

Commentarii Periodici Pontificii Instituti Biblici

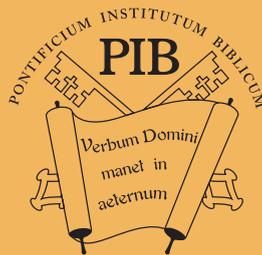
BIBLICA

Vol. 94

Fasc. 1

MICHAEL V. FOX

God's Answer and Job's Response



2013

God's Answer and Job's Response ¹

I. The Challenge

There is now a near-consensus that the Book of Job teaches that the universe lacks a moral economy in which deeds are met by appropriate and commensurate reward and punishment ². The purpose of the present essay is to offer an alternative interpretation.

This now-dominant interpretation originated in an article by M. Tsevat in 1966 ³. In Tsevat's reading, YHWH implicitly denies the existence of divine justice. Retribution is not part of reality, but only a delusion: "[W]here the principle of retribution has no valid-

¹ The present essay builds on four of my earlier studies: (1) M.V. FOX, "Job 38 and God's Rhetoric", *Semeia* 18 (1981) 53-61. I argue that God uses rhetorical questions to evoke Job's knowledge as a way of guiding his perceptions. See below, VII. (2) "Job the Pious", *ZAW* 117 (2005) 351-366. Here I examine the interplay of the two levels of communication: God to Job and author to reader. (3) "Reading the Tale of Job (Job 1:1-2:13 + 42:7-17)", *A Critical Engagement. Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum* (eds. D.J.A. CLINES – E.J. VAN WOLDE) (Hebrew Bible Monographs Series 38; Sheffield 2010) 162-179. I reject the interpretation of the frame tale as ironic and Job's repentance as tongue-in-cheek. (4) "Behemoth and Leviathan", *Bib* 93 (2012) 261-267. This is summarized below, in VI.

² Most scholars since the 1960s have accepted this view. Contrary readings are offered by (among others) J. LÉVÊQUE, *Job ou le drame de la foi* (eds. M. GILBERT – F. MIES) (Paris 2007); B.L. NEWELL, "Job: Repentant or Rebellious?", *WTJ* 46 (1984) 298-316; D.C. TIMMER, "God's Speeches, Job's Responses, and the Problem of Coherence in the Book of Job: Sapiential Pedagogy Revisited", *CBQ* 71 (2009) 286-305; S.A. GELLER, "Nature's Answer: The Meaning of the Book of Job in Its Intellectual Context", *Judaism and Ecology. Created World and Revealed Word* (ed. H. TIROSH-SAMUELSON) (Cambridge, MA 2002) 109-132. Geller rightly judges the prevailing interpretation, described earlier, to be "grossly anachronistic in its modern separation of nature and morality, creation and piety" (132).

³ M. TSEVAT, "The Meaning of the Book of Job", *HUCA* 37 (1966) 73-106. I dedicate my essay to the memory of my esteemed teacher, Professor Tsevat, who inspired me to engage with the book of Job.

ity, there can be no injustice”⁴. I will proceed largely by criticizing the case for this thesis as argued by Tsevat. Later refinements do not provide a fundamentally different or stronger argumentation.

A variant of this thesis envisions a god who is not only indifferent to justice but is actively malicious. In response to Job’s complaints, this view claims, God merely intimidates Job and sneers at his ignorance and weakness. God thereby exposes himself as, in D. Robertson’s words, a “charlatan god”⁵ or, in the view of J.B. Curtis, “remote”, “unfeeling”, “unjust”⁶. R. Polzin also sees YHWH as “insensitive” and “cruel”⁷. “Instead of appearing before Job to comfort him, God brings Job to his knees, demands recognition of his power and removes Job’s sufferings only after he forces a cry of repentance from Job’s lips”⁸. But this is not what happens.

II. God’s Attitude

Job had feared that God would “trample me in a storm and multiply my wounds without warrant. He would not let me catch my breath, but would sate me with bitterness” (9,17-18). But God does not do this. He gives Job the hearing that Job longed for and demanded, and twice pauses to let Job have his say (40,2; 42,4). He does not threaten to kill Job, though death is something that Job had (sometimes) longed for (see chapter 3). If a challenge to debate is “trampling” or if a series of rhetorical questions and a description of a well-maintained universe truly “multiplies” wounds, then Job is frailer than he appears in the Dialogue, in which he called on God to show himself to state his case (13,18-27; 14,15) and imag-

⁴ TSEVAT, “Meaning”, 98. This seems something of a sophistry. In places where anarchy reigns and no justice can be expected — Somalia today, for example — vast injustices are committed routinely. There are moral standards that apply to unjust rulers and no less to God. Is Job’s misery to be softened and his indignation mollified by learning that “Divine justice is not an element of reality” (100)? Indifference to justice is not a justification for allowing injustice.

⁵ D.A. ROBERTSON, “The Book of Job: A Literary Study”, *Soundings* 56 (1973) 464.

⁶ J.B. CURTIS, “On Job’s Response to Yahweh”, *JBL* 98 (1979) 510.

⁷ R. POLZIN, *Biblical Structuralism: Method and Subjectivity in the Study of Ancient Texts* (Philadelphia, PA 1977) 106.

⁸ *Biblical Structuralism*, 106.

ined himself speaking truth to power (10,2-27; 13,18-28). In the Theophany, God speaks in the tone of a wise teacher, who scolds the pupil for his ignorance but does not rage, shout, or threaten.

