to a windblown leaf expresses the disproportion of God's

¹³⁷ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 260. So also Hesse, *Hiob*, 102-103. Driver-Gray, *Job*, 130. Fohrer points among others to Deut.32,34f and Hos.13,12.

¹³⁸ Clines, *Job*, 334; Habel, *Job*, 244.

¹³⁹ Compare De Wilde, *Hiob*, 177.

¹⁴⁰ Fohrer again considers this sin as a sin stemming from human nature (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 253). De Wilde does not exclude that a copyist has later added this passage in order to weaken Job's accusation (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 171).

¹⁴¹ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 321; Hesse, *Hiob*, 101.

dealings with Job. Even if Job left open the possibility that he sinned when he was a boy, his belief that he is innocent and suffers unjustly would not be undermined. For, his current misery is disproportionate to any possible sins from his youth because God should turn a blind eye to such small transgressions.

A different approach to Job's situation can be found in 14,4. Here, Job mentions the motif of human imperfection. This suggests that nobody is fully pure.¹⁴² It would imply that Job argues that he is not able to be fully righteous too. Thus, –strictly reasoning– Job would admit that he is also guilty to a certain extent. In this speech, Job mentions the brevity of a human life (14,1-2) and establishes with some astonishment that God even contends with such an insignificant being as he is (14,3). Then Job wonders:

14,4 Who can bring what is pure from the impure?
No one can.

Job denies the possibility that anything righteous would stem from the unrighteous. Whereas the terms טהור (pure) and טמא (impure) are mainly used in cultic settings, in 14,4, they function within the wider context of Job's plea that he has lived a blameless life. Therefore, being pure here means displaying a correct moral behaviour.¹⁴³ Wondering why God brings human beings¹⁴⁴ to judgement even though their life is short (14,3), Job adds the argument that the expectation of fully blameless conduct as such is an illusion, since impure does not produce pure. Several scholars delete or bracket 14,4 because they are of the opinion that the motif of human imperfection is a topic of the friends and does not fit to the context of Job 14, where the brevity of life has been raised.¹⁴⁵ However, the reference to the motif of human imperfection can serve to intensify Job's reproach that God's treatment of mortals bears no relation to their weak position. For, God himself has attributed this weak position to them (14,5). One could value it as unjust, if God blames human beings for lapses, while he has created them in such a way that they can not actually avoid doing wrong.

The question then remains of whether Job states that all human beings as such are impure. According to Fohrer, 14,4 refers to all human beings since the fate of

¹⁴² This motif is mainly brought up by Job's friends: 4,17-21; 15,14-16; 25,4-6. See §3.4.

¹⁴³ Pace J.K. Zink, "Uncleanness and Sin. A Study of Job XIV 4 and Psalm LI 7", *VT* 17 (1967) 360.

¹⁴⁴ Reading הִמָּן (him) instead of אֲנִי (me) in 14,3b cf. LXX.

¹⁴⁵ Driver-Gray, *Job*, 127. phil. notes 89; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 173; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 37; Pope, *Job*, 106-107. Horst speaks of a dogmatic correction (Horst, *Hiob*, 207). Hesse does not delete the verse but notes that there is some tension with the context (Hesse, *Hiob*, 101). Gordis takes it as a virtual quotation of the idea expressed by Eliphaz which Job counters in 14,5 (Gordis, *Job*, 147). Furthermore, the brevity of the second line is brought up as an argument against its originality.

death implies that nobody is completely pure.¹⁴⁶ However, in 14,1ff, Job does not connect the mortality of human beings with the fact that creatures will always commit some sins because of their being a creature. Job only mentions the brevity of life in order to contradict God's intensive observation and judgement of humanity's way of life. Therefore, the fate of death as such does not reveal human impurity. Job 'only' notes that what is pure can not be brought forward by the impure. Apparently, only the pure produce the pure.

However, does Job believe that being pure is impossible? If Job did, it would seem that he undermines his conviction that he is blameless. The answer to this issue depends on the interpretation of the expression *לֵלֵד מֵאִשָּׁה* (born of a woman) in 14,1. Some scholars think that this expression means that a human being is weak by nature¹⁴⁷ or impure because childbirth is regarded as unclean¹⁴⁸. This would imply that being pure is impossible for human beings. However, *לֵלֵד מֵאִשָּׁה* occurs parallel to *מֵאִשָּׁה* and means mortal in the first instance.¹⁴⁹ Whereas Job's friends conclude that each person born of a woman is to a certain extent unrighteous before God¹⁵⁰, Job does not explicitly draw this conclusion. Job brings forward that something really pure can hardly be found because the impure do not produce anything pure.¹⁵¹ In this way, the choice is made to question God's treatment of Job from a different approach. The chance that human beings lapse is rather considerable. Therefore, it is unreasonable that God observes and judges human beings so intensively. Job does not explicitly exclude the possibility that someone is pure although it might be possible that he believes that nobody is completely pure as his friends also believe. The particular point here is the question of whether God's 'hunt' for the wrongdoing of human beings is or is not out of proportion because the chance that they do wrong is rather significant.

4.3.3 God Withholding Justice from Job

The central charge of Job in the dialogue is that God treats him unjustly. Thus, God's righteousness is at stake. This conclusion is drawn in Job 9. Although God's unjust actions towards Job is assumed in the remainder of the dialogue – for instance, Job goes on depicting how God besieges him–, the accusation that God

¹⁴⁶ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 255. See also Hesse, *Hiob*, 101; Weiser, *Hiob*, 102.

¹⁴⁷ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 254; Van Selms, *Job I*, 119.

¹⁴⁸ Rowley, *Job*, 127-128 (he refers to Ps.51,7); Van Selms, *Job I*, 120; Zink, "Uncleanness and Sin", 359-361. Tur-Sinai thinks that it refers to the unclean state of a woman in childbirth and even in conception (Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 232).

¹⁴⁹ 15,14; 25,4. Cf. De Wilde, *Hiob*, 173. Also Sir.10,18.

¹⁵⁰ 15,14-16; 25,4-6.

¹⁵¹ According to Clines, it has to do with the potential sinfulness of humankind here (Clines, *Job*, 326).

perverts justice has not been uttered by means of an explicit charge until Job 27. Here, Job repeats his actual charge.¹⁵²

27,2 As God lives who has taken away my right,
and the Almighty, who has embittered my life.

This verse is the opening of an oath. Job swears by the living God that neither his lips will speak falsehood nor he will give God right (27,4-5). The character of this God is further depicted in 27,2. In Job's eyes, God treats Job unjustly and spoils his life.¹⁵³ Taking away Job's right is placed parallel to embittering his life. This embittering of Job's life refers to the misery with which God has afflicted him. God's treatment of Job is unjust because it breaks the concept of retribution. The word *גִּזְפוּת* (right) refers to the legal right to which someone has the right according to this concept.¹⁵⁴ God has taken away Job's right by letting him suffer innocently. God has the power to take away (*סָרַף*, hifil) things from human beings.¹⁵⁵ Job opposes God's actions to his own. Whereas God has taken away his justice (27,2), he swears that he will not take away (*סָרַף*, hifil) his integrity from him (27,5). A bitter irony appears in this verse. For, the God to whom Job is appealing in his oath is the same God who is treating him wrongly.¹⁵⁶ It becomes clear in what discord Job finds himself. On the one hand, Job charges God with withholding his legal right to him and ruining his life for no reason. On the other hand, this same God is the only one who could possibly provide Job with a way out.

4.4 The Prosperity of the Wicked

Besides his own situation, Job mentions a second 'piece of evidence' in order to demonstrate that God deals unrighteously. Job calls attention to the fact that there are evildoers who live a prosperous life without calamity or setbacks. Job's friends base their view that the wicked will meet misfortune according to the concept of retribution on their own experience and the wisdom of the forefathers.¹⁵⁷ To this opinion, Job opposes his observation that the wicked are doing well. This objection is first mentioned casually in 12,6. There, Job remarks that the tents of robbers are left in peace.¹⁵⁸ Job elaborates upon this topic in more detail further on in the

¹⁵² Egger-Wenzel considers 27,2 as the second climax of the dialogue after 9,22-24 (Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit Gottes*, 290).

¹⁵³ See also 9,18; 13,26. Elihu summarizes this charge in 34,5.

¹⁵⁴ Pace Habel, *Job*, 376.

¹⁵⁵ 9,34; 12,20.24; 19,9.

¹⁵⁶ Gordis, *Job*, 287; Habel, *Job*, 379-380.

¹⁵⁷ E.g. 15,17-18.

¹⁵⁸ There is a debate about 12,6c because here the subject changes from plural to singular. Clines reads *לֵאלֹהִים* (God) as the subject because of the singular here and explains that God

dialogue (Job 21). After the friends each exposed the miserable destiny of the wicked in their speeches, Job replies:

21,7 Why do the wicked stay alive,
do they become old and even grow in power?

In Job 21, Job counters the conviction of his friends that the wicked are always rewarded with bad for their wrongdoing. He alludes to several elements in their depictions of the fate of evildoers. While the friends maintain that the wicked (עשׂה) live their life with continuous fear, enjoy their delight only for a short time, and die a premature death,¹⁵⁹ Job objects to the fact that they stay alive and become old. While Zophar claims that evildoers lose their (unjustly) obtained possessions (20,15.18), Job has observed that their wealth even increases in the course of their lives. The substantive כח (power) can refer to property and wealth (20,18). Job wonders why the wicked are not treated according to the retributive scheme, but live a prosperous life and attain a great age. On what exactly does Job cast doubt with this? Does he want to demonstrate the lack of the viability of the concept of retribution¹⁶⁰ or to show that God indeed acts unjustly? Probably, both elements play a role here. One could doubt whether a conclusion from someone's misfortune that one has sinned is reliable because a considerable number of evildoers apparently do not meet such a miserable fate. But what is more, Job keeps taking the concept of retribution as point of departure for his reasoning during the dialogue. Therefore, the examples of the prosperity of evildoers foremost illustrate God's perversion of justice. Job's case is not simply an incident, but God generally fails to act justly and benefits the wicked wrongfully.¹⁶¹

Job elaborates upon the prosperity of the wicked with concrete examples. They spend their days safely and in prosperity, they are happy, and their offspring are able to grow up carefree (21,8-13). They refuse to serve God (21,14-15). The excuse that the children of evildoers will pay for the sins of their parents is not a sufficient explanation for the failure of their misfortune in Job's eyes. God should repay the wicked themselves before they die, so that they suffer the consequences of their deeds (21,19-21). But, as it stands, there is no difference between the fate

does nothing about evildoers, although they are in his power (Clines, *Job*, 291). Even though this suggestion is attractive, it would require a modal meaning of the verb חיל (hifil) and therefore an imperfect. For, the perfect describes the situation of being in God's power and this is not the fact cf. 12,6ab. Therefore, it is better to take the evildoer as subject. The evildoer thinks that he is controlling God (compare Habel, *Job*, 218-219).

¹⁵⁹ 15,20, 20,5, 8,22; 18,5.

¹⁶⁰ So Habel, *Job*, 326; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 339. According to Fohrer, Job emphasizes this observation because Job's misfortune is proof that he is not a wicked person if the end of the wicked is happiness, success, and honour.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Job's charge in 9,22-24.

of righteous and that of evildoers. Both die an equal death and the wicked do not have to give account after they passed away.¹⁶² Thus, Job places his own case in a broader perspective. God's treatment of Job fits into a more general tendency in which God does not treat human beings according to the concept of retribution. Hence someone's fate might not be as indicative for one's former behaviour anymore as some might think that it is.

4.5 Doubt on the Sense of a Laborious Life

The debate in the dialogue particularly concentrates on the issue whether Job's suffering can be justified. However, Job's reaction to his hopeless situation of distress also contains a different aspect. This is the question of what the meaning of life full of misery is. Job opens the dialogue by cursing the day of his birth. He wonders why God did not let him die when he was born, so that he would have been spared his current trouble.¹⁶³ Furthermore, Job more generally characterizes a human life as the hard service of a labourer and compares its brevity with a breath.¹⁶⁴ These observations lead to the question of why God gives life to a human being, if such a life mainly exists of trouble and hard service.¹⁶⁵

After Job has uttered his complaint about the fact that he exists (Job 3), he asks more in general:

- 3,20 Why does he give light to the troubled
and life to the bitter ones¹⁶⁶,
...
3,23 to one whose way is hidden
and whom God has fenced in.

After Job has cursed the day of his birth and has asked why he did not die when he came into the world (3,3-19), he places the difficulty of his existence in its current state within a broader perspective. In 3,20, Job more generally raises the matter of the sense of a troubled life. Although God has not explicitly been mentioned until now, the subject of יָהוָה (he gives) can only be God.¹⁶⁷ For, God is the origin of life. אֵשׁ (light) stands equally with life, also because of the parallel with חַיִּים (lifetime).¹⁶⁸ Twice, Job uses the combination מַר נַפְשִׁי (bitterness of my inner

¹⁶² 21,23-26.31-33.

¹⁶³ 3,1-19. See also 10,18-19.

¹⁶⁴ 7,1-2.7.16; 14,1-2.

¹⁶⁵ In 10,3.13-14, this question even leads to the suggestion that God might have created human beings for his own benefit; namely as a toy that he can prosecute if they sin.

¹⁶⁶ Literally: those with a bitter inner self.

¹⁶⁷ Pace Gordis, *Job*, 38; LXX, Vulg., Tg..

¹⁶⁸ For אֵשׁ in this sense: 3,16; 18,5-6. In 33,30: בְּאֵשׁ הַחַיִּים (light of life).

self) in order to express his distressful situation.¹⁶⁹ In 3,20, the bitter ones refers to those who meet trouble and anxiety in their life.¹⁷⁰ Clines thinks that Job wishes that he could cease life.¹⁷¹ However, this view reads too much into the final part of Job 3. Although the desire for death is mentioned as characteristic of the troubled (3,21-22), it is not meant as a description of Job's own wish here. The central issue is what reason God might have to make a troubled existence possible. If one is unable to enjoy life, it seems to lack all sense.¹⁷² So, Job does not raise the question about the meaning of life in general, but asks about the intentions for giving life to human beings, who meet trouble and therefore desire to pass away during their laborious life.

The uncertainty and lack of prospect of the troubled is further emphasized in 3,23. The change from a plural in 3,20b-22 into a singular in 3,23 makes it clear that Job explicitly includes his own situation with those who are in depressed circumstances. The word *נַרְרָךְ* refers to a person's way of life. Job makes it clear that people in trouble do not know whether there will be any change in their miserable fate and how their life will further work out.¹⁷³ Job places the origin of this situation with God. God has fenced in the person in trouble. In 1,10, the satan suggests that Job fears God because God has put a fence around Job (*שָׂכַח בְּעַדוֹ*), about his house, and all that he has. There, it concerns a blessed protection by God. But in 3,23, God hinders each perspective by hiding the road ahead.¹⁷⁴ This situation of misery is experienced as a kind of imprisonment caused by God.¹⁷⁵ Hesse understands this description as an accusation because God first calls a human being absurdly to life, only to cut off all possibilities of life subsequently.¹⁷⁶ However, Job only describes the reality of a troubled person here.¹⁷⁷ Such persons do not see any perspective because God has fenced them in. Job struggles with the question of whether creating human beings, who are suffering to a great extent, has any sense.

¹⁶⁹ 7,11; 10,1.

¹⁷⁰ The plural of *נַרְרָךְ* (bitter ones) means that this question is put in general and does not refer to Job's case only.

¹⁷¹ Clines, *Job*, 98. He mentions this theme for 3,20-26.

¹⁷² In this way, one could say that Job raises the question of the meaning of a life of misery and affliction (so Habel, *Job*, 111; Horst, *Hiob*, 54).

¹⁷³ Compare Driver-Gray, *Job*, 39; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 125.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 126. See also 19,8; Thr.3,7-9. Clines understands God's hedging as keeping someone alive (Clines, *Job*, 101). However, the issue is that the troubled do not know whether there will be any change in their fate.

¹⁷⁵ Compare Horst, *Hiob*, 55-56. See also Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 46-47, who calls the term 'to put a hedge' in 1,10 and 3,23 mirror images of each other. She understands it in 3,23 as God withholding good for Job.

¹⁷⁶ Hesse, *Hiob*, 49. According to Fohrer, some of Job's later reproach can be found here (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 126).

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 101-102.

4.6 Job's Trust in His Heavenly Witness and Redeemer

4.6.1 General

Despite his desperate situation, Job does not lose all hope. He wishes that permanent registration of his bitter fate keeps his accusation against God alive, even if he has passed away, and he places his hope in a heavenly witness and redeemer.¹⁷⁸ Some cautious traces of hope have already appeared before these rather famous passages. In 13,15, Job states that he will hope in God, even if God may slay him soon.¹⁷⁹ Job relies on his innocence and expects that a defence of his conduct to God's face will be his salvation (13,15-16). In 14,13ff, Job wonders whether it would be possible for God to hide Job in the underworld until God's anger has passed. Such a prospect would make Job's current service endurable because there would be some prospect for better times. Thus, Job maintains some hope for relief and outcome at several places in the dialogue.

After these first cautious traces of hope, a new turn can be found in Job's speeches, when Job speaks of his trust in a heavenly witness (Job 16) and redeemer (Job 19). The structure of these two speeches is nearly equal. Both speeches open with some critical remarks on the misjudgement of Job's situation by the friends. Job subsequently exposes how God has turned against him and besieges him. He pictures elements of his misery, makes an attempt to keep his charge going in case he dies prematurely and finally expresses his trust in a heavenly witness and redeemer.¹⁸⁰ This equal structure makes it plausible to suppose that the witness and

¹⁷⁸ 16,18-22; 17,3; 19,23-27.

¹⁷⁹ As in several Psalms, the verb **יחל** (to wait) means hope on God, who brings good (Ps.31,25; 33,18.22; 71,14; 130,7; 147,11). In 13,15a, several scholars prefer to read the Kethib **ל** (not) instead of the Qere **לו** (for him) (Clines, *Job*, 312-313; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 123; Habel, *Job*, 225; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 238; Van Selms, *Job I*, 116; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 36). Clines argues that a reading according to the Qere is not appropriate because the context stresses no hope on Job's part, but rather the futility and danger that surrounds his approach to God. According to Clines, the expectation that God would vindicate Job in an afterlife would be out of step with Israelite thinking (Clines, *Job*, 312). Others think that Job expects to die because of the appearance in the sight of God in order to expose his case (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 251; Horst, *Hiob*, 201). However, some hope in vindication can be found in Job's wish to enter into a case with God. Moreover, even if God's current hostile attitude towards Job may lead to Job's death, Job can only hope that God will be moved by the exposition of his righteousness. For, God is the only one who is able to release Job from his misery. As long as Job keeps on arguing with his friends and God, Job must have this hope. Otherwise, his struggle for vindication would be senseless. Therefore, Job expresses some faith in a good outcome here.

¹⁸⁰ The speech of Job 16 is followed by a second part (Job 17), in which Job complains about his current miserable situation, among other things.

the redeemer both refer to the same being.¹⁸¹ However, the identity of the witness and the redeemer is a hotly debated issue. On the one hand, they are identified as God. On the other hand, several scholars argue that the witness and redeemer refer to a third party besides Job and God. Habel, for instance, argues that Job's depiction of God as his attacker, enemy, adversary at law, hunter, and as an intimidating terror can not be united with the role of advocate, saviour, or impartial judge.¹⁸² In this section, I will argue for the first option. Since the whole struggle with divine justice and the concept of retribution in the book of Job is concerned with the problem that all power is vested with God, only an appeal to God can be an effective gesture in order to change Job's miserable situation. God apparently fulfils different roles for human beings at the same time.

4.6.2 The Heavenly Witness

The final part of Job 16 can be read within the context of the image of the lawsuit. The cry of Job's blood and the witness both serve to move Job's cause in the hope that his innocence will be acknowledged, even if he has already died. After Job has exposed how God besieges him (16,7-14) despite his integrity (16,17), he states:

- 16,18 Earth, do not cover my blood,
and let there be no place for my cry.
16,19 Even now, see, my witness is in heaven,
and he who testifies for me on high.
16,20 My spokesmen are my friends,
my eye waits sleeplessly¹⁸³ for God.
16,21 That he pleads on behalf of a man with God,
as a human being does for his neighbour.
16,22 For a few years will come,
and I will go the way without returning.

The reason for Job's appeal to the earth and a heavenly witness is that only a limited lifetime seems to be left before he dies (16,22). This reference to his short lifespan would imply that Job makes an attempt to be vindicated before his death in 16,18-21.¹⁸⁴ However, the image of 16,18 can not refer to an action during Job's life. The blood of one who died innocently cries out to God for vengeance, as long as it remains uncovered.¹⁸⁵ Such an image supposes that Job's blood has been shed.

¹⁸¹ Compare Clines, *Job*, 459.

¹⁸² Habel, *Job*, 306.

¹⁸³ As in Ps.119,28, the verb דָּלַף can be derived from the Akkadic root *dalāpu* (be sleepless) (cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 281; Horst, *Hiob*, 254-255; Clines, *Job*, 372).

¹⁸⁴ So Fohrer, *Hiob*, 290; Habel, *Job*, 274.

¹⁸⁵ Gen.4,10; 37,26; Isa.26,21. In Ezek.24,7-8, the blood is placed on a bare rock in order to rouse God's anger and take vengeance.

Therefore, 16,18 can only refer to an action after Job's death.¹⁸⁶ However, the insights of Barth put this into a different perspective. Barth makes it clear that death does not always refer to one's physical death in the Hebrew bible. For instance, disease or loneliness can mean that someone dwells in the realm of death according to him.¹⁸⁷ This entails that the statement of 16,18 may also refer to Job's current miserable situation. For, that is a form of death.

The earth (אֶרֶץ) discloses the blood shed on it and does not any longer cover its defeated in Isa.26,21. In 16,18, the earth is equally the acting entity in Job's appeal. Job addresses the earth with the request not to cover his blood. Because of the parallel with דָּמִי (my blood), זַעֲקָה (cry) is the cry for vengeance that comes forward from the uncovered blood. The word מְקוֹם (place) can be a fixed place or a dwelling place.¹⁸⁸ Giving the cry a dwelling place stands parallel to covering Job's blood. It means silencing the cry for vengeance for Job's innocent physical death or innocent dwelling in a situation of misery. Job tries to assure in 16,18 that his charge against God does not fall silent if he dies or is silenced without being vindicated. If he is unable to speak, his blood may make an appeal to God to be his avenger of blood. Thus, Job actually makes an advance at 16,21, where God is incited against God. For, the blood calls on God to take his case up against God, who has let him die innocently.¹⁸⁹ Job is not willing to let God get away with his case if he dies. Even then, God has to be forced to account for his treatment of the innocent Job. Job's short lifespan makes him utter this appeal to the earth.

After this attempt to prevent his accusation falling silent if he dies without vindication, Job turns to a perhaps more appropriate option in the short run (16,19). גַּם־עַתָּה (even now) expresses a certain contrast to 16,18.¹⁹⁰ Job switches over to the short term and expresses his trust in a heavenly witness before his death. The identity and task of this heavenly witness depends on the interpretation of 16,20-21. The verb כָּחַל in 16,21a describes the activity of the witness. In general, this verb is understood in two different ways. On the one hand, it is translated as 'to mediate'. In this case, an arbitrating role between mortal and God is attributed to the witness.¹⁹¹ On the other hand, it is translated as 'to plead'. Then the task of the witness is to argue man's cause with God.¹⁹² Since it is Job's aim to convince God

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 388. See also Driver-Gray, *Job*, 147-148; Horst, *Hiob*, 251-252. This view is supported by 19,23-24, where Job also makes an attempt to let his accusation be permanent after his death.

¹⁸⁷ Barth, *Erretung vom Tode*, 72-97.

¹⁸⁸ 7,10; 14,18; 18,4; 28,12.20.

¹⁸⁹ Pace Clines, *Job*, 389.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Horst, *Hiob*, 252. See also 1 Sam.12,16; Joel 2,12.

¹⁹¹ This meaning of כָּחַל can also be found in 9,33 (מְוַכֵּחַ). In this case, לְ in 16,21a means 'between' (compare Isa.2,4; Mic.4,3).

¹⁹² For this meaning of כָּחַל see 13,3; 23,7. In this case, כָּחַל is read with עַם in 16,21a (cf. 23,7; Mic.6,2 (hitp.)). The witness pleads with God. לְ then means 'on behalf of'.

of his innocence, this second option is preferable. Job hopes that a heavenly witness will plead with God on his behalf. Because of this understanding of 16,21a, 16,21b can best be read as a comparison.¹⁹³ In this way, לְרַעְהוּ (for his neighbour) in 16,21b stands parallel with לְגַבַּר (on behalf of man) in 16,21a. Furthermore, וְיִוְכַח (16,21a) is assumed in 16,21b. The actions of the heavenly witness on behalf of man is comparable with how someone would act on behalf of another.¹⁹⁴

Who or what is this heavenly witness? The witness is generally identified with God or with a third party between Job and God.¹⁹⁵ For considering the witness as a third party, several arguments arise. First, the existence of a third party in the figure of the satan in the prologue does not provide any logical reason why such a third party could not be found in the dialogue. The figure of the witness could be seen as a counterpart to the satan.¹⁹⁶ Secondly, Elihu also accepts the idea of an angel figure (מַלְאֲכֵי) in heaven (33,23). Some also point to 9,33, where an arbitrator (מוֹכִיחַ) is mentioned as third party. Thirdly, some difficulty with a concept of God in which God has two sides or is split also plays a role.¹⁹⁷ However, there is the question of whether the *opus alienum* and *opus proprium* are incompatible within God. Firstly, such a combination has already been implied in 16,18. Job's call to the earth not to cover his blood means that Job makes an appeal to God to act as an avenger of blood against God, who is prosecuting him. In this way, Job assumes that it is possible that God acts favourably towards him. Secondly, Job has excluded the possibility of the existence of an independent intermediary between him and God (9,33). Job's whole problem consists of the fact that different roles come together in God. God has a sovereign position and is Job's adversary as well as his judge. Nobody can stop God or call him to account for what he is doing

¹⁹³ ו in 16,21b then expresses a comparison. Cf. Tg., Vulg., and Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Grammar*, §161a. So Clines, *Job*, 391; Habel, *Job*, 263; Van Selms, *Job I*, 148. Some Masoretic versions read וּבֵין (and between) instead of וְ. However, the text does not need to be changed if 16,21b is taken as a comparison.

¹⁹⁴ Some scholars understand רֵעַ (friend) as an opponent in a lawsuit in this legal context (so e.g. S. Mowinckel, "Hiobs gō'ēl und Zeuge im Himmel", BZAW 41, Gießen 1925, 211). However, this interpretation is not satisfactory if 16,21b is taken as a comparison.

¹⁹⁵ For this third party, several options are mentioned: an arbiter or advocate (Habel, *Job*, 275-276); an intermediary, intercessor (Pope, *Job*, 125); a guardian angel (cf. 33,23) or tutelary deity (Mowinckel, "Hiobs gō'ēl", 209); a personal private deity who is distinct from the high God (J.B. Curtis, "On Job's Witness in Heaven", *JBL* 102 (1983) 549-562). The opinion of a third party is also defended by Terrien, *Job*, 133-134; Van Selms, *Job I*, 147-148; Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes*, 241 (however, she takes the אֱלֹהִים in 19,25 as referring to JHWH (277)).

¹⁹⁶ Habel, *Job*, 275; Horst, *Hiob*, 256.

¹⁹⁷ Habel e.g. says that Job is not contemplating the good side of a schizophrenic deity (Habel, *Job*, 275).

(9,12). Therefore, Job has no other possibly effective option than putting his hope in a different side of this same God.¹⁹⁸

God can be עֵד (witness) on behalf of or against human beings.¹⁹⁹ Job addresses God's in this role of witness. A second witness is necessary in order to make a case sustainable (Deut.19,15). Job wishes that God fulfil this task and affirm before God that Job's conviction that he is blameless is true. So, a new twist can be found in Job 16. Despite his feeling that God treats him unjustly, now Job also expresses a certain trust in this same God. This step actually contains two aspects. On the one hand, Job does not have any other option than to appeal to God for a way out. For, nothing outside God can release Job from God's hand. On the other hand, this appeal to God puts some pressure on God to respond somehow in Job's case. If God helps human beings in despair, this is the moment to put this attribute into operation.

Clines excludes both options –God and a third party– and thinks that Job's own protests of innocence are the witness in heaven. He argues that the witness can neither be God, because God himself has no interest in Job's case or in the question of Job's righteousness, nor a heavenly mediator or umpire since Job has excluded this possibility in 9,33.²⁰⁰ However, the images of witness, spokesman, and redeemer (19,25) in heaven are too marked to be mere personifications of Job's cry of protest. Moreover, the nature of the task of these figures is assisting someone else in a legal procedure or an anxious situation. For example, the witness is called in order to support and confirm the testimony of an accused. It is implausible that Job's own protestation or claim of innocence fulfils this role of witness or redeemer because then a second testimony is still lacking.

How can 16,20 be understood within this context? The meaning of מַלְיָצִי and רַעִי (16,20a) in particular is rather unclear.²⁰¹ The word מַלְיָצִי can be derived from two different roots. It can be taken as a participle hifil of לַיִץ (to scorn) or as

¹⁹⁸ Gordis mentions 27,2 as a decisive refutation of the view that Job has been appealing to an unnamed third party because there the God to whom Job is appealing is identical to the God who has wronged him (Gordis, *Job*, 287). Hölscher states that it matters to Job that he really finds God, namely a God who is not only angry and demonic, but a God of love and loyalty, a friend and a protector of all upright people. According to Hölscher, this conviction breaks through in 16.18-19.21 (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 43; also cited in De Wilde, *Hiob*, 194). In general, I think that it would deserve more emphasis that Job is also forced to appeal to God because only God can provide Job with a way out of his misery. There is no hope beyond God.

¹⁹⁹ 1 Sam.12,5; Mic.1,2; Jer.29,23; Mal.3,5.

²⁰⁰ Clines, *Job*, 389-390 (Clines also identifies the גִּבּוֹר (champion/redeemer) in 19,25 as Job's cry for innocence (459)). So also C. Gross, "Notes on the Meaning of Job 16,20", *The Bible Translator* 43 (1992) 239-240.

²⁰¹ For an overview of a considerable number of different translations and emendations see Curtis, "On Job's Witness", 552-553, note 7.

the substantive מַלְאָךְ (interpreter/spokesman).²⁰² In the former case, Job describes his friends as those who scorn him. This would be the reason for turning to God with his plea or complaint.²⁰³ In the latter, Job characterizes his friends or the heavenly witness as his intermediary or spokesman.²⁰⁴ While the participle qal of מַלְאָךְ meaning ‘mocker’ occurs in the Hebrew bible several times, a participle hifil would be unique. Therefore, it seems more reasonable to understand מַלְאָךְ as the substantive מַלְאָךְ (spokesman).²⁰⁵

However, to whom or what does this spokesman refer? On a textual level, it can be a further characterization of the heavenly witness (16,19) or be taken with רַעִי (16,20a). However, the word רַע is not univocal and has been read in different ways. Most scholars take רַעִי from רַע II (friend) and read a plural or singular.²⁰⁶ In the plural, Job’s friends would be called his spokesmen. However, such a characterization can hardly be intended seriously because Job earlier qualified the comfort of the friends as worthless (16,2-5). Therefore, this reading is only possible if it is taken ironically or as a question.²⁰⁷ As a singular, both רַעִי and מַלְאָךְ would refer to the heavenly witness (16,19), who is called Job’s spokesman and friend.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, רַעִי can be taken from רַע I (cry) or רַע III (thought/intention).²⁰⁹ Then Job’s cry or attempt at vindication would be representing him. Since the heavenly witness has been identified with God, it is unlikely that the spokesman and the friend refer to the witness. For, Job would not call God his friend in his current situation.²¹⁰ It is less plausible that spokesman

²⁰² Furthermore, several emendations are suggested. Among other things: מַלְאָךְ לִי (Duhm, *Hiob*, 90; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 281); מַלְאָךְ בִּי (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 194).

²⁰³ So Budde, *Hiob*, 86; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 148; Terrien, *Job*, 134.

²⁰⁴ The word מַלְאָךְ can be found in Gen.42,23; Isa.43,27; 2 Chr.32,31; Job 33,23.

²⁰⁵ Duhm mentions this fact as a reason to exclude the first option (Duhm, *Hiob*, 90). This view is supported by Tg.

²⁰⁶ In the singular, the vocalization of the suffix of both מַלְאָךְ and רַעִי is changed into םִי.

²⁰⁷ So Gordis, *Job*, 170.179. He actually gives different options. He translates 16,20a as a question: “Alas! Are my intercessors my friends?” (170). He states that the Masoretic text can be defended. Then one can read: “Oh, my intercessors, my friends!”, where a bitter irony can be heard according to Gordis. Besides this option, Gordis proposes to add אֱלֹהִים (God) after רַעִי: “My intercessors are God’s friends”, by which ‘God’s friends’ is an ironic epithet (179).

²⁰⁸ So Habel, *Job*, 263.266; Horst, *Hiob*, 254; Van Selms, *Job I*, 147-148; Mowinckel, “Hiobs gō`ēl”, 210.

²⁰⁹ Pope, *Job*, 122: ‘thoughts’. Clines takes up Pope’s suggestion and explains it as equivalent to רַעוּת (longing/striving) from the same root רַע III. Though he calls Dhorme’s translation ‘clamour’ (רַע I) almost as attractive (Clines, *Job*, 371). It is striking that Clines’ commentary on 16,20 seems to tend more to a derivation from רַע I (see Clines, *Job*, 390.459). Hölscher, *Hiob*, 42: ‘cry’. Curtis reads *rō`î* (my shepherd) (Curtis, “On Job’s Witness”, 552-554).

²¹⁰ Moreover, nowhere is God called friend in the Hebrew bible. Only in Exod.33,11, a comparison of God with רַע can be found: Moses speaks with God as one with his

refers to Job's cry or his striving because the task of intercession is attributed to a helping entity which is different from Job himself in 16,19-21. Therefore, עֵרֵךְ can best be read as a plural referring to Job's friends, who are ironically called Job's spokesmen.

So, Job depicts his current situation in parenthesis with bitter irony (16,20) between his utterances about his heavenly witness (16,19,21). Job has been dependent on his friends as his spokesmen until now. However, their words have been qualified as idle at the beginning of this speech (16,3). Job has sleeplessly been waiting for any response by God to his request for a reason for his suffering and to his claim that he is blameless. Since this current situation does not progress Job any further, Job now takes the next step by appealing to God as his witness. In this way, Job calls God up against God. Despite God's hostile attitude towards him, now Job also puts some trust and hope in this same God. He hopes and wishes that God will plead as his witness with God, who apparently holds him guilty. Maybe this witness can confirm Job's integrity and convince God that Job's conviction that he suffers innocently is valid.²¹¹ In 17,3, Job makes a similar appeal to God. There, Job asks God to set a pledge for him with God himself because nobody else appears to be prepared to accept this task.²¹² Providing such a security would make it possible to release Job from his current trouble. In this way, Job chooses new openings in the course of the dialogue in order to evade his miserable fate and to be proved right. He appeals to God in God's role as witness and protector.

4.6.3 Job's Redeemer

In one of the most famous verses of the book of Job, Job places his hope in a redeemer. He states that he knows that his redeemer lives (19,25). As in Job 16, this affirmation is preceded by an attempt to let Job's case go on after a possibly premature death. Job wishes that his conviction that he is blameless and suffers unjustly is written down, so that his charge against God will not cease if he dies (19,23-24).²¹³ Subsequently, Job assures:

friend/neighbour. Though Fohrer thinks it possible that God is called friend here (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 291).

²¹¹ Are the readers again confronted with bitter irony because they know that God has confirmed Job's integrity in the presence of the satan (1,8; 2,3)?

²¹² Reading עֵרֵךְ as object of שִׁמָּה. Objects can serve as pledge (e.g. Gen.38,17f.20) or persons can be surety for someone else (Prov.6,1; 11,15; 17,18; 22,26).

²¹³ Several scholars are of the opinion that these written words are addressed to posterity. According to Fohrer, Job wants to prevent his friends' slander remaining unchallenged if he dies (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 316; so also Habel, *Job*, 303; Hesse, *Hiob*, 127). However, a human acknowledgement that Job is innocent would not help Job any further. Moreover, this is not Job's real problem. Job's real striving is convincing God that he is innocent and therefore suffers unjustly. Therefore, these written words serve to keep on confronting God with Job's undeserved and unjust suffering even if he has passed away, like in 16,18 (see Clines, *Job*, 455).

- 19,25 But I know that my redeemer²¹⁴ lives,
 he will stand up at last on dust.
 19,26 After my skin has thus been stripped off²¹⁵
 my eyes shall see God from my flesh,
 19,27 whom I myself shall see,
 and my eyes shall see and not another,
 my kidneys long (for it) in my inner self.

There is a major difference between post-mortem and ante-mortem interpretations in the exegetical literature about 19,25-27. The post-mortem position is of the opinion that the redeemer will stand up after Job's death. After Job's death, Job will become aware of his vindication.²¹⁶ The ante mortem position, on the other hand, thinks that Job expects to experience an intervention of the redeemer before he dies. This ante mortem view is favourable because nowhere does Job mention the option of an afterlife or resurrection.²¹⁷ There is, nevertheless, the question of to what extent a distinction between post-mortem and ante-mortem is tenable. The line between life and death is fluid because illness can also mean staying in the area of death;²¹⁸ but resurrection after a physical death is unlikely because the book of Job is not familiar with this perspective. Seeing God (19,26b-27) is only possible in Job's present life.²¹⁹ Moreover, Job's aim each time is to seek an

²¹⁴ For לַאֱלֹהִים several translations can be found: 'vindicator', 'champion', 'advocate', 'avenger of blood', or the traditional 'redeemer'. In German translations the term 'Löser' is used. Since it is hard to find a translation that corresponds exactly with the role and the different nuances of the לַאֱלֹהִים here, I choose to use the conventional translation 'redeemer'. In the explanation, the identity and the function of this redeemer will become clear.

²¹⁵ Reading נִקְרָא כִּזְאוֹתָי: the ך is emended to a ך.

²¹⁶ So e.g. Hölscher, *Hiob*, 48-49; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 171-172; Weiser, *Hiob*, 150-151; Habel, *Job*, 307-309; Rowley, *Job*, 173. Terrien, *Job*, 150-154.

²¹⁷ One could argue that Job's request to hide him in the netherworld until God's anger is past (14,13) contains the view of a second life or resurrection. However, here Job explores the option of staying at a place beyond God's influence during a period of his life. This interpretation is supported by Job's remark in 14,14 that he would have had hope if mortals would live again, after they had died. For this remark implies a denial of such an option.

²¹⁸ Barth, *Erretung vom Tode*, 72-97. See also H.J. Hermisson, ">>Ich weiß, daß mein Erlöser lebt<< (Hiob 19,23-27)", in: M. Witte (ed.), *Gott und Mensch im Dialog. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag II* (BZAW 345/II), Berlin-New York 2004, 684.

²¹⁹ Some of the post-mortem views are aware of this problem. Therefore, they do not assume an afterlife or resurrection but think that for a moment Job will become aware of his vindication in a state without body (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 48; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 172, Terrien, *Job*, 153-154). However, such a solution is not convincing because Job has expressed the conviction that death is the ultimate end of human existence (7,9; 10,21; 14,10-12). Therefore, Köhlmoos, among others, thinks that Job does not express any hope at all here.

immediate acknowledgement of his innocence from his friends and God in his other speeches.²²⁰ Therefore, it is likely that Job speaks of an action by his redeemer and of seeing God before he dies. Hence, the ׀ in 19,25a expresses a contrast between Job's attempt to preserve his charge after a premature death (19,23-24) and a possible way out in his current lifespan (19,25f).²²¹ A permanent description of Job's case seems unnecessary because there is a redeemer who can take care of Job's situation now before he dies.²²²

What are the exact identity and task of this redeemer in which Job puts his trust (19,25)? A גֹּאֲלֵם (redeemer) is an avenger of blood who takes revenge for the one who is murdered.²²³ It can also be someone who buys property back on behalf of a relative (Lev.25,25-26) or who marries a related widow in order to give heir to her dead husband²²⁴. In this way, the גֹּאֲלֵם protects and acts on behalf of a weaker relative. God can also have the epithet גֹּאֲלֵם. This is generally translated as 'redeemer'.²²⁵ The redeemer sometimes operates within a legal setting. In Prov.23,11, for instance, a strong גֹּאֲלֵם pleads (רִיב) the cause of the orphans, where it seems to refer to God.²²⁶ The context of the גֹּאֲלֵם in 19,25 also suggests a forensic use of this word. The verb קָם (to stand up) can have a legal connotation. It is used for a witness who rises in order to testify.²²⁷ So, the function of the גֹּאֲלֵם can be understood within the framework of the image of the lawsuit that is an important and constituent element of the book of Job. Just like the witness (16,19), the redeemer stands up and pleads on behalf of Job's cause. Like an advocate, he will denounce the injustice that is done to Job.²²⁸

According to her, Job indicates that his saviour will be too late (Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes*, 277). Habel understands this passage as the expression of Job's radical hope that he will see his divine adversary face to face, even if that happens post mortem (Habel, *Job*, 309).

²²⁰ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 320.

²²¹ An equal contrast can be found between 16,18 and 16,19ff.

²²² Budde, *Hiob*, 101-102.

²²³ Num.35,12.19.21.24-25.27; Deut.19,6.12; Josh.20,3.5.9; 2 Sam.14,11.

²²⁴ Ruth 2,20; 3,9.12-13; 4,3.4.6.8.

²²⁵ Isa.43,14; 44,6.22-24; 47,4; 48,17.20; 49,7.26; 54,5; 60,16; Ps.19,15; 78,35.

²²⁶ So also Jer.50,34 where the גֹּאֲלֵם certainly refers to God. See also Ps.119,154, where the verb גֹּאֲלֵם is used parallel with the verb רִיב.

²²⁷ Deut.19,15-16; Ps.27,12; 35,11. In 16,8, Job's leanness rises up and testifies against him.

²²⁸ Compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 321. He characterizes the גֹּאֲלֵם as advocate. Kessler understands the function of the גֹּאֲלֵם closer to its social connotation as 'Löser' and avenger of blood. According to Kessler, the גֹּאֲלֵם describes a new basis for the relation with God. He argues that it becomes clear from the divine speeches and the restitution of Job at the end that God acts like a גֹּאֲלֵם (R. Kessler, " 'Ich weiß, daß mein Erlöser lebet'. Sozialgeschichtlicher Hintergrund und theologische Bedeutung der Löser-Vorstellung in Hiob 19,25", *ZTK* 89 (1992) 139-158).

The identity of this redeemer is matter of debate. Here, a rather similar discussion arises as about the witness (16,19) because the redeemer and the witness are generally held to be the same entity. Likewise three options are suggested. The **לַשֵּׁן** refers to God, a third party, or Job's own protests. For a discussion about the different options, I refer to the discussion about the identity of the witness.²²⁹ There, I argued that it is most likely that Job appeals to God for assistance. Since the term **לַשֵּׁן** is used as epithet for God and can even bring about a juridical action of God, it is likely that the redeemer refers to God in 19,25. Moreover, it is not uncommon that someone puts trust in God for a good outcome, while this same God is seen as the origin of the trouble. In Ps.38, for example, the psalmist expresses his hope in God (Ps.38,16) who, in his anger, has punished him with illness (Ps.38,2-9). Therefore, an apparently complete reversal in the pattern of Job's thoughts is not unthinkable.²³⁰ Job's only chance of a way out of his misery is an appeal to God himself.

The use of the term **לַשֵּׁן** is not coincidental. The fact that being someone's **לַשֵּׁן** was the task of relatives seems to play a role.²³¹ Whereas Job's family has abandoned him and has not provided him with any assistance (19,13-19), a different entity, namely Job's redeemer, takes on the role of helper instead of Job's relatives. This redeemer is characterized as living. The adjective **חַי** (living) can emphasize God's active presence.²³² So, Job opposes the effective assistance of his redeemer to the lack of useful help by his relatives and friends.²³³ Job's redeemer is ready to take up his cause. The redeemer will stand up at last. The word **אֲחֵרֶיךָ** (last) refers within this legal context to the procedure of a lawsuit in which the one who speaks the last deciding argument wins a case.²³⁴ Job is convinced that his redeemer brings a decisive turn in his controversy with God. In comparison to

²²⁹ § 4.6.2.