God begins, "Who is this who darkens the plan (עצה) by words without knowledge?" (38,2). The root עצה essentially refers to deliberation: careful thinking and planning and the resolution arrived at by such thinking⁹. Hence "plan" or "design" is a good translation. (When עצה is communicated to others as advice it means "counsel"). It is this design that Job has "obscured" (38,2) and "hidden" (42,3). עצה is a common word and can have no idiosyncratic sense if it is to communicate anything to Job or the reader. From the start, then, Yahweh claims that he has a meaningful design for the world, and this is presumably what he is about to describe. The choice of this word suggests that there is more sense in the divine design than just the absence of retribution. And if God's design were merely the absence of retribution, Job could hardly be accused of having obscured it when he complained of the prevalence of injustice, as when he declared: "The land is given into the hand of the wicked, and he covers the faces of its judges" (9,24), and "The innocent and the wicked he finishes off" (9,22b), and numerous other such complaints.

Although Job's words were ignorant, God's design is something that Job could have known; otherwise, he could hardly be blamed for obscuring it. In the following speeches, God will describe the design by eliciting knowledge accessible to Job (and other humans), not by revealing mysteries¹⁰.

III. Creation

God begins by describing the time of creation (38,4-11). In Tsevat's paraphrase, God says, "You, Job, were not present at the creation of the earth and, consequently, you know nothing about its nature"¹¹. This paraphrase is not accurate. Job knows the facts that God describes: they are part of his cultural knowledge. God asks, "Where were you when I founded the earth? Declare it, if you have

⁹ See M.V. FOX, "Words for Wisdom", *ZAH* 6 (1993) 160-161.

¹⁰ This is contrary to what Zophar thought would happen if YHWH were to speak: "he would tell you the hidden things of wisdom" (11,6).

¹¹ TSEVAT, "Meaning", 83.

understanding” (38,4). Job must silently admit what no one could deny, that he was not there. “Who laid down its measurements — for you know — or who stretched a line upon it?” (38,5). This is not a hard question. The answer is obviously “You, God”. There is nothing degrading in a human not being God or not being present at creation, and Job is keenly aware of his frail humanness. The parenthetical “for you know” is not sarcastic. God is reminding Job that he knows quite well the identity of the architect and builder of the universe. This principle will be illustrated lavishly in the next four chapters.

Nor are the other questions stumpers. “Upon what are its [sc. the world’s] sockets sunk?” (38,6a) Job has already given the answer: “upon nothingness” (26,7). The only function of this question can be to evoke awe at the way the foundation pillars of the earth can rest on the void. The following circumstantial clause, “when the morning stars cried out and all the gods shouted” (38,7) has nothing to contribute to a question meant to stump or intimidate. Rather, it is part of painting a glorious and joyful scene. Note that this circumstantial clause assumes Job’s knowledge of the angels’ rejoicing.

Next God asks, “Who enclosed the sea in doors, when it gushed forth from the womb” (38,8)¹²? The sea is not here the mythical enemy Yamm (as Job regards it in 9,8) but a baby, unruly but controllable. God’s swaddling the infant sea (38,9) introduces a note of tenderness into what was traditionally pictured as a violent act. God asserts control, not by battle — which would be the appropriate image if the main point were YHWH’s might — but by paternal discipline, putting the rowdy child behind doors and setting limits to his roving by an admonition: “Thus far you may come but no farther, and here I stop your proud waves” (38,11)¹³. This passage sets the tone for the rest of the Theophany: God creates an orderly, elegant world, one he takes pride in and cares for, all without much violence. If it be objected that this picture is irrelevant to humans because they are not mentioned, consider what an uncontrolled sea would do to them.

¹² Reading *מי סך*. Thus D.J.A. CLINES, *Job 38-42* (WBC; Nashville, TN 2009) 16. See Clines’s commentary for surveys and discussions of this emendation and others proposed in this essay.

¹³ Emendation is necessary. The best emendation, requiring mainly a re-ordering of consonants, is *רפה אשבית גאון גליך*. Other reasonable emendations produce the same basic sense: the shore is the sea’s limit (see CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 16-18).

IV. Meteorology and Astronomy

YHWH asks, “Does the rain have a father?” and “From whose womb did ice come forth?” (38,28-29). Tsevat rephrases these queries as a taunt: “How do rain, ice, and frost come into being? Give a realistic answer. Do not give Me myths for facts”¹⁴. But the distinction between myths and facts is anachronistic. Those who believe in myths consider them factual. In any case, real knowledge of meteorology is irrelevant, and the questions in 38,28-29 are not hard to answer. They are a way of pointing to the rain’s true creator and hence his graciousness. Of course the rain has no mother or father. Yet it exists and is a great blessing of which YHWH is creator. The question evokes awe and gratitude, not a feeling of stupidity.

God asks Job if he ever commanded the morning or informed the dawn star of its place (38,12). The answer is obvious: “Of course not; but you, God, have”. The rhetorical question is a way of underscoring the fact that YHWH does manage the world, and Job knows it. The only answer to the question “Have you come to the stores of snow, or seen the stores of hail?” (38,22) is, “Of course not”. But this is so obvious that no answer is called for. The real purpose of the question is implied in the relative clause, “which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war” (v. 23). Job is reminded that YHWH is a war god with hidden armories at his call. The enemies for whom the weapons are held in readiness are not specified, but surely Job is not among them, because no such weapons are needed to defeat him. Job sometimes imagined himself as God’s enemy (10,17; 16,9-14; 19,10-12), but was certain that God was exaggerating Job’s menace (7,12).

All the meteorological phenomena mentioned demonstrate God’s skills in creation and management. Mankind, although not mentioned, is obviously among the beneficiaries. According to Tsevat, rain in the desert (38,25-27), is “wasted on land uninhabited and uninhabitable” and thus has no moral purpose¹⁵. Yet rain benefits not only desert animals but also humans, because the מרבר is grazing-land essential to the human economy¹⁶. To be sure, the verse says

¹⁴ TSEVAT, “Meaning”, 86.

¹⁵ TSEVAT, “Meaning”, 100.

¹⁶ As noted by CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 74.