²³⁰ Hermisson, "Ich weiß", 680-681". Pace Habel, *Job*, 306; Clines, *Job*, 465. Seow remarks that while Job may not have had a sudden reversal of his view of God, he certainly must have had God in mind, albeit *ironically* (my italics), when he speaks of his *gō'ēl*. God is reminded of a role that he is supposed to play but has not done so until now, according to Seow (Seow, "Job's *gō'ēl*", 700-706).

²³¹ Clines, *Job*, 459.

²³² E.g. Josh.3,10; Ps.42,3. In 27,2, **חַי** is used as part of an oath formula.

²³³ Although Job might also mention a contrast between his possibly soon death (19,10) and his redeemer who lives forever (see Clines, *Job*, 460; Habel, *Job*, 307-308), the emphasis lies on the readiness of the redeemer to act on Job's behalf (Clines also mentions this aspect (Clines, *Job*, 460)). It is also proposed that **חַי** (living) and **אֲחֵרֶיךָ** are read as divine epithets or names (so e.g. J. Holman, "Does My Redeemer Live or is My Redeemer the Living God? Some Reflections on the Translation of Job 19,25", in: Beuken, *Job*, 377-381; W.L. Michel, "Confidence and Despair. Job 19,25-27, in the Light of Northwest Semitic Studies", in: Beuken, *Job*, 166-170; Seow, "Job's *gō'ēl*", 702).

²³⁴ Pope derives **אֲחֵרֶיךָ** from the Mishnaic and Talmudic term **אֲחֵרֶיךָ** (guarantor) (Pope, *Job*, 146). However, MT can be understood.

16,19, the place of action differs. The word **עפר** (dust) in the modifier **על-עפר** refers to the face of the earth.²³⁵ While the witness operates in heaven, the redeemer will stand upon the earth. In this way, everybody can hear the redeemer's plea. Job's friends will see that Job's trust was not idle and discover that their insights are wrong. Job is convinced that God in the function of redeemer will successfully look after his interests.²³⁶ His advocate will make his innocence clear and change God's hostile attitude towards him.²³⁷

The result of the intervention of the redeemer is described in 19,26f. Job hopes to encounter the hostile disposed God in a different way. He compares his current miserable state to this new turn in his life. While Job has now been deserted by God and suffers gravely (19,26a), his eyes shall see God after the redeemer's final plea (19,26b-27). Job mentions his misery by referring to his disease. He has been afflicted with sores (2,7). This disease has harmed his skin (**עור**) and flesh (**בשר**).²³⁸ Job describes the damage of his skin by means of the verb **נכף** I (to strip off). Furthermore, this verb only occurs in Isa.10,34, where it is used for cutting down thickets in a forest. Job's disease has stripped off his skin.²³⁹ After having suffered to such an extent, the intervention of the redeemer will bring change. Experiencing this change is characterized as seeing God (19,26b-27). The verb **ראה** (to see) occurs in 23,9, where Job is not able to prove his innocence in a lawsuit because he does not see God. In his final answer, Job describes the observation of God's appearance and speaking as seeing God with his eyes (**עיני ראותך**; 42,5). So, the experience that God somehow reacts to Job's claims and situation is a fulfilment of seeing God. After the action of the redeemer on his behalf, Job will also learn where God is and see him. The author alludes to Job's final response with this characterization (42,5). Of course, Job can not foresee how God will react. But he is convinced that God, who has turned against him, will take a different attitude towards him thanks to the intervention of his redeemer.

The event of witnessing God is given further details. In 19,26b, Job says that he will see God from his flesh. The expression **מבשרי** can be translated as 'from my flesh' or 'without my flesh'. The second option is understood as a process of emaciation as a result of Job's disease²⁴⁰ or as a description of Job's situation after

²³⁵ So also in 4,19; 5,6; 14,8; 28,2.

²³⁶ The verb **ידע** (to know) expresses a conviction or belief (9,2,28; 10,13; 13,18) (see Habel, *Job*, 303-304).

²³⁷ Clines calls this passage a breakthrough since Job has never said before that he believes that he will in the end be successful in his lawsuit (Clines, *Job*, 458).

²³⁸ 7,5; 30,30.

²³⁹ Some scholars read 19,26a as a description of the destruction of the skin after Job's death (Habel, *Job*, 293; Weiser, *Hiob*, 152). However, such a view is not plausible because its implication that Job would see God after his death is not likely within the context of the book of Job.

²⁴⁰ So Fohrer, *Hiob*, 322; Hesse, *Hiob*, 128.

his death²⁴¹. The word בָּשָׂר (flesh) can refer to the whole body.²⁴² Since an ante-mortem interpretation of 19,25-27 is more plausible and seeing God without flesh in a spiritual form does not fit with Job's desire to be vindicated now, the meaning 'without' is less likely. Job will see God from his body. That means while Job is still alive.²⁴³ There is some contrast between 19,26a and 19,26b. Nevertheless, even though Job's disease has affected him considerably, Job will encounter God before he dies. Job emphasizes with אֲנִי (I) and לִי (for my self) in 19,27a that he will personally experience a change in God's attitude towards him.²⁴⁴ While earlier God hid his face (13,24), Job will then witness God. The accentuation of this personal experience is concluded with לֹא-אֲחֵר (not another) in 19,27b. Driver-Gray understand this expression as a qualification of God who will not be estranged.²⁴⁵ But the emphasis on Job's own observation of God makes it more probable that אֲחֵר refers to someone other than Job.²⁴⁶ Job's deepest inner self longs for this moment of vindication (19,27c).²⁴⁷ After the redeemer has taken action, Job hopes to see God personally.

4.6.4 Conclusions

With the expression of Job's trust in God as his witness, protector, and redeemer, the book of Job reaches a new milestone in the dialogue. It demonstrates the full complexity of Job's situation. As such, Job is powerless. He lacks the ability to do anything about God's arbitrary and hostile actions. Challenging God's actions in a legal case seems impossible because God is of a different order than human beings. The only possible gesture that could be effective is an appeal to God himself. For, only God is of the same order as God and is thus able to interfere with God. Therefore, Job has to turn to God in God's role as witness and redeemer, if he

²⁴¹ So Driver-Gray, *Job*, 174; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 49; Weiser, *Hiob*, 152. This translation can also be found in Pope, *Job*, 139; Strauß, *Hiob*, 3; Terrien, *Job*, 153-154.

²⁴² E.g. 4,15; Qoh,12,12.

²⁴³ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 461. In the Christian tradition during the past centuries, מִבְּשָׂרִי has been interpreted as referring to a bodily resurrection. After Job's death, Job would be resurrected and encounter God thanks to the intervention of the redeemer. It has been made clear here that such a view does not correspond with Job's worldview. For an overview of the history of interpretation of see 19,25-27: J. Speer, "Zur Exegese von Hiob 19,25-27", *ZAW* 25 (1905) 47-140.

²⁴⁴ Several scholars think that לִי expresses that Job will see the redeemer on his side (Budde, *Hiob*, 107; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 174; Rowley, *Job*, 174; Pope, *Job*, 139). But Job's point is here that he will personally encounter God (therefore also the use of אֲנִי and וְעֵינַי) (cf. Clines, *Job*, 434).

²⁴⁵ Driver-Gray, *Job*, 175.

²⁴⁶ Clines, *Job*, 462; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 322.

²⁴⁷ The kidneys are the vital part of a human body (16,13) and can be the seat of emotions (Ps.73,21; Prov.23,16). The verb בָּלַח can express a deep longing of something (with נַפְשׁ: Ps.84,3; 119,81; with יָיָ: Ps.119,82.123).

wants to evade his miserable circumstances. This new step remains within the context of the image of the lawsuit. Since Job had not succeeded in entering into a legal case with God until now, he calls on God to plead as his witness and advocate against God on his behalf at the present.

One could wonder to what extent Job believes that his hope for action by his witness and redeemer comes true. Clines makes a distinction between Job's expectation and his desire. According to him, Job expects his case to be resolved after his death (19,26a), but desires to see God and to see his name cleared while he is still alive (19,26b).²⁴⁸ However, such a distinction is not plausible because 19,25-27 deals entirely with hope for a change during Job's life. Moreover, Job wins little if he is vindicated after his death. Others think that Job does not have any hope at all and only complains that any help will be too late,²⁴⁹ but that is too pessimistic an interpretation. Job presents his hope with a certain measure of conviction. He keeps striving for vindication and conducting a lawsuit with God. This shows that he has not lost all hope. Moreover, the appearance of God at the end of the book makes it plausible that Job assumes that a good outcome is possible. Therefore, Job does display some realistic confidence in an intervention by God as his witness and redeemer. Nevertheless, Job is not one hundred percent sure. The appeal to the earth not to cover his blood (16,18) and Job's desire that his words are written down (19,23-24) also show some doubt. Job moves between hope and despair, between conviction and desire, waiting and hoping for some kind of reaction from God's side.

²⁴⁸ Clines, *Job*, 461. See also D.J.A. Clines, "Belief, Desire and Wish in Job 19.23-27: Clues for the Identity of Job's 'Redeemer'", in: Clines, *Postmodern II*, 762-769 [=BEATAJ 13], Frankfurt 1988, 363-370].

²⁴⁹ J.K. Zink, "Impatient Job. An Interpretation of Job 19,25-27", *JBL* 84 (1965) 149-152. So also Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 88-89; Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes*, 277.

Chapter 5

Creation, Insight, and Power: God's Answer from the Whirlwind and Job's Reply

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 General Introduction

Job's ultimate wish that God would somehow react finally comes true. At the end of the book of Job God gets up to speak.¹ He answers Job by means of an impressive speech from the whirlwind. This divine speech has an overwhelming character. It deluges Job with questions, impressions, challenges, and representations. God raises a corner of the veil of his counsel by expounding various elements of the Creation's structure and design. He focuses attention on his role as Creator and preserver. This exposition confronts Job with his lack of power and understanding. God makes it clear that God's actions and insights go beyond Job's capacities and knowledge. He disqualifies Job's words as darkening God's counsel. Thus, God's answer corrects Job's perception of God's actions. This does not answer each issue Job has mentioned, rather it refutes Job's charges more indirectly by the depiction of a counter picture. God opposes Job's charges through demonstrating that he is at the threshold of the ingenious order of the Creation, guarantees the cycles of seasons and procreation, punishes the wicked, and even provides desolate places with life. This different perspective on God's actions in the cosmos and the rejection of Job's charges result in some change in Job's attitude. After God's answer, Job admits in his reply² that he has spoken about God without having sufficient knowledge.

This fifth chapter deals with God's answer and Job's reply. First, it examines which view God presents on his actions in the Creation and on his position in relation to Job. There is special attention to how God assesses and reacts to the issues which Job has raised. For, this sheds light on the perspective in which the author wants to put Job's accusations and complaints. The fact that the author has

¹ 38,1-40,2 and 40,8-41,26. In several translations of Job 38-41, the numbers of the verses differ from the numbering of the Masoretic text in the BHS. In this study, I use the numbering of the BHS.

² 40,3-5 and 42,1-6.

placed these words in God's mouth makes it likely that he wants to give them more weight in comparison to the preceding speeches. Therefore, I assume that God's answer is intended to be a next step in the development of the thinking about the issue of how God's involvement in the existence of (innocent) suffering can be understood.³ Secondly, this chapter considers Job's reply to God's answer from the whirlwind. It explores how God's exposition, questions, and challenges have changed Job's attitude compared to the dialogue. In order to deal with these various topics, I first elaborate upon the substance of God's answer and reconstruct God's view of Job's words (5.2). Then, I consider Job's reply (5.3). and last of all I deal with the relation of God's answer and Job's reply with Job's speeches in the dialogue. This examination first concentrates on the relation with Job 9 because this chapter takes up a central position in the dialogue. Subsequently, Job's other speeches are also involved (5.4).

5.1.2 Starting Point: the Genesis of the Divine Speeches

The genesis of the divine speeches has been the subject of debate. While some scholars think that the book of Job did not initially contain any answer from God at all, others regard God's exposition as partially or completely original.⁴ Because of this diversity of opinion, it is necessary to give an account of the assumptions which are made in this study.⁵ In my opinion, several reasons favour the view that the book of Job originally contained a reaction from God's side. First, the evocative nature of Job's challenges, charges, and questions require a response. Even the mention of a reaction by God without an elaboration of its content⁶ would not be sufficient because Job's requests and appeals demand a substantial response.⁷ Second, the outcome of the book of Job would be very unsatisfactory, if

³ Pace Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 21-31. She thinks that the author of the book of Job does not take sides concerning the views of the different characters in the book and considers them as equal voices. However, such a view is unlikely, since first God's answer fundamentally criticizes the preceding speeches of Job. This indicates that the divine speech corrects the former view and reveals the problematic aspects of it. Furthermore, the fact that the author brings JHWH up in order to speak implies that the author wanted to give these words more weight. See also Fox's comment that the author of the book of Job remains in control, though Fox is of the opinion that this is done by means of the prologue (Fox, "Job the Pious", 358).

⁴ For an overview of different models and opinions see J. van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze. Eine literar- und redaktionsgeschichtliche Studie zu den Gottesreden des Hiobbuches* (BZAW 170), Berlin- New York 1987.

⁵ Understanding of the genesis of God's answer until its current shape also gives more insight into the structure of God's answer and the specific focus of the individual parts.

⁶ So Hesse, *Hiob*, 11-12.192.

⁷ See Job's questions and appeals in 3,23; 7,12.17-21; 10,2-14.18; 13,3.18-27; 16,19-22; 19,7.25-27; 23,3-7; 30,20; 31,6.35-37. See also Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 47 (note 103). Here, Van Oorschot also mentions formal and theological reasons (compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 486-487).

the stalemate in the debate between Job and his friends would not be broken through by a new perspective. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that the book of Job has always contained a divine reaction in some way.

However, several indications make clear that the divine speeches have not always existed in their current shape. First, there is a difference in style and focus between the passage about the Behemoth and the Leviathan (40,15-41,26) and the previous part (38,2-39,30; 40,2.7-14). While this previous part contains a considerable number of questions and deals with the relation between God and Job, the part about the Behemoth and the Leviathan hardly contains any questions and concentrates on the relation between Job and fellow creatures.⁸ Second, the position of 40,2 is striking because it is remarkably separated by Job's first reply (40,3-5) from its forensic context in 40,8f.⁹ Third, the position of Job's first reply can be described as curious. For, if it answered 40,2, it would be a rather early reaction because the forensic topic is mainly elaborated upon in 40,8-14. If it was meant as a reaction to 38,1-39,30, the forensic turn in 40,2 would disturb this relation.¹⁰ These three clues make it probable that 40,15-41,26 (on the Behemoth and the Leviathan) was added later to God's answer. It seems likely that the book

⁸ However, there are some questions in 40,25-31 that seem similar to the questions in 38,1-40,14. Some scholars cite this as proof of the originality of the passages about the Behemoth and the Leviathan (so e.g. Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob*, 39-40. See also V. Kubina, *Die Gottesreden im Buche Hiob. Ein Beitrag zur Diskussion um die Einheit von Hiob 38,1-42,6* (FThSt 115), Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1979, 117-119; Gordis, *Job*, 568). However, the character of these questions differs to a certain extent. While in 38,1-40,14, God keeps more closely after Job and forces him to take position, the rhetorical questions in 40,25-31 are less pressing. They do not challenge Job to admit that creative power and insight can only be attributed to God as the questions formulated with ׀ in the first part do. For a further elaboration of the differences between 38,1-40,14 and 40,15-41,26, see Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 159-171. Kubina takes the divine speeches as a unity with a bipolar structure, in which the first part predominantly deals with God's ruling over nature (38,1-40,2) and the second part with the theme 'history' (40,6-41,26). She argues that the theme 'creation' does not have an independent position but is attached to the theme 'history' in the divine speeches (Kubina, *Gottesreden*, 122-123). However, this bipolar structure with dependency on both parts is not clear. While the first part deals particularly with the relation between God and Job and demonstrates that Job does not hold a similar position to God (38,1-40,14), the second part deals mainly with the relation between Job and lower beings than God (40,15-41,26). The important issue of knowledge in the first part is lost in the second one. Furthermore, it is not clear how the descriptions of the mythical beings in the second part represent 'history'. Therefore, both parts can better be taken as two separate more independent expositions.

⁹ Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 148-158. Habel considers 40,2 as a pivotal point between two balanced speeches, which are opened by an initial challenge in 38,2-3 and 40,7-14 (Habel, *Job*, 528). However, the forensic turn of 40,2 is closely related to the legal topic that is further elaborated upon in 40,8. Therefore, it is more feasible to consider it as the introduction of the legal image, after the foregoing part dealt with creative elements, than to take it as a central point between both speeches.

¹⁰ See also Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 155-156.

of Job initially had one divine speech (38,1-39,30; 40,2.8-14) followed by one response from Job (40,3-5.42,2-6).¹¹ In this divine speech, among others, God's creative and preserving actions as well as Job's lack of insight into it play a role. Job subsequently replies that he is insignificant and is unable to see through God's counsel. When the passages about the Behemoth and the Leviathan were added, the divine speech and Job's answer became divided. Job's first answer was placed between the two divine speeches. The challenging question of 40,2 was placed before 40,3-5 in order to create a reason for this first answer.¹² The reason for this addition seems to be an attempt to increase the emphasis on Job's impotence. It takes the sting out of the direct contest between Job and God concerning the question of whether or not Job has divine capacities (40,8-14). Each suggestion that Job could somehow measure up to God is discounted because Job already lacks strength compared to the threatening powers of chaos that are lower than God. At the same time, this history of development makes Job's first response that he is too small and will not speak again (40,3-5) more understandable. It is a reaction following God's speech and fits in with God's challenge to be and act like God (40,8-14).

5.2 God's Answer from the Whirlwind

5.2.1 Introduction

God's answer from the whirlwind carries a rejection of Job's words. God labels Job's words as darkening of his counsel and as frustration of his justice. The crux lies in the nature and quality of Job's knowledge. God's basic point is that Job lacks sufficient knowledge in order to be able to see through the order of the Creation and the rationale behind God's behaviour. This is so because Job does not hold a divine position and lacks divine strength. God confronts Job with this fact by revealing several elements of the Creation's structure and pointing out some of his preserving activities in the world. God has constructed the earth, preserves it, and has the power to go and act in it. These are all creative activities. With the presentation of these activities, God wants to make it clear that the real coherence and logic behind his actions go beyond Job's observation. What is more, God tries to show that his actions differ from the impression Job had. While Job charges God with unjust actions, for instance benefiting the wicked, God demonstrates that he provides dead places with new life and punishes the wicked. God begins his speech with its central point.¹³ He reproaches Job for darkening (his) counsel by means of words without understanding (38,2). The subsequent questions, challenges, and

¹¹ Cf. Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 180-191; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 36-40. Both scholars also consider some verses or parts in 38,38,1-39,30 and 42,2-6 as secondary.

¹² Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 180-191. At this moment, 40,1 and 40,6-7 were added.

¹³ Compare Hesse, *Hiob*, 193: "das grundlegende Verdikt" (fundamental verdict).

depictions all have this basic thought in the background.¹⁴ They touch upon several reasons for this darkening and confront Job with his flawed impression of God's behaviour. God argues that it is impossible for human beings to have insight into God's plan. For, there is a fundamental difference between God and human beings.

God's answer broaches this message in three different ways. First, God uses questions which are formulated with the interrogative pronoun **מַי** (who). These questions emphasize that God is the Creator and origin of the earth. Secondly, God confronts Job with his lack of understanding. He wonders whether Job's insight underlies the order of the Creation and challenges Job to demonstrate some of his acquaintance with the earth's structure and design.¹⁵ Thirdly, Job is faced with his lack of strength to act creatively and preserveringly in this world. In this section, I further elaborate upon these separate topics and subsequently deal with the opening of God's answer (5.2.2), the questions formulated with **מַי** (5.2.3), the issue of knowledge and insight (5.2.4), Job's strength and capabilities (5.2.5), and the image of the lawsuit and God's final challenge (5.2.6).

5.2.2 The Opening of God's Answer

God opens his speech with a frontal attack. He wonders who it is that darkens (his) counsel (38,2). This question bears a rejection in it. Job's understanding of God's actions does not do justice to God's counsel. With this, Job is directly faced with God's central point. God gives Job the opportunity to defend himself and challenges him to provide God with evidence to the contrary.

- 38,2 Who is this that darkens counsel
with words without knowledge?
38,3 Gird your loins like a man¹⁶,
I will question you and you will inform me.

God begins his speech with an open question (38,2). Nevertheless, it is obvious that **מַי זֶה** (who is this) refers to Job because Job is explicitly addressed starting from 38,3.¹⁷ Job is designated as the one who darkens God's counsel. The word **עֲצָה**

¹⁴ Compare Strauß, *Hiob*, 356.

¹⁵ Among others, the roots **יָדַע** (to know) and **בִּיַן** (to understand) are used here.

¹⁶ Some scholars read **כְּגִבּוֹר** (like a warrior) cf. Tg. (Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 298; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 88; Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 521).

¹⁷ Wilcox argues that, here, God refers to Elihu because it violates the grammatical structure of the verse if it is read as referring to Job. This also solves the contradiction between 38,2 and 42,7 that comes into being if 38,2 is read as reference to Job, according to him (K.G. Wilcox, "Who Is This...?": A Reading of Job 38,2", *JSOT* 78 (1998) 85-95). However, Bimson convincingly refutes this view (J.J. Bimson, "Who is 'This' in 'Who is this...?'" (Job 38,2)? A Response to Karl G. Wilcox", *JSOT* 87 (2000) 125-128). An important issue of God's answer is to demonstrate that Job is the one who lacks knowledge

(counsel) includes several aspects. It occurs parallel to the word **מַחְשְׁבָהּ** (thought/plan)¹⁸, which is specified with the thought of God's heart in Ps.33,11. It can express God's decision or intention to deal in a specific way¹⁹ and is linked with such terms as wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and strength²⁰. In this way, **עֲצָה** refers to God's inner considerations, which are made in wisdom, and to God's decisions to act in specific ways that are made on the basis of these thoughts. This counsel of God was determined in the past, is definite, and will be carried out.²¹ It is different from human plans and thoughts.²² In 38,2, God's counsel refers to the thoughts and decisions that underlie the order and scheme of the Creation²³ and form the basis of God's dealings in the world. It expresses the divine intelligence with which this order came into being and with which God operates.²⁴ Kubina thinks that God's **עֲצָה** can be related exclusively to his active decree in the life of nations or individuals.²⁵ However, the presentation of parts of the Creation's ingenious construction makes it clear that the content of God's counsel goes beyond the arena of history.²⁶ It is the background of history and not history itself. God's counsel refers to the order and construction of the cosmos which God has realized and to the well-considered coherence of God's working in the world.

God blames Job for darkening this divine counsel. In Ps.139,12, the verb **חָשַׁח** *hifil* (to darken) occurs in order to express that even darkness is not able to hide from God. In 42,3, which alludes to 38,2, the verb **חָשַׁח** is represented by the verb

of God's counsel (see §5.2.4). Moreover, God's rejecting attitude is not limited to 38,2 (e.g. 40,8 (see §5.2.6)). The problem of the relation between 38,2 and 42,7, therefore, is not solved by reading it as a reference to Elihu.

¹⁸ Jer.49,20; 50,45; Mic.4,12; Ps.33,11.

¹⁹ Isa.14,26; Jer.49,20; 50,45; Mic.4,12.

²⁰ 12,13; Isa.11,2; Jer.49,7; Prov.8,14; 21,30.

²¹ Isa.25,1; 46,10; Ps.33,11. In Ps.20,5, the psalmist prays that God fulfils his plans.

²² Ps.33,10-11 (see also Prov.21,30). In the same way, a difference is made between human beings and a divine beings **מַחְשְׁבָהּ** (thought/plan). See e.g. Isa.55,8-9.

²³ Compare also De Wilde, *Hiob*, 359 and Keel, *Entgegnung*, 53: "Weltplan".

²⁴ Compare Habel, *Job*, 536. According to Habel, God's **עֲצָה** (he translates 'design') can be found in the order, mystery, and balance of creation and this design reflects the profound wisdom and knowledge of God. Hölscher particularly emphasizes the element of 'intelligence' and circumscribes **עֲצָה** as God's "Vernunft" (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 91). Fohrer defines **עֲצָה** as God's wanting and doing in the Creation and his governance of the world. It is, according to Fohrer, on the one hand the world order and on the other hand the inscrutability of God's wanting and doing (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 500). However, the component 'wanting' seems too limited. Although the word **עֲצָה** can refer to an intention or decision (Isa.14,26; Jer.49,20; 50,45; Mic.4,12), it more broadly expresses the knowledge and wisdom upon which God's right way of dealing is based. For, the ingenious construction of the Creation and God's preserving actions not only stem from his wish but are also the result of his knowledge and wisdom.

²⁵ Kubina, *Gottesreden*, 122.

²⁶ Habel calls this view of Kubina 'forcing the text' (Habel, *Job*, 528).

על (to hide). In 38,2, God reproaches Job because his interpretation of God's behaviour obscures the real order and logic which underlie God's actions. According to Driver-Gray, God rebukes Job for obscuring the fact that a divine purpose underlies the constitution and maintenance of the world, what should be plain.²⁷ However, God does not reproach Job for denying the existence of such a purpose as such but for depicting a specific purpose that does not correspond with God's real counsel which is the basis of God's actions. Job has drawn the conclusion that God deals unjustly because God lets him suffer innocently. This conclusion is based on the concept of retribution. But now God judges that this explanation darkens his counsel. It does not do justice to the real basis of God's actions. The cause of this darkening is a lack of knowledge (38,2b). Job's interpretation of God's actions appears to be inadequate due to insufficient insight into God's counsel.

The question arises whether or to what extent God's counsel is knowable for human beings. Is it completely unknowable²⁸ or does God expound (parts of) his counsel²⁹? God's answer presents a certain paradox.³⁰ On the one hand, it exposes several elements of the Creation's order and God's actions in it. God wants to make it clear that a good and well-considered structure underlies the Creation and God's preserving actions. On the other hand, Job's lack of understanding of this structure is one of the crucial points in God's answer. God hammers away at Job's inability to see fully through the coherence of the cosmos and of God's behaviour. Thus, Job's lack of insight into God's counsel becomes clear by revealing several aspects of this counsel.³¹ However, human beings are unable to have a view on God's complete counsel because of their limited strength and their inability to adopt a position from which they can observe God's actions.

God challenges Job to show his discernment in God's counsel (38,3). This adds strength to God's reproach in 38,2. God starts his interrogation by calling on Job to prepare for a strong dispute.³² The expression 'to gird the loins like a man' is a call

²⁷ Driver-Gray, *Job*, 326. So also Keel, *Entgegnung*, 54.

²⁸ For example, De Wilde states that the עֲצֵי consists of a number of mysteries. Among other, these mysteries are the issue of the origin of suffering and evil, the issue of the world's origin, the laws of the world, and the animal instincts (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 359).

²⁹ So, for example, Habel. According to Habel, God shows that paradox and incongruity are integral to the world's design (Habel, *Job*, 534-335).

³⁰ Compare Fohrer, who thinks that God points out to Job the paradox of a meaningful order and its utmost unfathomableness. According to him, this paradox is a unity in God and is cancelled out in the personal community with God (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 500). However, whereas it is true that there is such a kind of paradox, God does not make clear how such a paradox constitutes a unity in himself.

³¹ In §5.4, I argue that the depiction of several elements of the Creation's order and God's actions provide a counter picture in order to let Job realize that his impression of God's actions is incorrect.

³² This verse returns in 40,7.

to get ready for a strenuous or difficult undertaking.³³ It is, for instance, an appeal to someone to gather the necessary strength in order to speak on behalf of God (Jer.1,17) or run (1 Kgs.18,46).³⁴ In 38,3, God summons Job to gather all his power and courage in order to reply God's questions and challenges adequately. Job suggested that God should call and Job should answer, or that Job should call and God should answer (13,22). God now chooses the first option. He challenges Job to disclose his knowledge by answering God's questions. Whereas Job asked God to inform (עֲרַף; hifil) him about his transgressions (13,23), God now summons Job to inform God (38,3). Offering this opportunity to refute God's reproach sharpens God's assessment of Job's words. As long as Job is not able to refute God or to provide him with additional information, God's assessment that Job has darkened God's counsel with words without knowledge persists.

After this opening statement (38,2-3), the interrogation begins (38,4ff). Whereas the remainder of God's answer deals with issues such as insight, strength, and the question of who acts creatively, the first question (38,4) mentions Job's presence at the moment that God created the earth. The construction of the earth is the first topic that God addresses. Its structure and design stem from God's counsel. Understanding of this counsel is related to primordial wisdom. If only Job had been present at the time when the earth was founded, he might have some knowledge of God's counsel. Therefore, God asks whether Job kept him company in those days.

38,4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell it, if you have understanding!

The motif of the primal human being is combined with the issue of knowledge. This primal human being was present before the Creation of the world began and could watch God's actions and considerations. In Prov.8,22ff, wisdom existed before all time. Eliphaz sarcastically inquired whether Job was first born of the human race, attended the council of God, and limited wisdom to himself (15,7-8). God now takes up this motif again.³⁵ The combination יָסַד אֶרֶץ (to found the earth) is regularly used to stress that God is the one who founded the earth.³⁶ Since Job did not observe this process of creation, he lacks substantial knowledge of God's thoughts and the order behind the earth's construction. God accompanies

³³ Pope, *Job*, 291; Habel, *Job*, 536; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 359.

³⁴ In both references, the word מִתְהַנֵּים is used instead of הִלְצִים (loins). Furthermore, in 1 Kgs.18,46, the verb שָׁנַם is used instead of שָׂרָר (to gird). See also, Isa.5,27 where a person's strength is also meant. The expression might refer to the practice of belt wrestling (C.H. Gordon, "Belt-Wrestling in the Bible World", *HUCA* 23 I (1950-51), 136).

³⁵ See also 38,21.

³⁶ Isa.48,13; 51,13.16; Zech.12,1; Ps.24,2; 104,5; Prov.3,19.

this question with a renewed appeal for information (38,4b).³⁷ The verb **גַּנַּן** (to tell) is used by Zophar in order to suggest that Job's wisdom would double, if God told him secrets of wisdom (11,6). Whereas God reveals some of these secrets in his answer, he now summons Job to inform (**גַּנַּן**) him, if Job has understanding.³⁸ Here, understanding refers to primordial knowledge of God's counsel. Thus, the fundamental difference between God and human beings has already been introduced at the beginning of God's exposition. God distinguishes himself from Job by his knowledge of the Creation's and by his creative power. Job can not be acquainted with the details of God's counsel because of his absence at the moment of creation.

5.2.3 Who Else than God?

The fact that God and human beings are of a different order is an important issue in God's answer. God attempts to persuade Job of this fundamental difference. Job's lack of insight into God's counsel is connected to the position that Job adopts in relation to the Creation and God. Job does not hold a divine position from which he can observe the coherence of the cosmos. God confronts Job with this distinction between Job and God by focusing attention on his own position as Creator. By means of questions constructed with the interrogative pronoun **מִי** (who), God emphasizes that he himself is the Creation's origin and preserver. The only possible and correct answer to these 'who' questions is clear in advance. It is God who acts preserverly and creatively.

God continues the theme of creation after his question about Job's presence during this operation (38,4). From 38,5, he elaborates on some of his creative activities when he constructed the earth. Job's attention is immediately focused on the distinction between himself and his Creator. Job is forced to admit that God is the only one with creative capacities.

- 38,5 Who fixed its measurements, for³⁹ you know!
Or who stretched out a measuring line over it?
38,6 On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone...

The answer to the question of who designed and constructed the earth (38,5.6b) has already been given by the suffix **י** (me) of **בִּיסְדֵי** (when I founded) in 38,4. The interrogative pronoun **מִי** (who) points to God. In 38,5, God presents himself as the

³⁷ This appeal returns in 38,18.

³⁸ See also Job's promise that he will inform God about his steps (31,37).

³⁹ According to Fohrer, **כִּי** has a conditional meaning here (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 491). However, a causal meaning is more obvious; God challenges Job because Job would have knowledge of God's counsel.

architect of the cosmos. He has fixed its measurements. The word קָן (measuring line) occurs in Isa.34,17, where God portions out the land with a line. In 38,5a, God makes it clear that he has carefully determined the dimensions of the earth. Here, Job's knowledge is challenged ironically. If Job had sufficient understanding of God's counsel, he would know that God had fixed these measurements. The 'who' questions are interrupted by a test in substantial knowledge (38,6a). Can Job explain on what base the foundations of the earth rest? The structure of the world is compared to the construction of a house. יָסַד (base) is a pedestal in a building.⁴⁰ In 38,6a, the earth rests on such supports.⁴¹ God also mentions the cornerstone which is a supporting section of a building. The strength of a construction depends on it.⁴² Job has to make it clear who laid the earth's cornerstone. But actually, he can not ignore the fact that God is the founder of the earth and that God's wisdom underlies its ingenious construction.

In 38,8-11, God steps even more pointedly into the limelight. Whereas Job had the opportunity to choose between God and someone else in the preceding questions (38,5-6), God now only mentions the option that somebody else acted creatively during his own creative activities. God asks who shut in the sea with doors (38,8), when he bound it with clouds and darkness (38,9).⁴³ The sea can be a threatening power (7,12) but in 38,8-9, it is depicted as a baby, which stems from the womb and is bounded with clothes by God.⁴⁴ God has put a check on the sea and has prescribed it its boundaries.⁴⁵ Thus, creative activity consists particularly in controlling and limiting. Job does not even have a chance to suggest something

⁴⁰ See e.g. Exod.26,19.

⁴¹ See also 9,6.

⁴² Isa.28,16; Jer.51,26; Ps.118,22.

⁴³ In 38,8, יָסַד can best be read as סָךְ cf. Vlg. in correspondence with 38,6b (so Budde, *Hiob*, 228; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 88; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 491; Hesse, *Hiob*, 194; Habel, *Job*, 521; Pope, *Job*, 288; Weiser, *Hiob*, 238; Van Selms, *Job II*, 169). Strauß maintains the Masoretic text (Strauß, *Hiob*, 337). Driver-Gray and De Wilde want to read אִיפֹה הָיִיתָ (where were you) and change בְּדַלְתַיִם (with doors) into בְּדַלְתָּ (at the birth) because of a dittography (Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 299; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 361). De Wilde argues that it would be strange if the sea had already been shut in with its birth (361). However, shutting in the sea (38,8a) does not contradict the following description of 38,9-11 because 38,8a expresses an action that is further elaborated upon with concrete details in 38,9-11.

⁴⁴ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 503; Habel, *Job*, 538; Weiser, *Hiob*, 245.

⁴⁵ 38,10-11. In 38,10, it is better to emend וְאַשְׁבַּר (and I broke) because breaking a limit does not make much sense. Some scholars read the root סָגַר (to shut in) (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 491; Hesse, *Hiob*, 194) but I prefer reading וְאַשְׁיֵת (and I set) in correspondence with LXX (so Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 300; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 362) (compare 14,13). חָקִי does not need to be changed into חָקֶךָ (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 491, De Wilde, *Hiob*, 362; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 88; Hesse, *Hiob*, 194), since it can be understood as the limit set by God (cf. Habel, *Job*, 521).

different. For, God himself gives the answer to his question of who shut in the sea with doors (38,8). It is God who has set bars and doors to the sea (38,10).

The next 'who' question concentrates on a preserving action. God points to the water supply in waste land. This sustaining measure demonstrates how ingeniously the cosmos is constructed according to God's counsel. His counsel provides details that were not directly expected by everyone. God even brings rain to desolate land.

- 38,25 Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain
and a way for the thunderstorm,⁴⁶
38,26 to bring rain on land where no one stays
on wilderness where no human being is,
38,27 to saturate waste and desolate land,
and to let the dry ground⁴⁷ sprout fresh grass?

The distribution of rain is depicted as a heavenly irrigation system. God leads water to specific places by means of irrigation channels. The word *תעלה* (channel) can be a trench (1 Kgs.18,32) or a pool (Isa.7,3). In Ezek.31,4, channels lead water to all trees of the field. God has built a heavenly channel in order to irrigate waste land (38,25f). In 38,27, the combination *שמה ומשאה* (waste and desolate) occurs parallel to *ציה* (dry land).⁴⁸ It also stands parallel to *מדבר* (wilderness) (38,26), hence it means dry and desolate land. Rain and thunderstorm function according to God's rule.⁴⁹ Therefore, the presence of a channel in order to lead water to desolate places implies that God intended to let it rain there. It belongs to God's order and insight that it also pours on those unexpected desolate places.

The meaning of this rain fall in the desert is subject to debate. Since it can be considered part of God's counsel, the question arises which divine thoughts are represented by this action. Some scholars emphasize the senselessness of rain in such regions from a human perspective. According to Tsevat, for instance, the lack of relevance for human beings when rain falls on the desert demonstrates that rain is not a vehicle of morality at all. For Tsevat, this serves to deny the existence of retribution.⁵⁰ However, wasting water is not the central point here. Rain can be a

⁴⁶ Cf. 28,26b.

⁴⁷ The word *מצי* (source) makes little sense in this context. Some scholars read *צמא* (thirsty) (so Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 305; Pope, *Job*, 298). However, it is better to read *מצייה* (from the dry land) because of the parallel with *משאה* (desolate land) in 38,27a (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 492; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 90; Habel, *Job*, 522). See for the same parallel 30,3.

⁴⁸ Also, in 30,3.

⁴⁹ 28,26. Compare also 38,37, where God tips the vessels of heaven.

⁵⁰ Tsevat, "Meaning", 99-100. In the same way, Van Wolde argues that here God makes it clear that ethical categories of reward and punishment have nothing to do with the Creation and the continued existence of the Creation (Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 141). Albertz particularly sees a demonstration of the Creator's freedom in this senseless

vehicle of blessing or punishment.⁵¹ In Gen.2,5f, God makes life on earth possible by giving rain that moistens the dry unfruitful soil. A similar action can be found in 38,25-27. God sends rain to desolate areas in order to make vegetation possible. Ecological data shows that rich vegetation comes up within a few days after rain on the desert.⁵² The flocks of the Bedouin can find food at these desolate places thanks to these incidental rains.⁵³ Therefore, the rain at desolate places is a life giving deed.⁵⁴ God creates new life at places that are believed to be barren and unfruitful. This is a preserving action that might go beyond human observation. Whereas it may be true that God wants to show that his concern for the Creation exceeds human interests⁵⁵, this passage in particular serves to refute Job in the first place. Job reproached God for saturating him with bitterness without reason (9,18). God now replies that he saturates waste and desolate land (38,27). With this, he makes life possible even at unexpected places instead of spoiling a person's joy in life. It belongs to God's counsel to provide places of death with new life.⁵⁶

The elements from the Creation's structure and functioning (38,4-38,38) are alternated with a presentation of several animals (38,39-39,30). God asks who provides the raven with prey (38,41) and has assigned the wilderness as a dwelling place for the wild ass (39,5-8). The list of animals in 38,39-39,30 raises the question of whether these particular animals represent special intentions. Keel considers them all as somehow representative of an oppositional world.⁵⁷ According to him, God makes it clear with these images that the world indeed does not lack chaotic powers but that God as lord of the animals keeps the chaos under his thumb without falling into a boring rigid order.⁵⁸ Fuchs acknowledges such a chaotic background but, on the contrary, records that these (mythical) chaotic qualities hardly survive in the descriptions at hand. She says that God predominantly appears as the Creator of the animals with care for his creatures.⁵⁹ The depictions of the animals favour the observations of Fuchs. For, they concentrate more on their specific characteristics, which God has given them, and on God's caring treatment of them, than on God's control over them. The examples

moistening of the desert (R. Albertz, *Weltschöpfung und Menschenschöpfung* (CTM 3), Stuttgart 1974, 143).

⁵¹ Blessing: e.g. Ps.65,10-11. Punishing: e.g. Deut.11,17, where rain is withheld, or Ezek.38,22, where God enters into judgement with rains and hailstones.

⁵² Cf. 38,27b. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 507; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 365-366.

⁵³ So Fohrer, *Hiob*, 507. See also 39,5-8, where the wild ass has to find its food at barren places.

⁵⁴ Compare Keel, *Entgegnung*, 58.

⁵⁵ So Driver-Gray, *Job*, 332; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 366. See also Gordis, *Job*, 435.449.558.

⁵⁶ See also Nam, *Talking About God*, 136-137.

⁵⁷ Keel, *Entgegnung*, 63-70.

⁵⁸ Keel, *Entgegnung*, 81-125.

⁵⁹ G. Fuchs, *Mythos und Hiobdichtung. Aufnahme und Umdeutung altorientalischer Vorstellungen*, Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln 1993, 210-220.

of the raven and the wild ass confirm this. God is concerned with the raven's food supply. The case of the wild ass demonstrates that God gives each individual creature its particular function and place. In this way, the reference to several animals illustrates different facets of God's counsel and is a demonstration of God's powerful, creative, and preserving actions.

Some 'who' questions remain. God is the origin and controller of the weather. Ice stems from God's womb (38,29f).⁶⁰ God counts the clouds in his wisdom and pours celestial vessels of water in order to let it rain (38,37). Some intelligence has been applied to specific elements of the Creation. God equipped the *טחורת* and the *שכני* with a certain kind of wisdom and insight.⁶¹ So, each 'who' question mentions a specific element of God's counsel. Each question focuses the attention on God's creative and sustaining activities. Who is the brain behind this order? Who is the driving force that designed the earth and brought it into being? Who preserves its cycles and provides it with life? Job can only admit that God is the origin of this ingenious structure. God has given each detail of the Creation its function, characteristics, and place. The only correct answer to each 'who' question is 'God'.

5.2.4 Knowledge and Insight

The opening of God's answer has already made it clear that the issue of knowledge and insight is a very important consideration for God. God reproaches Job for having a wrong impression of God's order and actions due to a lack of knowledge. Job is challenged to inform God, if he has knowledge.⁶² After this introduction, the issue of knowledge and insight is further elaborated upon in three different ways. First, God tests Job's knowledge by means of questions with regard to the content. He incites Job to present some details of God's counsel. Secondly, God confronts Job with 'yes or no' questions. Finally, God goes one step further. He wonders whether it is Job's own insight that underlies the order of the cosmos. In this way, God wants to let Job realize that he lacks adequate understanding of the logic and coherence in the cosmos. Job is not able to explain or point out God's actions in it.

In the first place, God examines whether Job has substantial knowledge of God's counsel. He asks Job to clarify several facets of the earth's construction. Can Job explain on what the bases of the earth were sunk (38,6)? Does he know the way to the light's dwelling and where the place of the darkness is?⁶³ Where is the

⁶⁰ In 37,10, ice comes into being by God's breath.

⁶¹ 38,36. The meaning of *טחורת* and *שכני* is unclear.

⁶² 38,3-4. See §5.2.2.

⁶³ 38,19. Here, light and darkness are depicted as both having their own abode. According to Gen.1,3-4, they are separated. Some scholars consider 38,19-20 as a gloss that is unnecessary after the reference to the morning in 38,12f (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 90; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 492; Hesse, *Hiob*, 195). However, the argument of unnecessary repetition is not convincing because the points of view differ in both parts. While 38,12 deals with Job's ability to

way to the place where the wind is scattered over the earth (38,24)?⁶⁴ So, Job is challenged to demonstrate his knowledge and inform God. If Job thinks that he is able to assess God's actions and value them as unrighteous, one may expect that he has insight into the construction of the Creation and God's operating in it. His charges against God would lack each basis otherwise. Secondly, God also tries a different tack and wonders whether Job's insight underlies the design of the Creation. Is it by Job's discernment that the falcon takes flight (39,26)? As long as this is not so, Job's statements about God's actions seem rather doubtful.

In two 'yes or no' questions, God wonders whether Job surveys the coherence of the cosmos and is familiar with the laws and order that regulate life and continuation in the Creation.

38,18a Do you direct your attention to the expanses of the earth?

38,33a Do you know the laws of heaven?