“where no man is”, but the rain can change that. The rain falls on the desert “to satiate the waste and desolate land, to make grass sprout forth” (v. 27). Then animals can feed, herds can graze, and humans can prosper. This is exactly the sequence of events in Psalm 107, which first says that God dries up water sources and fertile land (vv. 33-34), but then,

He turns desert into a pool of water,
and parched land into sources of water,
and he makes the hungry dwell there,
and they establish an inhabited city.
And they sow fields and plant vineyards,
and these produce fruit of the harvest.
And he blesses them and they grow very numerous,
and he does not reduce their livestock (Ps 107,35-38).

The people in question here are the redeemed of Israel, but the phenomena are described as universal and recurrent. These people, if v. 39 is in place, are subsequently humbled, though it is not said why¹⁷. This psalm shows that rain in the desert is not considered irrelevant to human needs and wishes¹⁸.

In any case, it would be extremely egocentric of humans to expect that everything given to the world must benefit only them. We can compare how some near-contemporaries of the author interpreted rain in the desert. In Ps 104,10-11, provision of water to animals is listed among God’s blessings. Psalm 107 praises God for giving water (v. 9) and calls such acts “wonders” and “kindnesses” (107,8). The topos of water in the desert receives its most glorious expression in Isaiah 35. There, to be sure, the water explicitly serves a human purpose, namely to enable the returnees to survive the journey home. But the watering of the desert evokes a sheer delight that goes beyond the practical needs of the journey. Rain in the desert is a correlate of the

¹⁷ H.-J. KRAUS, *Psalms 60-150. A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN 1989) 325, says that transposition of vv. 39 and 40 is absolutely necessary to restore a “senseless text”. The emendation is reasonable, though the mechanism of the transposition is not specified.

¹⁸ The author of Job draws on Psalm 107 in several places. Ps 107,40 = Job 12,21a + 24b; Ps 107,42a = Job 22,19a; Ps 107,42b = Job 5,16b. It is more likely that Job is taking phrases from the psalm and using them in various places than that the psalmist is drawing together phrases scattered in Job.

rebirth of the nation and the healing of the people, literally and metaphorically. The *topos* of water in the desert is always an expression of blessing and joy, not waste. It is wrong to isolate some items in Job's Theophany — in this case rain in the desert — and adduce them as evidence of a universe indifferent to man.

V. Creatures Great and Small

The tour of the animal world displays God's care for his creatures. Job's ignorance of the gazelle's gestation period (39,1-3) has no significance other than to remind him that God cares for the birthing of creatures far beyond human reach. It hardly demonstrates an absence of justice in the world that God cares for creatures that Job cannot even approach. God hunts on behalf of the lion (38,39-40) and prepares food for raven chicks (38,41) when they "cry out to God" — an image of God as father of all. Of course, the lions, ravens, and eagles (or vultures) (39,27-30) eat meat, for which other creatures must die. "The strong prey on the weak and conduct themselves with cruelty"¹⁹. But this is not a vegetarian universe. God has arranged for the care of all creatures but not the elimination of pain, danger, and death. Providence protects the species, not the individual²⁰.

God has set the wild ass free (39,5). Tsevat takes this to mean that this creature owes Job nothing and is beyond his ken and reach²¹. This is true, but did Job think otherwise — or care? What is significant is that the wild ass does "owe" God, for he is its provider. That God *also* provides for wild animals does not show indifference to human needs. For Newsom, God's care for the wild ass, as well as the gazelle and mountain goats (39,1-4) is presented in terms of "an inversion of the values of human culture" because the city is the "locus of noise and oppression"²². But it is not the biblical notion

¹⁹ E.L. GREENSTEIN, "The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job", *Mishneh Todah*. Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment in Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay (eds. N.S. FOX et al.) (Winona Lake, IN 2009) 355.

²⁰ The belief in the providence of species in the animal kingdom is the Aristotelian view embraced by Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III, 17, who rightly cites Pss 104,21; 145,16; and 147,9 in favor of it.

²¹ TSEVAT, "Meaning", 88.

²² C.A. NEWSOM, *The Book of Job*. A Contest of Moral Imaginations (New York 2003) 246.

that human culture is all that counts or that the city is the essence of civilization. Job would have to be extraordinarily self-centered were he to feel an abasement of human faculties in the description of God's providence for animals. In Gen 1,30, God's care for wild creatures is an expression of the world's goodness, and nothing indicates a radically different valuation here.

The ostrich (39,13-18) is an interesting case. Not only is she free of human control, she hardly controls herself. She is senseless, abandoning her eggs to chance and racing off erratically. For Greenstein, this shows divine cruelty²³. But there are ostriches. Someone cares for their young, and this can only be God, who takes over as guardian of the helpless²⁴. For Newsom, the celebration of the ostrich "seems unnervingly to place God in considerable sympathy with the emblems of the chaotic"²⁵. If that is so, the effect is only to tame the chaotic. Can anyone really be made uneasy by the ostrich's "anarchic joy", as Newsom so aptly puts it²⁶. On the contrary, the reader is invited to appreciate the flight to freedom of one of God's zanier creations.

When God asks, "Do you give the horse its might?" (39,19a), the answer is obviously "No, but you do". The point of the extended description of the horse (39,19-25) cannot be to expose human helplessness, since humans can and do control this beast, a fact that could only demonstrate a competence. Moreover, there is no mystery in the horse that might be thought to confound Job's wit. What is said about the horse is that he is mighty and glorious. This elicits awe at God's creative powers.

Likewise in Psalm 104 God gives drink and food to all the animals of the field, including the wild ass, the gazelle, and other animals that live beyond human control. Even predators are under God's care and thus they turn to him for nourishment (Ps 104,21). So frequent are the correlations between this psalm and Job 38-41, that the dependence of the latter on the former is likely. And the priority of the psalm is assured by its dependence on the Greater Hymn to the Aton²⁷.