The crucial problem is that Job lacks the survey of the whole earth. He is unable to direct his attention to the expanses of the earth. With the question of 38,18a, God hints to what he elaborates upon at the end of his answer in more detail where he confronts Job with the fact that Job does not possess divine attributes.⁶⁵ Job does not adopt a divine position. He is unable to direct his attention to the expanses of the earth because he lacks a God's eye view. Job is part of the Creation. He does not adopt a standpoint independent from it from which he observes the expanses of the earth. The same counts for Job's insight into the laws of heaven (38,33a). In Jer.5,24, the word לִקְוֹת (law) refers to the appointed weeks for the harvest and in Jer.33,25 to the laws of heaven and earth. In God's answer, the regularities of heaven refer to the constellation and the cycles of the celestial bodies (38,31f). Is Job familiar with the scheme behind the positions and movements of the stars? Subsequently, another type of cycle is also brought up. God asks Job whether he knows the length of the gestation of an ibex or a hind (39,1-2). In this way, Job is confronted with his lack of knowledge of God's counsel. His reply to each question

summon the morning in order to take its position, 38,19f deals with Job's knowledge of the way to the dwelling places, where both light and darkness live. Moreover, 38,19f fits the context where Job's insight into different parts of the cosmos and his ability to be present there are explored (38,16-24).

⁶⁴ In 38,24a, the word אֶרֶב (light) can best be read as רוּחַ (wind) because of the parallel with מִזְרָח (east wind) in 38,24b (so Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 304; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 492; Budde, *Hiob*, 231; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 90; Hesse, *Hiob*, 196). Understanding אֶרֶב as lightning (so Habel, *Job*, 522; Strauß, *Hiob*, 330; Van Selms, *Job II*, 173) is less probable, since lightning is mentioned by means of the word בָּרָק (38,35) and אֶרֶב does not have the meaning of lightning in 38,19.

⁶⁵ 40,9-14. See §5.2.6.

can only be 'no' or 'I do not know'. With wondering to what extent Job has knowledge of the order of the Creation and God's considerations behind it, God wants to make it clear that God's wisdom and intelligence are beyond human understanding. Human beings are unable to direct their attention to the expanses of the earth. Finally, Job will admit this lack of knowledge in his reply (42,3).

5.2.5 Job's Strength and Capabilities

A very clear example of the fundamental difference between God and human beings is the distinction in strength and capabilities between them. God points to Job's lack of divine power. Has Job ever operated creatively or preserveringly in the world? Or is he able to move freely in each remote division of the cosmos? Job is faced with the fact that he is not equipped with divine power or other divine attributes. This serves to demonstrate that Job is not equal to God. In order to have insight into God's counsel it is necessary to be equal to God. Since God and human beings fundamentally differ, Job lacks this insight. In this way, the confrontation with Job's impotence backs up God's claim that Job has darkened God's counsel because of a shortage of understanding. It proves that Job simply does not hold a similar position to God.

The first question about Job's capabilities is an example of God's actions which contains creative as well as sustaining aspects. God mentions his control of day and night and his treatment of the wicked.

- 38,12 Have you ever commanded the morning in your life,
caused the dawn to know its place,⁶⁶
38,13 in order to take hold of the skirts of the earth,
so that the wicked⁶⁷ are shaken out of it?
38,14 It changes like clay under a seal,
and it becomes dyed like a garment.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Reading Qere.

⁶⁷ The ׀ is one of the *litterae suspensae* (see also 38,15a). However, it is not clear what an alternative reading could have been (cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 492). An original reading רשׁים (the poor) is unlikely because God would not withhold light from the poor. Other scholars regard it as an omission by a scribe that has been corrected (Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 302; Gordis, *Job*, 445; Strauß, *Hiob*, 338; Budde, *Hiob*, 229).

⁶⁸ Since the sense of 38,14b in its current shape can not be explained satisfactorily, change is necessary. Gordis reads בָּשׁוּ כָּלֵם (all put to shame) instead of לְבוֹשׁ (Gordis, *Job*, 446-447; see also Hölscher, *Hiob*, 88). Various other scholars emend וַיִּתְּצְבוּ (they stand) into וַיִּתְּצַמְּעוּ (it appears dyed) or וַיִּתְּצַבְּעוּ (it becomes dyed). The verb צָבַע is a hapax but the root can be found as a substantive in Judg.5,30. Reading the root צָבַע is preferable because this verse expresses the change of colours at dawn (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 492; Hesse, *Hiob*, 194; Pope, *Job*, 295; Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 302; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 363; Van Selms, *Job II*, 170).

38,15 Then their light is withheld from the wicked
and the upraised arm is broken.

God asks whether Job has ever called a new day into being. Each new morning breaks thanks to divine effort. God orders the personified dawn to rise and shows it its place. In this way, he limits the indefinable circumstances of the night by summoning the morning to take its place.⁶⁹ This act belongs to God's sustaining work. A part of the dawn's task is to take hold of the earth's skirts (38,13).⁷⁰ In combination with אָרֶץ , the word כַּנֶּף means the edge of the earth.⁷¹ The verb נָעַר (to shake) several times expresses an action against God's opponents. In Neh.5,13, God shakes someone, who does not perform this word, out from their house and possessions.⁷² When the dawn breaks, it seizes the edges of the earth and shakes it like a cloth. Some scholars think that in 38,13, the night is depicted as a coverlet that covers the earth and under which the wicked commit their crimes.⁷³ However, the representation of shaking the wicked out makes it likely that the earth itself is depicted as a cloth.⁷⁴ Wicked actions are characterized as dealing in the night (24,13-17). The light of the dawn unmasks such wrong deeds. Like shaking the crumbs out of a cloth, the wicked are dispersed and they hide when the morning dawns.⁷⁵ So, the light of the day functions as an opponent of the chaotic and threatening forces of the night. God limits these forces and comes into action against wrongdoers.⁷⁶ Has Job ever accomplished such creative and preserving deeds?

Subsequently, the rise of daybreak is depicted with a second image (38,14). Here, אָרֶץ (earth) from 38,13a is subject. The earth recovers its contours and colours when the day dawns. Its relief returns like the transformation of clay under the pressure of a seal. The grey and dark environment becomes dyed again like a garment. The effects of the daybreak for the wicked do not remain limited to dispersion. In 38,15 it becomes clear that 'shaking out of the earth' (38,13b) implies more than a temporal halt to their activities. Their light is withheld and their upraised arm is broken. Here, אוֹר (light) refers to the light of life. According to Bildad, the light of the evildoer (אֵשׁ) will be extinguished.⁷⁷ Job, by contrast,

⁶⁹ Compare 9,7 where, on the contrary, God summons the sun and it does not rise.

⁷⁰ Some understand 'you' as subject of לִּשְׂמֹךְ (to take hold) in 38,13a because of 40,9ff (Habel, *Job*, 521; Gordis, *Job*, 445). However, the change of the second person perfect (38,12) into an infinitive (38,13) suggests that an action of the dawn is described.

⁷¹ Isa.11,12; 24,16; Ezek.7,2.

⁷² See also Ps.109,23; 136,15; Exod.14,27.

⁷³ Pope, *Job*, 295; Habel, *Job*, 540.

⁷⁴ Cf. Driver-Gray, *Job*, 330; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 504; Gordis, *Job*, 445.

⁷⁵ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 504; Gordis, *Job*, 445.

⁷⁶ Compare Strauß, *Hiob*, 360; Hesse, *Hiob*, 195-196.

⁷⁷ 18,5-6. See also Prov.13,9; 24,20.

complains that the wicked hardly meet this fate (21,17ff). He states that God treats wicked and righteous equally (9,22-24) but God's answer presents a different picture. Here the light is withheld from the wicked. The expression זרוע שבר (to break the arm) is used for breaking the force of opponents or the wicked.⁷⁸ So, the wicked lose their power and prosperity at daybreak. They have to fear for their lives. This implies that God holds on to the concept of retribution.⁷⁹ Whereas Job established that the wicked prosper and live carefree, God presents an order in which the wicked meet setbacks and get what they deserve. In this way, God's presentation of his treatment of the wicked as a part of his counsel rejects Job's impression that the wicked prosper and are favoured in comparison to the righteous.⁸⁰

The ability to move freely within the cosmos is another topic in God's examination of Job's capacities. God wonders whether Job is able to enter into several regions of the cosmos.

38,16 Have you entered unto the springs of the sea
and have you walked in the recesses of the deep?

God presents some invisible places in the cosmos which are usually inaccessible for human beings. The deep (תהום) refers to the primeval ocean that is below the earth.⁸¹ The sea is filled with water from this source.⁸² Does Job have access to this area? The verb בא (to enter) is used again in 38,22, where God asks a similar question. Here God wonders whether Job has entered the storehouses of the snow. It belongs to God's abilities to traverse each region of the cosmos. The observation of such areas provides knowledge of their construction and functioning. God also refers to the dark part of the Creation that goes beyond the borders of a human life. Has Job seen the underworld (38,17)? Job's inability to visit these different places shows that he does not have divine capacities. Therefore, it is also reasonable to

⁷⁸ Jer.48,25; Ezek.30,21.24; Ps.10,15; 37,17. In 40,9, God asks whether Job has an arm like God.

⁷⁹ Pace Tsevat, "Meaning", 99. Clines follows Tsevat and is of the opinion that the divine speeches make clear that there is no divine justice. According to him, these passages do not refer to God's actions but are only an ironic invitation for Job to take the place of a god and to make such judgements for himself (Clines, "Does the Book of Job Suggest", 100-105). However, God confronts Job with some of his divine actions in order to make the difference between Job and God clear. Therefore, it can not be denied that some kind of retributive action through God returns in God's answer. Driver-Gray also see a retributive act here: "..., the wicked are brought to justice and punishment" (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 330).

⁸⁰ See also Habel, *Job*, 540; P. Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt? –Gottes Antwort an Ijob. Eine sprachwissenschaftliche und exegetische Studie zur ersten Gottesrede Ijob 38 und 39* (Altes Testament und Moderne 5), Münster-Hamburg-London 2000, 178.

⁸¹ Exod.20,4; Ps.24,2; 136,6. The earth was thought to stand on pillars above the deep (9,6).

⁸² Gen.7,11; 8,2; 49,25; Prov.8,28.

suppose that Job's knowledge of these regions is insufficient; he has never observed them.

The issue of Job's strength and capacities is further elaborated upon in two different ways. On the one hand, God questions Job's ability to act with divine strength. He confronts Job with several divine activities: the control of the course of the stars (38,31-32), letting it rain and sending forth lightning (38,34-35), the food supply of lions (38,39), and guaranteeing the cycle of gestation of the mountain goat and the hind (39,2). In this list, several facets of the Creation's order and God's persevering work are mentioned. God governs the cycles of seasons, procreation, and food supply. He rules the weather. Has Job ever played a role in any of these divine occupations? On the other hand, God mentions Job's creative capabilities. Does Job give the horse its might and its capacity to jump as a locust (39,19-20)? The power with which God acts controlling, creating, and preserving, fundamentally distinguishes God from human beings. This confrontation has to make Job aware of his limited strength.

The added parts about the Behemoth (40,15-24) and the Leviathan (40,25-41,26) particularly follow up on this topic of strength and capacity. Here, God considers Job's strength in relation to these two impressive beings that are lower than God.⁸³ Both the Behemoth and the Leviathan are striking because of their impressive build and considerable strength. God wonders whether Job would be able to subject them and domesticate them like harmless 'pets'.⁸⁴ The identification of these creatures is rather unclear. Whereas some think that these creatures represent zoological animals, it is more likely to suppose that they have mythological connotations.⁸⁵ For, the earlier depiction of the Leviathan's terrifying

⁸³ In 39,10-11, the first beginnings of such a comparison can be found. There, God asks Job whether Job is able to control the wild ox.

⁸⁴ 40,25-31. The passage about the Behemoth probably ends with a similar question (40,24). Then, 40,24a has to be taken as a question (so Driver-Gray, *Job*, 358; Strauß, *Hiob*, 377) or מַי הוּא (who is it) has to be inserted which disappeared because of the preceding אֵל-פִּי־הוּא in 40,23b (so Budde, *Hiob*, 246; Weiser, *Hiob*, 252; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 523; Gordis, *Job*, 480; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 384; Pope, *Job*, 327; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 95; Van Selms, *Job II*, 197; Hesse, *Hiob*, 205): who will grasp him by his eyes?

⁸⁵ The identity of these creatures is subject to debate. Respectively, the Behemoth and the Leviathan are frequently identified with the hippopotamus and the crocodile because their depictions seem similar to these animals (so e.g. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 528; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 99-100; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 380-381.385; Gordis, *Job*, 475-476.567-572). Some think that there could be a relation between the word בְּהֵמוֹתַי and the Egyptian word *p'-ih-mw* (water rind). However, Keel argues that identification with the hippopotamus only makes sense if it is not taken as the zoological hippopotamus but as the male, red hippopotamus, for which the Egyptian king and Horus hunted and which symbolizes evil. Only in this way is the hippopotamus invincible according to Keel (Keel, *Entgegnung*, 132-141). Keel notes that, in the same way, the crocodile is representative of evil in Egypt (Keel, *Entgegnung*, 143-154). Ruprecht differs in the sense that he suggests לִיָּהוֹן (Leviathan) as another surname

and monstrous appearance (41,4-26) leaves the impression of a mythical figure rather than an actual animal.⁸⁶ לַוִּיָּתָן (the Leviathan) is one of God's mythical opponents and represents the threatening forces of chaos.⁸⁷ According to Gammie, the descriptions of the Behemoth and the Leviathan are caricatures of Job and function as a mirror for him.⁸⁸ However, God explicitly compares Job to the Leviathan when he asks whether Job is able to cope with this fellow creature (40,25-31). Therefore, it is unlikely that the Leviathan represents Job. God confronts Job with his limited strength by pointing out his impotent position with regard to the Behemoth and the Leviathan. This proportion of Job to the forces of chaos is compared to the relation between Job and God. If nobody is fierce enough to stir up the Leviathan, then who can hold before God and remain undamaged when they confront God?⁸⁹ Since Job already lacks strength in confrontation with

of the hippopotamus because the hunting equipment as depicted in 40,25-31 does not match the crocodiles (E. Ruprecht, "Das Nilpferd im Hiobbuch. Beobachtungen zu der sogenannten zweiten Gottesrede", *VT* 21 (1971) 221-222). However, Keel maintains that the methods mentioned were also used for capturing crocodiles (Keel, *Entgegnung*, 142). Fuchs follows Ruprecht to a certain extent by supposing that, in her eyes, the text refers to one mythical being. However, she considers בַּהֲמוֹת as its generic name and לַוִּיָּתָן as its proper name (Fuchs, *Mythos und Hiobdichtung*, 247-248, 259-260). Others think that each similarity of בַּהֲמוֹת and לַוִּיָּתָן to a hippopotamus and a crocodile is lacking and, moreover, is not supported by any other texts. Therefore, they consider them as mythological terms that refer to the myth of the chaos battle and represent the forces of chaos (so e.g. Kubina, *Gottesreden*, 45-59; Pope, *Job*, 320-322, 329-331). See also, the overview in Habel, *Job*, 557-558.

⁸⁶ Some scholars regard this part as a later addition to the description of the Behemoth and the Leviathan (e.g. Ruprecht, *Nilpferd*, 223-224; Westermann, *Aufbau*, 121; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 384).

⁸⁷ 3,8; Isa.27,1; Ps.74,14. Ruprecht sees the Behemoth as a representation of the historical superpowers (Ruprecht, "Nilpferd", 230). This view corresponds with the opinion of Westermann, who considers the second part of God's answer (40,6ff) as glorification of God as Lord of history (Westermann, *Aufbau*, 112-114). However, it is unclear to what extent actual historical powers are meant. The figure of the Behemoth seems too vague in order to permit such a specific interpretation.

⁸⁸ J.G. Gammie, "Behemoth and Leviathan: on the Didactic and Theological Significance of Job 40:15-41:26", in: J.G. Gammie-W.A. Brueggemann-W.L. Humphreys-J.M. Ward (eds.), *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, Missoula 1978, 217-231. Habel adopts this view (see Habel, *Job*, 558-574).

⁸⁹ 41,2b-3a. Compare Ruprecht, *Nilpferd*, 224. Several scholars change the suffix י- of לִפְנֵי (before me) and of הִקְדַּיִמְנִי (confront me) into a ה- (him), so that it refers to the Leviathan instead of God (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 527; 529; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 96; Pope, *Job*, 337; Van Selms, *Job II*, 200; Strauß, *Hiob*, 335.346 (only 41,2)). However, this passage is meant to connect the passages about the Behemoth and the Leviathan to the relation between Job and God as it is discussed in the first part of God's answer. If this animal is already overwhelming to human beings, how then will Job remain undamaged before God? Therefore, it is not necessary to change the suffix. The verb שָׁלַח in 41,3a alludes to 9,4, where someone who resists God does not remain undamaged. In the same way, somebody

some of God's opponents, he will certainly not be able to measure up to God. God's restriction and control of these threatening powers of chaos can be labelled as a creative deed. For, it leaves human beings room for an undisturbed life. It is clear that Job does not have the capacity to operate in such a creative way.

5.2.6 The Image of the Lawsuit and God's Final Plea

God concludes his speech with a final plea (40,2.8-14). Here he sums up the issues which have arisen from different perspectives in a central point and comes back to his rejection of Job's words. In this final part, the image of the lawsuit returns. God wonders whether Job is willing to carry through the frustration of God's justice and confronts Job with his divine position. The presentation of God's creative and preserving work and the questions about Job's knowledge and capabilities in the preceding part of God's answer have all served to make it clear that Job does not hold the same position as God. In a final, provoking plea, God challenges Job to prove whether or not this observation is wrong.

- 40,2 Will the faultfinder⁹⁰ contend⁹¹ with the Almighty?
Let the one who argues with God answer!
- 40,8 Will you frustrate my justice,
will you condemn me so that you have right?

God assesses Job's words rather clearly. God feels that he is being reprimanded by Job (40,2) and values Job's words as frustration of God's justice (40,8). Things are turned around. While Job uses the verb **רִיב** (to contend) in order to express how others contend with him and understands his misfortune as God's legal case with

looking for a confrontation with God does not remain undamaged in 41,3a. Hence, it is reasonable to read **וַיִּשְׁלֶם** (and he remains undamaged) cf. LXX instead of **וַיִּשְׁלֶם** (and I remain undamaged) (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 527; Gordis, *Job*, 483; Pope, *Job*, 337; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 364; Budde, *Hiob*, 249; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 96; Hesse, *Hiob*, 206; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 388).

⁹⁰ The word **סֹרֵר** (fault-finder) is a hapax legomena. It can be derived from the root **סִר** (to correct/instruct) and is constructed like **גִּבּוֹר** (cf. Budde, *Hiob*, 240). Other scholars change the vocalization and read **סֹרֵר** from the verb **סָרַר** (to turn aside/yield) (so Pope, *Job*, 318; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 94) or **סֹרֵר** from the verb **סָרַר** (to be stubborn) (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 394). Gordis reads an impf. qal of **סִר** because of the parallel with **יַעֲנֵנָה** (let he answer) in 40,2b: 'let he instruct him' (Gordis, *Job*, 465; so also NBV). However, a chiasm can read in 40,2 through which **סֹרֵר** stands parallel to **גִּבּוֹרֵיחַ** (the one who reproves) and can be taken as a substantive.

⁹¹ Several scholars change the vocalization of the inf. abs. **רִיב** into a partic. **רִיב** (so Pope, *Job*, 318; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 94; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 394). Gordis argues that **רִיב** can be an archaic ptc. qal. of the Media waw verbs (Gordis, *Job*, 464; adopted by Habel, *Job*, 526). However, the infinite absolute can represent a finite form (Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Grammar*, § 113,4b). Therefore, emendation is not necessary.

him (9,3), God now designates Job's actions as contending with God.⁹² Job's attitude is characterized by the words יסור (faultfinder) and מוכיח (the one who argues). The verb כח can mean 'to reprove' (5,17) as well as 'to argue a case' (13,3.15). In 40,2, both elements play a role. On the one hand, the forensic atmosphere of this verse suggests that God refers to Job's attempts to enter into a legal case with God. Job's accusations are characterized and experienced as Job's pleading with God. On the other hand, the meaning 'reprove' is supported by the parallel word יסור. For, the root יסר expresses an instructing and reproving activity.⁹³ In God's eyes, Job is the one who argues with God because of supposed wrongdoing and rebukes God for incorrect behaviour. God makes it clear that things are turned around. According to God, Job is the one who blames God unjustly. Job should respond to God's questions and accept his challenges if he wants to continue instructing and contending with the Almighty (40,2b). Otherwise his accusations become unreliable.

God further turns up the heat on Job in 40,8. He asks whether Job wants to frustrate his justice. According to Huberman-Scholnick, here the word משפט (justice) has an executive dimension and refers to God's governance of the universe.⁹⁴ However, Job does not have the capacity to hinder God's actions as such because God is free to act in the way he wants. Therefore, it is unlikely that Job is accused of frustration of God's governance. The problem is that Job's reasoning did not do justice to the standards on the basis of which God values, creates, and acts. Bildad assures that God does not pervert justice (8,3). Here, justice refers to the logic behind God's actions and refers to the concept of retribution.⁹⁵ Equally, משפט expresses the patterns behind God's dealing in 40,8. This word is reminiscent of עצה (counsel) in 38,2. While first God more generally values Job's words as darkening of his counsel at the beginning of his answer, he now uses forensic terms. Job's way of reasoning is based on the concept of retribution. From his innocent suffering, he derived that God perverts justice in his case. This conclusion is backed by the observation that the wicked prosper. God now takes this reasoning as frustration of his justice. Apparently, God's actions can not be derived from reality and be pointed out on the basis of a person's fate by such a strict application of the concept of retribution.⁹⁶

In 40,8b, God summarizes the impasse in Job's thinking quite to the point. Job's conviction that he is right (צדק) results in a condemnation (רשע) of God. Whereas Job comprehended his misfortune as God's condemnation of him (10,2),

⁹² In 33,13, Elihu also designates Job as the one who is contending with God.

⁹³ 4,3; 5,17.

⁹⁴ Huberman-Scholnick, "The Meaning of *Mišpaṭ* in the Book of Job", *JBL* 101 (1982), 521-529. So also Habel, *Job*, 562.

⁹⁵ See §3.2.1.

⁹⁶ Meanwhile, readers know that there is indeed another reason for Job's suffering other than sinful behaviour.

God now points out that Job declares God guilty if he persists in accusing God. In this way, the provoking questions in 40,8 contain a disapproval of Job's striving to enter into a legal case with God.⁹⁷ God is of the opinion that Job's motive for this attempt is based on an incorrect understanding of the logic and coherence behind God's actions. The interpretation of God's actions in reality according to a strict application of the concept of retribution appears to be frustration of God's justice.

In order to enforce these reproving questions, God concludes his speech with a final plea. He confronts Job with the fundamental difference between God and human beings by challenging Job to be and act like God. For, only somebody with divine power and knowledge would be able to judge God's actions properly. Therefore, Job should prove that he holds such a divine position if he wants to declare God guilty. Otherwise his charge can be dismissed.

- 40,9 Do you have an arm like God
and can you thunder with a voice like his?
40,10 Deck yourself with pride and dignity,
cloth yourself with majesty and splendour.
40,11 Pour out the outbursts of your anger,
and look on all the proud and abase them.
40,12 Look on all the proud and humble them,
tread down the wicked where they stand.

God provokes Job to demonstrate divine capacities. If Job thinks that he can see through and judge God's actions in the Creation, he should be able to adorn himself with divine dignity and undertake various divine tasks. God distinguishes himself from Job with regard to his power. He wonders whether Job has an arm like God. The word זרוע (arm) expresses God's power, with which he punishes, fights, creates, judges, performs wonders, or acts beneficently.⁹⁸ While Job's impotence has already been mentioned in God's answer several times, God now explicitly asks whether Job possesses the same strength as God (40,9). The thundering of God's voice is an illustration of divine power (40,9b). It is an utterance of God's majesty.⁹⁹ While God earlier wondered whether Job is able to lift up his voice (קול) to the clouds (38,34), he now asks whether Job can thunder with his voice like God.

God challenges Job to be like God. In 40,10, he summons Job to adorn himself with God's royal dignity. The word גאון (pride) can be found, among others, in

⁹⁷ See also Kubina, who states that God's speech takes up Job's challenge to enter into a lawsuit with him in order to reverse it (Kubina, *Gottesreden*, 77-78).

⁹⁸ E.g.: to punish: Isa.30,30; to fight: Jer.21,5; to create: Jer.27,5; to judge: Isa.51,5; to perform wonders or act beneficially: Deut.5,15; 26,8; Isa.40,11; 59,16; Ps.77,16.

⁹⁹ 37,2.4.5.

Ps.93,1, where the Lord is king clothed with majesty (גִּשׁוֹרֵה).¹⁰⁰ In Isa.5,16, the Lord is exalted (גִּבֹּהַ) by justice. The combination הַדָּד וְהַדָּד (majesty and splendour; 40,10b) refers to the dignity of a king.¹⁰¹ God gets the royal title 'king' and is attributed with this dignity.¹⁰² In Ps.104,1, God is clothed (לְבָשׁ) with majesty and splendour. Job should deck himself with these royal vestments and act like God. If Job was equal to God, he would be able to judge God's ways but, since Job has none of these divine qualities, he can not form an opinion about God's actions. There is a fundamental distance between God and Job. This makes it logically impossible for Job to be like God and to survey his actions.

The divine tasks include ruling and judging. God takes punishing measures against the proud and wicked (40,11-13). In 40,11, God calls on Job to pour out the outbursts of his anger (אֵרָא). Job's friends have argued that God's anger hurts the wicked. For instance, Eliphaz makes it clear that those who sow trouble vanish by the breath of God's anger.¹⁰³ On the contrary, Job is of the opinion that God's anger is incalculable. For, God's anger has turned against him even though he is innocent.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, according to Job's observations, the wicked escape their punishment and are even favoured compared to the righteous.¹⁰⁵ In 40,11f, the outbursts of anger are connected with God's oppressing steps against the proud and the wicked. Proud human beings (אֲנָשִׁים) are characterized by their haughtiness and the setting of traps. They fall into disfavour with God.¹⁰⁶ In 40,12, they occur parallel to the רָשָׁע (wicked).¹⁰⁷ In this way, God takes the edge off Job's reproach that the wicked prosper. He depicts an image in which it belongs to the divine tasks to humble and tread down the proud and wicked (40,11-12).¹⁰⁸ Obviously, God acts according to the concept of retribution in the case of evildoers in a certain way.¹⁰⁹ How this exactly happens is beyond human observation.

The challenge to be and act like God reveals that Job does not have divine capacities. This is the reason for Job's lack of insight into God's counsel. The fundamental difference between God and human beings hinders human beings

¹⁰⁰ See among others Isa.2,10.19; Mic.5,3.

¹⁰¹ Ps.21,6; 45,4.

¹⁰² Ps.96,6.10; 111,3 (God's deeds); 145,5; 1 Chr.16,27.

¹⁰³ 4,9. See also 20,23.28. The friends are convinced that the wicked meet setbacks and perish (8,22; 11,20; 15,20; 18,5; 20,5.29. See also 27,13ff). See §3.2.1.

¹⁰⁴ 16,9; 19,11.

¹⁰⁵ 9,22.24; 10,3, 21,7.17.

¹⁰⁶ Jer.48,29; Ps.94,2; 140,6; Prov.8,13; 15,25.

¹⁰⁷ So also in Ps.94,2f; 140,5-6.

¹⁰⁸ According to Clines, this is not a divine judgment that some humans are wicked and some not because YHWH is ironically inviting Job to take the place of a god and to make such judgments for himself (Clines, "Does the Book of Job Suggest", 101). However, the expression כַּאֲלֹהִים (like God) in 40,9 implies that God does refer to his own actions in this final part of God's answer.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. 38,13-15.

from moving to a similar position as God. Brenner proposes to understand 40,7-14 as a straightforward, although partial, admittance of divine failure. According to her, God is conceding that he can not dispose of the wicked and of evil, at least no more than Job can.¹¹⁰ However, God does not challenge Job to operate with divine power because of his own incapability or lack of sufficient power to act in such a way. On the contrary, God wants to make it clear that nobody is able to carry out such divine tasks except himself. Therefore, God's unique power is underlined instead of reduced in this final plea.¹¹¹ Job does not adopt the same position as God. This implies that he is unable to overlook the logic and coherence behind God's actions completely. Job concluded on the basis of the concept of retribution that God perverts justice in his case. However, God sees this reasoning as frustration of his justice. Apparently, a person's behaviour can not be derived so directly from their fate. Nevertheless, God maintains the fact that there is a balance between a person's deeds and their consequences. He punishes evildoers for their wrong deeds but this action goes beyond the human ability of observation.

5.3 Job's Reply

The strenuous nature of God's challenges and questions forces Job to react. Therefore, Job takes the floor and responds.¹¹² This answer shows a turn in Job's attitude. God's answer changed Job's perception of God. Job has the feeling to understand God better thanks to the fact that he has somehow seen God in a more direct way. The fundamental difference between God and human beings returns in Job's reply. Job acknowledges that he holds a small position in relation to the mighty God. He admits that he did not overlook the exact logic of God's dealing when he earlier spoke about God. This fact hinders him in answering God and leads him to the conclusion that he has told without understanding. Therefore, Job expresses some regret about his former attitude towards God.

Jobs' reply follows on God's final challenge to be and act like God (40,9-14). God summons Job to answer (40,2). But in front of this overwhelming appearance, Job can only acknowledge that he does not hold a similar position to God and is unable to perform some of the divine tasks. Therefore, Job will not answer anymore.

40,4 Behold, I am small; how can I respond you?

¹¹⁰ A. Brenner, "God's Answer to Job", *VT* 31 (1981) 133. According to her, God subtly admits to the basic duality of his nature in the divine speeches (132). Kushner suggests a similar interpretation for 40,9-14 (Kushner, *Als 't kwaad*, 44-47).

¹¹¹ A criticism of Kushner's interpretation can also be found in J.J.J. Spangenberg, "Om teologiseer oor God en lyding: Opmerkings na aanleiding van Harold Kushner se interpretasie van Job 40:9-14", *HTS* 50 (1994) 995-996.

¹¹² 40,4-5; 42,2-6. It is likely that the book of Job originally contained one reply to God's answer. See §5.1.2.

I lay my hand on my mouth.
40,5 I have spoken once and I will not answer again¹¹³,
twice and I will not go on.

God's impressive speech makes Job draw the conclusion that he is small in comparison to God (40,4). The presentation of God's superior power and the confrontation with Job's lack of insight into God's ways seem to inspire Job with awe. Habel is of the opinion that Job suggests that he is reduced to smallness and humbled by the divine speeches.¹¹⁴ However, it is questionable whether the verb קָלַל (to be small) refers to such an act of humiliation. Several times this verb refers to a person's small state in comparison to another.¹¹⁵ In 40,4, it similarly establishes Job's position in relation to God. God's tempestuous exposition has made Job aware of the fact that he is not on equal terms with God. Faced by God's powerful (creative) actions in the Creation and Job's lack of knowledge of the counsel behind this, Job wonders how he could respond to God adequately. Answering God refers to a forensic context. In Job 9, Job has made clear that he would not be able to answer God in a legal case because God's powerful and terrifying manifestation would hinder him in putting an adequate answer into words.¹¹⁶ This expectation now comes true. For, in 40,5, Job does not accept God's challenge to answer him (40,2). God's majestic appearance, his provoking questions, as well as the elaboration of several details of his counsel have silenced Job. Within a legal context, ceasing to respond (עָנָה) means that a plaintiff is convinced by the arguments of the adversary or at least does not see any good in continuing to argue.¹¹⁷ Thus, Job does not mean that he completely stops speaking. He makes it clear that he abandons further contention with God as his adversary at law.¹¹⁸ In this way, Job's silence can be understood as an acknowledgement that

¹¹³ Several scholars read אֶשָּׁנָה (I will repeat) instead of אֶעֱנֶה (I will answer) (so Budde, *Hiob*, 240; Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 325; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 532; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 396). However, such an emendation is not necessary because אֶעֱנֶה fits the context very well. After Job's question about how he can respond God (40,4), Job now makes it clear that he will not answer again (40,5). Van Selms points out that עָנָה also includes the meaning 'to take the floor' (Van Selms, *Job II*, 187). Job will not start arguing again.

¹¹⁴ Habel, *Job*, 549. Habel sees the mood of complaint here.

¹¹⁵ Gen.16,4-5; 1 Sam.2,30; Nah.1,14.

¹¹⁶ 9,3.14-16.20. Although Job later keeps the possibility open that God calls and he answers (13,22).

¹¹⁷ Compare Driver-Gray: Job will give up the role of critic (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 347).

¹¹⁸ Therefore, possible difficulty with the fact that Job still speaks in 42,2ff is not necessary, even if there were two separate answers originally. For, in 42,2ff, Job does not start arguing with God again but further elaborates upon the consequences of his small position and explains why he ceased answering God. Pace Glazov, who states that the existence of the second speech implies that Job has taken his hand off his mouth and has repudiated his vow

God has a stronger case at this moment. Awareness of his small position in relation to God forces Job to give up further arguing.

The question arises of what the nature of Job's silence is. Does it demonstrate humbleness, disapproval, or awe? Fohrer sees a complete difference between 9,3 and 40,4f in the fundamental attitude of the one who keeps silence. Whereas it is an impotent and teeth gnashing silence in 9,3, it is a humble silence in 40,4f, according to Fohrer.¹¹⁹ However, it is questionable whether Job's silence here particularly expresses a humble attitude. The gesture of laying the hand on the mouth (40,4) may throw more light on its character. This gesture means becoming or being silent and at several points it is the result of awe or dismay.¹²⁰ Earlier, Job expressed his desire to speak up and fill his mouth with arguments¹²¹ although he was conscious that his mouth would condemn him impressed by God's superior power (9,20). However, Job now decides to keep his mouth closed (40,4). Glazov understands this gesture as disapproval because Job is aware that he did not get the freedom to 'open his mouth' and to state his case fairly as he wished in 9,34f and 13,20f.¹²² However, this argument neglects the fact that God also meets Job's wishes by getting up to speak and by reacting to several elements in Job's speeches.¹²³ It appears that Job's silence contains a forced and unavoidable element. In the sight of God's powerful actions, which also reveals Job's ignorance of God's counsel, Job can only acknowledge the fact that he is small and unable to refute. With this, the characterization 'humble' expresses too much deliberate resignation and submission.¹²⁴ God's impressive and overwhelming manifestation earlier evokes surprise and dismay. Such a show of strength silences Job. In this way, Job's predictive expectation in Job 9 that he would not be able to answer God comes true at the end of the book.

Job further determines his position in relation to God in the continuation of his reply. He contrasts God's unlimited possibilities with his own restricted capacities.

not to speak again (G.Y. Glazov, "The Significance of the 'Hand on the Mouth' Gesture in Job XL 4", *VT* 52 (2002) 37).

¹¹⁹ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 533.

¹²⁰ 21,5; 29,9; Mic.7,16; Judg.18,19. In Judg.18,19, it occurs parallel to the verb שָׁרַח (to keep silent).

¹²¹ 7,11; 23,4.

¹²² Glazov, "Gesture", 36.40. See also Brenner, who thinks that Job's answer in 40,4-5 shows disapproval because God did not learn anything new in his first speech (Brenner, "Answer", 133).

¹²³ Job's statement that his eye has seen God (42,4) also proves that Job does not value God's answer negatively. See §5.4, where I argue that God takes notice of several elements from Job's speeches by depicting a counter picture.

¹²⁴ For a similar reason, the suggestion of Strauß that it deals with the silence of a sage (Strauß, *Hiob*, 375; see also T.F. Dailey, "The Wisdom of Divine Disputation? On Job 40,2-5", *JSOT* 63 (1994) 113-119, who takes it as a sophisticated silence) is less likely. Such a suggestion supposes too much calmness and rationality at this moment.

While God is able to do everything, Job lacks understanding. However, the paradox is that, nevertheless, Job feels that he knows God better now. For, his eye has seen God.

- 42,2 I know¹²⁵ that you can do everything
and that no plan is impossible for you.
42,3 ..¹²⁶
Therefore, I have spoken without understanding it,
of things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
42,4 ..
42,5 By the listening of the ear, I heard of you,
but now my eye has seen you.

Job establishes his relation to God in more detail by opposing his small state to God's (unlimited) capacities. He declares that he knows that God can do everything (42,2). The verb *ידע* (to know) expresses a conviction.¹²⁷ The poet plays with this verb. God provoked Job to show his knowledge of God's counsel¹²⁸ and to operate with divine power. Now Job, states to the contrary that he knows that God can do everything (42,2) but that he himself has spoken about things which he did not know (42,3). The subject of this knowledge in 42,2 is God's ability to do what he wants. This could be indicated as a kind of divine omnipotence. In 42,2b, the substantive *מוצא* (plan) refers to God's intention to deal in particular ways. This can include avenging elements.¹²⁹ The verb *בצר* (to be possible) occurs in Gen.11,6, where God is worried that nothing that the human race proposes to do will be impossible. Job declares that God is able to execute everything he wants to do. Some scholars read an admission of God's wisdom in this verse.¹³⁰ However, such a designation is not explicitly mentioned.¹³¹ Job acknowledges God's sovereign position. God freely acts in the way he wants. This powerful and sovereign divine position fundamentally distinguishes God from Job.

¹²⁵ Reading Qere: *ידעת*.

¹²⁶ Most scholars regard 42,3ab and 42,4 as later insertions which cite 38,2 and 38,3b (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 532; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 396; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 372; Budde, *Hiob*, 253; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 98; Hesse, *Hiob*, 202). Others treat it as an intended quotation (Habel, *Job*, 576; Gordis, *Job*, 492; Strauß, *Hiob*, 386-387; Van Selms, *Job II*, 207-208; Kubina, *Gottesreden*, 107).

¹²⁷ Compare 9,2,28; 10,13; 13,18; 19,25.

¹²⁸ 38,3-5.18.21.33; 39,1-2. *ידעת*: 38,2.

¹²⁹ Jer.23,20; 30,24; 51,11.

¹³⁰ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 534; Hesse, *Hiob*, 203; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 397 (quoting Davidson).

¹³¹ An appreciative overtone can mainly be heard in Job's remark that he has now seen God (42,5).

This ultimate position of God has as a result that Job is unable to overlook and judge God's functioning. God wondered who it was that darkened God's counsel with words without knowledge (דַּעַת; 38,2). He summoned Job to say (נָגַד), if he has understanding (בִּינָה).¹³² Job now admits that he spoke (נָגַד) without understanding it (בִּינָה), about wonderful things which he did not know (42,3). In the dialogue, Job complains that he does not perceive (בִּינָה) God if God passes by.¹³³ Meanwhile Eliphaz asks rather provocatively what Job knows (יָדַע) and understands (בִּינָה) but which is not clear to the friends (15,9). Job's reply now displays the awakening that his knowledge is less reliable than Job earlier thought.¹³⁴ Job is already familiar with the fact he is unable to see God's ways through. However, this insight is now connected with his reasoning. Job has become aware that his interpretative tools were inadequate for valuing God's actions in reality correctly. Things are too wonderful for Job's understanding. The word נִפְלְאוֹת (wonderful things) can refer to powerful and beneficial actions of God (5,9; Eliphaz) as well as include God's unpredictable and devastating actions (9,10; Job).¹³⁵ In 42,3, it characterizes the unfathomable character of God's actions. God's actions are different, more wide-ranging, and more complicated than Job supposed. This functioning goes beyond Job's ability of observation and this awareness also includes an admission. Job acknowledges the fact that his reasoning and arguments did not do justice to God's counsel.

Job indicates the experience of God's answer from the whirlwind as the cause of this process of awakening. While Job had earlier only heard of God by the listening of the ear, he has now seen God (42,5). The contrast between 'hearing' and 'seeing' typifies the situation before and after God's speaking. These characterizations indicate the quality of obtained knowledge. The expression שָׁמַעַתְּ בְּאָזְנוֹ (by the listening of the ear) refers to information that has reached someone in an indirect way.¹³⁶ Job values the earlier interpretative frames which he had at his disposal in order to understand God's comings and goings as second-hand knowledge in comparison to the insights into God's functioning that he acquired from God's answer.¹³⁷ In 9,11, Job complains that he does not see (רָאָה) God, if God passes by. Hereafter he expresses his wish to see God with his eyes (19,27). The notion 'seeing God' in 42,5 expresses the fulfilment of this wish. Whereas Job experienced God as obscure and unreliable in 9,11, he has now encountered some

¹³² 38,4.18.

¹³³ 9,11. See also 23,8.

¹³⁴ Habel calls this statement a public confession, that Job is 'indeed' the one who obscured God's cosmic design (Habel, *Job*, 581). However, the characterization 'confession' is too strained. It is more the expression of a new awareness that Job has obtained experience of God's answer.

¹³⁵ Elihu also refers to the wonderful nature of God's actions in 37,5.14.

¹³⁶ 2 Sam.22,45; Ps.18,45. In 28,22, the hidden wisdom is only heard by rumours.

¹³⁷ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 534-535; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 372.

signs of God's involvement in his case and has learned God's reaction to his questions and charges. God's answer from the whirlwind has provided Job with some insight into God's functioning. Paradoxically this new knowledge is the consciousness that God's ways are too wonderful to comprehend. Nevertheless, Job has the feeling that he has come closer to God and knows him better. The combination of experiencing that God has taken notice of Job's case and getting the opportunity to observe several details of God's counsel has caused a new awareness and some change in Job.¹³⁸

In the final verse, Job summarizes the effect of the encounter with God. He expresses some regret. God's answer has let him see that he is insignificant before God's overwhelming appearance. The unbridgeable distance between God and Job is the reason for Job's lack of insight into God's counsel. Impressed by God's superior power and having become aware of the impossibility of fathoming God's actions, Job dissolves and regrets that he has spoken inadequately.

42,6 Therefore, I dissolve and regret,
for I am dust and ashes.

This verse is rather controversial because nearly every word is problematic.¹³⁹ The first obstacle is the verb **נסח**. This verb can be read as **נסח** 1 (to reject) or **נסח** 2 (to dissolve). The main problem is the absence of an object, by which it is unclear what **נסח** exactly means and to what it refers. If **נסח** is taken as **נסח** 1, three different meanings can be found. Some scholars translate it as 'to retract'.¹⁴⁰ This meaning is unlikely because it would be unique for **נסח** 1. Others understand it as 'to feel loathing contempt and revulsion'.¹⁴¹ Curtis, for instance, argues that Job feels loathing contempt towards God, since God responded with contemptuous and arrogant boasting.¹⁴² However, such an attitude is improbable because Job's statement that his eye has seen God (42,5) suggests a more positive impression of

¹³⁸ Fohrer calls it an inner transformation, through which Job bears his fate with unconditional devotion to God and in complete community with him (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 535). However, within the context, this verse particularly refers to nature of knowledge and insight. Job now has the feeling of knowing God better but he does not mention an unconditional devotion or complete community.

¹³⁹ For an overview see e.g. T.F. Dailey, "And Yet He Repents –On Job 42,6", *ZAW* 105 (1993) 205-206. Morrow argues that the ambiguity is deliberately built into 42,6 by the Joban author (W. Morrow, "Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42,6", *JBL* 105 (1986) 211-225).

¹⁴⁰ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 535-536; Habel, *Job*, 575; Pope, *Job*, 347 (recant); NBV.

¹⁴¹ So J.B. Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yahweh", *JBL* 98 (1979) 503-505; Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 578 (abhor). Both the meaning 'feel loathing' and the possibility of reading **נסח** 2 are mentioned in D.A.J. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew. Vol. V*, Sheffield 2001, 120-122.

¹⁴² Curtis, "On Job's Response", 505.

God's answer.¹⁴³ The final option, which takes **סָנַן** as a rejection according to the verb's basic meaning, would therefore be most likely, if **סָנַן** is read as **סָנַן** 1.¹⁴⁴ In that case, the question is what does Job reject? The most probable object is Job's speaking in the dialogue and in particular his charges against God based on the concept of retribution.¹⁴⁵ For, Job has already acknowledged that he argued without sufficient insight into God's counsel (42,3). If **סָנַן** is read as **סָנַן** 1, it is an intensification of Job's awareness that God's actions go beyond Job's ability of observation. Then Job would take the next step and reject his former conclusions and charges. However, Job's friends would finally triumph if Job repudiated his accusations. For, they summoned Job to give up arguing further with God.¹⁴⁶ It is questionable whether such a consequence is likely, if it is also taken into consideration that God rejects the friends' words in 42,7.¹⁴⁷

The versions LXX and 11QtgJob present trouble with a meaning of rejection and both show a preference for **סָנַן** 2.¹⁴⁸ This is especially striking in the case of LXX because a rejection or retraction of Job's words would have fitted better in its theology of weakening the sharpness of Job's rebellion against God.¹⁴⁹ In Ps.58,8, the psalmist asks God to let the wicked dissolve like water flows away. This is a prayer for depriving the wicked of their influence and strength.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Job has the feeling of losing his strength and becoming insignificant in the sight of God's majesty. In this way, the experience of seeing God (42,5) and the realization

¹⁴³ Kuyper argues that the usage of verb **סָנַן** hardly allows the extreme emphasis of 'to despise, to abhor' (L.J. Kuyper, "The Repentance of Job", *VT* 9 (1959) 92-94).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Kuyper, "Repentance of Job", 91-94; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 373; Strauß, *Hiob*, 336.

¹⁴⁵ Retracting his attitude and words (Pope, *Job*, 348); his words (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 536; NBV). Rejecting/repudiating his words: Kuyper, "Repentance of Job", 94; Budde, *Hiob*, 253; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 373. Despising his arguments: Gordis, *Job*, 492. Several other objects are proposed. For example; 1. Job withdraws his case against God (Habel, *Job*, 576.582 (following Scholnick)). However, it is not necessary to mention that explicitly because Job's silence has already made it clear that he gives up further arguing. 2. Job despises his life (cf. 9,20) (T.F. Dailey, "He Repents", 207 (his life and 'Lebenswelt' as it is now)). However because of the new perspective in Job's life due to God's answer, this is unlikely. 3. Job despises himself (S. Wagner, art. **סָנַן**, ThWAT IV, 627 (as part of penance); Strauß, *Hiob*, 336; Rowley, *Job*, 342; M.C.A. Korpel, "God heeft altijd gelijk. Theodicee in het Oude Nabije Oosten", *NTT* 58 (2004) 202 (as reflexive meaning)). 4. Dust and ashes (D. Patrick, "The Translation of Job XLII,6", *VT* 26 (1976) 369; E.J. van Wolde, "Job 42,1-6: The Reversal of Job", in: W.A.M. Beuken (ed.), *The Book of Job* (BETL CXIV), Leuven 1994, 249 (one of the two possibilities)).

¹⁴⁶ Noort, "Duister duel", 50.

¹⁴⁷ One could object that there God only rejects the friends' speaking of God. However, their call on Job to change his view on God and to take his accusations back directly concerns their opinions about God.

¹⁴⁸ 11QtgJob reads **סָנַן וְאֶתְנַסַּח** (I am poured out and dissolve); LXX: 'I consider myself little and melt'.

¹⁴⁹ Noort, "Duister duel", 50.

¹⁵⁰ Compare 2 Sam.14,14. See also 6,15-18.

of having spoken without sufficient understanding (42,3) have evoked the consciousness of being small (cf.40,4a). Because of the support of LXX and 11QtgJob, the solution to the problem of an implied object and a well fitting meaning within the context of the book, it is preferable to read **מֵאֵס** 2.¹⁵¹ It expresses Job's condition after hearing God's answer. Job's observation that he is unable to answer God (40,4f) has already articulated this state. Job has experienced his own insignificance during God's overwhelming appearance and dissolves.

The remaining part of 42,6 is equally problematic. In particular, the relation between **וַנְחַמְתִּי** and **עַל-עֵפֶר וְאֶפֶר** is the issue here. The verb **נָחַם** (nif.) can express the reconsidering of a decision about something that was planned or performed. This can involve regret about such a decision.¹⁵² The reason for Job's regret is having spoken mistakenly about God's actions. Seeing God (42,5) did not only cause a feeling of insignificance but also brought a change in Job's attitude towards God. Job regrets that he has spoken on the basis of insufficient knowledge. Now the question is, how is **עַל-עֵפֶר וְאֶפֶר** related to this? The verb **נָחַם** occurs several times with the preposition **עַל** which indicates the object of regret.¹⁵³ However, can **עֵפֶר וְאֶפֶר** be such an object? Patrick thinks that this word pair refers to the action of lamenting or mourning. According to him, Job forswears the physical setting associated with mourning and lamentation.¹⁵⁴ However, if the verb **נָחַם** also bears an aspect of regret, mourning can hardly be the object. For, why should Job be sorry for his grief in his miserable situation? If one takes notice of the caesura, 42,6b should be read independently. Traditionally, the preposition **עַל** has often been read as an indication of place. Job is sitting on dust and ashes.¹⁵⁵ However, other occurrences of the word pair **עֵפֶר וְאֶפֶר** express the mortality and insignificance of human beings.¹⁵⁶ In 30,19, Job has become like dust and ashes due to God's hostile actions. Since Job's awareness of his insignificance plays a

¹⁵¹ So Hölscher, *Hiob*, 98; Van Selms, *Job II*, 208; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 398-399; Noort, "Duister duel", 50-51. De Wilde and Noort translate as 'I recognise my insignificance'. The verb **מֵאֵס** also occurs as **מֵאֵס** 2 in 7,5. In 7,16 this seems likely too, where it can express the lack of sufficient strength to keep going (so e.g. Morrow, "Consolation", 214). One could even wonder whether in 36,5, **מֵאֵס** 2 should be read. For 36,5 can articulate the guarantee that God does not reject (**מֵאֵס** 1) the righteous (cf. LXX) or Job but it can also confirm God's power and express that God will not dissolve (**מֵאֵס** 2) (so e.g. Habel, *Job*, 497-498).

¹⁵² See e.g. Gen.6,6-7. Though the verb **נָחַם** could also be a pi'el (to comfort) due to its punctuation, it is not likely that Job speaks of comforting within this context.

¹⁵³ E.g. Jer.18,8.10; Amos 7,3.6.

¹⁵⁴ Patrick, "Translation", 370. In a similar way, De Boer is of the opinion that Job abandons the period of mourning about the calamities that affected him (P.A.H. de Boer, "Haalt Job bakzeil? (Job xlii 6)", *NTT* 31 (1977), 191-193).

¹⁵⁵ This is then taken as a reference to 2,8 (so e.g. Hölscher, *Hiob*, 98; Van Selms, *Job II*, 208; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 536; Habel, *Job*, 583).

¹⁵⁶ Gen.18,27, Sir.10,9; 1QHXXV.5.

considerable role in his reply, it is likely that this word pair also articulates Job's insignificance in 42,6. Such a meaning also corresponds with the feeling of smallness expressed by the verb **נָאֵס**. The particle **עַל** can indicate a reason.¹⁵⁷ If one takes **עַל** as a conjunction instead of a preposition and reads 42,6b as a nominal clause with **אֲנִכִּי** from 42,6a as its implicit subject, **עַל** does not refer to the place where Job dissolves and regrets but can express the reason for it. Job has become aware that he is insignificant compared to the greatness of God. Therefore, he dissolves and regrets his former attitude. For, Job is dust and ashes.¹⁵⁸

5.4 The Relation of God's Answer and Job's Reply with the Dialogue

5.4.1 Introduction

The introduction of God's answer characterizes this speech as a response to Job (38,1). However, God steers his own course. His answer does not clearly reply to all of Job's questions, accusations, and complaints. Therefore, there is doubt as to whether or to what extent God takes notice of Job's words. Some scholars think that the divine speeches completely ignore Job's contributions in the dialogue.¹⁵⁹ For instance, they argue that the fact that God appears and the event of the encounter between Job and God is more essential than the content of God's speeches.¹⁶⁰ On the contrary, other scholars recognise a substantial reaction to Job's arguments in God's answer. They read objections against Job's views in it, understand it as a rejection of Job's attitude, or see concrete allusions to Job's words in it.¹⁶¹ I have already elaborated upon the fact that God's answer contains a

¹⁵⁷ Art. **עַל**, HAL II, 827, n.9. In 32,2, Elihu becomes angry with Job because (**עַל**) Job considered himself to be correct before God.

¹⁵⁸ LXX has further paraphrased this: I consider myself as dust and ashes.

¹⁵⁹ E.g. Weiser, *Hiob*, 241; Hesse, *Hiob*, 11-12. Clines understands the failure of the divine speeches to respond to Job's problem implicitly as a refusal of the validity of Job's complaint (Clines, "Does the Book of Job Suggest?", 101).

¹⁶⁰ So e.g. Weiser, *Hiob*, 241. He speaks of 'das Geschehen'. See also Strauß, *Hiob*, 356.

¹⁶¹ E.g. Habel, *Job*, 530-535; Keel, *Entgegnung*, 51-158; Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 26-49; Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 118-142; Nam, *Talking About God*, 123-185; R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, New York, 1985, 85-110; Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 186-198; Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 138-262. Unfortunately, the study of Ritter-Müller only concentrates on Job 38-39, so it is unclear how one of the most crucial parts of God's answer (40,2.8-14) relates to the dialogue in her view. Engljähringer states somewhat paradoxically that in the images of the divine speeches there is an answer with regard to the content but that it is not at all accessible for contemporary readers (K. Engljähringer, *Theologie im Streitgespräch. Studien zur Dynamik der Dialoge des Buches Ijob* (SBS 198), Stuttgart 2003, 164-165). Newsom sees a particular dialogical relation between Job 29-31 and Job 38-42,6 (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 27.237-241). According to Maag, God's answer is a response to Job's complaint in Job 3 (Maag, *Wandlung und*

rejection. Job's impression of God's actions is criticized by the qualifications 'darkening (God's) counsel' (38,2) and 'frustration of God's justice' (40,8).¹⁶² This present section aims to demonstrate that these rejections in God's answer are accompanied by the depiction of a counter picture.¹⁶³ God has taken notice of several issues which Job brought up and responds to them in a more indirect way by showing that his functioning and dealing are different than Job thought.

Job 9 occupies a special position in the book of Job. This chapter has a key function in the dialogue and connects the dialogue with the prologue.¹⁶⁴ It is striking that a notably high number of elements from Job 9 return in God's answer and Job's reply. This is the reason for examining now the relation between Job 9 and the final part of the book in more detail (5.4.2). I argue that God's answer refutes Job's charge that God perverts justice by presenting several elements of God's counsel. This presentation portrays a counter picture, in which the earth is well constructed and designed, God acts preserveringly, and the wicked are punished for their wrong deeds. It appears that Job 9 bridges the dialogue and the final part of the book. The returning elements from Job 9 in the final part of the book connect both parts. Subsequently, the question arises of whether or not the relation between the remaining speeches of Job and this final part of the book corresponds with the impression that God's answer depicts a counter picture. I explore this in 5.4.3.

5.4.2 The Relation of God's Answer and Job's Reply to Job 9

5.4.2.1 Creation Images

In both Job 9 and God's answer, the construction of the earth and God's creative power play a considerable role.¹⁶⁵ The description of the foundation of the earth, the pillars, and the cornerstone (38,4-6) is reminiscent of the world's pillars in 9,6. As God determines the boundaries of the sea (38,8-11), he controls the waves (9,8b). In both speeches, God is able to let the day dawn.¹⁶⁶ They name the stars in the same way.¹⁶⁷ The question of who is able to bind or loose the stars and make them rise (38,31-32) alludes to the remark in 9,7, where God lets the sun rise and seals the stars. The Creation images function in quite the same way in both speeches. In 9,5-9, they show God's power, with which he can also act

Verarbeitung, 99-123). Alter also sees a particular relation between Job 3 and God's answer (Alter, *Art*, 96-100).

¹⁶² See §5.2.2 and §5.2.6.

¹⁶³ Compare Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 122.126-128. She remarks that some old views of Job and the friends get new connotations in the speech of God because God gives them a new overtone and colour and places them in totally different perspectives (122). According to her, God confronts Job with similar images but turns them around (128).

¹⁶⁴ See Ch.2.

¹⁶⁵ See also Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 161.

¹⁶⁶ 9,7; 38,12.

¹⁶⁷ 9,9; 38,31-32. See also Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 207.

destructively in his anger. The Creation images confirm that a rebellious human being does not remain undamaged before God (9,4) and prepare Job's observation that God's dealings can not be seen through or stopped (9,10-12). In God's answer, they serve to demonstrate some aspects of God's counsel behind the cosmos and God's way of working in it.¹⁶⁸ Job lacks insight into this construction of the earth because he was not present when God created the earth. Nor has Job the capacity to create in an equal way. In both parts, the Creation images demonstrate God's superior power over human beings and point out human inability to understand the structure of God's creative work. Both Job and God conclude from God's creative power that Job is unable to see through this divine action. Nevertheless, the use of this power differs to some extent. While Job also observes a devastating and incalculable dimension in God's actions (9,5-7), God particularly emphasizes his creating and sustaining work.¹⁶⁹

5.4.2.2 *Knowledge and Observation*

Knowledge is a central issue in God's answer.¹⁷⁰ Due to a lack of discernment, Job has wrongly spoken about God's counsel and dealings. God challenges Job to demonstrate his insight into the structure of the Creation. God shows elements of its arrangement in order to let Job realize that Job lacks knowledge of this. In 42,3, Job admits this lack of insight. He has spoken about things that he did not understand (לֹא יָדַעְתִּי), things too wonderful (נִפְלְאוֹת) that he did not know (אֲדַע). These words have already been uttered in 9,10-11. There, Job establishes the same observation. He states that God does wonderful things that are unfathomable (9,10). Job does not observe (לֹא יָדַעְתִּי) God if God passes by (9,11). God's conduct and actions can not be seen through by Job. So, Job and God both point out that God's ways pass by human knowledge and the human ability of observation. God illustrates this topic by confronting Job literally with the inscrutability of the Creation. He asks whether Job has entered (הִבַּטְתָּ) into the sources of the sea and the storehouses of the snow (38,22) and is able to walk through the unfathomable (קִרְקִר, compare 9,10) depths of the waters (38,16).¹⁷¹ While Job determines that it is impossible to count God's actions (9,10), God, on the contrary, makes it clear that he counts the clouds with wisdom (38,37) and counts the months of the gestation of the hind (39,2). In this way, God and Job agree about the fact that God's actions can not be perceived by human beings.

Even though the inscrutability of God's ways is mentioned in both speeches, this divine characteristic serves different purposes. God wants to let Job see that the

¹⁶⁸ See also Alter, *Art*, 90.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 161. See also Habel, *Job*, 1985, 530; Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 124-125; Nam, *Talking About God*, 129-130.

¹⁷⁰ See §5.2.4.

¹⁷¹ Compare Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 153.

order of the Creation and God's actions are beyond Job's knowledge and ability of observation. This implies a reproof. For, Job valued God's actions as unjust whereas he is not able to survey the rationale of God's behaviour. Job has already mentioned this inscrutability in Job 9 but uses it there as an argument against God. God can not be stopped when he misuses his power and can not be called to account for what he is doing (9,12) because his ways are unfathomable. While Job uses God's greatness as an argument against God, on the contrary, God brings up his position as Creator as an argument against Job. God confirms Job's observation that God's comings and goings can not be seen through but he rejects Job's conclusion that he abuses this position. Therefore, the connotations of Job's reply that God does marvellous things, which Job does not understand (42,3), somewhat differ from this similar observation in Job 9. Whereas it supports Job's conviction that God misuses his position and acts unjustly in Job 9, it loses its accusatory tone in 42,3. In Job's reply, it expresses the intangible and unobservable character of God's order and actions which human beings lack insight into.

5.4.2.3 *The Image of the Lawsuit*

Job 9 introduced the image of the lawsuit into the dialogue. This image returns at the beginning of Job 40. In 40,2, God uses the forensic terms **רִיב** (to contend), **מוֹכֵיחַ** (arbitrator), and **עֲנֶה** (to answer). God asks whether Job wants to contend with the Almighty (40,2a). Whereas Job interpreted his misfortune as God's contention with Job (9,3), God now labels Job's accusations as Job's contention with God. God forces Job to choose a position. The one, who argues with God and rebukes him, must respond (40,2b). Job answers this challenge with the admittance that he is too small to refute God. He will not answer again (40,4-5). With this, an important line of thought from Job 9 returns in Job 40. In Job 9, Job states that he will not be able to answer God adequately when God contends with him (9,3.14f). Impressed by God's strength (9,17-19), his mouth would declare him guilty even though he is right (9,20). Thus, Job's conclusion that he is too small before God's impressive and powerful appearance and that he therefore can not answer God (40,4-5) has already been foreseen in Job 9.¹⁷²

God continues to speak in legal terms in 40,8. He asks whether Job will frustrate God's justice and condemn God (**רָשַׁע**), so that Job is proved right (**צָדִיק**). Job is convinced that he is blameless (**צַדִּיק**; 9,21) but has to be guilty (**רָשַׁע**) beyond his influence (9,29). Reasoning according to retributive patterns, Job concludes that God has perverted justice in his case (9,22). For, he deserved prosperity because of his righteousness instead of misery. God and Job actually blame each other for the same offence. While Job thinks that God unjustly holds him to be guilty, God

¹⁷² Noort, *Duister duel*, 15.

accuses Job of the same.¹⁷³ God values Job's reasoning as frustration of God's justice. According to God, Job accuses God on the basis of false reasons. In this way, God rejects Job's charge.¹⁷⁴ The indication 'frustration of my justice' demonstrates that Job's charge was unjust. Understanding God's actions on the basis of the concept of retribution apparently does not do justice to the divine considerations behind God's actions. Thus, the book of Job questions the concept of retribution as an adequate tool of interpretation for understanding God's actions towards human beings. Whereas God's answer does not fully reject this concept, it becomes clear that it is impossible for human beings to derive one's former behaviour from one's fate. Obviously, not all suffering is punishment.

The following challenge in God's answer (40,9-14) underlines this rejection. Job would only be able to make such a judgement, if he held a divine position. God confronts Job with the fundamental difference between him and Job. Can Job act wrathfully (40,11; compare 9,5-7.13) and thunder with his voice (40,9; compare 9,16) like God? Job has already brought this difference up by the image of the arbitrator in 9,32-33. There, he establishes that he can not have a legal case with God because God is not a human being like Job. Job is not able to judge God's actions correctly or to denounce them because he does not adopt God's position and does not have his eye view.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, Job lacks divine power and insight.

5.4.2.4 *God's Power, Actions, and Appearance*

Job and God's answer value God's actions rather differently. While Job accuses God of satisfying (שבע) him with bitterness (9,18), God, on the other hand, states that he saturates waste and desolate land with rain in order to let dry ground sprout fresh grass (38,27).¹⁷⁶ According to Job, God treats the righteous and the wicked equally and even favours the wicked by giving the earth in their hands (9,22-24). However, God's answer presents a different view. In 38,13-15, the wicked are shaken from the earth and God withholds them their light. Treading down the wicked explicitly belongs to the divine tasks (40,12). Whereas Job reproaches God with deviating from the concept of retribution through punishing a blameless man instead of rewarding him, God refutes this reproach and demonstrates that he does treat the wicked as he should do according to Job's opinion of justice.¹⁷⁷ Another point of contradiction is God's actions from the storm. Job charged God with increasing his wounds for no reason in the storm (9,17). However, God answers

¹⁷³ Engljähringer also remarks that 40,8 in particular refers to Job 9 and then especially to 9,21-24 (Engljähringer, *Theologie im Streitgespräch*, 173-174).

¹⁷⁴ Compare Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 195.

¹⁷⁵ Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 125.

¹⁷⁶ Compare Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 195; Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 28.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Habel, *Job*, 540; Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 178.

Job from the whirlwind instead of wounding or punishing him.¹⁷⁸ In this way, God's answer indirectly refutes parts of Job's imputations by depicting a counter picture. Whereas Job portrayed a concept of God in which God unjustly satisfies a blameless person with bitterness, benefits the wicked, and wounds Job in the tempest, God's answer depicts a different concept, in which it belongs to God's counsel and order to saturate the desolate land with water, to punish the wicked according to justice, and God unexpectedly answers Job from the whirlwind. Responding to Job's allegations, God presents a counter picture, in which he maintains justice, acts preserveringly, and provides life giving facilities.

5.4.2.5 Conclusions

The similarities between Job 9 and God's answer are striking. Both mention God's superior power in the Creation and the inscrutability of God's ways. However, they draw different conclusions from these divine characteristics. Job concludes that God can not be stopped or called to account. Therefore, God has room to misuse his sovereign position and he indeed does in Job's view. Job sums up how God can act devastatingly, wounding him unjustly, and even benefiting the wicked. Job's impotence in relation to God hinders him denouncing this behaviour. God confronts Job with this same divine power and inscrutability but, on the contrary, he uses these in order to point out Job's lack of knowledge of God's counsel and actions. He judges Job's reasoning to be a frustration of God's justice. So, God rejects the suggestion that human beings are able to deduce what a person's former conduct was from their current fate by reasoning according to a retributive logic, as Job did. A shortage of insight into God's counsel is the reason for this impossibility. Human beings do not adopt a divine position in order to survey God's actions. In order to underline this rejection, God contradicts Job's impression of God's actions with a counter picture.¹⁷⁹ He shows elements of an ingenious order in which he acts preserveringly and creatively, provides desolate land with the possibility of life, and withholds the wicked their light. In this way, God has taken notice of several important elements from Job 9. Through these similarities, Job 9 connects the dialogue with God's answer and Job's response at the end of the book of Job.

There is the question of what significance should be attached to the fact that Job has already foreseen in Job 9 that he would be unable to answer God adequately because of God's overwhelming strength. This observation appears to sharpen Job's accusation that he is in the hands of God –justly or not–. For, God confirms that Job takes a powerless stand in the sight of God. It becomes true that nobody can defend himself in a lawsuit with God in front of God's power. This

¹⁷⁸ 38,1; 40,6. Cf. Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 145. See also Habel, *Job*, 535-536; Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 29; Engljähringer, *Theologie im Streitgespräch*, 189.

¹⁷⁹ See also Keel, *Entgegnung*, 61.

consciousness underlines Job's impotence in his miserable situation. If human beings have the feeling of being wrongly done by God, they lack the possibility to denounce it.

5.4.3 The Relation of God's Answer and Job's Reply with the Remaining Speeches of Job

5.4.3.1 Introduction

The former subsection demonstrated how God refutes several accusations in Job 9 by means of the depiction of a counter image. The issue is now whether the thesis that God answers Job by means of a counter picture also counts for the remaining speeches of Job. In order to prove that this is indeed the case, it is necessary to examine the relation of God's answer and Job's reply with the remaining speeches of Job in more detail. That happens in this subsection.

5.4.3.2 God's Creative Power and Activities

Nowhere does Job question as such God's power as Creator and ruler of the world.¹⁸⁰ However, God and Job have different views on the use of these capacities.¹⁸¹ Job wishes that God would have exerted his power in order to prevent the Creation of his existence on the one hand and cease limiting the perspectives of a troubled one on the other hand. On the contrary, God shows that he applies his creative power in order to create and continue life.¹⁸² His limiting activities serve to restrict threatening chaos in order to give room for life. Job's request for a deed of anti-creation occurs in Job 3. There, he curses the day of his birth. Job wishes that this day would perish and is claimed by darkness (3,3-5). Clouds may cover it (3,5). It would have been better if the night of conception had never been ended by daybreak and got stuck in the chaos of the night (3,9). God confirms that the control of day and night belongs to him. He commands the morning (38,12). God knows the way to the dwelling of light and darkness (38,19) and to the place where the light is dispersed (38,24). He counts the clouds with wisdom (38,37) and has made them the sea's garment (38,9). God is familiar with the gates of deep darkness and death (38,17). Although Job does not incite God directly, it is clear that God should have prevented his birth by bringing about this deed of anti-creation. For, God rules day and night.

However, God applies this control of day and night differently than Job desires. Job wishes that the night of conception does not come into the number of the months (3,6). On the contrary, God presents himself as the guarantor of the process

¹⁸⁰ The only exception might be when Job considers the option that God has characteristics similar to human beings (10,4-5).

¹⁸¹ See also Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 126-128.

¹⁸² Compare Alter, *Art*, 96-97.

of procreation and counts the months that the goat and the hind bear (39,2).¹⁸³ Whereas Job hopes that the stars of the night's dawn are dark (3,9), the morning stars rejoice when God constructs the earth (38,7). They value what God created positively, while Job condemns it.¹⁸⁴ While Job encourages God to darken the stars (3,9), God blames Job for darkening his counsel (38,2).¹⁸⁵ Job longs for the undoing of a creative deed by wishing that he was never born. The reason for this desire is the fact that Job does not notice any sense of giving light –life– to one in misery (3,20). On the other hand, God governs the alternation of day and night. This is a creative and chaos-limiting deed. He provides the world with new life by guarding the process of procreation instead of undoing new life. His creative activities bring joy. Although Job's question about the sense of a life in misery remains unanswered, God counters Job's desire with portraying a picture in which God's creative power is utilized for sustaining and life-giving actions. Such a deed of anti-creation such as Job wishes appears to be darkening of God's counsel.¹⁸⁶

Another component of God's creativity consists of binding and limiting actions. In God's answer, this activity concentrates on the restriction of the sea. That the sea (ים) is a threatening force becomes clear from Job's question of whether God sees Job as the sea which he then sets a guard over (7,12). God shuts in the sea with doors when it bursts out (נצח) from the womb (קבר) (38,8). On the other hand, Job wonders why God has not shut the doors of his mother's womb (3,10) and why he did bring (נצח) him forth from the womb (קבר) (10,18).¹⁸⁷ Paradoxically, the act of limiting would be a deed of anti-creation in Job's case, while it is a creating and chaos-limiting act in God's speech.¹⁸⁸ God binds the sea as a baby with clothes (38,9). Job feels that God does not care for him. According to Job, God wilfully obstructs any hope or perspective of a troubled person because he fences (כס) them in (3,23). God, on the other hand, presents how he creates room for living by shutting the sea in with doors (38,8). Job refers to God's limiting activities by pointing to the fact that God has set bounds (קבר) to the duration of human life. Job wonders why God still troubles human beings despite their limited time on earth (14,5-6).¹⁸⁹ Since Job does not understand the reasons for God's actions, he wonders whether God's days are like the days of a mortal (10,5). On the contrary, God makes it clear that he has set his bounds (קבר) to the

¹⁸³ According to Ritter-Müller, here God answers that Job does not have power over the moment of his origin because he is not even able to count the months until the hind's young are given birth (Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 218).

¹⁸⁴ Compare Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 170; Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 28; Alter, *Art*, 98-99.

¹⁸⁵ Compare Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 148.170; Alter, *Art*, 97.

¹⁸⁶ Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 26-27. It is true that light is withheld from the wicked (38,15). However, this action serves to disarm anti-creative forces in the Creation.

¹⁸⁷ Nam, *Talking About God*, 130.

¹⁸⁸ See also Alter, *Art*, 99.

¹⁸⁹ See also 7,16, 9,25, 17,11.

sea in order to restrict this threatening force (38,10). He confronts Job with the difference between a human's limited lifetime and God's eternity. Job would have had more knowledge if the number of his days were great (38,21). In this way, the opinions about how God acts and should use his creative power differ. Job accuses God of improperly using of these limiting activities on the one hand and asks him to perform a deed of anti-creation with this power on the other hand. However, God shows that he only invests his limiting and bounding efforts in creative and chaos-restricting acts in order to provide room for life.¹⁹⁰ He rules day and night in order to continue life.

5.4.3.3 *God's Handling of Creatures*

Job's opinion of God's actions with regard to creatures is also altered in God's answer. Whereas Job and God both mention similar activities of God, they hold different views on the application of these occupations. Job thinks that God actively watches him in order to judge him when he sins (10,14).¹⁹¹ Job calls God 'watcher of humanity' (7,20; נֹצֵר) and wonders whether God sees him as the sea that God sets a guard over him (7,12). On the other hand, God demonstrates that he observes (שָׁמַר) the time that the hind calves (39,2). While God's watching has a negative and prosecuting connotation in Job's mouth, it serves to secure the continuation of life according to God.¹⁹² Job has the feeling that God has not taken precise notice of his way of life. Therefore, he challenges God to count his steps (14,16) and is prepared to give account of their number (31,37).¹⁹³ God makes it clear that he indeed practices this activity of counting. He counts the clouds with wisdom (38,37). In this way, Job's suggestion that God has not carefully observed his real way of life, when God decided to afflict Job, is challenged. God does count in wisdom. Job has the feeling that God hunts him like a lion (10,16). On the contrary, God says that he applies his hunting activities for sustaining goals; he provides the lion with prey (38,39).¹⁹⁴ While Job complains that his cry for help is not heard by God, God shows that he does answer cries for assistance. He provides the raven with prey when its young ones cry to God (38,41).¹⁹⁵ So, Job's impression that God utilizes some of his qualities carelessly or for wrong and evil purposes is corrected. God presents a picture in which he operates conscientiously in the world. He governs the world with wisdom and applies his capacities in order to guarantee the continuation of life.

The handling of the wicked and the application of anger attract particular attention. Job understands his misery as a manifestation of God's anger (19,11).

¹⁹⁰ Compare Habel, *Job*, 538-539.

¹⁹¹ In 14,16, Job assures that God will not observe any sin.

¹⁹² Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 217-218.

¹⁹³ See also 31,4.

¹⁹⁴ Compare Habel, *Job*, 544; Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 210.

¹⁹⁵ Compare Habel, *Job*, 544; Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 213.

According to Job, God tears him in his anger (16,9). Job proposes that God should temporally hide him in the underworld until God's anger has passed (14,13). Job is of the opinion that he suffers the effect of God's anger unjustly because he is innocent in his eyes. This conclusion is enforced by the observation that the wicked are not punished for their deeds. On the contrary, they even get preferential treatment. According to Job, God favours the plan of the wicked (10,3), while Job has always distanced himself from such a plan (21,16). The evildoers live on (21,7) and their lamp is not put out (21,17). God has even delivered Job into the hands of the wicked (16,11). However, God's answer contradicts this impression. God does indeed act sometimes with anger but he denies that he employs this anger wrongly and benefits wicked. It belongs to divine tasks to pour outbursts of anger over the proud and wicked (40,11). The wicked are shaken out of the skirts of the earth and their light is withheld (38,13.15). They meet God's anger and are trodden down (40,11-12). So, God refutes Job's accusation that he favours the wicked in comparison to the righteous.¹⁹⁶ To Job's complaint that God has set darkness upon his paths (19,8), God responds that light is withheld from the wicked (38,15). Thus, according to God, the lamp of the wicked *is* put out. An important aspect of God's answer is the question of whether human beings are able to recognise these deeds of anger. Whereas Job and his friends meant that they can perceive and point out this action by God by means of a strict application of the concept of retribution, God, on the contrary, designates this reasoning as darkening of his counsel and frustration of his justice. God underlines this assessment by depicting a counter picture. He treats creatures differently than Job thought. This presentation of the treatment of the wicked serves to support God's refutation of Job's charge that God perverts justice. In this way, God does not deny the concept of retribution as such. But the way in which God's actions are determined by this concept is beyond human observation.

5.4.3.4 *Knowledge and Insight*

Job touches upon several facets of the issue of knowledge and insight. On the one hand, he expresses different convictions by means of the verb *יָדַע* (to know). Job knows that God had a hidden purpose when God created human beings (10,13), that he himself is right (13,18), and that his redeemer lives (19,25). On the other hand, Job is faced with the limits of his knowledge and ability of observation. He does not know God's dwelling (23,3), nor does he perceive God in any quarter of the world (23,8-9). At the same time, the reason for his suffering remains unclear. Therefore, Job presses God to inform him about his offences (13,23) and the grounds for God's contending with him (10,2). For then Job would learn (*יָדַע*) and understand (*יָבִין*) what God would answer him (23,5). Job's convictions are more or less related to his uncertainties. Job's belief that he is righteous and therefore

¹⁹⁶ Habel, *Job*, 540; Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 178.

suffers unjustly raises the question of why God acts in such a way. Since God is untraceable, it is impossible to understand and discuss this action with God. Nevertheless, at the same time Job keeps relying on God for a change in his miserable situation.

The nature of God's knowing is also denounced. Job doubts God's omniscience and questions the reliability of God's observations. He wonders whether God sees like human beings see (10,4). Therefore, God should notice carefully and weigh Job in a just balance, so that he learns Job's integrity (31,6). On the other hand, Job uses this omniscience as an argument against God. He calls God to account because God is familiar with Job's way of life (23,10) and knows that Job is not wicked (10,7). Why does God pursue Job, although he knows that Job is innocent? Job's unjust suffering makes him question the reliability of God's capacity to observe.

At the end of the book, God puts the ball back into Job's court. Job's call to inform him about the reasons for his misery is opposed by God's challenge for Job to inform God.¹⁹⁷ Job should display his knowledge and insights if he thinks he is able to judge God's actions. God's answer confirms several of Job's convictions and observations. Firstly, God does somehow appear as Job's spokesman. In 42,5, Job also declares that his expectation that his eye will see God (19,27) is fulfilled.¹⁹⁸ Secondly, God confirms that his ways are untraceable. He points to the fact that Job was not present when God founded the earth (38,4) and confronts Job with his inability to enter into unfathomable regions of the Creation (38,16.22).¹⁹⁹ Something paradoxical can be found with regard to the issue of knowledge and insight. While Job expresses his impotence to discuss his case with God by referring to God's inscrutability, God partly removes this inscrutability by answering Job and presenting several elements from the Creation's order and his preserving work. However, this presentation demonstrates that this order and God's actions go beyond human knowledge and observation. Job's charges based on the concept of retribution are characterized as words without knowledge that darken God's counsel (38,2). Job's doubt about God's ability to observe is contradicted by the question of whether Job has any knowledge of the earth's order and whether his understanding underlies the Creation's design.²⁰⁰ The construction and order of the

¹⁹⁷ God's challenge: 38,3; 40,7. See also 38,4-5.18.21. Job's call: 10,2; 13,23. Van Hecke also says that it is easily possible to read God's challenge as a direct reaction to Job's claims of knowing how God deals with people and how he governs the world, voiced in particular in Job 9-10 and 12-14 (Van Hecke, *Job*, 398).

¹⁹⁸ Compare Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 36.

¹⁹⁹ See also §5.4.2.2.

²⁰⁰ For the elaboration of the different questions and challenges with regard to the issue of knowledge and insight in God's answer, see §5.2.4. The inadequate nature of Job's knowledge can also be illustrated by Job's knowledge of the underworld. Job depicts the underworld as place of rest and equity (3,16-19), as a temporal dwelling place out of range of God's anger (14,13-15), and as a land of darkness (10,21-22). God, on the contrary,

cosmos are based on God's counsel. God oversees the Creation, controls the cycles in it, and acts sustainingly in it. All this passes Job's insight and power. In his answer, Job acknowledges this paradox. Now that his eye has seen God, he realizes that he has spoken about things that he did not understand (42,3.5).

5.4.3.5 *The Image of the Lawsuit*

Despite his consciousness that a lawsuit with God is impossible (9,32-33), Job does not put aside his attempts to take up his case with God. Job interprets his miserable fate as God's judgement. He asks God not to condemn (רשע) him (10,2).²⁰¹ Job sees his suffering as unjust because he is convinced of his innocence. He states that he is not guilty (לֹא אֲשַׁע; 10,7) and that nobody would be able to refute (רִיב) him if he explained his case.²⁰² Job refuses to think that God is right (צדק; 27,5). This belief that Job is blameless has two implications. Firstly, Job draws the conclusion from it that God perverts justice. In Job's eyes, God has taken away his right (מִשְׁפָּט; 27,2). Job complains that justice is lacking in situations where a weak person needs it (19,7). Secondly, it encourages Job to persist in his attempts to denounce God's conduct in a lawsuit. Job wants to plead his case before God and fill his mouth with arguments.²⁰³ He leaves it open as to whether God calls and he answers or he calls and God replies (13,22).²⁰⁴ So, the image of the lawsuit is used to explicate Job's misery as a manifestation of divine judgement on the one hand and to express his desire to discuss the legitimacy of this fate with God on the other.

Job's attempts to provoke a reaction from God or to stage a debate with God are answered in a particular way in the final part of the book. God answers Job from the whirlwind (38,1). However, this answer contains a rejection of Job's charge. God contests Job's accusation that God has taken away his right (27,2) by asking whether or not Job will frustrate God's justice (מִשְׁפָּט; 40,8a). Job argues that he is not guilty (10,7) and refuses to think that God is right (27,5). On the contrary, God wonders whether Job will condemn (רשע) him, so that Job has right (צדק; 40,8b). Job and God blame each other for a similar offence.²⁰⁵ While Job accuses God of withholding his justice, God is of the opinion that Job frustrates his justice. Job labelled God as wicked on the basis of the concept of retribution.

wonders whether Job has ever seen the gates of the underworld (38,17). How is it then possible that Job has substantial knowledge of it? Compare Habel, *Job*, 541; Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 182.

²⁰¹ In 14,3, Job designates God as the one who brings Job into justice with him. See also 23,6, where Job wonders whether God would contend (רִיב) with him with superior power.

²⁰² 13,18-19. Job's innocence is elaborated upon in more detail in §4.3.2.

²⁰³ 13,3; 23,4. In Job 31, an element of such a lawsuit can be found. There, Job defends his righteousness in an extended oath of innocence.

²⁰⁴ In 31,35, Job calls on God to answer to his oath of innocence.

²⁰⁵ See also §5.4.2.4.

According to this concept, God has let Job suffer unjustly. However, God sees this reasoning as frustration of his justice. Obviously, a person's former conduct can not so easily be deduced from their fate. Such a conclusion can not be drawn because Job does not hold a divine position and lacks divine knowledge. Job seems to reconcile himself to this reproach. For, after hearing God's answer, Job's intention to fill his mouth with arguments²⁰⁶ has changed into the gesture of laying his hand on his mouth (40,4). Within the context of the image of the lawsuit, God wins the case and is proved right because Job does not respond with counter arguments.

5.4.3.6 Conclusions

God's answer meets Job's conviction that his eye will see God. It takes up Job's challenge to speak to him and counters Job's complaint that God does not answer when Job calls for help (30,20).²⁰⁷ God does not go into Job's charges and requests explicitly. He does not mention or reject Job's most important argument that Job is blameless.²⁰⁸ Neither does God answer the question of why life is given to one in misery, nor does he respond to Job's request to give reasons for Job's suffering. Nevertheless, God does take notice of Job's speeches in a more indirect way by questioning the frame of interpretation that was the source of most of these issues. Job's charges and accusations were inspired by Job's feeling of suffering unjustly. Job based this on the concept of retribution. God values this way of reasoning as darkening of his counsel and frustration of his justice. God's actions in the world can not be interpreted by such a strict application of the concept of retribution. Human beings lack knowledge of the exact details of God's counsel. What is more, they are unable to observe God's dealings objectively because they do not adopt a similar position as God. Therefore, they are unable to judge God's actions in the world.

God disproves Job's reasoning by depicting a counter picture. God does not address each question or accusation of Job separately but refutes Job's impression of God's actions by giving an alternative view. Job reproaches God by applying his attributes wrongly. According to Job, God guards humans in order to prosecute them, punishes the wrong people with distress, does not carefully observe the ways of human beings, restricts the perspectives of people in misery, and does not prevent an existence that is marked by strife. God's answer counters this impression. It presents some details of God's ingenious plan that underlies the order of the Creation and is the basis of God's actions. God shows elements of a

²⁰⁶ 23,4. See also 7,11.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 142.

²⁰⁸ This implies that Job's claim that he is innocent was just. One could wonder whether God also does not reject this claim when he values Job's words as darkening God's counsel and frustrating his justice. However, Job's own innocent state is not part of God's counsel or justice.

well-constructed earth, in which he has given each thing its specific place. He points to his preserving activities, with which he limits threatening powers of chaos, keeps the cycles of day, night and seasons going, provides nourishment, creates conditions which make life possible, takes careful notice of each detail, and guards the process of procreation. Job is faced with a certain kind paradox, in which God reveals some details of his counsel in order to make it clear that the complete coherence of this counsel goes beyond human knowledge and observation. So, God enfeebles Job's charge that God acts unjustly and arbitrarily in this world.²⁰⁹

However, God's answer does not fully repudiate the concept of retribution. There remains a certain amount of balance. God withholds the wicked their light. What God rejects is that such measures can be observed by human beings. His actions transcend human observation. The implication is that God indeed punishes the wicked but other factors might cause suffering, too. Human beings can not know or judge that. Therefore, a person's conduct can not directly be deduced from their fate. In this way, God's answer does not offer a complete denial of retributive thinking as such but denies that such a relationship is visible for and calculable by human beings. This keeps open the possibility that suffering is brought about by causes other than sin.

One could wonder why God does not take notice of Job's charges and requests in a more explicit and visible way. This would have prevented a lot of doubt about the exact impact of God's answer. Perhaps the relatively intangible nature of God's answer should be understood as an utterance of God's sovereignty in comparison to human beings. Although God does answer human calls, it does not mean that human beings are able to direct or manipulate God's actions. This would imply that, in particular, the shape of God's answer represents God's freedom. In the

²⁰⁹ Van Oorschot thinks that the defence of God's freedom is the central point of God's answer. According to him, both Job and his friends have exceeded the limit of human possibilities with their arguing and God now defends his freedom, which a human being experiences as hidden (Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 192-209). However, God's freedom as such is not the problem. Job acknowledges this freedom and even argues that God abuses this sovereign position (Job 9). The issue at stake is God's righteousness. Job charges God with unjust actions. However, God's answer makes it clear that such an accusation is unfounded.

prologue, the satan's question of whether Job fears God for nothing (1,9) denounces Job's motives for being righteous as well as God's method of earning honour and worship.²¹⁰ A strict order of reward and punishment would imply that in fact God procures his worship on the one hand and that human beings are able to affect his actions on the other. At the end of the book of Job God opposes this suggestion. His actions can not be directly affected or determined by human beings.

²¹⁰ See §6.2.2.

Chapter 6

Prologue and Epilogue

6.1 Introduction

The poetic dialogue is surrounded by the prose of the prologue and epilogue.¹ The prologue introduces the main character, Job, and provides the necessary ingredients that constitute the central issue of the book of Job. It gives the reader insight into the cause of Job's miserable fate. This is not a reward for bad behaviour but a battle of prestige between God and the satan in which God's honour is at stake. The satan discredits Job as well as God. His insinuations lead to a testing of Job's motives for living an ultimately pious life. The prologue presents a case of extremes. While Job is presented as someone who is ultimately righteous, his miserable fate touches truly everything he has and affects even himself. In this way, the reader can not ignore that Job's suffering gives a disproportionate impression and occurs beyond the concept of retribution. With this, the prologue creates the necessary conditions for a debate about innocent suffering.² The epilogue reports Job's restoration. God acknowledges that Job has spoken correctly and gives Job twice what he had. The story about the cause of Job's suffering and his final restoration forms the framework of the book of Job.

There has been great debate about the question of how the framework is related to the dialogue.³ For, both entities differ, for example, in their way of mentioning God, their social setting, and their style of formulating.⁴ These differences have produced theses which suppose that the framework and dialogue came into being independently. They vary from assuming the existence of two originally independently written sources⁵ or an older chapbook to taking older oral traditions or stories for granted. Furthermore, several scholars also notice a literal growth

¹ Prologue: 1,1-2,13. Epilogue: 42,7-17.

² See also Clines, *Job*, 8.

³ For an overview see W.D. Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt. Die Prosatexte des Hiobbuches und ihre Rolle in seiner Redaktions- und Rezeptionsgeschichte* (BZAW 336), Berlin- New York 2004, 25-49.

⁴ Framework-dialogue: prose-poetry; kind of tale-speeches; patriarchal (pastoral) setting-urban setting; frequent use of divine name (JHWH)-general designation of God (שְׁדָא/אֱלֹהִים) (except 12,9).

⁵ In a recent study, Syring e.g. reconstructs two independent sources which are connected and completed by a redaction (Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt*, 151-168).

within the prologue and epilogue.⁶ Although it is possible that an older oral or written story lies at the basis of the book of Job, the framework and dialogue are, in my opinion, constructed with reference to each other.⁷ The dialogue intends to demonstrate the limits of the concept of retribution by means of which God's actions are understood. This requires the prologue's backing that Job is righteous and does not suffer because of sins.⁸ Since the central issue of the book of Job is constructed by the interdependence of prologue and dialogue, it is reasonable to suppose that the same hand created them both.⁹

This sixth chapter deals with the prologue and the epilogue. First, I deal with the embedding of Job's righteousness (6.2.1), the testing of Job's intentions that result in his misfortune (6.2.2), and Job's reaction to his misfortune (6.2.3) in the prologue. Subsequently, I consider God's final words (6.3.1) and Job's restoration (6.3.2) in the epilogue.