²³ GREENSTEIN, "Problem of Evil", 355.

²⁴ In other words, God is for abandoned animals what he is for human orphans — their provider (Deut 10,18; Jer 49,11), "helper" (Ps 10,14), and "father" (Ps 68,6).

²⁵ NEWSOM, *Book of Job*, 247.

²⁶ NEWSOM, *Book of Job*, 247.

²⁷ The specificity of the parallels between Ps 104,20-30 and the Hymn to the

Psalm 104 and other psalms with descriptions of natural wonders and blessings, such as 19,1-7; 74,12-17; 147,8-11.16-17, show that all these natural phenomena can be, and were, adduced to show God's goodness. This is true even of the raven (Ps 147,9) and the lion who beg their food from God (Pss 147,9; 104,21). God is shown as the great huntsman (and scavenger) on behalf of carrion eaters. If God's giving predators their food elicits exclamations of exultation in Ps 104,21, there is no reason to suppose that the same deed in Job would show YHWH nurturing "an element of creation hostile to humans", as Newsom says²⁸. Psalm 19,2 epitomizes the idea that God's goodness is declared by the natural world. Of course this cannot be presumed to apply to the book of Job, but it is the assumption that readers can be expected to bring to the book, and nothing in God's words contradicts this assumption.

VI. Behemoth and Leviathan

In an effort to bring to the fore the chaos and danger thought to inhere in God's description of the cosmos, contemporary commentators have dramatized the evil of Behemoth and Leviathan. The beasts are described as "horridly terrifying creatures" and "uncontrollable, except to a limited degree by God"²⁹. But I doubt that the ancient reader would have been quite that distressed. After all, YHWH always defeats Leviathan, even when portrayed in its full-blown, primordial ferocity (Isa 27,1; Ps 74,14). One sign of the beast's dreadfulness, according to J.G. Williams, is the statement that Behemoth is the "first of God's works" (Job 40,19a). This supposedly displaces wisdom from the primogeniture it has in Prov

Aton and their shared sequence proves that the Hymn, or some derivative thereof, is one of the sources of the psalm. We must minimally assume indirect transmission of Atonist motifs and imagery. This is affirmed by A. KRÜGER, *Das Lob des Schöpfers*. Studien zu Sprache, Motivik und Theologie von Psalm 104 (WMANT 124; Neukirchen-Vluyn 2010), who rightly insists on the influences of other literary traditions as well (2-22 [with history of research], and 403-422 [with motif-historical analysis]). Still, the concentration of motifs from the Hymn in these eleven verses of Psalm 104 (with some shared motifs elsewhere) indicates a more specific literary connection than just diffusion of motifs.

²⁸ NEWSOM, *Book of Job*, 246.

²⁹ GREENSTEIN, "Problem of Evil", 355.

8,22³⁰. Williams assumes that the author knew Prov 8,22 and would have read Job 40,19a in this fashion. Williams finds this all the more disturbing insofar as “Behemoth is a primary symbol of the power of chaos, of destruction, and of thwarted relationships”³¹. Even if this is an accurate picture of Behemoth’s mythical background (and it does fairly describe the Egyptian God Seth), none of these traits come into view in this passage. As Newsom acutely observes, “[...] although God’s ability to overcome them [sc., Behemoth and Leviathan] is taken for granted, there is little or no reference to enmity or hostility between God and these creatures. Instead, God describes them with evident admiration”³².

Nevertheless Newsom finds these placid pictures unsettling, because “the uncomfortable sense grows that God’s identification with the chaotic is as strong as with symbols of order”³³. From the “relationship of congruence” between God and Leviathan (and Behemoth) “the nonmoral and nonrational aspects of deity are highlighted. Knowing Leviathan, one knows something of the monstrous that is its own reflection of the numinous, wholly otherness of God”³⁴. This might be so if Leviathan and Behemoth were portrayed as the embodiments and generators of chaos and evil, but the author has chosen not to import these associations into his depiction. These creatures may be anarchic — as wild animals are by nature — but they are God’s creations and under his control (40,15; 41,3; cf. Ps 104,26).

If God’s pleasure in Leviathan is “identification”, then God can be said to “identify” with the sea monsters that he calls “good” in Gen 1,21. But no one would read that verse to mean that God stands on the side of chaos in opposition to the ordered world he is creating. And it is overly dramatic to say, as A. Brenner does, that in describing the two beasts “God here reveals himself as he is never revealed elsewhere” for the beasts must originate from God’s “dark side, the one that generates evil” and is thus “part of the Godhead”³⁵. But even if the beasts were, in their mythological origins, from “the dark side”,

³⁰ J.G. WILLIAMS, “You Have Not Spoken Truth of Me: Mystery and Irony in Job”, *ZAW* 83 (1971) 246.

³¹ WILLIAMS, “You Have Not Spoken”, 246.

³² NEWSOM, *Book of Job*, 249.

³³ NEWSOM, *Book of Job*, 252.

³⁴ NEWSOM, *Book of Job*, 252.

³⁵ A. BRENNER, “God’s Answer to Job”, *VT* 31 (1981) 134.

they are nevertheless no more disruptive to an orderly worldview than Deutero-Isaiah's insistence that God creates light and darkness, well-being and evil (Isa 45,7). Lest you think it might be, Deutero-Isaiah soon insists that God did not create the world as chaos (45,18).

Leviathan is not said to do anything destructive or even hostile. Behemoth was created like Job (40,15)³⁶, implying affinity not enmity. These beasts were presumably created before humans (thus in Gen 1,21, and perhaps implied in Job 40,19a), but their precedence in creation does not show the world to be chaotic and disorderly. Sea serpents come before humans in Genesis 1, but that account is unquestionably describing a realm of order and goodness. The same is true of Ben Sira's description of the frightful powers in creation (including sea monsters), which culminates in a call to praise God in awe and wonder (Sir 43,28-33).