6.2 The Prologue

6.2.1 The Embedding of Job's Righteousness

Job's conviction that he is righteous is an important pillar of Job's protest in the dialogue. Job is of the opinion that God treats him unjustly because God has reserved a miserable fate for him while Job considers himself as blameless. However, such a claim of being innocent is as such disputable because it can not be verified by bystanders. Nobody can fully observe a person's conduct or fathom person's inner thoughts.¹⁰ Therefore, Job's claim that he is righteous needs to be confirmed by an independent authority. Otherwise Job's struggle with God and his

⁶ See the overview of Syring. While the mention of Job in Ezek.14,14.20 leads to the suspicion that the story of Job has older origins, the representation of the satan is considered as a post-exilic development. Therefore, some scholars regard the parts about the satan (1,6-12;2,1-8) as later additions (e.g. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 29-32; Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt*, 151-168). On the other hand, among others, Maag thinks that a third heavenly scene, where the satan is said to cease because of his defeat, was deleted when the dialogue was inserted into the story (Maag, *Wandlung und Verarbeitung*, 39-41). However, the problem of such a view is that the assumption of such a missing scene remains speculative.

⁷ Clines e.g. thinks that the framework and the dialogue (except Job 28 and 32-37) are written by the same author although the story of Job may be much older (Clines, *Job*, lvii-lx). He calls the impression that the framework is a primitive tale a strategy of false naivety (D.J.A. Clines, "False Naivety in the Prologue to Job", in: Clines, *Postmodern II*, 735-744 [originally published in: *Hebrew Annual Review* 9 (1985) 127-136]).

⁸ This relation is also proved by the occurrence of several words and details which the prologue and the dialogue have in common. E.g. several terms for describing Job's righteousness (1,1.8; 2,3): **יָשָׁר**: 9,20-22; **יָשָׁר**: 23,7; **חֹזֶק הַמַּחְזָק**: 27,5-6; the lack of reason/cause: **אֵין** (1,9; 2,3): 9,17; 22,6; Job's children (1,2.4-5.13-15.18-19): 8,4.

⁹ See also §2.2.3.

¹⁰ This is one of the reasons that Job's friends do not believe Job's claim that he is blameless is true.

questioning of God's behaviour could lack legitimate grounds. The prologue of the book of Job offers this embedding of Job's righteousness.¹¹ It informs the reader about Job's irreproachable way of life. The narrator and God both assure that Job is blameless:

1,1.8/2,3...He is blameless and upright, fears God and turns away from evil.

Job's righteousness is described by four different characterizations. The first two words אָמֵן (blameless) and יָשָׁר (upright) are general indications. These roots¹² occur parallel several times.¹³ The root אָמֵן can point to one's innocence¹⁴, is in keeping what God has commanded (1Kgs.9,4), and functions as a characterization of one's heart¹⁵. צַדִּיקָהּ (righteousness) guards one whose way is irreproachable (אָמֵן; Prov.13,6). So, אָמֵן makes it clear that nothing can be reckoned against Job.¹⁶ The root יָשָׁר can be found parallel to צַדִּיק (righteous)¹⁷ and is the opposite of רָשָׁע (wicked)¹⁸. The upright turn away from evil (Prov.16,17) and will be blessed with prosperity (Ps.112,2-4). Job can be rated among this group of upright people. His uprightness is subsequently elaborated upon by the second word pair that describes the attitude of a righteous person. Fearing God refers to a person's respect for God and results in ethical behaviour. It shows wisdom and insight.¹⁹ Those who fear the Lord hate evil (Prov.8,13) and turn away from it (Prov.16,17). A righteous way of life combines respect for God, worship, and ethically pure behaviour. Therefore, רָע (evil) here means neglecting to serve God and performing ethically wrong actions. The prologue portrays Job as one who meets the conditions of an ideal human being according to Wisdom literature's standards. Compared to the narrator, God even increases the uniqueness of Job by stating that

¹¹ Wierenga points to the reader's 'information superiority' in comparison to Job thanks to the scene in heaven. According to him, the reader can develop compassion and sympathy for the pathetic victim thanks to this lead. At the same time, the reader is also forced to sort out the unpleasant knowledge that Job's trouble has been caused with permission of JHWH (L. Wierenga, <<Job>>: *het leed, het vuil en de laster. De prozasecties van <<Job>> gelezen als routeplanner voor het boek <<Job>>*, Kampen 2004, 110-118).

¹² אָמֵן, אָמֵן, and אָמֵן; יָשָׁר and יָשָׁר.

¹³ E.g. 1 Kgs.9,4; Ps.25,21; 37,37; Prov.2,7.21; 28,10.

¹⁴ Gen.20,5; Ps.26,1.11.

¹⁵ E.g. Gen.20,5-6; 1 Kgs.9,4; Ps.78,72; 101,2.

¹⁶ Noah, Jacob, and David also receive this qualification (Gen.6,9; 25,27; 2 Sam.22,24.26; Ps.18,24.26). In Ps.15,2, the ones who may dwell on God's holy hill are those who walk irreproachably (אָמֵן), do what is right, and speak the truth of their heart.

¹⁷ E.g. Isa.26,7; Ps.33,1; 64,11; 97,11; 140,14; Prov.21,18.

¹⁸ Prov.11,11; 12,6; 14,11.

¹⁹ 28,28; Prov.9,10.

there is no one like Job on earth.²⁰ So, the reader knows from the very beginning of the book that Job can not be blamed for any transgression.²¹

The narrator illustrates this irreproachable way of life with two examples. Firstly, Job's prosperity is mentioned. He has seven sons and three daughters and possesses an extended stock (1,2f). Although the concept of retribution has not explicitly been mentioned yet, it is already assumed here.²² Job's wealth is related to his uprightness. In Deut.28,1-14, the one who observes the commandments of the Lord is blessed with prosperity.²³ This implies that upright behaviour can be derived from a person's prosperous state. Equally, the prologue understands Job's prosperity as God's blessing for upright behaviour. Job's wealth proves that he is righteous. Secondly, the narrator provides the reader with insight into Job's religious life. Job's cares for his family to such an extent that he even sacrifices offerings regularly on behalf of his children (1,5). Some scholars regard this as a rigid aspect of Job's piety.²⁴ One could easily get such an impression. However, this seemingly over the top practice serves to underline unconditional devotion to God. Job takes full responsibility as head of the family. In this way, no reader can deny that Job's exceptionally upright.²⁵ This is the necessary condition with which the understanding of God's actions according to the concept of retribution can be questioned in the dialogue.

²⁰ 1,8; 2,3.

²¹ For instance Driver-Gray state that $\square\eta$ (blameless) does not mean perfect in the sense of absolutely sinless (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 3). But Clines rightly remarks that the issues of the book are posed in simple terms of innocence and guilt, so that a suggestion that $\square\eta$ would not mean that Job is sinless is rather questionable (Clines, *Job*, 12).

²² Fohrer and Clines differentiate between blessing and reward. They are of the opinion that it is not a retributive theology of virtue and reward that is at play here but the old idea of God's blessing in which the pious have a share (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 74; Clines, *Job*, 13). However, such a distinction is unlikely in the light of the remainder of the book. Sharing in God's blessings is the logical result of righteousness according to the concept of retribution. The insinuations of the satan in 1,9-11 make it clear that it is seen as a kind of reward. For the satan doubts whether Job remains loyal to God if he loses this reward and receives trouble (compare Hesse, *Hiob*, 24: what befalls one corresponds to a person's actions). Elsewhere, Clines states that Job's offering of sacrifices for his children each morning in case they have offended God (1,5) is a narrative gesture to retributionist theology (D.A.J. Clines, "Job's God", in: E. van Wolde (ed.), *Job's God* (Concilium 2004/4), London 2004, 44).

²³ The satan will question this automatism.

²⁴ E.g. Clines, *Job*, 15. Brenner calls the portrait of Job in the frame story an ironic exaggeration of conventional piety. According to her, it is almost a parody of faith (A. Brenner, "Job the Pious? The Characterization of Job in the Narrative Framework of the Book", *JSOT* 43 (1989) 37-45).

²⁵ See also e.g. Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt*, 63; Hesse, *Hiob*, 26.

6.2.2 Testing Job's Intentions for Living a Pious Life

After a general introduction of the leading character of the book, the focus shifts to heaven (1,6-12). There, God receives his heavenly court like a king.²⁶ The members of this court are the **בני אלהים** (sons of God) who can be considered as heavenly beings in the surroundings of God.²⁷ God enters into conversation with one of these heavenly beings who is more precisely designated as the *satan*. When God becomes aware that the *satan* has returned from wanderings over the earth, he rather proudly enquires whether the *satan* has taken notice of God's servant Job. This would be worth it because nobody on earth is as upright as Job (1,7f). Apparently, the *satan* is familiar with Job's piety and seizes the opportunity to denounce the nature of this piety.

1,9-11 The *satan* answered the Lord: "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not shielded him, his house, and all that he has from every side? You have blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land. But reach out your hand and touch all that is his, then he will surely curse²⁸ you in your face."

In the book of Job, the figure of **השטן** (the *satan*) operates within God's sphere of power. The *satan* can only accomplish something on earth with God's permission (1,12). The article makes it clear that the term **שטן** refers to a function instead of a proper name.²⁹ However, there is the question of what this function exactly includes. The word **שטן** is used for human as well as heavenly beings and basically represents a role of adversary or opponent to God or human beings.³⁰ Some scholars say that the *satan* fulfils the role of accuser.³¹ However, it is unclear whether the word appears in a juridical context elsewhere, so that a semantic basis for this view is lacking.³² Moreover, the *satan*'s words do not bear a full accusation

²⁶ The representation of a divine court can also be found in 1 Kgs.22,19-22, Dan.7,9-14, and Ps.82,1.

²⁷ Here, the word **בן** (son) indicates membership of a group and not the relationship of father and son (cf. Clines, *Job*, 19).

²⁸ Here, the verb **ברך**, which normally means 'to bless', is a euphemism for 'to curse' because the *satan* refers to a negative action against God (so also in 1,5; 2,5.9; 1 Kgs.21,10.13; Ps.10,3).

²⁹ Cf. Horst, *Hiob*, 13; Habel, *Job*, 89; Clines, *Job*, 19-20; Pope, *Job*, 9; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 10. In 1 Chr.21,1, it can be found as a proper name.

³⁰ E.g. Num.22,22.32; Ps.38,21; 71,13; 109,4.20.29.

³¹ G. von Rad, art. **δίαβολος** B., ThWNT 2, 71-74; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 87 ('Anklage-Engel'); Van Selms, *Job I*, 21; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 10-11 ('opposing or accusing men before God'); Gordis, *Job*, 14 ('prosecutor'). Partly also Habel, *Job*, 89 ('accuser, adversary, doubter').

³² Horst, *Hiob*, 14. In Ps.109,6 and Zech.3,1f, a juridical role as accuser is regularly attested to **שטן**. However, a juridical context is not clear at these places. In Zech.3,1f, legal terms and an accusation are lacking. Here, the activity of the *satan* is described with the verb **שטן**

but can better be seen as insinuations which attempt to put Job in a bad light and provoke God. Therefore, here the role of the satan is one of adversary.³³ The satan is Job's adversary in the first place. His opposing behaviour towards Job consists of discrediting Job's piety in front of God which has far-reaching consequences for Job's life. However, the satan functions as an opponent of God too. Although he is under the strict supervision of God, his provoking remarks challenge God and cast doubt on the way God gains worship. Fohrer calls the satan the embodiment of the divine doubt about the disinterestedness of human piety which must be tested.³⁴ However, such doubt would contravene God's unconditional conviction that Job is blameless within the framework of the story. Why would God be suspicious if he is omniscient and is convinced that Job's piety is motivated by devotion? Moreover, the satan has an ontological status in the story itself. Therefore, the satan is not the embodiment of a dark side of God but functions as an independent member of the divine court. Whereas it is clear that God gives permission to test Job³⁵, this permission is inspired by the will to enfeeble the insinuations of the satan rather than God's own doubts about Job's motives.³⁶ The satan operates as an adversary

that can mean 'to thwart' or 'to be/act hostile(/ly)' (compare A.S. van der Woude, *Zacharia* (POT), Nijkerk 1984, 62-63; Horst, *Hiob*, 14). In Ps.109,6, the שָׂטָן does not necessarily fulfil an accusing role. There, he can function as an adversary or hostile enemy (cf. Ps.109,4.20.29). Tur-Sinai sees the origin of the satan as an official of the secret police and describes him as the eyes of God (Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 38-45. Compare Pope, *Job*, 10-11). However, the semantic argumentation of this proposal is questionable (see Fohrer, *Hiob*, 83, note 18). Hölscher identifies the satan with an evil spirit that roams about the earth and brings calamity (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 13). This is unlikely because bringing calamity is not a goal as such in the prologue.

³³ Clines, *Job*, 20; Hesse, *Hiob*, 28; Horst, *Hiob*, 13-14; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 83 ("Menschenfeind").

³⁴ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 83. See also Habel, *Job*, 89. Clines makes a distinction between the level of the story and the level of theological reading. While there are two heavenly personalities in uneasy confrontation for the storyteller, the satan is an embodiment of some of God's functions at the level of a theological reading; he raises the question of whether Job's piety is disinterested, and he puts into effect the divine authorization to afflict Job, according to Clines (Clines, *Job*, 22). Spieckermann is also of the opinion that at a theological level the satan represents the drawback of God. According to him, the 'satanization' (Satanisierung) of God in Job's speeches and particularly the use of the verb שָׂטָן in 16,9 show that the poet of the dialogue has also understood the novel in such a way (H. Spieckermann, "Die Satanisierung Gottes. Zur inneren Konkordanz von Novelle, Dialog und Gottesreden im Hiobbuch", in: I. Kottsieper et al. (eds.), "Wer ist wie du, Herr, unter den Göttern?" *Studien zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte Israels. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 70. Geburtstag*, Göttingen 1994, 435.439).

³⁵ 1,12; 2,6.

³⁶ However, this does not mean that the Lord already knows that Job will pass the test on the basis of his omniscience. God has confidence in Job because he has carefully observed Job's inner side but does not know what has not happened yet (compare Clines, *Job*, 29).

who tries to sow doubt and suspicion. His approach is somewhat tempting and disturbing. Within his limited sphere, the satan opposes Job as well as God.

The satan's role as adversary finds expression in his question of whether Job fears God without reason (1,9). This question denounces Job's intentions as well as God's credibility. Here, the word $\square\eta\eta$ (for nothing) refers particularly to the lack of compensation.³⁷ The satan doubts whether Job's exceptional uprightness is only the result of pure worship. He suggests that Job's efforts to lead a pious life are inspired by the reward Job receives in exchange for his piety rather than by respect for God. God blesses the work of Job's hands and protects³⁸ Job and his property (1,10). According to the satan, it would become clear that Job's loyalty is not only motivated by devotion, if this prosperity was damaged (1,11). God can reach out his hand ($\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta\eta$) and touch ($\eta\eta\eta$) in order to perform blessing as well as destructive deeds.³⁹ The satan incites God to apply this power destructively and touch everything Job has because the disinterested nature of Job's piety can only come to the surface if Job loses his rewards. God agrees to such an experiment under certain conditions. He forbids the satan to stretch out his hand against Job himself in the first instance (1,12). So, a testing of Job's intentions is born with God's permission.

Whereas the satan explicitly denounces Job's intentions for being upright, his insinuations also refer to God. The satan tries to discredit God's credibility in two different ways. Firstly, God's proud presentation of Job's uprightness would be undermined if Job's piety appeared to be motivated by profit. This would mean that either God's 'omniscience' has failed⁴⁰ because God has let himself be dazzled by Job's outward show without taking notice of Job's inner intentions, or God has wilfully given the truth a twist in order to show off in the presence of the satan. Secondly, the nature of God's relationship with human beings is denounced. The satan casts doubt on the way God gains worship. Does a causal relation between a person's actions and what befalls them not mean that God actually procures devotion by rewarding them for their faithfulness?⁴¹ The satan suggests that the reward of protection and blessing could promote righteous behaviour motivated by wrong intentions. One could get the impression that God more or less enforces worship under threat of disaster. It would mean that the motive for having a relationship with God is one of fright or profit rather than respect.⁴² So, the question of whether Job fears God for nothing (1,9) also brings into question God's

³⁷ See also e.g. Gen.29,15; Isa.52,3.

³⁸ In 3,23, Job understands God's shielding ($\eta\eta\eta$) as a negative deed that limits the prospects of human beings.

³⁹ Blessing: e.g. Jer.1,9. Destructive: e.g. Amos 9,5.

⁴⁰ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 85.

⁴¹ So also Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt*, 71.

⁴² Compare Weiser, who states that God would be dethroned and degraded to a guarantee of happiness if the satan gets right (Weiser, *Hiob*, 30).

credibility and honour.⁴³ It denounces the way in which God gains trust and worship.

If readers take note of these implications of the satan's words (1,9-11), they realize that the satan plays a paradoxical role. Whereas the satan appears as a 'bad guy' within the framework of the story in the prologue, his role is considerably less negative from an overall perspective. To Job and God, the satan appears as an adversary who tries to discredit them. But this adversary voices one of the basic issues that the narrator wants to bring up on the level of the book. The book of Job comments on the concept of retribution. It introduces a case of innocent suffering in order to show the limits of a strict application of this concept. Now, it is a remarkable detail that it is the satan who gives the initial impetus to call some aspects of this concept into question.⁴⁴ On the one hand, he points to the danger of a *do ut des* mentality in such a theology. A causal relation between upright behaviour and reward with prosperity may lead to wrong intentions for worshipping God. On the other hand, he remarks on God's approach of gaining worship. God seems to force devotion which would decrease his dignity. This would mean that a relation between God and human beings is not fully free. Then the relation between them would not have worship as a starting point but mutual interest, in which both interests do not need to be equal.⁴⁵ So, the narrator calls in the figure of the satan in order to initiate his debate about the tenability of the concept of retribution.⁴⁶ This debate will be held by questioning in particular some consequences of this concept.

In the second scene in heaven, God meets the satan again (2,1-7a). Here, God establishes with considerable satisfaction that Job has passed the trial after a first round of calamities (1,13-19). Job's misfortune has not caused him to curse God, even though it is not a punishment for wrong behaviour and, therefore, may be an unjust fate in Job's perception. God underlines that sinning is not the reason for this suffering.

2,3 "...He still persists in his integrity, although you have incited me against him in order to destroy him without reason."

Job's attitude towards God has not altered despite his miserable fate. Job still persists in his integrity. In the dialogue, Job uses the same terms in order to stress that he will not put away his integrity (יָצַד; 27,5) and persists (יָצַד) in his righteousness (27,6). Job's wife urges him to cease persisting in his integrity (2,9)

⁴³ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 85; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 87-88.

⁴⁴ See also Habel, who states that the satan also challenges the entire doctrine of reward and retribution with the expression יָצַד (Habel, *Job*, 85)

⁴⁵ See also §8.5.4.

⁴⁶ Compare Clines, *Job*, 27.

but Job will not compromise on this. The opposition between God and Job has come into being as a result of the trouble that the satan has brought about. The verb **סוּר** (to incite) expresses the action of opposing one to another.⁴⁷ The satan has incited God against Job, whereas a legitimate reason is lacking in light of the concept of retribution. God designates the satan's actions as **בְּיָדָא**. Some scholars think that here it means 'without result' and refers to the fact that the supposed effect of Job's calamities fails to occur.⁴⁸ However, here it is more likely that God points to the lack of a legitimate reason for Job's misery if one takes the concept of retribution as a starting point. In this way, the basic problem of the dialogue, that Job suffers innocently, is mentioned here. In 9,17, Job states that God multiplies his wounds without reason (**בְּיָדָא**).⁴⁹ There, he reasons according to the concept of retribution and concludes that God's actions towards him lack legitimate grounds. A similar intention can be found in 2,3. The word **בְּיָדָא** does not express a complete absence of reasons for Job's fate because a matter of prestige between God and the satan has led to it. But the destruction of Job does not have a legitimate grounds according to the concept of retribution.⁵⁰ So, God confirms that Job's wounds are multiplied without reason and explicitly declares that the concept of retribution has been broken in Job's case. He admits that he may have given a hostile impression to Job, even though it was not his intention.

6.2.3 Job's Reaction on His Miserable Fate

Job reacts to the loss of his possessions and children (1,13-19) and the infliction of loathsome sores (2,7) with an attitude of acceptance. He does not reproach God for acting wrongly (1,22) nor curse him (2,10)⁵¹ but accepts God's divine right to give

⁴⁷ 1 Sam.26,19; 2 Sam.24,1; Jer.43,3.

⁴⁸ Horst, *Hiob*, 23-24; Habel, *Job*, 94.

⁴⁹ See for the meaning 'for no reason' also e.g. Ps.35,7.19; 69,5. A reason for hostility is also lacking.

⁵⁰ 2,3 alludes to the question of the satan in 1,9 where **בְּיָדָא** refers to the disinterested nature of Job's piety. Ebach describes the basic meaning of **בְּיָדָא** as 'ohne Äquivalenz'. According to him, 'without reason' and 'without result' are both meant in 2,3 (J. Ebach, ">>Ist es >umsonst<, daß Hiob gottesfürchtig ist?<< Lexikographische und methodologische Marginalien zu **בְּיָדָא** in Hi 1,9", in: J. Ebach, *Hiobs Post. Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Hiobbuch zu Themen biblischer Theologie und zur Methodik der Exegese*, Nuekirchen-Vluyn 1995, 15-31; particularly 19). In 10,8, Job states that God destroys (**בִּלְעֵד**) him even though he is God's creature.

⁵¹ In 2,10, sinning with Job's lips refers particularly to the prediction of the satan that Job would curse God if he lost his prosperity. Pope states that it was apparently not regarded as culpable for Job's thoughts if they remained unexpressed in word of deed (Pope, *Job*, 23). However, such a distinction between thoughts and words is unlikely here because, first of all, the entire story of the prologue serves to demonstrate the imperturbability of Job's loyalty to God and secondly a person's mouth expresses one's inner life (compare 15,5).

and take. This reaction in particular consists of more or less existing formulas.⁵² After the messengers informed Job about the catastrophes that had affected his children and all he has (1,13-19), he plunges himself into mourning and says:

1,21 Naked I came⁵³ from my mother's womb
and naked I shall return there.
The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away;
blessed be the name of the Lord.

This reaction depicts Job's current situation and proves that his loyalty to God does not end despite his innocent suffering. The first half of this verse can be found almost word for word in Eccl.5,14. There, this saying illustrates the state of a wealthy person who has lost all his riches: he does not obtain anything from his toil and dies as naked as he was born. So, naked (עָרַב) refers to the loss of all possessions. Job indicates the relativity of being wealthy with this saying. Riches do not belong to the vital elements of life because they are temporal phenomena and do not give profit at the moment of one's death.⁵⁴ This implies a parrying of the insinuation that Job's piety is inspired by the reward with prosperity. Job makes it clear that riches as such are not his goal in life. There is debate about the word אִשָּׁרָה (there) because a return to the mother's womb when one dies seems strange. In Ps.139,15, the depths of the earth are depicted as the place where the poet has been made. There, they stand parallel to the womb of a mother (Ps.139,13). It is likely that such a representation of the earth's inner parts is also the background of 1,21.⁵⁵ Job is deprived of all his properties and thus 'naked'. His prospect at this moment is living his life in a destitute state until he dies. Nevertheless, Job indicates that he is not stuck with riches because they can not be taken along into death. Some tension could be seen between this kind of resignation and the idea that wealth is the result of a pious life.⁵⁶ It is a proper illustration of the fact that the motivation for Job's loyalty to God goes further than the reward he receives.

The second half of 1,21 identifies God as the origin of Job's misfortune as well as his prosperity.⁵⁷ From Job's perception, God has brought his suffering about because he is the one who gives and takes. Both the good and the bad are accomplished by God. Nowhere in the book of Job is this basic thought questioned. All speakers presuppose that God gives and takes. However, the issue at stake is

⁵² Among other things, the use of the divine name JHWH by the non-Israelite Job points to this assumption (Habel, *Job*, 94; Clines, *Job*, 39; Gordis, *Job*, 18; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 89).

⁵³ Reading Qere.

⁵⁴ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 93; Hesse, *Hiob*, 35.

⁵⁵ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 37. See also Pope, *Job*, 16. Some scholars understand אִשָּׁרָה as a (covert) reference to the underworld (e.g. Budde, *Hiob*, 6; Hesse, *Hiob*, 35).

⁵⁶ See also Clines, *Job*, 36.

⁵⁷ In 42,11, God is also mentioned as the origin of Job's calamities (עָרַב=evil).

whether God does it in a proper way. This will be doubted by Job in the dialogue. Job's blessing of God's name demonstrates that he accepts at this moment that God has taken his prosperity and assesses it as a just or permissible action.⁵⁸ The blessing of the Lord's name expresses respect that is attributed to him (Ps.113,2).⁵⁹ Ironically, the expectation of the satan comes true, though differently from how he intended it to.⁶⁰ While the satan used the word בָּרַךְ euphemistically in order to predict that Job would curse God (1,11), Job now uses this verb to express his continuing loyalty to God. Job accepts that God has taken away the prosperity, which God had earlier given him, and he does not blame God for it (1,22).

After the satan had inflicted Job with loathsome sores in a second round of testing (2,7) and Job's wife urged him to leave his loyalty and curse God (2,9), Job explicitly declares that he accepts both good and bad from God.

2,10 ...Would we then receive the good from God
and not receive the bad?...

Job maintains a certain kind of balance.⁶¹ Someone who enjoys the blessings, with which God provides one, should also be prepared to accept the bad from God's sight. The contrast between good and bad refers to the blessing with prosperity on the one hand and the calamities which harm Job on the other.⁶² Job demonstrates that a righteous person accepts both good and bad from God's hand. This attitude presupposes that God always acts justly and knows what he is doing.⁶³ It is proof of true faith if one is able to accept God's actions without questioning them. This almost stoical attitude of acceptance has been assessed differently. Miskotte, for instance, sees it as Job's highest and best moment of flourishing belief that he later loses in the dialogue.⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, on the contrary, designates these words as no more than what professional comforters scantily measure out the individual.⁶⁵ So, there is the question of whether Job's words of acceptance only express intense faith in God or are also the words of someone who has not registered the real pain of his miserable fate yet and is so paralysed that he can only utter fixed formulas without being fully aware of all their implications. The doubt is then not so much

⁵⁸ See also Fohrer, *Hiob*, 94.

⁵⁹ See for the blessing of God's name also Ps.96,2; 145,21; Neh.9,5.

⁶⁰ Habel, *Job*, 83.93; Clines, *Job*, 36.

⁶¹ Pace Wierenga, who suggests that one should not read a formal parallelism, so that here evil is not directly attributed to God. According to him, here Job does not give his opinion on the origin of evil (Wierenga, <<*Job*>>, 227-229). However, Job always regards God as the origin of both good and bad in the book of Job.

⁶² Here, עָרָא refers to the disasters that have affected Job rather than to moral evil (Habel, *Job*, 96; Clines, *Job*, 54).

⁶³ Compare Clines, *Job*, 54.

⁶⁴ Miskotte, *Antwoord*, 93-94.

⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 197.

concerned with the issue of whether it is true that God gives and takes but more with whether one should accept this fact without protest. Either way, the continuation in the dialogue shows that acceptance is not Job's only and final response. A way of wrestling, complaining, asking, and accusing will follow. Obviously, more needs to be said rather than just patient acceptance.⁶⁶

6.3 The Epilogue

6.3.1 God's Final Words

The rejection of Job's words in God's answer is not God's final response to Job's speeches. When God takes the floor in the epilogue once again and addresses Eliphaz, he makes it clear that Job has spoken true things unlike his three friends. Apparently, Job's arguing, accusing, and complaining are not fully rejected after all.

42,7 ..“My anger is kindled against you and your two friends because you have not spoken of⁶⁷ me what is true as my servant Job.”..

The friends have kindled God's anger because their words were not true in God's eyes. In 1 Sam.23,23, the verb יָצַד refers to reliable and correct data about the hiding places of David.⁶⁸ Contrary to Job, the friends have said things which lack

⁶⁶ Newsom remarks that in the prose tale the principle of retribution quite literally has no place in Job's moral imagination (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 64). I would say that at this moment Job does not fully realize yet what it implies with regard to his perception of God that this miserable fate happens to him as a blameless person. Indeed, his faithfulness to God prevails. Later, the problematic side of this event in relation to his concept of God is also getting through to Job.

⁶⁷ Some scholars translate לִּי as 'to me', referring to the attitude with which Job and the friends have spoken because the meaning 'of me' can not adequately be explained (Budde, *Hiob*, 254; M. Oeming, “>>Ihr habt nicht recht von mir gereredet wie mein Knecht Hiob<< Gottes Schlusswort als Schlüssel zur Interpretation des Hiobbuches und als kritische Anfrage an die moderne Theologie”, *EvTh* 60 (2000) 103-114). Van Hecke adopts this translation and is of the opinion that, unlike Job, the friends are blamed for not speaking to God (Van Hecke, *Job 12-14*, 425-426.432). However, the issue at stake is how God's actions towards Job should be understood. The debate between Job and his friends concentrated on the question of whether or not God had performed reprehensible actions in Job's case. God now refers to the views which the friends and Job have expressed about this. Moreover, if God meant to blame the friends for not speaking to God at all, the characterization נְכוֹנִים (what is true/right) is somewhat strange. For, they would not have spoken in a wrong way to God rather they would not have directed themselves to God at all (cf. I. Kottsieper, “>>Thema verfehlt!<< Zur Kritik Gottes an den drei Freunden in Hi 42,7-9”, in: M. Witte (ed.), *Gott und Mensch im Dialog. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag II* (BZAW 345/II), Berlin-New York 2004, 777; Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt*, 108-109; See also Strauß, *Hiob*, 397).

⁶⁸ See also Deut.17,4. In Ps.5,10, there is no truth in the mouth of the enemies.

such correctness according to God. The statement that Job has spoken correctly of God is particularly puzzling because God rejects Job's speaking as words without knowledge in God's answer. Therefore, there is the question of which elements in the speeches of Job and his friends God exactly refers to.⁶⁹ Since it is likely that the dialogue and the framework were constructed with reference to each other, it does not suffice to explain this apparent contradiction between the dialogue and the epilogue diachronically. It is improbable that God refers to Job's words in the prologue or only to Job's acknowledgement of lacking sufficient insight into God's counsel at the end of the dialogue because God opposes the words of the friends to Job's words.⁷⁰ Moreover, since the prologue provides the reader with its own affirmation of Job's correct behaviour, a new one in the epilogue would be unnecessary.⁷¹ Therefore, God's statement in 42,7 can best be considered as concerning all that Job and his friends have said in the dialogue.⁷²

⁶⁹ For an overview of the different proposals in the history of research see Oeming, "Nicht recht von mir geredet", 104-110.

⁷⁰ Cf. Noort, *Duister duel*, 51. See also Oeming, "Nicht recht von mir geredet", 106. Several scholars think that Job's final answer (40,4-5; 42,2-6) speaks the truth about God (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 4; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 539; Strauß, *Hiob*, 397). De Wilde selects an element from the dialogue and one from Job's final answer about which Job is right (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 405). However, such an approach is rather arbitrary; God should have specified what is true more precisely.

⁷¹ 1,22; 2,10. In 2,10, the narrator even explicitly mentions Job's speaking.

⁷² So Pope, *Job*, 350; Habel, *Job*, 583; Gordis, *Job*, 494; Noort, *Duister duel*, 51. Oeming argues that God does not dismiss the words of the friends because he basically does not say anything new with regard to the content of his answer that the friends have not already said (Oeming, "Nicht recht von mir geredet", 106). Newsom points out that several elements from the speeches of the friends come true in the epilogue. For her, this is one of the reasons for reading the book of Job polyphonically; because the epilogue displays a different opinion to the dialogue and the divine speeches (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 20-21). However, there is a fundamental difference. Even though Zophar, for example, precludes God's most important point that human beings can not fully see through God's ways (11,7-8), the friends differ in the sense that they do not render account of this insight for their own reasoning. The friends have a fixed idea of how God operates and think that they can observe God's dealings in this world by deducing them from a person's fate. Therefore, God can criticize the words of the friends without undermining his own statements. Köhlmoos thinks that Eliphaz was wrong in not accepting the opportunity to answer God when God spoke to him in the night vision (4,12-21). According to her, Job acted correctly because he answered God after God spoke to him from the whirlwind (Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes*, 349). However, this view is rather unlikely because first it is unclear exactly who delivers the night vision (on the ambiguous character of 4,12-16, see Harding, "Spirit of Deception", 137-166) and secondly the reference to Eliphaz' two friends in 42,7 remains unexplained. Kottsieper thinks that the friends are reproached because they failed to go into the actual theme of Job's complaint; that is why God gives life to human beings if they have to suffer (Kottsieper, "Thema verfehlt!", 781). However, Job's complaint particularly addresses God's unrighteous actions in the dialogue.

If this judgement refers to the complete dialogue, the following two questions have to be answered. What exactly was incorrect in the speeches of the friends and how is God's approval of Job's speaking related to God's former rejection in God's answer? One could argue that Job and his friends do not really differ in their approach. Both understand God's actions according to the concept of retribution. Both are hardly prepared to deviate from this clear-cut picture. However, the application of this fixed concept of God leads to opposite conclusions. On the one hand, Job thinks that God acts unjustly because Job suffers innocently; on the other, the friends conclude that Job must have sinned since misery is a punishment for wrong behaviour. The contrast between Job and his friends lies in this different outcome. The reader knows that the conclusion of the friends is wrong because a trial is the cause of Job's suffering. On the contrary, Job speaks the truth in the sense that he is right in his conviction that God can not have inflicted his suffering because of possible sins.⁷³ It is true that also Job's conclusion is inadequate. For this, God reproaches Job in his answer. However, Job was right in questioning the legitimacy of God's actions towards him from his perspective with the concept of retribution as the interpretative framework. Therefore, God prefers Job's struggle in order to understand the background of God's actions to the friend's frenetic efforts to save their clear-cut concept of God at the price of false allegations against Job.⁷⁴ So, the whole diversity from complaining, asking questions, accusing, and denunciation of God to a trust in God that is never given up is assessed as correct speaking of God. After God's rejection of Job's words in God's answer, a reader might have thought that the friends were right in their conclusion that Job had sinned and that Job had followed their advice to change at the end. However, this source of misunderstanding is eliminated now.⁷⁵ Although Job's conclusions were inadequate as such, Job has spoken true things of God within the limited space that his range of interpretative tools allows him, unlike his friends.⁷⁶

6.3.2 Job's Restoration

The book of Job ends like a fairy-tale. After a period of intense misery, God alters Job's sad situation. Job is restored and receives even more than he had.

42,10 And the Lord turned Job's fate⁷⁷ after he had prayed for his friends.
And the Lord gave Job twice of all he had.

⁷³ Compare Rowley, *Job*, 344.

⁷⁴ Compare Gordis, *Job*, 494; Habel, *Job*, 583.

⁷⁵ Weiser, *Hiob*, 267; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 538; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 404.

⁷⁶ With this, the whole divine speech does not necessarily become ironic if 42,7 is understood to refer to the complete dialogue (pace Oeming, "Nicht recht von mir geredet", 107).

⁷⁷ Reading Qere.

The restoration follows Job's mediation on behalf of his friends. Only Job's prayer can stop God's anger at the friends (42,8). The story tells that Job has granted this favour to them (42,10). Subsequently, God restores his former state. The word pair *שוב שבו* indicates a change which God brings in one's fate mostly for the better but sometimes for the worse.⁷⁸ It can refer to a return to a previous state.⁷⁹ God restores Job's previous prosperity and even gives him double the amount he had. He blesses Job's remaining life with enormous wealth, a new family, and longevity (42,12-17).

There is debate about the nature of Job's restoration. While several scholars understand it as an act of grace⁸⁰, others regard it as a rightful consequence of the recognition that Job was right. If grace is taken as God's favour, which does not depend on a person's deeds, it is questionable whether it is a matter of grace in this context. The conclusion that Job has spoken rightly (42,7) and the mention of Job's prayer on behalf of his friends (42,10) as proof of Job's continuing upright behaviour precede Job's restoration. These indications of Job's righteousness suggest that a certain kind of balance between a person's actions and what befalls them is maintained. The restoration of Job's previous state seems a logical consequence of the fact that Job has passed the test of innocent suffering by remaining faithful to God despite his rebelliousness. Although there could be an element of restitution for suffered damage⁸¹ or of consolation for undergoing an unwarranted trial⁸² in this generous restoration⁸³, its basis is Job's righteous behaviour during the dialogue for which he receives prosperity again.⁸⁴ Noort calls the book of Job a book of the united antithesis because nowhere is the doctrine of retribution attacked in such a way as in this book but almost no book has such a fairy-tale ending in which the relation between a person's actions and what befalls them is fully confirmed.⁸⁵ However, if one realizes that God's answer does not fully reject the concept of retribution but in particular criticizes the reducibility of a

⁷⁸ For better e.g.: Deut.30,3; Jer.29,14; Hos.6,11; Ps.14,7. For worse e.g.: Ezek.16,53ff.

⁷⁹ E.g. Ezek.16,53ff, although it is the return to a bad state here.

⁸⁰ Habel, *Job*, 584-585; Weiser, *Hiob*, 269; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 543

⁸¹ Strauß, *Hiob*, 399; Wierenga, <<*Job*>>, 242-248.

⁸² Habel, *Job*, 585.

⁸³ Van de Beek thinks that the double amount includes God's acknowledgement that he has been acting unjustly in the case of Job. He argues that in Ancient Eastern criminal law, double must be given if something has been stolen, according to Exod.22,4 (Van de Beek, *Rechtvaardiger dan Job*, 91-92). However, God can restore (Isa.61,7; Zech.9,12) or punish (Isa.40,2; Jer.16,18; 17,18) someone with a double amount. This is not always connected to an assumption of suffered damage that has to be compensated. In the epilogue, a further indication that God admits guilt is lacking. Therefore, the double amount indicates the abundance with which God restores Job (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 543).

⁸⁴ Compare Hesse, *Hiob*, 209. Understanding Job's restoration as only a reward for his willingness to pray for his friends (so Hölscher, *Hiob*, 101) is, therefore, too restricted.

⁸⁵ Noort, *Duister duel*, 52.

person's former behaviour by means of it, this fairy-tale ending in the epilogue conflicts less with the previous dialogue than scholars sometimes think.⁸⁶ Job's restoration is the confirmation that Job's claim that he is righteous was not vain. Wickedness was not the cause of his severe suffering.

⁸⁶ E.g. Newsom is of the opinion that at the narrative level the prose conclusion introduces a contradiction. She refers in particular to 42,7. For Newsom, this is an important argument for reading the book of Job as a polyphonic text (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 20-21). Clines has argued that the epilogue undermines the foregoing part of the book because it affirms the doctrine of retribution again while the book of Job has tried to demolish it in the foregoing part (D.J.A. Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job", in: D.J.A. Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (JSOT.SS 94), Sheffield 1990, 112-114). Either way, Clines later also proposes a second possible reading of the epilogue in which the epilogue does not affirm the doctrine of retribution at all (Clines, "Does the Book of Job Suggest", 106).

Chapter 7

Summary and Conclusions of the Biblical Theological Part

The book of Job does not fully reject that there is a relation between a person's actions and what befalls them. God shows that he punishes the wicked. Also, Job's restoration at the end of the book appears to represent a balance between one's behaviour and one's fate. Nevertheless, the book of Job does question a theology that understands God's actions in this world according to the concept of retribution. Firstly, it points to the nature of devotion that this retributive view might provoke. For Job as well as God, keeping a relationship with the other could be prompted by a *do ut des* motive. On the one hand, Job's reason for living a pious life might be reward with prosperity instead of unconditional respect. On the other hand, God might procure or force human devotion, if punishment is the consequence of a wicked way of life. Secondly, it becomes clear that the concept of retribution leaves no room for innocent suffering. This is the point where the concept fails. As long as it remains true that Job is blameless and that his suffering is out of proportion in relation to his way of life, the only conclusion can be that God deals unjustly if it is assumed that God acts according to the concept of retribution. Job's observation that the wicked prosper serves as a backing for this conclusion. This unrighteous action makes God unreliable in Job's eyes. With this impasse –the impression God acts arbitrarily and unjustly if the common concept of God is maintained– that culminates in Job 9, the book of Job demonstrates the limits of the concept of retribution. It gets stuck in cases of innocent suffering. Thanks to the prologue, the reader knows that Job rightly believes in his integrity. What is more, the prologue shows that the concept of retribution has already been broken by permitting the testing of Job's motives for living a pious life. So, the book of Job reveals some problematic aspects of a theology that understands God's actions exclusively according to retributive standards.

Job and his friends take the concept of retribution as a starting point. Eliphaz makes it clear that people reap what they have sown. The friends in particular demonstrate another implication of the concept of retribution. This is the fact that a person's behaviour is calculable. For, a person's fate reveals one's former behaviour.¹ The friends hold to their belief that God does not pervert justice. In

¹ Job is actually doing the same when he derives from his fate that God treats him unjustly.

their view, it is therefore unavoidable that Job has committed serious sins. His miserable fate can only be punishment for wickedness. While this strict nexus between deed and consequence is the basic worldview of the friends, they mention several other facets of suffering within this framework. There is the call to take account of the pedagogical aspect of a bitter fate. God warns by means of setbacks and tries to correct wrong ways of life. When human beings unconsciously act sinfully, their trouble should make them aware of their behaviour. However, divine punishment is not irreversible. If a sinner abandons his wicked way of life, his miserable fate will change for better. In order to protect God's righteousness from each possible attack, some modifications to the concept of retribution are introduced. The motif of human imperfection limits the chance that a human being is completely righteous. In its view, being righteous is mainly a theoretical possibility. However, the fundamental difference between God and human beings entails that practically nobody is righteous before the Creator. With this, the friends undermine in advance Job's conviction that he is blameless. Nevertheless, the concept of retribution is broken once by a summary remark of Zophar. Zophar suggests that God has forgiven some of Job's sins. Paradoxically, this excursion outside the concept of retribution actually serves to defend it. For, the notion of forgiveness is mentioned in order to reject the fact that God has treated Job unjustly.

While Job initially appears to accept his innocent suffering, a struggle with his miserable fate unfolds in the dialogue. The patiently suffering Job of the prologue changes into a rebel against God in the dialogue. In his speeches, Job considers several aspects of God's involvement in human suffering. The image of the lawsuit offers a pattern by means of which Job is able to put the impasse of his situation and his desires into words. On the one hand, Job understands his misery as God's accusation against him. Apparently, God considers Job as an opponent. On the other hand, Job uses this image in order to express his desire to denounce what is in his eyes God's unjust treatment of him. Job defends his righteousness extensively. For him, God has become one who besieges him unjustly because God does not act according to the concept of retribution. So, Job does not reject this retributive concept. It is because Job holds on to it that he can only infer that God perverts justice. At the same time, the image of the lawsuit also indicates Job's impotence. For, it is impossible to have a fair case with God because of the fundamental difference between God and human beings.

This experience of being treated unjustly by God makes Job wonder whether God is different from how he thought or whether God had other motives for creating human beings than is commonly accepted. Was the Creation of human beings meant for having a toy to play with and hunt instead of having a mutual

relationship based on respect? Or, does God lack some divine attributes such as omniscience, through which he can not observe Job's case correctly? While Job charges God with unjust actions and suggests that God had dubious motives for the Creation of human beings, the only possible way out of his misery is an appeal to this same God. With this, the ultimate consequence of a monotheistic concept of God comes to light in all its intensity. When God has turned against someone, only God himself is able to cause a change. Among other things, the image of the lawsuit demonstrates the impotence of human beings before God. They are unable to enter into a legal case with God. Therefore, a solution in Job's case can only come from God himself. Only God himself is a match for God. Therefore, Job calls on God as his witness and his redeemer in order to act against God. Even though God is hostile towards Job, the only realistic hope for an outcome is placing his trust and hope in this same God.