Behemoth is based on the hippopotamus³⁷. The only inaccuracies are the huge size of his tail (40,17)³⁸, and the notions that the produce of the mountains comes to it³⁹. These inaccuracies may have come from a traveler, who would, after all, not get too close to the strange beast. For the Egyptians, the hippopotamus was the embodiment of Seth, who represented chaos, and he was annually defeated by Pharaoh, the Living Horus. There is no evidence that this myth was known in Israel, but perhaps it too was brought by a traveler⁴⁰. This mythic background would explain Behemoth's pairing with Leviathan. In any case, what is significant is not Behemoth's mythic origins but the fact that he too has been naturalized and tamed, so much so that all he does is stand in the river and graze imperturbably. He is explicitly a herbivore (40,15b). The beast portrayed in Job does not fight. We learn that "his maker" — alone — can "bring his sword near" (40,19b)⁴¹. It is unclear

³⁶ HALOT 839.2.2b.

³⁷ This is the consensus; see the survey and discussion in CLINES, *Job* 38-42, 148-157.

³⁸ Herodotus (*History*, 2.71) and Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca historica*, VIII 95) made the same error, though both had visited Egypt.

³⁹ Unless we emend הריים to נהריים. See CLINES, *Job* 38-42, 117.

⁴⁰ Behemoth is identified as Seth by E. RUPRECHT, "Das Nilpferd im Hiob-buch", *VT* 21 (1971) 209-231, and O. KEEL, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob. Eine Deutung von Ijob 38-41 vor dem Hintergrund der zeitgenössischen Bildkunst* (Göttingen 1978) 127-141.

⁴¹ The emphasis on "his maker" is supported by the frontal positioning of the subject. We should emend הַעֲשֵׂי אֱלֹהִים to אֱלֹהִים הַעֲשֵׂי to eliminate the ungrammatical article of הַעֲשֵׂי.

whether humans can capture him with hooks, for though 40,24 is formulated as an indicative it may be an unmarked rhetorical question meaning that Behemoth cannot be captured even by hooks in his nose and eyes. (Hippopotami were in fact hunted in Egypt, but the author may not have known this.) In any case, the hippopotamus is most definitely a formidable beast.

Though Leviathan is usually thought to be a crocodile⁴², the picture of Leviathan is, I have argued⁴³, based on whales, or perhaps whales conflated with schools of dolphins. Whales could be known from reports of seafarers, — “those who go down to the sea” as they are called in Ps 107,23, and who are said to tell God’s wonders (v. 24). Ben Sira (43,24-25) likewise speaks of “those who go down to the sea” and tell of its wonders, namely God’s amazing creatures and “the power of Rahab”.

I do not say that Leviathan in Job *is* a whale, but that this depiction is based on one. Leviathan was a sea monster who could be imagined variously from features of actual animals, such as a serpent’s coiling⁴⁴. And contrary to a common notion, whales are to be found in the Mediterranean⁴⁵. The whale, not the crocodile, “sneezes”, ejecting a spout that can be said to glow when the sun shines through it (41,10a) and be pictured as smoke or steam (41,12). And the whale, not the crocodile, stirs up the depths and makes the abyss seem to boil (41,23) by leaping and crashing back into the water, and thereby leaving behind a white wake (נתיב) (41,24).

⁴² See CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 155-156. The biblical authors pictured Leviathan in various ways. In Isa 27,1, Leviathan is called a “swift serpent”; thus too in Job 26,13. But this epithet cannot possibly fit the Leviathan in Job 41. Nor is Leviathan in Job 41 compatible with the monster of multiple heads (Ps 74,14; KTU 1.5.I.3). Though a crocodile might be called a serpent, it could not have been more than vaguely the model for the mythical Leviathan, who was a deep-sea creature.

⁴³ FOX, “Behemoth and Leviathan”, 264-266.

⁴⁴ Until modern times, whales were often depicted in fantastic and monstrous guises; see the references in my “Behemoth and Leviathan”, 265. In any case, the distinction between real and mythological animals is a modern one. The creatures mentioned in Isa 13,21 and 34,14 include both real animals and demons, all of them assumed to actually reside in the desert.

⁴⁵ These include the fin whale and the sperm whale. See P.G.H. EVANS, *The Natural History of Whales & Dolphins* (London 1987) 60-69; 93-94, and further references in FOX, “Behemoth and Leviathan”.

Leviathan is a whale (possibly conflated with dolphins) in Ps 104,26, שֵׁם אֲנִיּוֹת יִהְיוּ לְיָמֵי הַיָּם לְשִׂחָבָו. By word-play, this means both “There [in the great sea] ships travel, (and) Leviathan (לְיָמֵי הַיָּם), which you created to play with”, and “There ships travel, (and) their escort (לְיָמֵי הַיָּם), which you created to play therein”. Pods of whales and dolphins do indeed “escort” ships. In Psalm 104, Leviathan is one of God’s playful creatures, neither particularly monstrous nor a threat to civilization. In Job’s Theophany, humans cannot defeat him (40,25-32; perhaps 41,1-6), but who would try? Of course a whale seen up-close can be frightening, by virtue of its size if nothing else, but it rarely imperils humans, except when they stick harpoons in it.

Leviathan in Ugaritic and Hebrew mythology was a primordial monster who was among Baal’s, then YHWH’s, enemies. Perhaps Behemoth was originally of the same sort. Nevertheless, the Theophany lacks any hint of a creation battle or even of any particular hostility between YHWH and these creatures. They have been controlled and naturalized. To the author, they are majestic, powerful creatures, like the warhorse (Job 39,19-25)⁴⁶.