God's answer discusses two different aspects with regard to the concept of retribution. On the one hand, it does not fully reject this concept. God gives the wicked their just reward. At the same time, Job's new prosperity in the epilogue also displays the awareness that Job's suffering 'for no reason' and his remaining faithfulness to God need to be acknowledged by means of restoration of his former state. On the other hand, God criticizes that human beings can determine and observe God's actions by a theology in which there is a close relation between a person's actions and what befalls them. Job's strict reasoning according to this scheme darkens God's counsel and frustrates God's justice. God's actions are more diverse or at least surpass human frames of reference. This entails that a person's previous behaviour can not simply be deduced from one's fate. Hence, the concept of retribution is not generally applicable to God's actions. This has already been confirmed by the prologue where the battle of prestige between God and the satan was the cause of Job's trouble. So, God is not only an automaton that calculatedly rewards human beings according to their conduct; God's actions are more complex and go beyond human observation.

There is some substance in God's answer to Job, in which he uses a counter picture in order to respond. In reply to Job's impression that God acts arbitrarily, perverts justice, and benefits the wicked, God makes it clear that divine actions are creative, preserving, provide with life at unexpected places and punish the wicked. The fundamental problem is Job's lack of insight into God's counsel. The order and considerations which are at the basis of the Creation and God's actions in it go beyond Job's ability to observe. God confronts Job with the fundamental difference between God and human beings. Actually, God manifests his transcendence. Paradoxically he makes this clear by revealing several elements of his counsel. Job lacks knowledge of God's counsel because he does not adopt a similar position to God. He does not have God's eye view. This is the reason for Job's inadequate assessment of God's treatment of him. After God's overwhelming exposition, Job

admits that there is a fundamental difference between him and God. He is indeed impotent before God and unable to reply to God anymore as he foresaw earlier. God's answer makes Job aware of the fact that he has spoken about divine matters without having sufficient knowledge. Therefore, Job ceases making further charges or replying with counter arguments.

Whereas the book of Job wants in particular to denounce some implications of a theology in which God's actions are understood according to the concept of retribution, it also demonstrates how to cope with life in times of distress. Job's continued faithfulness to God might be exemplary for those who suffer innocently. This is shown to have an extra dimension due to God's remark in the epilogue that Job has spoken rightly of God. Even though Job's impression of God's actions was not correct, his protest and his conclusion that God did not treat him correctly were right within the frame of the interpretative tools that was at his disposal. Apparently Job was allowed to have this battle with God when misfortune affected him. If the book of Job is also meant to give some instruction on how one should behave in times of trouble, it offers a frame within which the struggle with trouble can be pursued. This ranges from despair and rebellion to holding on to and maintaining hope in God despite everything that happens. Hence, the correct way to behave is not restricted to unconditional acceptance according to the book of Job.²

² See also E.J. Keulen, "Van acceptatie tot rebellie. Job als paradigmatisch gelovige", *Schrift* 218 (2005) 55-59.

Part 2

Chapter 8

Systematic Theological Reflections on the Issue of Theodicy by Means of the Book of Job

8.1 Introduction

This study intends to explore the contribution the book of Job could make to the systematic theological issue of theodicy. It tries to realize this goal in two different steps.¹ First of all, it maps out from a biblical theological point of view how the different characters in the book of Job speak of God and human beings in relation to the existence of evil.² This has been elaborated upon in Part 1 of this study (Ch.2-7). The second step consists of a systematic theological reflection on the issue of theodicy by means of this biblical material in order to examine what the book of Job has to offer and to ask systematic theology with regard to this issue. This eighth chapter (Part 2) deals with the second step. It considers the value of the book of Job for systematic theological thinking about God's relation to the existence of evil.

The evaluation of the value of the book of Job for contemporary theological discussions with respect to the issue of theodicy consists of an interaction between the biblical material and systematic theological insights. On the one hand, systematic theology is confronted by topics which the book of Job gives rise to. For example, the issue of knowledge is an important topic in the book; it becomes clear that the extent of one's insight into God's actions depends on the position which one adopts. While the all-knowing narrator informs the reader about the encounters between God and the satan in heaven, Job and his friends do not know what has taken place in the divine realms. God points out this difference to Job. Job lacks the capacity to adopt a position from which he is able to observe God's actions in relation to the Creation (40,9-14). Therefore, Job has not comprehended the expanses of the earth (38,18) nor does he know the laws of heaven (38,33). The possibilities and limits of having insight into God's motives and acting play an

¹ See §1.3.

² I take the all-knowing narrator to be one of the characters.

important role when one reflects on the issue of theodicy. This issue deals with the question of how God's involvement in the existence of evil should be understood. A theodicy offers an answer to this question and tries to justify God's choice to create a world that includes evil and clarify his intentions. Now, the biblical material from the book of Job confronts this systematic theological debate on the issue of theodicy with an epistemological question. It asks whether the position of a systematic theologian is equal to Job's or the all-knowing narrator's position. What does this imply ways of speaking about God in relation to evil?

On the other hand, the biblical material is challenged by systematic theological questions. This is necessary in order to evaluate to what extent specific views from the book of Job are applicable in current theological thinking. The implication of this approach is that it is possible that the biblical material can be confronted with an issue that would not have been raised at the time(s) the text came into being. For instance, I contrast the concept of retribution with the free will of human beings. Then I wonder to what extent belief in God is still a free choice, if worshipping God is affected by the threat of a miserable fate when one fails to worship. Don't human beings more or less become puppets or robots in such a theology? One could argue that notions such as 'puppet' or 'robot' are unfamiliar concepts in the Ancient Near East. Or that such a theological question overreaches the scope of the biblical text. It is justifiable, nevertheless, to ask such a question because it is necessary for the evaluation of the relevance of the biblical material for systematic theological thinking.³

The epistemological issue, which the book of Job gives rise to, acts as a guidance for the structure of this eighth chapter. The chapter examines three epistemological perspectives from which a systematic theologian can theologize. They are theological realism (8.2), theological idealism (8.3), and theological relationism (8.4). Special attention is paid to how God's role with regard to evil is understood within the context of these perspectives. On the one hand, I consider what implications the insights about knowledge from the book of Job have for these three epistemological perspectives. On the other hand, I look at whether the book of Job offers clues which support specific systematic theological views on the relation between God and evil. The conclusion is that theological relationism meets the insights of the book of Job more closely than theological realism or theological idealism. Subsequently, I propose to approach the biblical material from this perspective (8.5). The book of Job can then be taken as a debate about how the relation between God and human beings can be understood when evil occurs. This debate concentrates on the different roles God fulfils in relation to the sufferer in times of innocent suffering.

³ See §1.2.2.

8.2 Theological Realism

8.2.1 Theological Realism

The perspective of *theological realism* pretends to describe the reality, when it deals with God and God's relation to the world of human beings. Theological realism supposes that its models are reliable copies of the structure of the reality between God and the world.⁴ An example of a form of theological realism is the work of Pannenberg who sees 'the reality of God' as the central topic of a systematic theological exposition.⁵ According to him, knowledge of this reality can be acquired because God reveals himself in this world by his historical actions.⁶ For Pannenberg, these historical actions by God are self-evident and do not require additional (inspired) explanation.⁷ In this way, Pannenberg assumes that the divine reality is knowable independently of the frame of reference with which human beings perceive the reality around them. It is objectively clear that a certain event is an action by God according to him. However, this is problematic. For, events can be interpreted with and without God's interference.⁸ That a specific event is an intervention of God can only be established objectively if someone is able to adopt a neutral position external to God and the world. For, only from such an external position, can one observe God's actions in the Creation as an object from which s/he is not part of her/himself. This can be illustrated by means of the book of Job. While the all-knowing narrator watches the deliberations in heaven as well as their consequences on earth and knows the true cause of Job's misfortune, Job and his friends are not familiar with these things. There remains the question of which position a systematic theologian adopts; that of the all-knowing narrator or of Job and his friends.

Pannenberg's approach is reminiscent of the way in which Job and his friends perceive God's actions in actual historical events. The friends and Job both interpret misfortune as punishment from God and prosperity as his blessing. For them, these events are self-evident actions by God. God reveals himself with such deeds in history.⁹ Thus, God's actions are traceable and calculable. Job's misfortune must therefore be a punishment for sins he committed.¹⁰ However, a problem arises here; the suffering Job considers himself to be blameless. Job draws

⁴ See also L.J. van den Brom, *Creatieve Twijfel. Een studie in de wijsgerige theologie*, Kampen 1990, 31.

⁵ W. Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie I*, Göttingen 1988, 69-72.

⁶ Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie I*, 266. Pannenberg thinks that it is closer to the spirit of the biblical traditions if theology seeks to reconstruct God's historical actions in the sequence of events which the bible records (254).

⁷ Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie I*, 272-273

⁸ Van den Brom, *Creatieve Twijfel*, 25-26.

⁹ Elihu also stresses the warning and correcting nature of misfortune (§3.5.2).

¹⁰ See the conclusion of Eliphaz in 22,5-9 (§3.2.2).

the conclusion that God acts unjustly in his case because he suffers innocently.¹¹ What happens is that Job's 'theological' frame of interpretation –the concept of retribution– determines how Job (and also his friends) associates a historical event to God's dealings in the world. But God criticizes Job's way of reasoning and calls this frame of interpretation 'frustration of God's justice'.¹² Job lacks understanding of God's comings and goings because he does not adopt a similar position to God (40,9-14). While Job interpreted his misfortune as an illegitimate punishment by God, God calls this opinion a flawed explanation of what has befallen Job. This illustrates that God's actions in history are not self-evident. The problem is that Job does not have a God's eye view from which he can objectively observe how God acts in the world.¹³ Job is not familiar with everything that the narrator has observed from his point of view, a view which is external to God and the world. God's answer makes it clear that Job's understanding of God's dealings which is based on Job's specific 'theological' frame of interpretation does not fully correspond with the divine reality. This entails that events are not as self-evident as Pannenberg thinks.

Job's knowledge of God's actions in the world differs from the narrator's insight into it due to the different positions which they adopt in relation to God and the world. The narrator, who surveys everything, notices the true reason for Job's misfortune from a position external to God and the world. This is the position that theological realism supposes in its theologizing. Job, on the contrary, does not have such a view into heaven. He can only try to understand his miserable fate by means of his frame of interpretation while being unfamiliar with what happened in heaven. If this difference in position is applied to the perspective from which systematic theologians theologize, the question is which position do they adopt when they speak of God and human beings in relation to God? Do they adopt the position of the all-knowing narrator who watches heaven and earth from an external point of view? Or are they situated in Job's position, which is that of a relationship to God in which he tries to understand his suffering by means of the interpretative tools at his disposal, without losing his belief in God? In my view, the second option adheres to the position of systematic theologians most closely because human beings are unable to step outside themselves and the world in

¹¹ This impression is strengthened by Job's observation that there are wicked people who live prosperous lives.

¹² 40,8. That Job's impression of God's actions does not correspond with the reality becomes clear in two ways. Firstly, the reader has become aware from the prologue that a battle of prestige between God and the satan is the source of Job's misfortune and not previous wicked behaviour. Secondly, God demonstrates in his answer by means of a counter picture that his actions differ to what Job thought.

¹³ See e.g. God's question of whether Job observed God's creation of the world (38,4).

which they live in order to observe heaven and earth from a position external it and God.¹⁴

This conclusion has considerable implications for the way systematic theologians can portray God and human beings in relation to God. Job becomes aware of the fact that he is not able to describe the reality of God because this goes beyond his abilities of observation (42,3). If systematic theologians adopt a similar position to Job, then they are unable to observe God's reality from a point of view external to God and the world. This implies that the goal of theological realism to describe the reality of God can not be achieved; it is impossible to watch the reality of God. God's answer demonstrates the limits of human observation and knowledge. This insight asks for modesty with regard to the status of theological claims. Systematic theological descriptions can not be more than attempts to perceive God's reality.¹⁵

A specific form of theological realism is theism. Theism thinks that there is one personal God who is eternal and omnipresent, almighty, omniscient, perfectly autonomous, perfectly good, and transcendent and who is the Creator of the universe.¹⁶ One can label theism as a form of realism because it supposes that its sound construction represents a reality which also exists independently from the theologian. However, the presence of evil in the world has given rise to a huge debate about the viability of theism. On the one hand, atheists argue that the presence of evil is incompatible with the existence of a theistic God. On the other, theodicists defend theism and try to explain why the existence of evil is compatible with the existence of a perfectly good God. Both atheism and theodicy deal with a form of theological realism. In this section, I have highlighted some problems in theological realism and illustrated them by means of the book of Job. I now examine further what implications the story of Job has for the ideas and arguments of atheists and theodicists. First, I deal with some arguments for atheism (8.2.2) and consider several defences of theism (8.2.3). Later, I make some remarks about the fact that these opposing parties both treat God as a member of our moral community (8.2.4).

8.2.2 Evil as Argument for Atheism

The existence of evil has functioned as an important argument against the conviction that a theistic God exists. Atheists value evil as logically or evidentially

¹⁴ L.J. van den Brom, "Theologie als verbeelding over grenzen heen", *NTT* 58 (2004) 282; *Theoloog als jongleur*, 36.

¹⁵ One could argue that critical realism takes this restriction into account. Pannenberg e.g. ascribes the status of 'hypothesis' to his descriptions (Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie I*, 66). However, this does not change the methodological objection that human beings are unable to take an external position in order to observe and describe the divine reality.

¹⁶ See e.g. R. Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy) (rev. ed.), Oxford 1993 [1977], 99-238.

incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent and perfectly good God. Belief in the existence of such a God is therefore irrational according to them. An example of the logical argument can be found in a classic article of Mackie.¹⁷ Mackie formulates some additional premises, which connect the terms ‘good’, ‘evil’, and ‘omnipotent’, in order to demonstrate the contradiction between the existence of a theistic God and the presence of evil in this world. These additional principles are that ‘good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can’ and that ‘there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do’. Mackie is of the opinion that, from these premises, it follows that a good omnipotent being eliminates evil completely and therefore that the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.¹⁸ This is proof that religious belief is positively irrational according to Mackie.¹⁹

However, these two additional premises have been subject to debate. The issue is whether they are as cogent as Mackie thinks.²⁰ Firstly, one can say that Mackie’s premises suggest that there is a kind of balance between ‘good’ and ‘evil’. In his reasoning, good and evil are related to each other and this gives rise to the impression that this relation can be influenced in a causal way. It appears that evil can be removed or compensated for by good. However, even a lot of good can not remove the pain and damage which evil causes. Therefore, the tenability of Mackie’s additional premises becomes questionable. Secondly, the question arises of how human beings can establish the validity of these premises with certainty. Howard-Snyder points out that the two additional premises and the proposition that ‘God is omnipotent and God is wholly good’ rule out the possibility that ‘evil exists’ only if the additional premises are necessary truths. However, he doubts whether the premise that ‘good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can’ is a necessary truth. For, it is possible to formulate the proposition that ‘there is a morally justifying reason for God to permit evil He could prevent, a reason we could not know of, and He permits evil for that reason, and evil results’, according to Howard-Snyder.²¹ This observation

¹⁷ J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”, in: M.M. Adams-R.M. Adams (eds.), *The Problem of Evil* (ORPh), Oxford 1990, 25-37 [=J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”, *Mind* 64 (1955), 200-212].

¹⁸ Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”, 26. In his article, Mackie disputes several attempts that try to justify why God created or permitted evil in the world.

¹⁹ Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”, 25.

²⁰ This subsection mainly concentrates on the first premise. There has also been a considerable debate about the question of how God’s omnipotence should be understood. Does it e.g. go beyond the rules of logic or can an omnipotent being limit its omnipotence so that its power is restricted?

²¹ D. Howard-Snyder, “Introduction: The Evidential Argument of Evil”, in: D. Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument of Evil*, Bloomington-Indianapolis 1996, xiii. For a more extensive treatment of the issue of morally sufficient reason, see e.g. N. Pike, “Hume

reveals a crucial problem. Human beings can never exclude the fact that God has morally sufficient reasons for permitting evil. They can only exclude the fact that God could have a morally sufficient reason, if someone has insight into the motives underlying God's behaviour. This requires the ability to adopt a position external to God and the world as the all-knowing narrator in the book of Job does. As long as human beings are unable to adopt such an external position, they can not claim to have examined all of the possibilities.²² Therefore, it is impossible to maintain that 'good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can' is a necessary truth. Hence, Mackie's conclusion on the basis of logical arguments is not cogent. Human beings lack the overview to determine this with certainty.

This objection is partly met by the evidential argument derived from evil. The evidential argument distinguishes itself from the logical argument by its awareness that it can not be *proved* that God permits some suffering which is pointless. Therefore, it considers whether an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good being does have *reasonable grounds* for failing to prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering. This would be the case if, for instance, there is some greater good that is obtainable by the wholly good being, only if the wholly good being permits an instance of intense human or animal suffering.²³ Rowe cites the example of a fawn that is trapped in a forest fire, is horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering. Even though Rowe is unable to find any greater good which would have been lost if the fawn's suffering had been prevented, he makes it clear that we are not in a *position* to prove that this is true. According to him, we can only have rational grounds for believing that this is true.²⁴ So, the evidential argument displays some modesty with regard to what can be said of God. It realizes that human beings are unable to adopt position from which they can observe God's actions as well as the coherence of everything that happens in the world –as God's answer has made clear.

However, it is questionable whether Rowe draws the obvious conclusion from the awareness which he puts into words. For, he finally concludes that we do have rational support for atheism. Rowe concludes that "it seems quite unlikely that *all* the instances of intense suffering occurring daily in our world are intimately related to the occurrence of a greater good or the prevention of evils at least as bad".²⁵ Whereas Rowe's inductive way of reasoning shows some modesty with regard to the human capacity of observation, he

on Evil", in: Adams-Adams, *Problem of Evil*, 38-52 [=N. Pike, "Hume on Evil", *PhRev* 72 (1963), 180-197].

²² See Pike, "Hume on Evil", 41-42.

²³ For an elaboration of this argument see e.g. W.L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism", in: Howard-Snyder, *Evidential Argument*, 2-5 [originally appeared in *APQ* 16 (1979)].

²⁴ Rowe, "The Problem of Evil", 4-5. Rowe states that it would require something like omniscience on our part before we could lay claim to knowing that this is true.

²⁵ Rowe, "The Problem of Evil", 5.

subsequently violates his own restrictions. Rowe first states that human beings do not adopt a position external to God and the world but he subsequently adopts such a position when he generalizes some particular observations of apparently pointless suffering and comes to the general conclusion that it seems unlikely that all instances of suffering result in a greater good. Wykstra formulates his criticism of the evidential argument by means of the application of what he calls 'the Condition Of Reasonable Epistemic Access'. He summarizes this as follows: 'we can argue from "we see no x" to "there is no x" only when x has reasonable seeability'.²⁶ According to Wykstra, Rowe's argument does not pass this test because it is likely that for any selected instance of intense suffering, there is good reason to think that if there is a prevailing good of the sort at issue connected to it, we would not have epistemic access to this.²⁷ It is exactly this point of epistemic access that is also made in the book of Job. God's answer demonstrates that human beings are unable to know the details of God's counsel. Therefore, the transition from a logical to an evidential argument is insufficient in order to give in to the objection that we are unable to survey God and the world from an external point of view. The evidential argument still assumes the perspective of the all-knowing narrator in the book of Job.

The logical and the evidential argument both contend that belief in the existence of a theistic God is irrational because the existence of evil is incompatible with it. It is striking that the figure of Job follows a rather similar course as these arguments but draws a different conclusion. All three cases see a conflict in the concept of God which concentrates on God's goodness. Goodness here refers to morally correct actions.²⁸ They value a particular instance of

²⁶ S.J. Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil", in: Howard-Snyder, *Evidential Argument*, 126.

²⁷ This argument is elaborated upon in S.J. Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance'", in: Adams-Adams, *Problem of Evil*, 138-160 (especially 151-157) [originally appeared in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984) 73-93] and Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments", 126-150. It is striking that Rowe and Wykstra both mention in their arguments that human beings lack the ability to survey God's actions and purposes. This is reminiscent of the debate between Job and God where both use the fact that God is unfathomable against each other. On the one hand, Job refers to God's inscrutability and concludes that God abuses this position by letting him suffer unjustly (Job 9). On the other hand, God points out Job's lack of insight into God's counsel because Job does not adopt a similar position to God. Therefore, Job lacks knowledge of God's actions (Job 38-41). Plantinga also points to the lack of insight into God's thoughts in Plantinga's criticism of the evidential argument. He mentions the story of Job. According to Plantinga, there may be much that God takes into account which is entirely beyond our ken and our cognitive powers are too feeble to understand all the reasons God might have. In order to illustrate this, Plantinga refers to the book of Job: "The point here is that the reason for Job's suffering is something entirely beyond his ken, so that the fact he can't see what sort of reason God might have for permitting his suffering doesn't at all tend to show that God has no reason" (A. Plantinga, "Epistemic Probability and Evil", in: Howard-Snyder, *Evidential Argument*, 70-76 [originally appeared in *AF* 56 (1988)]).

²⁸ In Job's case, these are actions according to the concept of retribution.

suffering which is incompatible with God's omnipotence and utter goodness. However, for Job, these conflicting elements do not lead to the inference that God does not exist.²⁹ Job holds to his belief in God and trusts that God will come to his assistance despite his feeling that God harms him unjustly.³⁰ This remaining trust in God raises the question of whether belief in the existence of God can be denied on the basis of exclusively rational arguments. The logical and evidential arguments suppose that the proposition 'God exists' is of the same epistemological nature as 'this chair in this room exists'. However, there is a considerable difference. If there is disagreement about the issue of whether or not the chair exists, the opponents can both enter into the room and observe the chair from a position external to the chair. However, this does not apply to the existence of God. It would require the independent position of the all-knowing narrator with his viewpoint external to God and the world in order to determine whether or not God exists. Human beings are unable to adopt such a position. The issue whether or not God exists can therefore not be decided on the basis of logical or evidential arguments. This is of a different epistemological order than knowledge of the existence of the chair. One could characterize belief in the existence of God as awareness and a conviction that a divine being is present in this reality.³¹ Someone experiences God as being a part of his or her world. Rational arguments stemming from innocent suffering or inexplicable evil do not directly apply to this conviction because belief in God is of a different epistemological order. The confrontation with evil may undermine a person's belief in God in an individual case³² but it can also initiate a process of examining how the relation between evil and God can be understood without saying farewell to God. In this way, the existence of evil as such is not a cogent argument for atheism.

²⁹ E.g. Ps.14,1 and Ps.53,1 demonstrate that the conclusion that God does not exist was an option at that time, although it is true that this is not a theoretical but a practical atheism (cf. H.J. Kraus, *Psalmen 1* (BKAT XV/I) (5th), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1978, 248).

³⁰ These apparently conflicting impressions of God are best demonstrated by Job's call for God to plead on behalf of Job against God (16,21).

³¹ E.g. Plantinga is of the opinion that belief in God can also be warranted by non-propositional evidence: "Perhaps belief in God resembles certain perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, certain a priori beliefs and others in being *properly basic* in the right circumstances" (Plantinga, "Epistemic Probability", 89). Nevertheless, the existence of God remains a propositional claim for Plantinga.

³² Compare e.g. D.Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil & the Problem of God*, Minneapolis 2004, 118: "If the questions go far enough in a certain direction, they will lead, not to changes within the relationship with God but to the end of that relationship". I further refer to this book by means of the short title *Evil & God*.

8.2.3 Defending Theism by Means of a Theodicy

8.2.3.1 *General*

The suggestion that the existence of a theistic God is incompatible with the presence of evil in the world has been answered with several proposals that try to explain how these two can be reconciled. They are the so called theodicies. These proposals defend God's justice in spite of the existence of evil in God's creation. Some see a greater good which justifies the fact that God permits the existence of evil. Important representatives of this type of theodicy are the free will defence and pedagogical views. They regard evil as an inevitable by-product of a greater good or as a means to accomplish it. A somewhat different approach is offered by eschatological theodicies. This type of theodicy is of the opinion that God can not be blamed for permitting the existence of evil because there will be a future compensation for current unjustifiable harm. On the one hand, one could see clues in the book of Job for all three forms of theodicy. The free will defence can be recognized in the concept of retribution to a certain extent because this concept also maintains the starting point that the free choice of human beings has positive or negative consequences as a result. Job's final deeper relationship with God (42,5) could be seen as an illustration of the idea that evil is necessary for personal growth. This would support a pedagogical view on evil.³³ Job's ultimate restoration (42,7-17) seems to confirm the eschatological view that innocent suffering will finally be compensated for. However, on the other hand one could also wonder to what extent each theodicy assumes a general overview of God's actions and the coherence of all that happens in the world which is criticized by God's answer. The confrontation of these three forms of theodicy and the book of Job is now further examined in this section.

8.2.3.2 *The Free Will Defence*

The free will defence justifies the existence of evil by pointing out the value of a world in which human beings are free to choose to perform morally wrong or good actions. Plantinga depicts the free will defence in a well-known description as follows; the free will defence considers a world containing creatures who are significantly free as more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. It supposes that God can only create such a world if creatures are capable of moral good as well as moral evil because creatures are not significantly free if God prevents them from performing wrong actions. The free will defence claims that it is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good without creating one that also contained moral evil.

³³ Moreover, Elihu also suggests a pedagogical function of evil when he suggests that setbacks can be a warning from God.

Therefore, God had to permit moral evil as a result of wrong actions.³⁴ Thus far only moral evil has been mentioned. An additional step is required in order to give natural evil a place. Therefore, Plantinga adds to his argument the possibility that natural evil is a result of the actions of significantly free but non human entities.³⁵ He also suggests that some natural evils and some persons might be related in such a way that the person would produce less moral good if the evils had been absent. Then the existence of natural evil serves to accomplish more moral good.³⁶ Plantinga distinguishes his *defence* emphatically from a free will *theodicy*. According to him, a theodicy claims to state what God's reason for permitting evil *really is*, while a defence does *not* claim to know or even believe that its proposition is true but at most wants to show what God's reason *might possibly be*. Hence, Plantinga's only aim is to show that the premise that 'God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good' can be consistent with the premise that 'God creates a world containing evil and has a good reason for doing so'.³⁷

The heart of this free will defence is the assumption that a world containing human beings who are significantly free is more valuable than a world without free human beings. However, there is the question of how to judge that our current world is more valuable than another one. There are two problems, namely. Firstly, the comparison between two possible worlds is problematic. It requires that someone can adopt an independent position in relation to the two objects of comparison in order to be able to judge which alternative is more valuable. This would be the position of God or the all-knowing narrator in the book of Job. However, God's answer makes it clear that human beings do not occupy such a divine position. Job does not have primordial knowledge, nor did he fix the measurements of the earth (38,4-5). Human beings are unable to step out of their form of life in order to objectively compare their situation to an alternative. Therefore, they can not establish that our world, including significantly free creatures, is more valuable than another one. Secondly, the question arises of what precisely one would compare, if such a comparison were possible. Since free will is an essential characteristic of human beings, an alternative world in the

³⁴ A.C. Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, Grand Rapids 1977, 29-31 [reprinted ed. of New York 1974]. For Plantinga, being free with respect to an action means that a person is free to perform that action and free to refrain from performing it (29). Pannenberg also supposes that creating free human beings involved the risk that human beings would abuse this freedom. He is of the opinion that only the eschatological completion of the world can definitively prove God's justice but he concludes that the Creator had to put up with the transitory nature and suffering of creatures, and also the possibility of evil as a result of their striving for autonomy, if he wanted a world of finite creatures and their interdependence (W. Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie II*, Göttingen 1991, 193-194.200-201).

³⁵ Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 57-59.

³⁶ Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 57-58.

³⁷ Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 27-29.

comparison would contain creatures that are not human beings. The claim of the free will defence would then be that a world in which we are human beings is more valuable than a world in which we are not human beings. When the free will defence claims that we would lose some greater good, it thinks in relation to us. However, the problem is that we are not us anymore in the alternative. Therefore, the choice between the two alternatives can not be made.³⁸ In this way, the free will defence fails to offer a possible *justification* for the existence of evil. It can ‘only’ be taken as a description of how a considerable part of evil comes into being. Regularly, people fall victim to the consequences of morally wrong actions by fellow human beings. However, we can take this situation only as a fact. Assessing whether this situation is a greater good is beyond our capabilities.³⁹

This chapter deals with the interaction between the biblical material from the book of Job and systematic theological views on the issue of theodicy. While insights from the book of Job have in particular questioned some systematic theological views until now, the biblical material itself can also be questioned for its systematic theological implications.⁴⁰ A comparison between the free will defence and the concept of retribution then reveals an important shortcoming in the case of the latter. Both views have in common the fact that they take the free will of human beings as a starting point. Human choices affect the cause of events in the world. The free will defence understands a person’s suffering as the result of another’s morally wrong actions. These are the actions of fellow human beings or other significantly free entities but not actions by God. On the contrary, the concept of retribution sees suffering as a consequence of one’s own actions. As Job’s friends argue; Job’s suffering can only be God’s punishment for earlier wrongdoing (22,5-9). Here, God also causes suffering. The confrontation between the free will defence and this biblical view reveals a weakness in the scheme of the relation between a person’s actions and what befalls them. This scheme lacks any consideration of the fact that someone may suffer as a victim of the morally wrong actions of fellow human beings. Job’s innocent suffering denounces this shortcoming. Job does not see any sin that could justify his misfortune that has been caused by, among others, the surprise attacks of the Chaldeans and Sabaeans. The concept of retribution is blind to the effects of such actions by individual agents in interaction with each other. It is true that the book of Job does not fully exclude the possibility of being a victim. The friends, for instance, charge Job with

³⁸ Cf. Phillips, *Evil & God*, 54-55.96.

³⁹ One could wonder whether Plantinga’s modesty with regard to his ambitions –he only formulates a possibility and does not claim that it is true– meets the criticism of God’s answer. However, this is not the case because the methodological problem remains in Plantinga’s argument. It assumes an external point of view which a human being is unable to adopt.

⁴⁰ §1.2.2 and §8.1.

stealing and failing to support the weak.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the focus is on a person's own guilt with regard to suffering instead of the awareness that someone can be the victim of another's deeds.⁴² However, Job's case indicates the limits of this retributive logic and demonstrates that wrong behaviour is not necessarily the cause of misfortune.

The distinction between the self-centred bias of the concept of retribution and the free will defence's eye for the effects for the environment may affect the intentions of one's actions. While self-wellbeing is the focus in the first case, awareness that one's actions also affect others gets more attention in the second case. The satan's question of whether Job fears God for nothing (1,9) touches on this matter. This question deals with the motive for Job's devotion to God. If a theology is particularly concerned with a person's own welfare, self-interest threatens to be a more important reason for worshipping God and leading a righteous life than awe because of God's greatness. The good treatment of fellow human beings is then inspired by self-interest rather than altruism. The downside of the concept of retribution is the threat that the main motive for worshipping God and looking after fellow human beings is the compensation with prosperity which is on the horizon.⁴³ At the same time, one could wonder to what extent belief in God is still a free choice, if it is rewarded according to a relation between a person's actions and what befalls them. The fear for a miserable fate if one is not faithful may dictate a person's worship to God instead of devotion.⁴⁴ Human beings would then somehow be like puppets or robots that are faced with the prospect of reward or punishment. They seem less free to choose whether or not they want to serve God in this case.⁴⁵ Hence, human beings are greater partners before God, if their choice to serve God and look after fellow creatures is not inspired by a reward or compensation that is on the horizon.

There is also a tendency in the book of Job that limits the free will of human beings. The concept of retribution implies a free choice for doing good or bad. However, Job's friends see a restriction with regard to the human capacity to be righteous. They introduce the motif of human imperfection which denies that a

⁴¹ 22,6-9. See also Job's declaration of innocence (Job 31) where morally correct action is directly related to dealings with fellow human beings.

⁴² A consequent application of the concept of retribution would mean that victims of a person's morally wrong actions must have acted in a morally wrong way themselves. For, otherwise the misfortune is not justified. It seems clear to me that such a consequent application demonstrates the limits of a retributive scheme.

⁴³ The nature of the relation between God and human beings is further elaborated upon in §8.5.4.

⁴⁴ Job's friends give extensive catalogues of the misfortunes of the wicked. This enumeration also suggests that self-benefit is a particular motivation for devotion.

⁴⁵ This touches on the second implication of the satan's question in 1,9; does God not actually procure devotion by rewarding human beings for their faithfulness? See §6.2.2.

human being can be fully righteous before God.⁴⁶ In their speeches this view serves to take the edge off Job's argument that he is blameless.⁴⁷ However, the implication of this motif is that the free will of human beings is restricted to some extent. For, human nature determines that human beings are unable to be completely righteous in their actions. This would mean that human beings are partly prescribed because they can not evade doing some wrong.⁴⁸ If this is true, one could wonder whether God is morally reprehensible because he has created human beings in such a way that they always commit some sins. Some argue that God is blameless because he created people imperfectly in order that they can be released.⁴⁹ However, God would then be like a doctor who feeds someone with bad food in order to be able to treat them for food poisoning afterwards. Then human beings would be more like a toy in God's hands than full partners within a covenant because their free will is limited.⁵⁰ God would indirectly cause wrong actions by human beings in this case.⁵¹ Therefore, the motif of human imperfection is not satisfactory if it makes an essential statement about human beings. Moreover, it would require a position external to God and the world in order to be able to establish that all creatures are not fully righteous before God. The awareness of failing in relation to God can only be observed within the context of one's personal relationship with God. Only individuals themselves can establish that they do not come up to the mark before God.

8.2.3.3 *Pedagogical Views on Evil*

Representatives of a pedagogical view are not satisfied with the free will defence as justification for the existence of evil.⁵² They value Plantinga's view that it is possible that natural evil is due to the actions of significantly free but non-human

⁴⁶ 4,17-21; 15,14-16; 25,4-6. See §3.4.

⁴⁷ See §3.4.

⁴⁸ The doctrine of original sin has a comparable pessimistic anthropology. However, it attributes the imperfect nature of a human being to transgressions of the first human beings. In this way, it safeguards God for having brought about evil by creating people imperfectly.

⁴⁹ Barth e.g. states that the Creation makes it possible and creates room for the foundation and history of the covenant to take place (K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik III/1. Die Lehre von der Schöpfung*, Zürich 1945, 107). The content of this covenant is Jesus Christ according to Barth. God wanted the Creation in order to make the history of redemption possible; because *servatio*, therefore *creatio*... (K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik III/3. Die Lehre von der Schöpfung*, Zürich 1950, 90-91).

⁵⁰ In 10,12-14, Job utters a similar suspicion. He suggests that God created human beings for the hidden purpose of spying on them in order to punish them if they sin instead caring for them.

⁵¹ Compare e.g. Job's charge in 9,24.

⁵² E.g. R. Swinburne, "Problem of Evil", in: S.C. Brown (ed.), *Reason and Religion*, London 1977, 85.

entities as unsatisfactory.⁵³ Pedagogical views, therefore, formulate additional reasons for why God has created a world containing the existence of evil. They argue that evil is necessary for bringing about some greater good which would not come into being without it.⁵⁴ The starting point of pedagogical views is that human beings are created 'immaturely' with the potential to grow. The goal is to develop a good character and become a more perfect human being.⁵⁵ Hick describes this as becoming children of God which includes conscious fellowship with God.⁵⁶ According to pedagogical views, the existence of evil is necessary in order to accomplish this development. It serves to provide people with insight into the distinction between morally right and wrong action and evokes responsibility and compassion for each other.⁵⁷ Swinburne argues that creatures would lack any very strong responsibility for each other if they did not have the power to hurt each other.⁵⁸ According to Hick, unmerited suffering is needed to evoke compassion and self-giving for others because we do not acknowledge a moral call if someone receives his just punishment.⁵⁹ In this way, evil is a necessary ingredient of this world in order to enable creatures to become more perfect human beings in the eyes of a pedagogical view.

Pedagogical views justify God by means of a parent-child analogy. According to Hick, for instance, parents are willing to allow their children miss out on a certain amount of pleasure in favour of the growth of these children in greater values such as moral integrity, unselfishness, compassion, et cetera. Hick is of the opinion that, if God's purpose for his human creatures is rather similar to that of parents for their children, then the ultimate end for which the world exists is not the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain but being a place of soul-making.⁶⁰ Since it is richer and more valuable that one attains to goodness by meeting and mastering temptations and by rightly making choices than if one would be if created in a state either of innocence or of virtue from the beginning, the existence

⁵³ E.g. R. Swinburne, *The Existence of God* [rev. ed.], Oxford 1991, 202. Swinburne elsewhere claims that not all evil actions are actions of agents with free will (Swinburne, "Major Strands", 41). Furthermore, the free will defence has not given grounds for supposing that the existence of evil consequences of moral evils is compatible with the existence of God according to Swinburne (Swinburne, "Problem of Evil", 86).

⁵⁴ E.g. Swinburne, "Problem of Evil", 82. Swinburne mentions various goods in Swinburne, "Major Strands", 30-48.

⁵⁵ Swinburne, "Problem of Evil", 88-89 (see also 94-95); Hick, *Evil and God*, 291-295. Hick calls this 'soul-making' (295).

⁵⁶ Hick, *Evil and God*, 291.

⁵⁷ Swinburne further argues that natural evil is necessary in order to provide people with knowledge of evil (Swinburne, *Existence of God*, 200-214).

⁵⁸ Swinburne, "Problem of Evil", 88.

⁵⁹ Hick, *Evil and God*, 370.

⁶⁰ Hick, *Evil and God*, 294-295.

of evil is justified according to Hick.⁶¹ A consequence of pedagogical views is the possibility that a person's innocent suffering only brings some good for somebody else. Swinburne values this as legitimate by referring to his right as a parent to let the younger son suffer *somewhat* for the good of his and his brother's soul.⁶² Hence, the good of free development of human beings justifies that God has allowed the existence of evil. It is necessary in order to enable human beings to grow in the right direction.

A problem arises when it is not clearly visible which greater good a specific evil brings about. At this point, the two important representatives of a pedagogical view –Hick and Swinburne– seem to take different courses. Hick displays some modesty and realizes that some excessive suffering reaches far beyond the constructive function of character building.⁶³ Swinburne, on the other hand, refers to our restricted overview and maintains the connection between evil and good. He argues that God sees the results of particular evils more clearly than we do and, therefore, may know the good that comes about thanks to a particular evil and which would not come about otherwise.⁶⁴ Each evil or possible evil removed takes away one more actual good, according to Swinburne.⁶⁵ However, the strict application of such a connection in actual situations leads to rather far-reaching statements. Swinburne, for example, says that the suffering of Jews in concentration camps made heroic choices possible for people normally too timid or too hardhearted to make them.⁶⁶

The criticism of God's answer to Job's attempt to adopt a God's eye view touches pedagogical theodicies in two ways. The first point is reminiscent of the objection against the free will defence. It concerns the claim that this world is more valuable than another one. In a similar way, the defenders of pedagogical views value the current world, in which one attains to goodness by meeting and mastering temptations and by rightly making choices, as richer and more valuable than an alternative one. However, such a judgement would require the ability to position oneself independently from this world and one's own human existence. Otherwise a comparison with other possible worlds can not be made. Since this is impossible,

⁶¹ Hick, *Evil and God*, 291. Hick thinks that a world in which suffering exists to least a moderate degree may well be a better environment for the development of moral personalities than would be a sphere that was void of all changes (369). According to Swinburne, "...the price of possible passive evils for other creatures is a price worth paying for agents to have great responsibilities for each other" (Swinburne, "Problem of Evil", 88).

⁶² Swinburne, "Problem of Evil", 92; *Existence of God*, 217.

⁶³ Hick, *Evil and God*, 366.

⁶⁴ Swinburne, "Problem of Evil", 92: "God may know that the suffering that A will cause B is not nearly as great as B's screams might suggest to us and will provide (unknown to us) an opportunity to C to help B recover and will thus give C a deep responsibility which he would not otherwise have".

⁶⁵ Swinburne, "Major Strands", 44.

⁶⁶ Swinburne, "Major Strands", 44.

the current world can not be valued as 'richer and more valuable'.⁶⁷ Secondly, pedagogical views themselves also suppose an impossible God's eye view. Their basic premise is that evil in a particular context brings about some greater good if it is considered from a broader perspective. However, there is the question of how one notices that there is such a relation between a specific evil and some greater good. Swinburne admits that human beings might sometimes not observe the connection to a greater good.⁶⁸ It obviously demands a point of view external to this world in order to be able to survey the coherence between all that happens and to observe that a specific evil finally brings forward some greater good. Only God adopts such a position. But Swinburne does not take the implications of his own observation into account. For, how does he know that some good stems from each evil, if human beings lack insight into the broader effects of a specific deed? It is impossible to establish objectively that each evil ultimately has some good as result or by-product. Moreover, the examples of good, which defenders of pedagogical views mention, can often be refuted by counter examples.⁶⁹ Swinburne, for instance, states that the holocaust made heroic deeds possible. But, at the same time, this tragedy incited some to betrayal and dreadful practices in order to survive.⁷⁰ In this way, a pedagogical justification of the existence of evil fails. It supposes an overall view which human beings do not have.

Furthermore, Swinburne's statement that each evil or possible evil removed takes away one more actual good raises the question of what kind of concept of God such a view supposes. If the connection between evils and the good they cause is so strict, then each intervention would break this connection. However, this would imply that God does not have any room to act freely anymore. The result, then, is that God would not be theistic any longer. Swinburne's statement implies that God has only set things in motion but God does not intervene because removing some evil would take away some good. Such a concept of God is compatible with the deist position.

Nevertheless one could argue that the book of Job contains several clues which do support a pedagogical view of evil. On the one hand, Job's development in the course of the book could be understood as a soul making process. His miserable fate ultimately appears to stimulate the intensification of his relationship with God.

⁶⁷ See also §7.2.3.2.

⁶⁸ Swinburne, "Problem of Evil", 92.

⁶⁹ See also D.Z. Phillips, "Problem of Evil", in: S.C. Brown (ed.), *Reason and Religion*, London 1977, 112-114; *Evil & God*, 63. Hick, though, admits that the problem of evil remains in its full force and that the soul-making process does in fact fail in our world at least as often as it succeeds (Hick, *Evil and God*, 369-372; see also 375).

⁷⁰ The story of Job also illustrates how evil sometimes brings forward more bad than good. The epilogue makes it clear that the friends have failed to take their responsibility rightly. They have spoken wrongly of God (42,7). So, it appears that evil also brought forward some more evil.

Even though Job's struggle leads at first to serious charges against God, he finally feels that he knows God better than before. While Job earlier only heard of God, his eye has now seen him (42,5). The evil, which God permits as a test and which affects Job, apparently results in the good of the growth of Job's relationship with God in the longer run. On the other hand, the coming of Job's friends and their attempts to comfort Job could be taken as an illustration of how innocent suffering evokes compassion and offers the opportunity to show responsibility. This implies that Job's blameless suffering enables the friends to develop their characters by being morally virtuous. In this way, the book of Job seems to offer an illustration of a soul making process as well as an example of how innocent suffering gives someone else the opportunity to display compassion and responsibility.

However, several objections can be raised against this pedagogical understanding of the book of Job. Firstly, it is questionable whether one can connect Job's eventually deepened relationship with God to his suffering with any certainty. This is namely an external explanation of Job's frame of mind. An outsider estimates Job's inner considerations and subsequently designates Job's intensified relationship with God as the fruit of the evil that has been inflicted upon him. But how can this observation be made so surely? A lot of people lose their belief in God after suffering evil. They are disappointed in God because God did not manifest his presence and assistance in the way they had expected at that the time of their suffering. Perhaps Job's relationship with God grew despite his suffering instead of thanks to it. The point is that such an assessment can not be made from an external position. Human beings simply can not look into the mind of another person. Only suffering individuals themselves can clarify whether their struggle with grief, which they met at a certain moment, has deepened or, on the contrary, harmed their relationship with God in the longer run.