VII. Questions ⁴⁷

Rhetorical questions set the tone of the Theophany. If God praised himself in the indicative, he would be merely boasting of powers that Job never denied. If he had said, “I created the earth. I set its measurements. I hung it on nothingness. I always command the morning. I show the light and darkness to their places”, and so on, the tone (however justified the claims) would be tediously boastful. Instead, God uses rhetorical questions that elicit knowledge from Job and the reader, thereby making them participants in the depiction ⁴⁸. The

⁴⁶ J. LÉVÊQUE, “L’interprétation des discours de YHWH (Job 38,1–42,6)”, *The Book of Job* (ed. W.A.M. BEUKEN) (Leuven 1994) 203-223, at 213, 216, likewise sees a diminution in the violence and hostility of these creatures.

⁴⁷ See further FOX, “Job 38”.

⁴⁸ See also L.J. DE REGT, “Implications of Rhetorical Questions in Strophes in Job 11 and 15”, *The Book of Job* (ed. W.A.M. BEUKEN) (Leuven 1994) 321. De Regt notes that, “[b]ecause the speaker implies more than the words as such and expects no response, the hearer is impressed by the thought processes that would logically lead to the kind of answer the speaker intends the hearer to reach”.

questions create a community of knowledge — there is much that Job does not know, but there is also much within his grasp: potential knowledge he can activate by looking at the world around him and seeing evidence of God’s power and providence. It is this knowledge rather than any humiliation that elicits Job’s repentance. The questions are no more hectoring or humiliating than the very similar rhetorical questions in Proverbs (30,4) and Deutero-Isaiah (40,12-14; 41,2.4.26)⁴⁹.

Only three of the questions in Job 38–42 are genuine interrogatives that require the answer, “I don’t know”. In 38,19 God asks, “What is the way to where the light dwells? And darkness — where is its place?”. Here too the question is really directed to the issue of power and maintenance of the world, as the continuation of the sentence shows: “[...] so that you could take it to its territory, show (it) the path to its house” (38,20). The question in 38,24, “What is the path where the light is distributed, where the east wind spreads out on the earth?” is an actual interrogative calling for information that Job cannot provide. The question about the gazelle’s gestation period (39,1-3) is truly unanswerable — for Job. We now know that the answer is six months, but that knowledge does not change the real issue, which is God’s care for creatures far beyond human reach.

VIII. Psalm 104

The affinities between Psalm 104 and Job 38–40, some of which are mentioned above, are well known. Still, the significance of this resemblance has not been adequately explored. The psalm depicts “a harmonious place in which the spheres of human and animal coexist as complementary creations”⁵⁰. If Job’s Theophany is to be read as

⁴⁹ Many of the questions begin with imperfects, which can be translated with either “can” or “do”, e.g., *התקשר מערנות כימה*: “Can you bind the bonds of the Bear?” or “Do you bind the bonds of the Bear?” (38,31). Both renderings point out that Job cannot and (therefore) does not do these things, but there is a difference in emphasis. The former translation has the questions emphasizing Job’s inability to do these things; the latter underscores the fact that it is not he who does them. The many questions that begin with perfects (e.g. 38,12; 39,1) emphasize facticity rather than ability. God of course points out his own ability to maintain the world, but the greater emphasis is placed on the fact that it is he who does it. The latter is also the emphasis of the “who” questions.

⁵⁰ NEWSOM, *Book of Job*, 245.

making the opposite point, it must be distanced from the psalm. Newsom devotes more attention to this problem than most commentators do. She notes three features of the Theophany which distinguish it from the psalm: “[1] the suppression of descriptions of human activity, [2] the explicit opposition between animals and human purposes, and [3] repeated references to God’s provision for these creatures”⁵¹. The following are my responses.

(1) The deliberate omission of human activity cannot be intended to show that God treats humans differently or that his providence does not extend to them. Certainly we are not meant to understand that humans alone are not cared for. It is hardly the case that humans alone inevitably starve or fail to bear infants and feed their young. God is painting a picture which Job is invited to extend to mankind, as happens also in Psalm 107 and similar hymns.

(2) The opposition between animal and human purposes is of little consequence to humans. How many people *want* to harness a wild buffalo or corral the wild ass or catch an ostrich? To do so is not a human purpose, any more than Job’s inability to bind the Pleiades (38,31) implies that humans wish to do this. These are all simply examples of things that Job cannot do. Besides, much of what God describes does serve human purposes, such as his creating a world, holding back the sea, and bringing rain.

(3) When God says that he provides for animals he does not mean that he fails to provide for humans. But it is true that this is not explicit, and the question is why. The first reason is that for God to list the blessings he bestows on mankind would look like an attempt to ingratiate himself with Job: I gave you this and I gave you that, so why don’t you trust me? This would diminish God’s dignity, which God himself certainly takes seriously. Second, there is the touchy issue of what became of these blessings in the case of Job. God gave great things to the species, but he snatched them away from this individual. Third, God wants Job to draw his own conclusions. That is why much of the description is in the form of rhetorical questions.

Newsom believes that the cluster of the three distinctions she observes between the Theophany and Psalm 104 “destabilizes the customary binary oppositions of order and the chaotic, culture and nature,

⁵¹ NEWSOM, *Book of Job*, 245 (Numbers added).

blessed and godforsaken” and associate God with the creatures of “the fearful beyond”⁵². Yet few of the creatures in the Theophany are frightening, and as for those that are, such as the lion, God is “associated” with them in Ps 104,21 and elsewhere. In the Theophany, the threat posed by Behemoth and Leviathan has been deliberately toned down. In fact, the Theophany does the opposite of what Newsom says. It describes much order and little chaos, and it claims that blessing is found even well outside civilization, not that it is absent within it. The three features of the Theophany that Newsom lists in no way show its worldview to be incompatible with that of Psalm 104.

God does describe a moral order, even without addressing the question of justice directly. The creation and maintenance of a beautiful and well-functioning universe *is* a moral act, one whose traces Job can see, just as we can see the traces of the Big Bang in microwave radiation. An Egyptian, I think, would have understood this moral order as Ma’at, which is both a well-ordered cosmos and a moral order, one in which aesthetics testify to ethics.

IX. The Theophany

The world God describes is good, and (by extension) mankind is well provided for, but what about justice? First of all, nothing God says implies the absence of retribution. In fact, YHWH does say that the wicked are punished. The result clause in 38,13 shows why God summons the dawn: “so as to seize the skirts of the earth, that the wicked may be shaken out of it”. Verse 14 is unclear, but the result in v. 15 is “that light be withheld from the wicked and the arrogant arm be broken”. Since v. 13 is something that YHWH actually and regularly does, the result clause too must mark an actual deed. Also, in 40,9-13 YHWH challenges Job to punish the wicked. According to Tsevat, “God and Job know that he [Job] cannot possibly do these things; it is not in the plan, not in the plan for the wicked to be punished”⁵³. But this reading runs contrary to the logic of the other rhetorical challenges, which adduce acts that Job does not do but that God can and usually does perform⁵⁴. And since God can and does command the

⁵² NEWSOM, *Book of Job*, 245.

⁵³ TSEVAT, “Meaning”, 99.

⁵⁴ The exception is Job 40,25-31, where the questions do refer to something

morning, he can do and does what the result clauses say. God's challenge to Job to trample down the wicked (40,12-13) likewise implies that God can do this, not that he too is helpless. In any case, if God is saying that he cannot defeat the wicked, he is presenting a form of theodicy that is not considered in Job or elsewhere in the Bible: the excuse of divine finitude. If, as Brenner says, the Theodicy demonstrates "the pained inability of God to control evil"⁵⁵, the book would be an apology for divine failure. But that would empty the book of meaning. The Prologue assumes that God has the option of not afflicting Job, and Job's complaints assume that God could do better. Moreover, God's descriptions of his rule prove, as Job says in 42,2, that God "can do everything".

God says nothing about rewarding the righteous. There is a false symmetry between the two sides of the retribution equation, for it could be the case that God punishes the wicked yet sometimes refuses to give the righteous their due. This is, in fact, presumed in the Prologue. On the one hand, the Adversary is going around looking for the wicked to report to the divine judge, and on the other, Job is unfairly afflicted. In the Theophany, God affirms the first assertion of the equation, but does so almost *en passant*. The punishment of the wicked is not the concern of this book. Still, God's beneficence toward his creatures somehow implies his punishment of the wicked. Psalm 104 ends, "Sinners will disappear from the earth, and the wicked be no more. O my soul, bless the Lord. Praise the Lord" (v. 35). A connection of this sort seems to be in the background of the Theophany speeches, but it is not emphasized.

that Job cannot do — defeat Leviathan — without implying that YHWH actually did or does them. This passage does not allude to the defeat of Leviathan at creation. The subjugation of Leviathan here is described by an array of incompatible images: being caught by barbs and harpoons, with his carcass sold in the market, being forced into indentured servitude, and being tamed and toyed with like a pet bird on a leash. The mythological Leviathan is killed by blows from a club, and the other images in this passage are also clearly irrelevant to him.

⁵⁵ BRENNER, "God's Answer", 134.

X. Job's Repentance

To God's description of the order and providence in his world different responses are possible. Job might, as Gordis suggests, find ease for his pain in the harmony of the cosmos⁵⁶. In a sentence often cited just to be brushed aside, Gordis says, "The beauty of the world becomes an anodyne to man's suffering — and the key to truth"⁵⁷. In fact, Job now has the additional discomfort of being chastised for speaking in ignorance. Or he might feel even worse, seeing himself cruelly isolated from the world's beauty and God's care⁵⁸. He could continue raging, for he has nothing left to lose. But then he repents, in 42,6.

But why? After all, Job is the wronged party. (YHWH says as much in 2,3.) In 40,4 Job prepares the way for his repentance by saying he will keep silent, an act that typically signifies humility and patience, as in the psalms⁵⁹. In 42,2-5, he declares God's omnipotence and his own ignorance. His recognition of these traits, which he had long known, is the sort of confession whereby one takes to heart something he already knew. The profession of God's omnipotence is especially significant, because he may do things of importance beyond what is visible. This the reader knows to be true. Nevertheless, Job's words on his way to repentance are often dismissed as evasive or facetious and as merely the muttered resignation of the helpless. Job's repentance comes to a climax in his declaration: על כן אמואם ונחמתני על-עפר ואפר (42,6).

Its meaning at least seems clear: "Therefore I am disgusted, and I repent on dust and ashes". If Job's words were spoken by a psalmist, no one would doubt that they express contrition. Still, the current consensus holds that Job's repentance is cagy and contrived, not really contrite.

⁵⁶ R. GORDIS, *The Book of God and Man* (Chicago, IL 1965) 133. Gordis states, in italics, the author's basic conclusion: "*just as there is order and harmony in the natural world, though imperfectly grasped by man, so there is order and meaning in the moral sphere, though often incomprehensible to man*" (133).

⁵⁷ GORDIS, *Book of God and Man*, 133.

⁵⁸ Those who think that נחמתני means "I am comforted" do not say that Job is comforted by the beauty he has seen; that would make no sense with "on dust and ashes".

⁵⁹ E.g., Pss 4,5; 32,3; 37,7; 38,14; 39,3.10; 50,21; 62,2.6; 131,2; cf. Isa 53,7. But silence can also be tactical, as in Judg 18,19 and Prov 17,20. On Job's silence, see NEWELL, "Job", 307-310.