The second objection concerns the pedagogical view's basic premise that some evil is justified because of the greater good it ultimately has as a result. So, Job's suffering would be warranted because of the greater good, namely that it gives the friends the opportunity to show their compassion and moral responsibility. It would enable the friends to develop their characters. The focal point of this thinking is the greater good, which stems from the evils that happen and which justifies it. The evils serve as an instrument in order to bring about the greater good. However, this instrumentalization of evil causes difficulties. It ignores the harm which these evils cause. The supposed good of a responsible reaction by the friends does not compensate the loss of property that Job has suffered nor pay damages for the unique value of the personal relation to each of the children, who are irreplaceable and whom Job now misses. In the same way, heroic deeds do not compensate the suffering of millions during the holocaust.⁷¹ It would be a trivialization of the pain

⁷¹ See also Phillips, "Problem of Evil", 110-111. Phillips here cites W. Somerset Maugham.

people suffer, if evil is justified by the good it provides. Pain can not be balanced by good on the basis of calculations of gain and loss.⁷² Moreover, the source of the entire debate on theodicy –innocent suffering– would not be taken seriously anymore, if it was justified as being the instrument for some greater good. The pain, the grief, or the despair as such which evil may cause can not be relieved, eliminated, ignored, or justified by the greater good that it seems to bring forward.

One could argue that this second objection can (partly) be met by the argument that God does not let people suffer without limit. This would remove the impression that God is not concerned with the pain of those who suffer at all. In this way Swinburne, for example, argues that a good God certainly stops too much suffering. Human physiology puts limits on how much human beings can suffer at any given time, according to Swinburne.⁷³ This would imply that it is not immoral to let Job suffer his immense losses because God does not let Job suffer more than he can bear. Swinburne assumes that this general explanation is applicable to each actual individual case. However, this is problematic. Phillips values the transition in Swinburne’s argument from talk of the world to talk about human beings and from conceivable limits to actual limits as unwarrantable. He argues that what constitutes a limit or going too far for one person may not apply to another. Therefore, we need to refer to actual limits instead of conceivable limits, according to Phillips.⁷⁴ Actual examples show that Phillips’ observation is correct. People sometimes succumb to their miserable fate. It makes no sense to argue that such suffering remains within limits when people themselves experience it differently. Limits have simply been crossed in these individual cases. Only in actual cases can it be judged whether or not an individual’s suffering has gone beyond the limits. The book of Job illustrates the risks of applying general concepts to individual cases. The theodicy of the friends that trouble can be explained by the concept of retribution becomes stuck in Job’s case. It leads to flawed accusations against Job.⁷⁵ In a similar way, the general claim that God has limited human suffering to a bearable amount does not tone down the fact that the harm done by suffering is trivialised, if it is justified by a greater good which it serves. People sometimes suffer more than they can bear in individual cases.

A third objection regards the nature of the responsibility that one’s suffering has to evoke. A pedagogical view would label Job’s suffering as an opportunity for the friends to show their responsibility and to develop their character. Here,

⁷² Phillips, “Problem of Evil”, 71. In Dostoyevski’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan argues that innocent suffering (the suffering of a child) is outweighed by the idea that such misery is necessary for learning the difference between good and evil (Fifth Book, chapter 4).

⁷³ Swinburne, “Problem of Evil”, 89-90; “Major Strands”, 43. The parent-child analogy then justifies this limited suffering.

⁷⁴ Phillips, “Problem of Evil”, 112.

⁷⁵ 22,5-9. In 42,7, this is seen as wrong by God. At the same time, the narrator has already made the reader familiar with Job’s innocence in the prologue.

responsibility is depicted as something that one chooses to take on in a particular case or not. Each new case of suffering then requires a new consideration about whether one will accept or refuse the opportunity. However, it is questionable whether responsibility works in such a way. Firstly, an act of responsibility or compassion is not preceded each time by the choice of whether one will display these virtues or not. There is not always a temporal gap between willing and doing. Showing responsibility or compassion can be an expression of a person's character without considering the alternatives beforehand.⁷⁶ Secondly, the kind of responsibility which pedagogical views present is particularly concerned with the benefit for the individual who takes advantage of this opportunity and shows responsibility. Phillips calls this pseudo-responsibility. According to him, "if we remind someone of his responsibilities, we are directing his attention to concerns other than himself. Swinburne's analysis makes these concerns the servants of that self".⁷⁷ So, if self-interest is the motive for having concern for another, one can not speak of responsibility or compassion anymore.⁷⁸ It would be as if availing themselves of the opportunity to develop their characters was the motive for the coming of Job's friends. That seems unlikely. It seems that concern for Job is a more likely reason for the friends setting out from their homes in order to sympathize with Job and to comfort him rather than self-interest.

8.2.3.4 *Eschatological Theodicies*

An eschatological theodicy justifies current suffering by referring to a future compensation for the harm which has been done. This compensation will normally take place in an afterlife. An eschatological theodicy can also function as an *additional* explanation or promise alongside another theodicy. Hick, for example, admits that evil does not always result in a phase in the fulfilment of God's purpose. According to him, a Christian theodicy must therefore point forward to a final blessedness and claim that this infinite future good will render worthwhile all the pain, travail and wickedness that has occurred on the way.⁷⁹ In this way, the eschatological theodicy supposes a certain kind of relation between what human beings do and what happens to them. For, that which is considered as innocent suffering can apparently only be explained if it is compensated by a similar or greater amount of good. This is the case if future compensation is strictly related to an individual's earthly travails and if the existence of suffering as such is balanced

⁷⁶ See Phillips, *Evil & God*, 28-32.

⁷⁷ Phillips, "Problem of Evil", 110. See also Phillips, *Evil & God*, 56-58.

⁷⁸ This reminds of the satan's question of whether Job fears God for nothing (1,9). Here, it can be applied to relations between human beings. Is self-interest or compassion the motive for concern for the other?

⁷⁹ Hick, *Evil and God*, 375-377.

by a future infinite good or fulfilment of God's good purpose.⁸⁰ God's actions would be immoral without such a balance in the eyes of those who hold to an eschatological view.⁸¹ The prospect that God will somehow accomplish a future (eschatological) good –as compensation– makes the existence of evil in our current world less problematic according to the eschatological theodicy.

The epilogue in the book of Job could be understood as a warrant for an eschatological theodicy. The fairy-tale end of the book tells how Job is restored with more than he had before his misfortune. Job is rewarded for his blameless way of life. It is true that Job himself was not quite sure that his miserable fate would change, even though he expressed his trust in divine intervention on his behalf. He did not struggle along because of the prospect of a future compensation. What's more, Job's protest would not have been necessary if he had had such a prospect. For then he could have borne his innocent suffering while just awaiting the coming of better times. Nevertheless readers could argue that the restoration of Job at the end of the book justifies the harm which God had permitted before, when they look back over the course of Job's life. They could take from it an assurance that God compensates or restores earlier (innocent) suffering.⁸²

However, the main question with regard to eschatological theodicies is the way in which the prospect of future compensation justifies or explains current suffering. The prospect of God putting right or compensating suffered harm at a later time does not explain the sense of the existence of evil in the world now. God would be like a dentist who breaks somebody's tooth but promises to repair it afterwards. It seems immoral on God's part to let someone suffer in such a way for no clear reason or only for self-interest.⁸³ Neither can the future compensation be reparation of some imperfection or small fault which God earlier made when he created the earth. For then God's omnipotence would be under discussion. Moreover, compensation as such can often not pay damages for the harm or the losses that someone has suffered. For instance, nothing can make up for the loss of a child even if it is heavenly compensation.⁸⁴ For, that would imply that there is a kind of balance within which evil can be exchanged for good. However, the pain of suffering and the damage it causes is trivialised if it is justified by the

⁸⁰ Hick distinguishes his position from the view that the promised joys of heaven are to be related to man's earthly travails as compensation or reward. According to him, the 'good eschaton' will not be a reward or a compensation proportioned to each individual's trials but an infinite good that would render worth while any finite suffering endured in the course of attaining to it (Hick, *Evil and God*, 376-377).

⁸¹ Compare Job's accusation that God is acting unjustly because God does not reward him with prosperity even though he is blameless (Job 9).

⁸² This idea is strengthened by the fact that the book of Job does not reject the concept of retribution in the end. God's answer makes it clear that the wicked are punished.

⁸³ It reminds of Job's suggestion that God's hidden purpose for creating human beings was to be able to punish them when they sin (10,12-14).

⁸⁴ Phillips, *Evil & God*, 85-86.

compensation that will later follow.⁸⁵ Scars can not be removed by subsequent compensation. Nevertheless, it is true that believers often draw hope and strength from the prospect that their misery or pain will be removed, compensated for, or restored. The expectation of an afterlife or a definitive establishment of the Kingdom of God can inspire them now to bear their misfortune. However, then the future good is no longer a justification of the existence of evil but a *promise* that God will heal what is broken in our current world.⁸⁶ Human beings are in a similar position to Job. He did not know what his life would be like but he maintained trust in his witness and redeemer. Equally, God's promise that there will be no evil anymore in a future world can provide those who are suffering with comfort, motivation to remain faithful to God and strength to bear current misery⁸⁷ but that does not justify their suffering.

8.2.4 God as Fellow Moral Agent

The debate on the issue of theodicy concentrates in particular on God's perfect goodness. The main point is whether or not God can be blamed for morally wrong actions by permitting the existence of evil in this world and Job believes that God can be blamed. He comes to the conclusion that God perverts justice because God has inflicted him with misfortune despite his innocence. This conclusion is based on the concept of retribution. Job believes that God acts in this rather mechanical way. He judges by means of this standard whether God's actions are right or wrong.⁸⁸ But what Job considers as God's standard of what is good is unmasked by God's answer as a standard that does not fully correspond with God's reality. God calls it frustration of his justice (40,8). Job learns that it is God who has fixed the measurements of the earth, not Job (38,5). God makes it clear that it goes beyond Job's ability to have insight into God's counsel (38,2). It surpasses the limit of God's transcendence if God's actions are understood through human frames of

⁸⁵ Compare §8.2.3.3. In Dostoyevski's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan is of the opinion that subsequent compensation (eternal harmony) is not worth the price of innocent suffering (the suffering of children) now. According to him, eternal harmony is worthless if innocent suffering is not avenged. Ivan would return the ticket for entering heaven because the price of the harmony is too high (Fifth Book, chapter 4).

⁸⁶ A separate issue is the role which Christology plays in the realization of this promise. Is the suffering of Christ, for example, a sign of God's compassion for those who suffer or does it play a role in overcoming evil? This is a huge topic which is not discussed further in this study.

⁸⁷ The book of Job does not reject the concept of retribution. One could apply this logic rather strictly to the promise of future compensation and argue that there will be reward as well as punishment according to how human beings have lived their lives. Whether the eschaton should be taken in this way or in a different way is another debate. This is not discussed in this study.

⁸⁸ Job's friends use the same standard. However, they assume that God is 'perfectly good' (e.g. 8,3) and therefore conclude that Job must have sinned given his misfortune.

reference. God demonstrates that Job measured God's righteousness according to a standard external to God. However, God would lose his divinity if it could be conceived that there is something next to and greater than God. Job can only trust and take for granted that what God does is good by definition.⁸⁹ This can not be judged on the basis of human (moral) standards.⁹⁰

When theodacists and atheists deal with the issue of theodicy they follow a similar policy to Job. Namely, they judge God's actions according to a norm external to God. Atheists consider it as morally wrong to let someone suffer harm. Because of the existence of evil, they draw the conclusion that God violates this norm. Theodacists, on the other hand, suppose that it is morally wrong to let someone suffer without sufficient reason. Therefore, they argue that God keeps this moral rule and explain why it is justified that God has permitted the presence of this seemingly unjustifiable evil. So, both parties apply a norm from our human moral community to God. They treat God as a member of our moral community and evaluate whether God acts in accordance with the moral standards of this community. However, God points out his transcendent position in his answer and makes it clear that his actions can not be measured according to human standards. He can not be treated as if he is a member of our moral community.⁹¹ This is where the debate among theodacists and atheists on the relation between God and the existence of evil fails. Both deal with God as if he were a fellow moral agent among human agents. But this ignores the implications of God's transcendence. There is a fundamental difference between God and human beings.⁹²

Job himself is rather ambivalent on this point. On the one hand, he realizes that it is impossible to enter into a lawsuit with God because God is not a human being like Job.⁹³ On the other hand, Job's desire to have a case with God remains.⁹⁴ Job proves his innocence with an extensive declaration and challenges God to disclose the reasons for his suffering.⁹⁵ God's answer has frequently puzzled readers because they have the impression that God ignores what Job has argued. However, could it be that God wants to show with his indirect way of reply that he can not be called to account as if he is a member of our moral community who has to justify his actions? Moreover, it would give the impression that God can be manipulated by human behaviour or rebellion, if he replied to everything Job put before him. God takes up a transcendent position and is not a fellow moral agent. Therefore, it

⁸⁹ This is the Euthyphro-dilemma: are morally good acts willed by God because they are morally good, or are they morally good because they are willed by God?

⁹⁰ See also Miskotte, *Antwoord*, 93.167.179; Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 107.

⁹¹ Phillips, *Evil & God*, 34-44.148-151.

⁹² See among others: 9,32-33; 33,12; 36,22-23; God's answer (particularly 38,4.18; 40,9-14).

⁹³ 9,32-33. See also 23,3.8-9.

⁹⁴ 13,3; 23,4.

⁹⁵ Job 31.

seems that he does not go into Job's charges and challenges in a straight forward way. Nevertheless, God does answer Job, even though the nature of God's response is different than one might expect. This reveals some of the character of the God whom Job worships. Whereas the Almighty can not be manipulated by human beings or summoned to court as if he was part of our moral community, he does not ignore the cries of the afflicted. Job becomes aware that God has taken notice of his miserable situation.⁹⁶ God does take notice of the misery of human beings, their call for assistance, and their requests in despair but on his own terms.

The nature of the relationship between God and human beings depends on whether or not God is thought of as part of our moral community. If God is taken as fellow moral agent, the covenant between God and human beings is a kind of contract on the basis of which both parties can be judged.⁹⁷ It seems part of this contract is that God provides human beings with the best of things and, therefore, that he does not let people suffer unnecessarily. Mutual interest would be the basis for maintaining the relationship with the other party. Devotion would be inspired by what God offers in return. Now the subject for debate among theodiscists and atheists is whether or not God has broken this contract by permitting the existence of evil. It is this contractual thinking that is denounced in particular by the satan in the prologue. The satan suggests that Job's piety is inspired by God's reward with prosperity for upright behaviour. If this were the case, it would mean that Job understands his relationship with God as a contract according to which God rewards the righteous with prosperity and punishes the wicked with misfortune. In such a view, God is treated as a fellow moral agent who can be called to account and honour the contract. However, the book of Job rejects contractual thinking as the basis of a person's relationship with God. God permits Job's test in order to prove that Job's devotion is not motivated by contractual thinking. If someone acknowledges that God is not a fellow moral agent among human agents, the nature of one's relationship with God differs from that based upon contractual thinking. Then awe for the Most High is the basis for maintaining a relationship with God.⁹⁸ Evil may evoke doubt about God's righteousness in this case but a person's belief does not then fully depend upon whether they justly find good or evil in their life.

8.3 Theological Idealism

Since the story of Job points out several problems of theological realism, one could wonder whether it propagates a *theological idealism* as alternative. Theological

⁹⁶ Firstly, God answers Job, whereas Job thought that God would remain silent (30,20 vs. 38,1). Secondly, God takes notice of Job's questions and accusations by presenting a counter picture (see §5.4).

⁹⁷ See Phillips, *Evil & God*, 147-151.

⁹⁸ The nature of the relation between God and human beings is more extensively dealt with in §8.5.4.

idealism takes theologies as constructions of our thoughts with which a theologian tries to grasp a certain order in the reality of God and human beings. This kind of theology does not pretend that its theories are true like theological realism does. It offers constructions that do not describe the reality but are useful for giving direction to a person's life in this reality. The ideas are the focus.⁹⁹ The theology of Tillich could be labelled as an example of theological idealism. Tillich says that knowledge of God is symbolic because revelation is the manifestation of the mystery of being and therefore does not increase our knowledge about the structures of nature, history, and human beings.¹⁰⁰ According to him, nothing can be said about God as God which is not symbolic except the non-symbolic statement that God is being-itself.¹⁰¹ This view draws a strict distinction between the reality of God and the concepts with which God is spoken of. Human concepts do not touch the divine reality. Now there is the question of whether God's answer in the book of Job offers support for such theological idealism. God points out Job's lack of insight into God's counsel (38,2). Therefore, Job has spoken of God without knowledge. Job is unable to adopt a divine position in order to survey the coherence of the world and the starting points of God's actions. In his response, Job also acknowledges that he has spoken about things that are too wonderful to understand (42,3) and resolves to be silent in the future (40,4-5). If systematic theologians are in a similar position to Job, does this mean that their speaking of God is only a human construction which lacks any accordance with the divine?

Some idealistic tendencies can be found in the interpretation of God's answer by Miskotte¹⁰² who draws a strict distinction between God, who is hidden, and the word of God (God's answer in the book of Job), which comes to human beings and in which God reveals himself. According to him, God is not manifest as such in our reality but in the word of God.¹⁰³ So, God himself is distinguished from his word in Miskotte's view. The word is recognizable and not God himself. God remains hidden. However, there is the question of whether or not God's words can be separated from God himself so strictly. When Job experiences God's answer, he does not make a distinction between God and his word. Job's eye has seen God (42,5). Hearing God's answer is an encounter with God in Job's perception. Therefore, God's answer can not be labelled as a kind of representation of God

⁹⁹ See also Van den Brom, *Creatieve Twijfel*, 31-32.

¹⁰⁰ P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, Chicago 1951, 129-131.

¹⁰¹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 238-239.

¹⁰² However, Miskotte does not fully comply with the definition of theological idealism because he explicitly regards God's word as stemming from God. For Miskotte, this is not a human construction. The idealistic tendency in his thinking is concerned with the strict separation between God himself and his word.

¹⁰³ Miskotte, *Antwoord*, 182-184.199 (see also 122). According to Miskotte, this mystery of God which Job finds and confesses remains the last word in opposition to streams of senseless pain and harm that are found in this creation (267).

while God himself remains behind the horizon. The concept 'revelation' would be empty if we assumed a void between God and his revelation.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, it requires a position external to God and this world in order to be able to observe that God stands apart from the word with which he manifests himself in the world. The book of Job demonstrates that human beings can not adopt such an external point of view.¹⁰⁵ It is true that God points out that his actions go beyond human observation but he does not remain hidden from Job. God presents several elements of his counsel and answers Job's impression of God's actions by means of a counter picture. Hence Job not only sees indirect signs of God but he experiences how God reveals himself to him.

The story of Job demonstrates that some experience of the divine itself is the basis of a person's relationship with God. Theological idealism ignores this relation with the divine. The implication of a very strict form of theological idealism could even be that the existence of God is of less or no relevance.¹⁰⁶ The main issue then is whether or not some idea of the divine is useful for daily life. However, since belief in God supposes some relationship with God, systematic theology is not only concerned with constructions that function independently from the divine. Its theologizing can not ignore that there is a relation with God. Therefore, systematic theological thinking also somehow deals with the divine. Either way, this relationship is not denied in God's answer. However, the divine words want to show that human concepts that try to describe this reality do not completely correspond to this reality as if it offers a copy of it. God's answer asks for modesty with regard to what can be said of the divine. This modesty is connected to the position that human beings adopt in relation to God. Since human beings are not in a similar position as the all-knowing narrator in the book of Job, they do not survey God's actions and being from a perspective external to God and the world. People can only speak of God while they live in a relationship with God. Since theological idealism ignores this relationship with the divine, it can not be an adequate alternative for theological realism.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ V. Brümmer, *Speaking of a Personal God. An Essay in Philosophical Theology*, Cambridge 1992,42.

¹⁰⁵ So, theological idealism has the same problem as theological realism (see §7.2.1). Both suppose a viewpoint external to God and the world (Van den Brom, *Theoloog als jongleur*, 39).

¹⁰⁶ See also Van den Brom, *Theoloog als jongleur*, 39.

¹⁰⁷ Job's decision to remain silent (40,4-5) could be understood as the acknowledgement that human speaking of God is incapable of approaching the divine reality. If this were the case, it would support theological idealism. However, Job makes this statement within the context of the image of the lawsuit. Therefore, it does not mean that Job will never speak of and to God again but implies the acknowledgement that God has a stronger case at this moment (see §5.3). Moreover, God's remark that Job has spoken rightly (42,7) encourages the view that what is meant by 'God' should be debated, if one uses this word.

8.4 Theological Relationism

8.4.1 Theological Relationism

If one accepts that a systematic theologian adopts a position equal to Job, then theological realism and idealism appear to be inadequate perspectives in order to theologize from. Both approaches assume the viewpoint of the narrator, who observes God and the Creation from a position external to them. But God's answer demonstrates that human beings do not have such a God's eye view.¹⁰⁸ This implies that we can only speak of God from an internal point of view. If God is mentioned, a relationship between God and human beings is presupposed.¹⁰⁹ For believers this relationship with the divine is part of the reality in which they live. They can not step outside this relationship and adopt an independent position towards it in order to observe both parties in this relationship as objects from an external position. For example, Job struggles with his misfortune while he is in a relationship with God. He is criticized for the point where his argument assumes the position of the narrator in the book. For, his conclusion that God perverts justice supposes insight into God's actions and motives from an external point of view. Job becomes aware that he does not have such knowledge of God. If systematic theologians accept that they are in a position equal to Job and realize that they are unable to adopt a position external to God and the world like the narrator in the book of Job, it only remains possible for them to theologize from an internal perspective.

Theological relationism has such an internal perspective as its starting point. It takes the relation between God, human beings, and the Creation as its basis.¹¹⁰ Theological relationism provides language in order to make the interaction between God and human beings debatable. A relational theology does not describe God *in se* or offer a hypothesis that tries to explain everything (pace theological realism) but it does take notice of the existential dimension of Christian belief in God, who is transcendent. Therefore, theological relationism speaks of the meaning of God

¹⁰⁸ This is e.g. made clear by the question of whether or not Job was present when God created the world (38,4), by the doubt about whether or not Job surveys the expanses of the earth (38,18), and by the challenge to adopt a divine position and perform divine tasks (40,9-14). The prologue underlines Job's lack of insight into God's motives. For, it confirms that Job does not know the real reason for his suffering.

¹⁰⁹ This counts for an insider's (systematic theology) as well as an outsider's (philosophy of religion) perspective. When religion is described from an outsider's perspective, it is still the case that one observes the divine from the relationship that human beings have with the divine. For, an observer is also unable to adopt a position external to God and the world.

¹¹⁰ This description of theological relationism is based on Van den Brom, *Creatieve Twijfel*, 32-34; *Theoloog als jongleur*, 37.40-41; "Theologie als verbeelding", 273-291; L.J. van den Brom, "Theïsme voorbij. Een relationeel alternatief", in: T. Boer (ed.), *Schepper naast God? Theologie, bio-ethiek en pluralisme. Essays aangeboden aan Egbert Schrotten*, Assen 2004, 39-40.50-52.

pro nobis. The relation between God and human beings is not only a construction in the mind of believers which ends when they die (pace theological idealism). Theological relationism regards God as present in our midst. As Job articulates; his eye has seen God (42,5). A relational view is therefore concerned with the divine and supposes that the relation between God and human beings continues after death. Thus, it makes 'ontological' claims. That is to say, theological relationism attempts to approach the divine by describing its relations with human beings and this world. These claims refer to the relations between God, human beings, and the world instead of a description of God's essence independently from these relations. However, the relation with God can not be described in the same way as relations with visible objects. God's transcendence places a limit on our theological language. The help of relations between familiar elements is needed in order to explicate relations between God, human beings, and the world.

The implications of a relational view and its difference to theological realism can best be clarified by an example. In 16,19-21, Job states that his witness is in heaven. He calls on God to plead as his witness with God. Here, God fulfils the role of witness and plaintiff at the same time. Theological realism would take these two functions as descriptions of God's essence. It would argue that these functions of God exist independently from his relation with human beings. A realistic view takes up an external perspective. Therefore, it considers itself capable of surveying the coherence between the different attributes and characteristics within God. Theological realism sees it as its task to make a harmonious synthesis of them because there can not be internal conflict within God by definition. However, this is where the problem lies. Job's call in 16,19-21 is puzzling if 'witness' and 'plaintiff' are taken as descriptions of God's essence. An incoherent concept of God threatens because God fulfils two opposing roles. Some exegetes are of the opinion that 'witness' (16,19) should not be understood as God. Habel, for instance, says that Job is not contemplating the good side of a schizophrenic deity.¹¹¹ The characterization 'schizophrenic deity' appears to reveal the underlying assumption that it would give a conflicting concept of God if Job incited God to plead on behalf of him with God. Could it be that a realistic frame of reference has affected the scholar's interpretation of 'witness'?¹¹²

Theological relationism, on the contrary, understands 'witness' and 'plaintiff' as indications of the relation between Job and God. 'Witness' and 'plaintiff' then characterize two different roles which God fulfils in relation to Job. On the one hand, Job interprets his misfortune as God's charge against him. In this miserable

¹¹¹ Habel, *Job*, 275.

¹¹² The same counts for the 'redeemer' in 19,25. See also Müller's remark that the contents of Job's complaint lead to anti-theism if they are misunderstood as 'konstative Äußerungen'. Müller refers to 16,9 in this context (H.P. Müller, *Das Hiobproblem. Seine Stellung und Entstehung im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (EdF 84), 3rd rev. ed., Darmstadt 1995, 135).

fate, God manifests himself as Job's plaintiff and opponent according to Job. On the other hand, Job puts his trust in God. He makes an appeal to God's role as helper of those who are in distress and who have no alternative aid. Thus, both terms identify two different, simultaneously fulfilled roles in the interaction between God and human beings and make these roles debatable. Harm can give rise to the feeling that God has turned against one; then God can become the target of question and protest because he has permitted the existence of evil. On the other hand, though, people can call for God's help when evil afflicts them. They then appeal to God as the one who provides strength and hope. Human beings can not say more than that God sometimes fulfils these seemingly conflicting roles in relation to them at the same time that they live in a relationship with God. This is the implication of a monotheistic concept of God. How these different roles are related within God is beyond human observation because this requires an external point of view. We can only deal with how God reveals himself to us.¹¹³ A relational view tries to provide language for making debatable the different ways in which God reveals himself to us. Since a relational view deals with how God manifests himself to us instead of God's essence, the implication is that God can only be spoken of in a fragmentary way.

Theological relationism takes the relation between God and human beings as a starting point. Calling God his 'witness' and 'plaintiff' therefore also places Job in a relationship with God. Job experiences God as his opponent on the one hand but he declares his dependence upon divine intervention for a change in his miserable fate on the other. In this way, 'witness' and 'plaintiff' can not be understood independently from the form of life in which they function. They give words to different aspects of Job's relationship with God during the time of his suffering.

8.4.2 A Relational View on Evil

The existence of evil has mostly been treated as a theoretical problem. While atheists are of the opinion that it causes a logical or evidential problem for the existence of a theistic God, theodicians offer theoretical explanations in order to justify God's decision to permit evil in this world. However, both camps lose sight of the fact that in first instance the existence of evil is an existential problem instead of a theoretical one. The idea that evil serves to accomplish a greater good illustrates this observation rather well. Here, the pain and distress of sufferers risks being trivialised. However, the confrontation with an evil event can hit human beings in the heart of their existence. It evokes confusion, raises questions about a sense of evil, and brings God's role in relation to evil under discussion. A relational

¹¹³ See also Brümmer's remark that we experience God only as he has revealed himself to us and not as he actually is in himself (Brümmer, *Personal God*, 40). This implies that God's revelation also determines the limits of what we can know and say of God, according to him (42-43).

approach to evil wants to take notice of this existential aspect. It therefore takes the relation between grief and the human being suffering it as a starting point when it defines 'evil'. Evil is then harm which is caused to sentient beings without justification.¹¹⁴ This means that evil is not an entity that exists independently. For, it would require a position external to God and the world in order to observe objectively that a particular event is evil. Whether something is evil is established in relation to the one who suffers the event.¹¹⁵ The issue at stake is now not whether or not God can be justified for permitting the existence of evil. As I have argued, this is beyond our ability of observation. The starting point of theological relationism is human beings who experience evil while they live in a relationship with God. God is part of their form of life. The issue then is how the interaction between God and human beings can be made debatable during a period of innocent suffering. Which role(s) does God fulfil with regard to the existence of evil and in relation to an individual who suffers unjustified harm? In this way, theological relationism takes the perspective of believers, who stand in a relationship to God and experience evil in their life.

Thus, a relational approach results in modesty with regard to justifications of God or claims about the sense of evil. Understanding God's motives for permitting the presence of evil in this world is a topic that is too wonderful to be fathomed by human beings.¹¹⁶ Therefore, human beings can do no more than confess that God created this world and trust that this world is good as it is.¹¹⁷ This outcome is reminiscent of Job's reaction to his misfortune in the prologue. There, Job states that the Lord has given and the Lord has taken away. He blesses God's name without questioning his fate (1,21). There is a considerable difference between Job's worldview and ours nowadays. While Job supposes that his misfortune is a direct intervention of God, we regularly leave more room for inner worldly dynamics and the laws of nature. Nevertheless, it appears that the basic thought of Job's statement in the prologue still counts. Human beings can only observe that God has placed them in a world where a confrontation with an evil event belongs to the possibilities. In this sense, the Lord has given and the Lord has taken away.

Miskotte calls Job's reaction in the prologue Job's highest and best moment of flourishing belief that he later loses in the dialogue.¹¹⁸ Earlier I questioned this

¹¹⁴ This definition includes natural, moral, and metaphysical evil because it leaves the cause of a specific evil open.

¹¹⁵ So, the question is not whether evil is something substantial or something which does not really exist (e.g. Augustine: 'privatio bonum' or Barth: 'das Nichtige'). A relational view takes individual persons who experience an event as unjustified harm as a starting point. For them, this event is problematic and labelled evil. God created a world in which the occurrence of this evil event is possible. Therefore, God is also responsible and his actions come under discussion.

¹¹⁶ Cf. 42,3.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Gen.1.

¹¹⁸ Miskotte, *Antwoord*, 93-94.

view and wondered whether Job's reaction also displays a person's paralyses after a disaster instead of just intense faith.¹¹⁹ Do the preceding insights imply that Miskotte is right, nevertheless? Miskotte indeed mentions an important insight but I propose a modification. This modification concerns the order in which things are said. Suffering evil can cause victims to wrestle with their fate. The story of Job shows how evil can be puzzling. It can cause a conflict in one's concept of God. The grief that evil causes often conflicts too much with our impression of what a good life should be so that it could be accepted without question, feelings of rebellion, or disappointment. Therefore, it can be valued as a sign of belief and taking the relationship with God seriously rather than as a moment of unbelief, if someone struggles with a miserable fate.¹²⁰ Moreover, God is of the opinion that in the dialogue Job has spoken true things about God during the intense struggle with his fate and with the issue of God's involvement in it (42,7). Although God criticizes Job's speeches at several points, he acknowledges the legitimacy of Job's wrestling and rebellion in Job's miserable circumstances. So, struggling with one's misfortune and God's role in it is a legitimate element of the process of coming to terms with it. It seems to me that generally one must first pass through this phase of questioning and rebellion before one is able to draw a conclusion such that which Job stated in the prologue. Therefore, I propose a change in the order in which things are said. Often one first needs to struggle before one is able to accept that only little can be said about God's reasons for permitting evil. Hence it would have been more obvious if the statement 'The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' as an expression of ultimate trust in God's righteousness was mentioned in Job's final reply at the end of the book of Job.

8.5 God's Different Roles when Evil Occurs

8.5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine what the book of Job has to offer and to ask of systematic theology with regard to the issue of theodicy. Until now I have concentrated on the different perspectives from which it is possible to theologize in this chapter. Firstly, I tried to reveal some problems of theological realism by means of the book of Job.¹²¹ Through this, different forms of theodicy came under discussion because they have theological realism as a starting point. Subsequently, it appears that theological idealism is not an adequate alternative.¹²² In the previous section I have argued that, in my opinion, theological relationism most closely

¹¹⁹ §6.2.3.

¹²⁰ Miskotte praises believers who question and encourages them to do it. He even calls it a commandment to ask. Not asking is a sign of unfaithfulness according to him (Miskotte, *Antwoord*, 218-228).

¹²¹ §8.2.

¹²² §8.3.

matches the insights which the book of Job provides.¹²³ The question now is what the implications are if the book of Job is read from a relational perspective. If it is not useful for offering essential descriptions of God, how then can the views and images from the book be applied in systematic theological thinking? This section further elaborates upon this issue. It expounds how a relational view takes the various indications of God in the book as descriptions of relations between God and human beings. In this way, the book of Job offers language in order to put into words which roles God fulfils with regard to the sufferer in times of blameless suffering. Since different characters with different insights take the floor, the book of Job can be taken as a debate on how the interaction between God and human beings and God's involvement in the existence of evil could be understood when evil afflicts someone.¹²⁴ This debate demonstrates various views on God's involvement in miserable fates. It also offers language to discuss God in several stages in one's struggle with evil.

There is a considerable gap between our contemporary world view and Job's. Job considers each event of prosperity or setback as an accomplishment of God. According to Job, a person's behaviour determines what happens to them. Nowadays, events are generally not so strictly related to direct action by God.¹²⁵ The present world view leaves room for laws of nature and human free will; evil can be the result of natural processes or human actions. Therefore, one's fate is usually not directly related to one's former behaviour. This gap between both world views raises the question of whether elements from the book of Job can still be applied to contemporary discussion of God's involvement in the existence of evil. For, how can the book of Job supply contemporary believers with language for discussing God in their lives if God's actions in this world are considered differently? Nevertheless, various aspects of the struggle with the relation between God and the existence of evil in this world nowadays are recognised in the book of Job. Scholars and believers still find clues in the book of Job that could be valuable for current thinking about the issue of theodicy.¹²⁶ In my opinion, the case of Job demonstrates that suffering evil is an existential experience. It can lead to a struggle with God. The relation with God, which is constitutive for one's life, can be on trial due to blameless suffering. The book of Job provides tools in order to

¹²³ §8.4.

¹²⁴ In this way, I have some sympathy for the approach of Newsom, who reads the book of Job as a polyphonic work in which the different characters represent different moral imaginations while the author does not take sides (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 21-31). However, my approach differs in the sense that I am of the opinion that the author does take sides (see note 3 in §5.1.2). Furthermore, it is possible that an individual character mentions different roles which seem opposed to each other: e.g. God as opponent and witness in the speeches of Job.

¹²⁵ The book of Job has already denounced this way of reasoning somewhat. For, it questions the possibility that one's previous behaviour can be derived from one's fate.

¹²⁶ See also §1.1.1.

discuss God in this situation. Firstly, it demonstrates how God's functioning can be subject to debate through the experience of evil. Secondly, it shows which different roles God fulfils or seems to fulfil in the eyes of the sufferer of evil in such circumstances.

8.5.2 Evil Denounces God's Functioning

Suffering evil is often a drastic and confusing experience. It puts pressure on a person's relation with God. The reason for this confusion is the feeling that God acts differently than one might have expected in such a situation.¹²⁷ Victims of evil regularly experience their fate as incompatible with the existence of a perfectly good and powerful God. They expected that this God would prevent the existence of evil. As long as acceptable reasons which justify that God has permitted the existence of evil can not be formulated, the presence of evil in this world denounces God's functioning. In the eyes of victims of evil, God fails to be the one who is merciful and who accomplishes good for human beings. Evil might give the impression that God is not wholly good. It causes pain and disappointment about the lack of divine intervention. This can question God's functioning and put pressure on a relation that is significant for one's life. It seems to me that logical and evidential arguments against the existence of a theistic God are based on this existential experience. They transform the feeling that God acts wrongly and the disappointment about the failure of divine intervention into formal arguments. God is not a reliable partner anymore for many who suffer innocently because he failed to prevent their misery. Because of this, God's functioning becomes subject to debate when evil happens.

The book of Job illustrates these feelings. It offers believers language to express them. In Job's eyes, God is the absent one during the struggle with his fate. Job calls for help but God does not answer him (30,20). At the same time, Job also doubts God's righteousness. He has the impression that God treats him unjustly.¹²⁸ This impression is based on Job's idea of how God should act. Understanding God's actions according to a retributive theology, Job observes that God simply acts to the contrary. He, the blameless one, suffers and the wicked are doing well. So, God becomes unfathomable for Job. Job waited for good but evil came (30,26) so God does not meet Job's original expectations. Because of this, God can become an unreliable partner and end up in the role of opponent for blamelessly suffering human beings. In their eyes, God has turned against them. Job illustrates this impression of God's opposing and hostile attitude towards him by means of, for example, the images of God as archer or warrior on the battlefield.¹²⁹ This feeling might raise the question of whether or not God is still worth worshipping now that,

¹²⁷ See 30,26.

¹²⁸ 9,21-24.

¹²⁹ §4.2.1.

according to a person's observation, he has turned out to be less reliable than expected. Even if a particular misfortune has not directly been caused by God but is the result of natural processes or actions by fellow human beings, the question remains of why God has created a world in which this is possible. Why did he give life to unfortunate and bitter human beings (3,20)? In this way, the existence of evil confronts human beings with a difficult and unruly side of God. One can not go beyond this because human beings lack a God's eye view in order to observe the rationale behind God's actions and the coherence of the world as it is. What remains is the acknowledgement that, particularly in times of suffering, God sometimes seems to operate in the role of opponent and unreliable partner rather than a tower of strength.

Attempts have been made to soften, explain, or justify this difficult aspect of God. Some have proposed some of God's attributes be modified. In this way, Job, for instance, wonders whether perhaps God is not omniscient or has a limited ability of observation with which he does not notice that Job has lived a blameless life (10,4). In a similar way, it has been proposed that God's power is limited and because of this he is unable to prevent evil.¹³⁰ God is cleared of morally reproachable actions because he lacks the capacity to intervene and prevent the existence of evil. However, such modifications are unacceptable because God would lose his divinity if he did not survey everything or if there was something external to him that is greater than he is. Others argue that evil is the result of wrong actions by free human beings. But even then God is still responsible for the way in which this world has been created. Actually, each form of theodicy tries to take away the impression that God fails to fulfil his obligations towards the suffering innocent by permitting the existence of evil. However, none of these 'solutions' is able to safeguard God against the suspicion that he is to a certain extent not loyal to his creatures.¹³¹ It does not change the fact that those who suffer innocently sometimes have the impression that God remains silent or has even turned against them. Recommending God as help or refuge does not remove this unruly side of God. This observation that God does not only 'give' –operates as support and redeemer– but also 'takes away' –permits the existence of evil–¹³² causes confusion about the nature of God's functioning in relation to human beings in times of innocent suffering.

This difficult and confusing side of God is not everything that can be said about God's involvement in the existence of evil. In the book of Job, God reacts to this impression in two different ways. Firstly, God disputes the claim that he is unrighteous or disloyal. He argues that these suspicions stem from Job's

¹³⁰ E.g. Kushner, *Als 't Kwaad*, 44-47; D.R. Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*, Philadelphia 1976, 251-274.

¹³¹ §8.2

¹³² Cf. 1,21.

incomplete insight into God's counsel. God presents a counter picture by means of which he demonstrates that he functions differently than Job thought. He reveals himself in his role as Creator and preserver. As the Creator of the earth, only God has complete insight into its coherence and workings. At the same time, God takes care of the cycles of the days, the seasons, and the gestation of animals, he provides animals with prey, and he provides opportunities to live in places where life seems unthinkable. God also refutes the reproach that wicked prosper by explicitly pointing out that the wicked are shaken off from the edges of the earth. In this way, God shows himself as loyal and righteous. He responds to the call of those in despair and guarantees the preconditions, which make life on earth possible. This means that God's answer resists a deistic concept of God. It displays language that describes God getting involved in earthly affairs. God's answer does not offer an explanation or justification for the existence of evil. On the contrary, it emphasizes the distinction in knowledge and power between Job and God. Human beings are unable to grasp God's involvement in sound concepts or explanations. However, at the same time, God wants to demonstrate that he is reliable. In order to achieve this, God's answer uses a form of natural theology. It invites those who live in relation to him to read his loyalty in the coherence and beauty of the Creation and the continuous cycles of seasons and life. At this, the passages on the Behemoth and the Leviathan support the fact that the powers of chaos are under God's control. In this way, God's answer assures that the Creation is not a project that got out of hand and grew beyond God's influence. To the suspicion of playing dubious roles in times of suffering, God presents a counter picture in which God shows himself as a reliable partner, who answers the cry of human beings and is continuously involved in the continuity of life. With this, God's answer offers an opposite view of God's functioning in relation to human beings at the moment one is the victim of evil.

Secondly, God's reaction contains a second aspect. Besides displaying a different view in comparison with Job and the friends, God also confirms the legitimacy of Job's impression of God during his miserable situation. Even though Job was not right, God states that his confusion about God's role with regard to his fate *from Job's perspective* is correct (42,7). Suffering evil confronts human beings with an unruly side of God because it is hard to relate this to a God who is said to be good and reliable. With the acknowledgement that Job has spoken right of God, God confirms that the existence of evil is to a certain extent problematic for human beings. God does not reject the rebelliousness that stems from such feelings. So, the book of Job leaves room for the confusion and struggle that an experience of evil might bring forward. It offers language in order to express these feelings. At the same time, this is not the final thing that can be said about God's role in relation to the existence of evil. God refutes that he would be unreliable, unjust, or hostile towards human beings. However, the implication of God's statement that

Job has spoken right things of God is that the divine answer (Job 38-41) does not simply overrule Job's protest. The rebellion against God and the struggle with the concept of God is a legitimate phase in times of trouble and setbacks. In this way, the debate about how God's involvement in the existence of evil should be understood goes further than reaching a final conclusion, which rejects former opinions and leaves no room for different feelings. Even though God's answer puts Job's former representation of God's actions remaining under criticism, Job's original incomplete impression is not brushed aside just like that. Difficulty with and confidence in God's functioning during hard times are both given a voice in the book of Job.

8.5.3 The Image of the Lawsuit

Job's story shows the dilemma a victim of evil faces. On the one hand, Job considers God as his opponent. Job has the impression that a hostile God attacks him.¹³³ On the other hand, Job can only appeal to this same God for assistance. His hope for an outcome can only be placed in God's hands even though God is both opponent and helper. The image of the lawsuit expresses this dilemma most clearly. Job understands his misery as God's legal charge against him.¹³⁴ God manifests himself as plaintiff and judge in Job's eyes. However, Job also wants to call God to account in a legal case because he has the impression that God treats him unjustly. He challenges God to explain the reasons for his fate.¹³⁵ So, God also becomes the accused. It even becomes more complicated because Job appeals to God to plead as his witness before God (16,21).¹³⁶ Hence, God fulfils different roles, when evil occurs. He can function as plaintiff, judge, opponent, accused, and witness at the same time. Now there is the question of the way in which these different and sometimes opposite roles are related to each other. How can they be placed in systematic theological thinking?

If theology takes these opposite functions as essential characteristics of God and tries to grasp them in one harmonious model, it gets into difficulty. Then there would seem to be a contradiction within God. This can be prevented if the different

¹³³ See §4.2.1.

¹³⁴ 9,3 (see §2.2.2.1).

¹³⁵ See §4.3.1.

¹³⁶ According to Miskotte, this is about constantly changing references to God, about what we call God and what we should call God. Miskotte opposes the God of the revelation, the totally different one, to the God of the experience (Miskotte, *Antwoord*, 150-152). However, my view differs from Miskotte's. In Miskotte's view, there is a difference between good and wrong speaking as well as good and wrong understanding of God. With this, he introduces an external criterion into the book of Job on basis of which he differentiates between parts of the text. However, I do not draw this difference between good and wrong speaking about God here but maintain the order of the text. In my opinion, the different roles of God each describe a relation that God can take in relation to human beings.

functions are taken as descriptions of the relations between God and Job.¹³⁷ Then God is not, for instance, plaintiff or judge *a se* but fulfils this role in relation to Job. So, one can say that God fulfils the critical function of plaintiff and judge –God sets the standard for Job’s actions– as well as that of helper in distress, redeemer from trouble and unfathomable opponent, whose actions sometimes appear dubious because of the occurrence of evil in this world. It is possible that God fulfils these different roles in relation to someone all at the same time. In reverse, these descriptions also determine Job’s relation to God. Job acknowledges God as the norm and directive for his actions, experiences God as his opponent but also considers God as his helper in distress. How these different roles are related to each other within God is beyond our range of vision.

How can these juridical images play a role in systematic theology? What can they contribute? Firstly, the image of the lawsuit offers language in order to put the struggle with evil into words. In the eyes of human beings, the existence of evil places God in the dock. Victims of evil confront God with questions and accusations. God has to explain why human beings suffer innocently. A theodicy is also about this justification of God’s actions with regard to evil. At the same time, the complexity in this situation comes to light. Whereas God is experienced as opponent, one can only appeal to this same God for assistance as one’s witness in a legal case. The fact that God considers Job’s desire to call God to account legitimate (42,7) leaves room for these feelings of despair and rebellion when evil occurs.

Secondly, God’s role as plaintiff and judge mentions a critical function of God in relation to human beings. Taking the relation with God as constitutive for one’s life means that God is also seen as the highest norm, which is directive for one’s actions. At the moment human beings do not meet this norm, God becomes their plaintiff and judge.¹³⁸ God has taken the risk that people act differently than he wants through giving them free will. Human beings are free to choose whether or not they want to live their lives as partners of God. Nevertheless, it would be an attitude of indifference if God were left untouched when his intentions for this world are harmed. Within the context of the image of the lawsuit, the function of judge and plaintiff are the expression of this involvement. It supports ethics. These ethics originated with God. Human beings living in relation to God accept these ethics as guiding for their lives. With this, they also make themselves subject to God’s criticism.

Thirdly, Van den Brom brings both aspects above together –the wish to have a legal case with God and God as critical function– when he speaks about designs for ‘the Last Judgement’. These designs regularly deal with God’s judgement of the question of whether human beings live according to God’s intentions. However,

¹³⁷ See also §8.4.1.

¹³⁸ Job’s oath of innocence (Job 31) serves to demonstrate that Job has met God’s norm.

Van den Brom points out that God is liable if he bears responsibility for the existence of human beings. According to him, God will account for his deeds and his involvement in history before human beings if it comes to pass that there is a point at which God considers history and when all evil is designated as evil.¹³⁹ In this way, both dimensions of the image of the lawsuit –God as well as human beings are accused as well as plaintiff– come out in the image of an eschatological legal case. It would be respectful in relation to human beings with their questions and struggles in circumstances of blameless suffering, if God gave room for this questioning and responded. For, then human beings are not only instruments in God's experiment 'creation' but one could speak of a personal relationship between God and human beings. In a personal relationship, God takes the interests of human beings to heart.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, it is conceivable that God explains his actions to all those who have questions at the end. However, this representation does not offer a justification for God's actions with regard to evil. It only holds out the prospect of a heartfelt agreement on human life in the eschaton to human beings.

Lastly, one could wonder how the emphasis on the different functions of God in relation to each other is divided in systematic theological thinking and in the perception of believers. Job calls on God as his witness and redeemer.¹⁴¹ With this, he mentions God's role as helper in times of distress. Apparently, God can not be called upon too often in this role because Job appeals to this function whereas God himself is the opponent. This call on God is based on Job's great confidence in God's assisting role in hard times on the one hand and in the awareness that there is no other way out on the other. The notion that God assists when all other help fails is an important notion in Christian belief. It is telling that the sentence 'I know that my redeemer lives' (19,25) is one of the most famous quotations from the book of Job and has its own history. While this 'redeeming' and 'assisting' aspect has received a lot of attention, the issue is to what extent this aspect is in balance with God's other roles within the concept of God. It seems to me that contemporary theology is often inclined to emphasize the aspect of God as the one who throws himself into the breach for human beings. God is the one to turn to for assistance in times of distress and provides the suffering with courage and strength. But are theologies sometimes not too one-sided at this point? Is there not insufficient light sometimes shed on other aspects such as opponent, plaintiff or judge? A theology would ignore the fact that evil also confronts human beings with a hard and confusing aspect of a monotheistic concept of God, if it only concentrates on God's

¹³⁹ L.J. van den Brom, *Zin in de theologie*, Kampen 1995, 24-26. With this point, Van den Brom supposes that the relation between God and human beings is of a personal nature.

¹⁴⁰ See also Van den Brom, *Zin*, 24-26. The nature of the relation between God and human beings is further elaborated upon in §8.5.4.

¹⁴¹ 16,19; 19,25.

role as helper and redeemer. The mysterious and unfathomable side of the concept of God has received considerable attention over the course of the time. Particularly after the atrocities of the World War II, God frequently ended up in the position of accused. This is appropriate in my view. For, the question of how these events can be related to the existence of a wholly good God is enormous. But to what extent does the critical role of God also (still) get a place in contemporary theology? A considerable part of the misery and innocent suffering in this world is the result of actions which deviate from how God wants people to act. Should this critical function of God and therefore ethics perhaps not deserve more attention in systematic theological thinking?

8.5.4 The Nature of the Relation between God and Human Beings and Personal God-talk

The relation between God and human beings is the starting point in a relational theology. However, what is the nature of the relation between both parties? Three fundamental kinds of relations can be distinguished: manipulative, contractual (agreements of rights and duties), and relations of mutual fellowship.¹⁴² A manipulative relation is asymmetric; A acts as a person and B becomes an object of A's manipulative power. The two other relations are symmetric. Contractual relations are based on certain rights and duties which have to be fulfilled. In a relation of mutual fellowship, both partners identify themselves with the interests of the other by treating them as if they were their own interests, while both parties act independently. It is generally held that the relation between God and human beings can be taken as a relation of mutual fellowship. In this way, human beings are free partners who can choose whether or not they want to enter into this relationship with God. At the same time, their motivation for keeping up a relation with God is inspired by respect for God's greatness and identification with how God wants this world to be. The book of Job also supposes such a relation of mutual fellowship as the norm for the relationship between God and human beings. The testing of Job's motives for living a fully pious life assumes that a relation of mutual fellowship should be one's starting point for serving God. However, the presence of evil in the Creation raises the question of the extent to which a relation of mutual fellowship is the starting point of both God and human beings for maintaining a relationship with the other party. Is the existence of evil not proof for the fact that God did not have a relation of mutual fellowship in mind at all? Or does misery not motivate human beings to worship God for other or 'wrong' reasons? It is the Satan who brings up this issue in the book of Job. His question of whether Job fears God for nothing (1,9) regards Job as well God on this topic.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Cf. Brümmer, *Personal God*, 139-142.

¹⁴³ §6.2.2.

A contractual approach might be the motive of human beings for loyalty to God. In their eyes, God has the contractual obligation to provide them with good. The Satan suspects that Job's pious attitude towards God is contractually inspired. He proposes that Job would cease his righteous actions as soon as God ceased to fulfil his obligation to reward Job for this (1,9-11). The Satan suggests that Job does not identify with God's interests at all but only worships God in order to guarantee the continuation of his prosperity. With this, an important danger of the concept of retribution is revealed. The reason for entering into a relationship with God could be receiving prosperity as a reward for a righteous way of life rather than respect for God's greatness. So, the relation between God and human beings becomes contractual from a human perspective because God is bound by his contractual obligation to punish sinful behaviour with setbacks and reward piety with prosperity. One could wonder to what extent a similar mechanism can be observed in the contemporary debate about the issue of whether the existence of evil is compatible with the existence of a perfectly good God. The logical and evidential argument against the existence of a theistic God considers the fact that God permits evil as failing to fulfil the obligation of a wholly good God to accomplish good for human beings and prevent innocent suffering. To what extent is self-interest or self well-being an important component of the kind of belief that is supposed in this reasoning?¹⁴⁴

The existence of evil also questions God's intentions for keeping up relations with human beings. For, evil can give the impression that God has lost sight of the interests of human beings or does not worry about it. This might also be one of the feelings lying behind the logical and evidential argument against the existence of a theistic God. Job puts these feelings into words. He wonders whether God perhaps created people in order to serve as playthings in God's hands. Does God spy on human beings in order to be able to punish them as soon as they have committed a sin?¹⁴⁵ If this were the case, the relation between God and human beings would be a manipulative one, within which human beings are subject to God's whims. Job argues at a certain moment that this is the case. In his view, God misuses his sovereign position and acts unjustly and arbitrarily as his case and the prosperity of the wicked show.¹⁴⁶ The fact that God does not intervene and a divine answer to

¹⁴⁴ Kuitert typifies Christianity in this way. According to him, it is a belief that is not able to create a world of 'meaning' anymore but is directed towards the well-being of the believer himself (H.M. Kuitert, *Voor een tijd een plaats van God*, Baarn 2002, 107-109). However, it is true that a love-relation is not without self-interest. Human beings also enter into relations because these relationships can contribute to their own happiness. See M. Sarot, *God, Passibility and Corporeality* (Studies in Philosophical Theology), Kampen 1992, 86-87.

¹⁴⁵ 10.13-14. One could even argue that the prologue demonstrates that Job is right in this case. Job appears to be a 'plaything' within the battle of prestige between God and the Satan.

¹⁴⁶ See e.g. Job 9.

Job's request for an explanation of the reasons for his suffering appears to fail to occur in the course of the dialogue strengthens Job's suspicion that God is not concerned about Job's interests. However, God's answer refutes this impression by presenting a counter picture. The fact that God answers demonstrates that God has taken notice of Job's case. God's creating and sustaining actions in the world have the continuity of life in mind. However, the self-willed way of responding makes it clear that God can not be manipulated to create and sustain by human beings or to answer as a contractual obligation.¹⁴⁷ It is God's free initiative to reply Job. Thanks to God's answer, Job may be sure that God is a reliable partner in the relation of the mutual fellowship they maintain towards each other.

In the prologue, God seems to be convinced that self-interest is not the basis of Job's uprightness. He holds to his impression that Job maintains a relation of mutual fellowship towards God. It is interesting to analyse whether Job's speeches in the dialogue offer clues which prove that this assessment is true. Brümmer points out that a mixture of all three kinds of relations will be found in the practice of human relations.¹⁴⁸ This is also the case in the speeches of Job. For instance, Job's protest against the fact that a reward for his righteousness is not forthcoming could be taken as dissatisfaction with the fact that God does not fulfil his contractual obligation towards Job. But it could also be disappointment about the lack of reaction from God based on a relation of mutual fellowship because of which Job had expected that God would be concerned about his fate. There might even be seen an attempt at manipulation in Job's call for a justification of God's actions. For, Job tries to move God to make him do something that he is apparently not going to do. However, it could also be that Job calls God to account as partners in a relation of mutual fellowship sometimes question each other. Even though it appears that the nature of Job's attitude towards God is not univocal, a relation of mutual fellowship dominates. Job does not give up his relationship with God despite his suffering. He keeps on trusting that God will look after his interests as witness and redeemer and does not turn away from God, although he has the impression that God treats him unjustly and is not concerned about his unjust suffering. In a contractual relation, this would have been a plausible reason for giving up the relationship. Therefore, one could say that in this sense Job passes the test. He demonstrates that his piety is not inspired by self-interest.

If the relation between God and human beings is thought of as a relation of mutual fellowship, this implies that God is spoken about by means of personal language. For, only human beings are able to start relations of mutual fellowship. By 'personal', I mean that God operates independently and freely, has relations with other persons, and possesses his own intentions and his own identity. Job and his friends suppose that God acts according to the concept of retribution. Bildad

¹⁴⁷ See also §5.3.4.6.

¹⁴⁸ Brümmer, *Personal God*, 139-140.

assures that God does not deviate from this scheme (8,3). However, one could wonder to what extent any room is left for personal talk of God in this theological view. This scheme restrains God's freedom by determining how God acts in each specific situation. In this way, God is thought rather mechanically. The benefit of such a concept of God is that God's actions are in a certain sense observable and calculable for human beings. It may give human beings something to hold on to. People would also be able to judge the righteousness of God's actions. But there would not be room in God-talk for God to consider human circumstances or personal initiatives if God was thought of so rigidly. Moreover, God's independence would be restricted because human behaviour would affect and regulate divine actions. Job actually examines the limits of this mechanical concept of God, when he wonders why God does not forgive sins that he may have committed (7,21). For, this request calls on God to break through mechanical patterns and show the personal character of his actions.¹⁴⁹ The personal character of the God-talk is neglected if God's actions are determined according to a strict application of the concept of retribution.

In a relation of mutual fellowship, partners can hurt each other. Is this also possible in the relation between God and human beings? In theology, this issue has been the subject of a considerable amount of discussion. In particular, theists hold as problematic the suggestion that God can be affected by human actions. This is the problem of God's (im)passibility.¹⁵⁰ God would be dependent on something external to himself if human behaviour affected him. For theists, this is problematic because something that exists necessarily can not depend on something that is contingent. God has his origin in himself and is thought to be perfectly *in se*. Therefore, God's existence and well-being can not depend on something external to him in this view. The dialogue of the book of Job contains traces of a similar opinion. Job's friends are convinced that God is not affected by human actions. According to them, righteous actions only benefit human beings and do not benefit God (22,2-3). It appears that Job is familiar with the same notion. He asks what he does to God, if he sins (7,20).¹⁵¹ This opinion confirms the mechanical character of the God-talk that understands God's actions according to the concept of retribution. God's function is then a kind of automaton paying out reward and punishment

¹⁴⁹ Job's friends also see some room within the strict thinking according to the concept of retribution. They suggest interpreting misery as a pedagogical instruction of God and they consider a change in one's fate due to a change of one's behaviour possible; although it is true that they see this within the context of retribution (see §3.5). Only Zophar really breaks through this relationship by suggesting that God has even forgiven some of Job's sins (11,6).

¹⁵⁰ See e.g. Sarot, *Passibility and Corporeality*. Sarot defines the term *impassibility* as "immutability with regard to one's feelings, or the quality of one's inner life" (30).

¹⁵¹ Job's argument seems to be that God would not need to punish him, if sinful behaviour did not touch on God at all (see §3.2.3).

according to one's deeds. In this way, nothing outside God is able to affect God. But if the relation between God and human beings is thought of as a relation of mutual fellowship and the God-talk has a personal character, this implies that God has chosen to adopt a vulnerable attitude in relation to human beings.¹⁵² In a relation of mutual fellowship both parties operate towards each other independently and freely. By creating human beings who are free to decide whether or not they want to enter into a relationship with God, God has thus taken for granted that he runs the risk of being hurt. So, God has chosen to make himself dependent on someone external to himself. Therefore, God might also be hurt by human actions within the relation between God and human beings.

If God adopts a position that is to a certain extent dependent on something external to him, the question arises of whether this dependence has any limit. Are there forces that are able to affect God? In this way, Job, for example, wonders whether God regards him as a power of chaos that could be a serious danger.¹⁵³ Job struggles with the question of the extent to which God can be affected. On the one hand, Job wants to persuade God with his protest that God treats him unjustly. With this, he hopes to move God to turn his fate. On the other hand, Job considers this striving as unfeasible. He states that God does not allow himself to be influenced, his actions stopped or his decisions affected by any human action.¹⁵⁴ In this way, one could say that two sides of God's passibility come to light in the book of Job. On the one hand, God has taken notice of Job's call for explanations and answers Job from the whirlwind. With this, God reacts to human actions. This means that human actions can affect God's actions.¹⁵⁵ On the other hand, God emphasizes his independence. He does not let himself be declared guilty and responds to Job's questions and reproaches in his own way. Job's experience is that the transcendent one can not be manipulated but he is free with regard to his actions towards human beings. So, within the relation with human beings, one can say that God can be thought of as impassible in the sense that human beings can not enforce some specific divine action or intervention. Either way, Job points out the irreversibility of God's actions with regard to his anger towards the helpers of Rahab (9,13). Paradoxically, God's anger has a salutary effect here. God shows himself to be indestructible against the powers of chaos which threaten the Creation.¹⁵⁶ This immutable attitude in relation to powers of chaos makes God a reliable preserver of the Creation. In this way, God's passibility has limits. If God

¹⁵² Brümmer, *Personal God*, 143.

¹⁵³ 7,12. Job's question, 'What are human beings that God makes so much of them?', (7,17) has a similar background (see §4.2.3).

¹⁵⁴ 9,12-13; 23,13. See §4.2.4.

¹⁵⁵ See e.g. also the biblical notion of divine repentance (e.g. Gen.6,6) or God's reconsideration of an earlier decision (2 Kgs.20,1-11).

¹⁵⁶ In the descriptions of the Behemoth and the Leviathan, it is emphasized again that God is able to cope with the powers of chaos (40,15-41,26).

is discussed by means of personal language, this implies that one can say that God's love within the relationship with human beings can be damaged. God can be moved by a human cry for help. However, an impassible side of God can also be spoken of if impassibility is interpreted in the following way; God can neither be manipulated nor replaced by some other force. In this way God is reliable; he safeguards life on earth.

8.5.5 A Glimpse of Heaven: an Arbitrarily Acting or Testing God?

The scene in heaven in the prologue presents a rather deviant image in comparison to the rest of the book of Job. The narrator, who surveys everything, lets the readers see heaven. Through this, the readers become aware of the rights and wrongs of Job's suffering. A battle of prestige between God and the satan is the reason for Job's misery. The misery is meant to test whether Job's devotion to God is indeed inspired by respect for God instead of self-interest. With this, the prologue presents a rather problematic concept of God. Firstly, it gives an impression of arbitrariness. Job's suggestion that human beings are only playthings in God's hands¹⁵⁷ appears to be confirmed by the fact that the battle of prestige between God and the satan is the cause of Job's misery.¹⁵⁸ Secondly, the question arises of whether the existence of evil can nevertheless be justified by a pedagogical explanation.¹⁵⁹ Has God permitted the existence of evil in order to test the faithfulness of human beings in their relation to God? This would mean that there is a certain asymmetry in the relation between God and human beings. For, human beings would, to a certain extent, be submitted to God's manipulative power with which he puts them to the test by letting them suffer innocently. If this were the case, it would not be a matter of a relation of mutual fellowship and the God-talk would not have a personal character anymore.

These two comments raise the question of whether or how the talk about God in the prologue should be discounted in systematic theology. Actually, the issue is what ultimately the status of the prologue is? Is it 'only' a (necessary) introduction to the debate between Job and his friends or does it also offer a realistic representation of what happens in heaven? If one bears in mind what has been argued in the preceding sections, the problem begins with the perspective that is taken up in the prologue. The narrator informs about the intrigues in heaven from a point of view external to both God and the world. The rest of the book of Job

¹⁵⁷ See §4.2.3.

¹⁵⁸ For example, the reflections of Jung on the book of Job are inspired by his great difficulty with this representation of God in the prologue. Jung characterizes God's actions here as the amoral actions of someone without any consciousness reflection (Jung, *Antwort*, 13.39). According to him, God is an antinomy (18), which Job realizes (30), and God himself has darkened his counsel by placing a bet with the satan (32).

¹⁵⁹ In §8.2.3.3, I have listed several objections to a pedagogical theodicy.

illustrates that human beings are unable to adopt such an external position in order to observe God.¹⁶⁰ This means that the prologue presents a concept of God which, systematic theologically considered, goes beyond the human ability of observation. If systematic theologians adopt a similar position to Job, they are unable to notice the conversation between God and the satan in heaven and draw the conclusion that God has brought evil into this world in order to test human loyalty towards him. So, the systematic theological evaluation of the biblical material from the prologue of the book of Job results in the conclusion that the representation of the battle of prestige between the satan and God and the notion that God created evil as a test are not useful in this form for contemporary discussions about God.

However, Kierkegaard considers the ordeal as a key to explaining the position of Job. He describes this as follows; this ordeal places a person in a purely personal relationship of opposition to God, in a relationship such that a person can not allow himself to be satisfied with any second-hand explanation. It is an absolutely transcendent category that can not easily be observed. Job pleads on behalf of human beings in the great case between God and human beings. This trial results in the whole thing being an ordeal.¹⁶¹ In this way, the ordeal includes the dialogue section of the book and Job's announced intent to take God to court.¹⁶² Kierkegaard praises Job for the fact that he does not let his conviction that he is innocent be silenced or smothered by those who disagree with him.¹⁶³ According to him, Job's significance is that the disputes at the boundaries of faith are fought out in him.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, Job's complaints are in particular an expression of his fear of God.¹⁶⁵ Kierkegaard states that the fear of God is in Job's heart even when he brings complaints.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, according to Kierkegaard, Job maintains his blamelessness in such a way that in him are manifest the love and trust that are confident that God can explain everything if one can only speak to him.¹⁶⁷ So, life can be a permanent situation of ordeal in which opposition to God because of the existence of evil can be an expression of a person's fear of God and makes it clear that one understands that evil can not easily be explained.¹⁶⁸

Kierkegaard reflects on Job's actions by means of the knowledge which the prologue has provided him. In this way, he observes Job and God from a similar

¹⁶⁰ See §8.2.

¹⁶¹ Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 209-210. This view is mentioned in one of the letters from the Young Man.

¹⁶² T.H. Polk, *The Biblical Kierkegaard. Reading by the Rule of Faith*, Macon 1997, 177.

¹⁶³ Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 207.

¹⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 210.

¹⁶⁵ See also Polk, *Biblical Kierkegaard*, 181.

¹⁶⁶ Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 198. He wonders whether perhaps we do not dare complain to God (197).

¹⁶⁷ Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 208.

¹⁶⁸ Kierkegaard warns that the ordeal should not be thought of as temporary (Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 210).

position as the narrator, who surveys all. Thanks to this position, Kierkegaard knows that Job's misery is meant as a test and is able to characterize Job's position as an ordeal. This implies that Kierkegaard describes and assesses Job's actions from an external perspective. Earlier it became clear that human beings are unable to observe God from such a position. However, at the same time Kierkegaard also seems to distance himself from such a form of realism. For, he emphasizes the transcendence of the ordeal and points out that God's relation to evil can not simply be understood by second-hand explanations. With this, God maintains an unruly side because of the confrontation with evil in the eyes of human beings who stand in a relation to God: "purely personal relationship of opposition to God"¹⁶⁹. This tends towards a relational perspective because it is characterized here from the relation a believer has with God. In my opinion, the concept 'ordeal' becomes useful if it is consequently applied from a relational perspective. This entails that 'being tried' is not an essential characteristic of human existence. It can not be concluded that a person's setbacks are meant as an ordeal from an external position. Only believers themselves can establish that trouble in their lives has tested their relationship with God. People can only be or become aware themselves that living a life devoted to God can bear an element of being tested because they sometimes have to choose between God's interests and those of something or someone else. In this way, believers can experience certain choices or blameless suffering as testing their loyalty to God. Kierkegaard rightly states that human beings do not have to undergo this without protest if sense or reasonableness is, in their view, lacking. God makes room for these feelings by saying in the epilogue that Job has spoken right of God (42,7).

The scene in heaven also raises two other important theological topics. Firstly, it mentions an important problem of thinking according to the concept of retribution. This can result in a piety that is particularly inspired by self-interest instead of fear of God.¹⁷⁰ Secondly, the scene serves to determine that Job's trouble is not punishment for former sins. This is necessary in order to bring a second problem of the concept of retribution into the open. Namely, that it can not simply be deduced from a person's misery that one has sinned. With this, the author of the book of Job brings the complete concept of retribution under discussion. It is apparently possible to suffer innocently. The scene in heaven offers the required conditions in order to be able to make this point. It is necessary to get 'the case of Job' going. The author communicates a possible reason for trouble that deviates from the prevailing retributive thinking via the prologue. This is an important and different note compared to a theology which understands God's actions according to the concept of retribution. Whereas the book of Job does not fully reject this theology, it does break it open and reveals some problems in it. But the

¹⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 210.

¹⁷⁰ A contractual instead of a mutual love-relation (see §8.5.4).

representation of the prologue does not give a real –in the sense of a copy– glimpse of heaven.

8.6 Summary and Conclusions

It is the aim of this study to investigate what the book of Job could contribute to systematic theology with regard to the debate on the issue of theodicy. This contribution consists of two parts. Firstly, the reading of the book of Job as presented in this study raises an epistemological issue. It demonstrates that theological realism and idealism are impossible perspectives from which to theologize. They both adopt an external position from which they consider God and the world and which corresponds to the position of God and the all-knowing narrator in the book of Job. However, God's answer makes it clear that Job does not hold a similar position to God. Because of this, Job lacks insight into God's counsel and is unable to see through the rationale behind God's actions. If systematic theologians acknowledge that they adopt a similar position to Job, they can only draw the conclusion that theological realism and idealism are inadequate perspectives. This has consequences for the way in which the concept of God can be represented. Theological realism and idealism portray the concept of God with harmonised aspects. However, if they are inadequate perspectives, this entails that God can not be discussed by means of coherent models. So, the present reading of the book of Job proposes systematic theology in order to avoid depicting the concept of God with harmonised aspects.

Various theodicies have theological realism as a starting point. Their attempts to justify God's actions with regard to the existence of evil fail because they suppose an impossible viewpoint external to God and the world. Moreover, theodicians as well as those who argue that the existence of a theistic God is logically or evidentially impossible, treat God as a member of our moral community. However, this is not possible because, if this were the case, there would be something outside God that is greater than God. God would then lose his divinity. On the other hand, theological idealism is not an appropriate alternative. It breaks the relationship between its own concepts and the divine. However, Job indicates in his reply to God that he has experienced a revelation of God (42,5). A perspective which does not deal with the divine at all is therefore insufficient.

The book of Job favours a theology that takes an internal perspective. Theological relationism has such an internal point of view as a starting point. By describing the relations between God, human beings, and the Creation, it holds to a relation with the divine but at the same time avoids considering God from an external viewpoint impossible for human beings. This has considerable implications for how the concept of God should be represented. In a relational view, the concept of God is not put into words with harmonised aspects but with

complementary aspects. These aspects are not complementary in the sense that they are additional and give a complete picture if they are taken together but in the sense that they exist simultaneously, the one next to the other, as the image of the lawsuit in the book of Job demonstrates. God can fulfil the role of plaintiff, judge, accused, and witness at the same time. In this way, the reading of the book of Job as presented in this study suggests the systematic theology to bring God up by means of complementary aspects. The implication is that God can only be spoken of in a fragmentary way.

Secondly, once one has accepted that a relational perspective is the appropriate one for theologizing, the book of Job can contribute to the systematic theological debate on the issue of theodicy in the following way. The book of Job can provide systematic theology with language in order to express the various relations God has with human beings and the Creation in times of innocent suffering. There is some dynamic. One could say that the book of Job contains a debate on how God's involvement in the existence of evil should be understood or that it describes different stages in one's coping with evil. For instance, whereas those who suffer sometimes experience God as their opponent, to this view a picture is opposed in which God answers the cry for assistance and responds with life giving actions. The complexity of the situation of a victim of evil becomes strikingly clear within the image of the lawsuit. God can fulfil the role of plaintiff, judge, accused, and witness simultaneously. While people can have the impression that a hostile God has turned against them, the only way out is an appeal to this same God. So, the book of Job can offer language in order to put different –complementary– aspects of the concept of God into words.

The book of Job takes note of the fact that experiencing evil can be a drastic event in one's life and put the relation with God under pressure. What is more, it values feelings of rebellion and one's struggle with God as legitimate stages in these situations. In this way, living in relation to God can be experienced as an ordeal. However, the book does not offer an explanation of the sense of the existence of evil, nor does it try to justify God. All that can be said is that God has created a world which includes the existence of evil. A believer can only trust that this is good. God might explain this action in the eschaton but for now no more can be said more than that 'the Lord has given and the Lord has taken away' (1,21).

The issue at stake in the battle of prestige between God and the satan is the question of what motivates Job and God to maintain a relation with the other. Is this a relation of mutual fellowship, a contractual, or perhaps even a manipulative one? This question reveals a problematic aspect of a theology that understands God's actions according to the concept of retribution. The nature of the relation between God and human beings in such a theology threatens to become a

contractual or even a manipulative one. For, Job's piety might be motivated by the interest to safeguard his prosperity. Or, God might manipulate human beings because he forces them to live a pious life by threatening them with punishment if they do not. Although the book of Job does not fully reject the retributive logic, it reveals its limits. The concept of retribution leaves no room for innocent suffering and easily evokes a piety that is inspired by self-interest. The systematic theological objection against this concept is that God becomes a mechanism that rewards and punishes like an automaton according to one's actions. The personal character of the God-talk fades away in this theology even though the challenging question by the satan of whether Job fears God for nothing (1,9) makes it clear that it is the basic supposition of the book of Job that the relation between God and human beings ought to be a personal one. Perhaps the whole struggle with the situation of innocent suffering in the book of Job can be characterized as a quest for finding how to speak of God in a personal way when evil occurs. For, the whole problem arose due to the fact that God was thought in the mechanical way of the concept of retribution.

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Nederlandse Samenvatting

Regelmatig verwijzen mensen naar het bijbelboek Job als het gaat om de vraag hoe God betrokken is bij het bestaan van ongerechtvaardigd lijden. Deze vraag wordt het vraagstuk van de theodicee genoemd. In dit proefschrift wordt nagegaan welke bijdrage het bijbelboek Job zou kunnen leveren aan de systematische theologie met betrekking tot dit vraagstuk. Het onderzoek bestaat uit twee delen. Het eerste deel is een bijbels theologisch deel (Hoofdstuk 2-7). Hier worden de theologische implicaties van het bijbelboek Job gereconstrueerd. Er wordt in kaart gebracht hoe de verschillende karakters in het bijbelboek Gods handelen in relatie tot Jobs onschuldige lijden interpreteren. Het tweede deel van deze studie is een systematisch theologisch deel (Hoofdstuk 8). Dit deel bestaat uit een systematisch theologische reflectie op het vraagstuk van de theodicee met behulp van het materiaal uit het bijbelboek Job.

Vooraf dient de vraag beantwoord te worden op welke wijze de Schrift en de systematische theologie zich tot elkaar verhouden. Dit gebeurt in het inleidende hoofdstuk (Hoofdstuk 1). Ik beschrijf deze verhouding als een interactie. Enerzijds is er een beweging van de systematische theologie naar de Schrift. De systematische theologie doet een beroep op de Schrift met de vraag welke theologische implicaties haar teksten hebben, omdat de Schrift leidend is voor het denken en handelen van de christelijke geloofsgemeenschap. Overigens kan dit beroep op de Schrift vanuit een systematisch theologische vraagstelling voor de exegese een heuristische functie hebben. Anderzijds is er een beweging van de Schrift naar de systematische theologie. De Schrift voorziet de systematische theologie van inzichten, ideeën en concepten die bruikbaar kunnen zijn voor haar denken. Bedacht dient te worden dat de systematische theologie op een heel diverse wijze gezag toekent aan elementen uit de Schrift.

Hoofdstuk 2 beschrijft de centrale positie van Job 9 in het bijbelboek Job. Deze rede van Job heeft een sleutelfunctie in het bijbelboek. Ten eerste wordt door middel van deze rede het verstaan van Gods handelen in termen van vergelding in de dialoog (Job 3-42,6) beslissend aan de kaak gesteld. Het beeld van het rechtsgeding speelt hierbij een belangrijke rol. Job houdt in Job 9 vast aan zijn integriteit en wijst op zijn onmacht om God ter verantwoording te kunnen roepen voor diens handelen. Hij gaat ervan uit dat God rechtvaardigen beloont met voorspoed en goddelozen bestraft met tegenslag. Omdat Job ondanks zijn rechtvaardigheid lijdt, kan hij niet anders dan concluderen dat God in zijn geval onrechtvaardig handelt. Zo komt het godsconcept dat Job hanteert in botsing met de praktijk. Op deze wijze komt in Job 9 het denken in termen van vergelding beslissend ter discussie te staan. Als Job rechtvaardig is, moet God wel onrechtvaardig zijn. Ten tweede wordt in Job 9 de dialoog met de proloog (Job 1-

2) verbonden. In de proloog bevestigen de verteller en God dat Job rechtvaardig is en zonder reden lijdt. Job gebruikt in Job 9 dezelfde woorden. Dankzij de relatie met de proloog weet de lezer dat Job in de dialoog terecht zijn onschuld naar voren brengt. Zo kan de lezer niet langer negeren dat er een problematische kant zit aan het godsconcept dat Gods handelen verstaat in termen van vergelding. In deze theologie is geen ruimte voor onschuldig lijden. Ten derde vormt Job 9 ook een brug naar Gods antwoord en Jobs reactie daarop aan eind van het bijbelboek Job. Dit derde aspect van de sleutelfunctie van Job 9 wordt uitgewerkt in Hoofdstuk 5.

In Hoofdstuk 3 wordt beschreven hoe de vrienden van Job het vergeldingsdenken introduceren in de dialoog. In hun ogen hangt iemands lot af van hoe iemand eerder heeft gehandeld. Mensen oogsten wat zij hebben gezaaid. Hierdoor is zowel Gods handelen als het eerdere gedrag van mensen herleidbaar. Zo concluderen de vrienden uit Jobs leed dat Job wel moet hebben gezondigd en dat zijn claim dat hij integer is niet waar kan zijn. Hoewel vergelding aan de basis ligt van het denken van Jobs vrienden, komen in hun redes ook enkele andere facetten van het lijden naar voren. Twee van de vrienden benadrukken het pedagogische aspect van leed. Mensen zouden leed dat hen overkomt, moeten opvatten als een waarschuwing van God en als een aansporing om hun verkeerde gedrag te wijzigen. Goddelijke straf is in de ogen van de vrienden ook niet onomkeerbaar. Indien mensen zich afwenden van hun goddeloze levenswandel, zal hun lot ten goede keren. Het motief van de menselijke onvolkomenheid beperkt de kans dat iemand volledig rechtvaardig is. Rechtvaardig zijn is volgens dit motief slechts een theoretische mogelijkheid. Door middel van dit motief wordt Jobs overtuiging dat hij onschuldig is op voorhand ondermijnd. Eenmaal wordt het vergeldingsconcept in de redes van de vrienden doorbroken. Sofar brengt naar voren dat God zelfs een deel van Jobs zonde vergeeft. Hij gebruikt deze notie om Jobs bewering dat hij rechtvaardig is te verwerpen. Hiermee probeert Sofar de impasse die Job met zijn bewering veroorzaakt –Job is rechtvaardig, dus moet God onrechtvaardig zijn– te doorbreken. Dit ‘uitstapje’ dient er zo paradoxaal genoeg toe om het vergeldingsdenken veilig te stellen.

In Hoofdstuk 4 komen de overige redes van Job aan de orde. Hier wordt duidelijk welke ambivalente houding Job tegenover God aanneemt. Hij klaagt God aan en beschuldigt God van onrechtvaardig handelen. Maar tegelijk kan Job niet anders dan zijn hoop vestigen op deze zelfde God. Gedurende de hele dialoog spelen Jobs overtuiging dat hij onschuldig is en zijn wens om Gods houding ten opzichte van hem aan de kaak te stellen een prominente rol. Job gebruikt hiervoor het beeld van het rechtsgeding. Dit biedt een kader om zijn aanklacht, onmacht en verlangen tot

uitdrukking te brengen. Job wil God ter verantwoording roepen in een rechtsgeding om zo zijn onschuld aan hem voor te leggen. Tegelijk beseft hij dat zo'n rechtsgeding tussen God en mensen onmogelijk is. Job beschrijft God als een tegenstander die hem bestookt. Volgens Job beschouwt God hem als een vijand. Hij zoekt naar motieven voor dit optreden van God. Beschouwt God Job als een bedreiging, laat Gods 'alwetendheid' hem in de steek waardoor hij Jobs onschuld niet waarneemt of had God kwade bedoelingen bij de schepping van mensen? Job voelt zich overgeleverd aan het willekeurige handelen van God. Hij beseft dat mensen dit niet kunnen beïnvloeden. Om zijn aanklacht breder te funderen noemt Job ook zijn waarneming dat het goddelozen voor de wind gaat. God handelt derhalve in het algemeen niet naar de maatstaven van de vergelding. Job vraagt zich af waarom God eigenlijk leven schenkt aan mensen die tegenslag te verduren krijgen. Toch kan Job niet anders dan zijn hoop vestigen op deze God die zich tegen hem heeft gekeerd. Verschillende exegeten zijn van mening dat het bij Jobs beroep op 'zijn getuige in de hemel' en 'zijn verlosser' gaat om een middelaar tussen God en Job. Job heeft echter al duidelijk gemaakt dat een rechtszaak tussen God en een andere partij onmogelijk is. Alleen God zelf kan partij bieden aan God. Daarom kunnen de 'getuige' en de 'verlosser' slechts slaan op God. God is de enige die Job een uitweg kan bieden uit zijn ellende. Daarom vestigt Job zijn hoop op God.

Hoofdstuk 5 houdt zich bezig met het antwoord van God en Jobs reactie daarop. Met een indrukwekkende rede vanuit de storm beantwoordt God Jobs aanklacht en zijn roep om een reactie. Hoewel God het vergeldingsconcept niet volledig verwerpt, zet hij wel vraagtekens bij de herleidbaarheid van zijn handelen aan de hand van dit concept. Zowel Job als de vrienden gaan ervan uit dat God handelt volgens de lijnen van vergelding. Op basis hiervan concludeert Job dat God hem onrechtvaardig behandelt. God noemt dit echter verdonkeremaning van zijn plan en frustratie van zijn recht. Hiermee verwerpt God in zijn antwoord dat zijn handelen kan worden vastgesteld met behulp van een theologie die een strikte relatie ziet tussen iemands handelen en wat hem overkomt. Verschillende exegeten zijn van mening dat Gods antwoord inhoudelijk niet ingaat op de redes van Job. Ik verdedig de these dat God Job indirect antwoordt door het schetsen van een 'tegenbeeld'. Tegenover Jobs indruk dat God willekeurig handelt en het recht buigt, schetst God hoe hij scheppend en onderhoudend opereert, op onverwachte plaatsen leven schenkt en de goddeloze straft. Job 9 heeft bij deze relatie tussen Gods antwoord en Jobs redes in de dialoog een sleutelfunctie. God confronteert Job met zijn gebrek aan inzicht in de orde en de overwegingen die ten grondslag liggen aan de schepping en Gods handelen daarin. Job neemt niet dezelfde positie in als God. Het ontbreekt Job aan een 'God's eye view'.

In reactie op Gods antwoord geeft Job toe dat er een fundamenteel verschil is tussen hem en God. Hij is zich ervan bewust geworden dat hij heeft gesproken over goddelijke zaken die zijn begrip te boven gaan. Daarom staakt Job het verdere debat met God en zal hij God niet meer bestoken met vragen of tegenargumenten. Hij versmelt tegenover God en betoont spijt, want hij is stof en as.

Het raamwerk van het bijbelboek Job komt ter sprake in Hoofdstuk 6. De proloog schetst de noodzakelijke randvoorwaarden waardoor in het boek een aantal kanttekeningen bij het vergeldingsconcept kunnen worden geplaatst. De verteller verankert Jobs rechtvaardigheid en maakt duidelijk dat Jobs leed geen straf is voor zonde. De satan speelt een paradoxale rol. In het verhaal treedt hij op als een tegenstrever van God en Job. Maar door zijn vraag of Job God vreest zonder reden wordt wel meteen een aspect van het vergeldingsdenken ter discussie gesteld. Een *do ut des* motief zou namelijk voor zowel God als Job een reden kunnen zijn om de relatie met de ander te onderhouden. Tegelijk wordt in de proloog het vergeldingsconcept doorbroken. Door de scène in de hemel wordt duidelijk dat er meer oorzaken voor iemands leed zijn dan alleen de misstappen die iemand heeft begaan. De proloog is noodzakelijk om voor de lezer het vergeldingsconcept beslissend ter discussie te stellen. Daarom veronderstel ik dat dialoog en proloog zijn geconstrueerd met het oog op elkaar. Hoewel Job in zijn redes Gods plan heeft verdonkeremaand, waardeert God in de epiloog Jobs worstelen, vragen, klagen en beschuldigen in de dialoog als een juist spreken over God. Vanuit Jobs interpretatiekader gezien ging Job terecht met God de strijd aan. Het herstel van Job aan het eind van het boek ligt weer in de lijn van de vergelding. Sommige exegeten vinden dit strijdig met het voorafgaande. Maar dit is niet het geval, omdat God in zijn antwoord de vergelding niet volledig verwerpt.

Hoofdstuk 7 is een samenvatting van het bijbels theologische deel en verwoordt enkele conclusies. Het bijbelboek Job verwerpt het vergeldingsconcept niet volledig, maar brengt de grenzen van een theologie die dit voorstaat aan het licht.

In Hoofdstuk 8 vindt de systematisch theologische reflectie op het vraagstuk van de theodicee plaats met behulp van materiaal uit het bijbelboek Job. De epistemologische kwestie uit het antwoord van God bepaalt de opbouw van hoofdstuk. God houdt Job voor dat het Job aan goddelijke macht en een 'God's eye view' ontbreekt. Ik confronteer drie perspectieven van waaruit kan worden getheologiseerd –theologisch realisme, theologisch idealisme en theologisch relationisme– met dit inzicht uit Gods antwoord. Theologisch realisme en theologisch idealisme veronderstellen beide een externalistische positie om God en

de wereld te beschrijven. Dit is de positie van de alwetende verteller in het bijbelboek Job. Theologisch relationisme veronderstelt een internalistische positie. Dit is de positie van Job. Job meende aanvankelijk Gods handelen te kunnen beoordelen met behulp van het vergeldingsconcept. Hij nam hierbij een gezichtspunt in buiten God en de wereld. Gods antwoord maakt hem duidelijk dat hij heeft gesproken zonder inzicht. Job heeft geen ‘God’s eye view’. Indien een systematisch theoloog dezelfde positie inneemt als Job, is theologisch relationisme het meest adequate perspectief om vanuit te theologiseren. Er zijn verschillende theodicees geformuleerd om Gods rechtvaardigheid te verdedigen ondanks het bestaan van kwaad in de schepping. Deze theodicees veronderstellen echter een theologisch realisme. Zij voldoen derhalve niet, omdat zij uitgaan van dit inadequate perspectief. Zo geeft materiaal uit het bijbelboek Job in de eerste plaats aanleiding tot een kritische beschouwing van enkele theologische perspectieven die aan de basis kunnen liggen van systematische theologie.

Vervolgens stel ik voor om het bijbelboek Job te lezen vanuit een relationeel perspectief. Dit bijbelboek levert dan taal om onder woorden te brengen welke verschillende rollen God in tijden van onschuldig lijden ten opzichte van mensen vervult. De beschrijvingen van God zijn dan geen beschrijvingen van Gods wezen, maar beschrijvingen van relaties tussen God en mensen. Het beeld van het rechtsgeding in het bijbelboek Job schetst de complexiteit van de situatie van slachtoffers van kwaad. Enerzijds kunnen zij de indruk hebben dat God zich als een tegenstander tegen hen opstelt. Dit stelt het vertrouwen in God op de proef. Zo geeft materiaal uit het bijbelboek Job woorden aan het feit dat de confrontatie met kwaad kan leiden tot een worsteling met een verwarrende en moeilijke kant van God. Anderzijds kunnen slachtoffers van kwaad ook niet anders dan hun hoop vestigen op deze zelfde God. God vervult de rol van rechter, tegenstander, pleiter en aangeklaagde tegelijkertijd. Men zou de vraag kunnen stellen hoe deze verschillende rollen zich in een theologie tot elkaar verhouden.

In de proloog stelt de satan de vraag of Job God zonder reden dient. Hiermee stelt hij de aard van de relatie tussen God en mensen ter discussie. Is dit een manipulatieve, contractuele of liefdesrelatie? Deze vraag legt een problematisch aspect van het vergeldingsconcept bloot. God dreigt in dit concept mechanisch te worden gedacht. Hij vergeldt en beloont zonder ‘persoonlijke’ inbreng. Zo verdwijnt de persoonlijke godtalk op de achtergrond. Misschien kan de hele worsteling met het onschuldige lijden in het bijbelboek Job wel worden gekarakteriseerd als een zoektocht naar hoe te spreken over God op een persoonlijke manier wanneer mensen met kwaad worden geconfronteerd. Het hele probleem kwam immers aan de oppervlakte door het feit dat God werd gedacht op de mechanische manier van het vergeldingsconcept. De prestigestrijd tussen God en de satan, waarbij de trouw van een mens aan God door middel van leed op de proef wordt gesteld, acht ik op zich niet gebruikbaar om Gods betrokkenheid bij

leed in de huidige tijd ter sprake te brengen. De reden is hiervoor dat dit 'inkijkje in de hemel' een externalistische positie veronderstelt die wij niet kunnen innemen.