A radical reinterpretation of this verse was proposed by J.B. Curtis, who translates: “Therefore, I feel loathing, contempt and revulsion [toward you, O God], and I am sorry for frail man”⁶⁰. Other interpreters imbue the verse with a hostile intention ironically hidden beneath the superficial penitence⁶¹. Many have followed this approach, with variations, and there is a strong consensus that Job does not actually show contrition⁶².

The correct translation of 42,6 is the one most common (with variations) among the interpreters until recently: “Therefore I am disgusted and repent / on dust and ashes”. This translation is philologically unproblematic:

- **נאס** is one of a number of verbs that are both transitive and intransitive⁶³. To be sure, even without a syntactic direct object, verbs of emotion have a contextual object, something at which the emotion is directed. In the present case, what Job feels disgust at is himself (LXX ἐφάυλισα ἐμαυτόν) or, more specifically, his words (thus Ibn Ezra, for he has spoken in a way he regrets, namely without knowledge).
- **נחם** in the *niphal* certainly can mean “repent”, “change one’s mind”. (God is usually the subject in this sense, but humans are the subject in Exod 13,17 and Jer 8,6). Although **נחם על** can mean “be comforted for”, **על** is here serving as a preposition of location — not “for” but, literally, “on”.
- **על-עפר ואפר**. As indicated by the Masoretic dichotomy after the second verb, the action of both verbs takes place “on dust and ashes” which is where Job is sitting. This is the place where the wretched sit in Sir 40,3 and this is certainly the most natural construal in Esth 4,3 and Isa 58,5, which refer to acts of repentance, not mourning. “Dust and ashes” is at the same time an objective correlative of Job’s condition. The phrase, when Abraham (Gen 18,27) and Job (30,19b) use it of themselves, does not mean wretchedness but connotes it.

⁶⁰ CURTIS, “On Job’s Response”, 505.

⁶¹ K. FULLERTON, “The Original Conclusion to the Book of Job”, *ZAW* 42 (1924) 125, achieves the same effect as the ironic reading by the older exponent of eliminating 42,1-6 as a later gloss. Verse 6 does, he says, express repentance, but if Job were really to speak 42,1-6, “He would humble himself before power and would therefore be untrue to himself”.

⁶² An exception is NEWELL, “Job”, 315, who argues that Job is contrite for his verbal overreaching and speaking without understanding”.

⁶³ E.g. **מלא**, **ירא**, **פחד**, **יראה**, **ידע**.

Nor is it an epithet of humanity, as if you could say “dust and ashes” and everyone would know that you are alluding to humans. Nor does it refer to symbols of mourning for his children, as Clines proposes⁶⁴ (similarly the Targum). One would not “be consoled” for mourning or its symbols, but only for the loss itself⁶⁵.

Apart from the philological unlikelihood of Curtis’s parsing and its variants, I find it peculiar that the proud, outspoken Job, who was convinced that God demanded honesty, would suddenly become shifty and evasive, whether by concealing his real meaning beneath an acceptable one, or by speaking “tongue-in-cheek”⁶⁶. Either way he would be lying. Nor does it help matters if we assert, with Clines, that Job’s reply (however translated) was “not insincere; but it is a crafty and subtle speech that means more than it says”⁶⁷. If so, it means less than it says, for God is not supposed to extract its full meaning. It is still evasive and more craven than straightforward repentance would be⁶⁸.

⁶⁴ CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 175.

⁶⁵ When עָלָה נַחֵם means “be comforted for”, the indirect object is not the mourning itself but a deceased person (2 Sam 13,39; Jer 16,7) or a personified city (Jer 31,15; Ezek 14,22; 32,31) or (in the *piel*) the misfortune itself (Job 42,11). With humans as the subject, נַחֵם means “repent”, “show contrition” (Jer 8,6 and 31,19). With God as the subject, it means “change [his] mind” (Gen 6,6-7; Exod 32,12.14; Judg 2,18, and often). This is usually, and correctly, translated “repent” or “regret”, for while God would not be said to feel contrition for a misdeed, he does change his mind and regret earlier decisions.

⁶⁶ As ROBERTSON, “Book of Job”, 466, puts it.

⁶⁷ CLINES, *Job 38-42*, 177.

⁶⁸ According to ROBERTSON, “Book of Job”, 466, Job’s ironic confession shows that he has been forced “to entreat his opponent; in order to calm God’s whirlwinds he has to declare his guilt by his own mouth”. In fact, Job in no way “entreats” God, nor is he terrified by the whirlwind, which is a concomitant of Theophany (Ezek 1,4; Nah 1,3; Zech 9,14, etc.) and, in that setting, not devastating to its recipients. Tsevat does not find 42,6 problematic. Job, it seems, is repenting of his misconception that the world is run by retribution (TSEVAT, “Meaning”, 93, 100). But Job’s contrition seems exaggerated if it is merely for his having shared the nearly universal belief in divine morality. W.S. MORROW, “Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42,6”, *JBL* 105 (1986) 225, examines three different and incompatible interpretations of 42,6 and decides that since none can be disproved, all are intended. The author, he concludes, “created a situation that can be interpreted in several ways according to the theological inclinations of the reader. The vague and ambiguous language of 42,6 is a re-

If Job's real intention were the concealed one and God understood it, it was strangely tolerant of him to declare Job right and to agree that he himself was unfair just on the basis of one double entendre. If God missed this intention, then he has not "been had" in a grand irony in which he unwittingly admits that he is a "chaotic, capricious, jealous Tyrant"⁶⁹. There is no "terrible self-incrimination"⁷⁰. God has merely failed to catch a bad pun.

Job is genuinely repenting — not of any sin that might have justified the calamity, but of having spoken in ignorance — as God rebukes him for doing (38,2)⁷¹. His ignorance was not a sin, but it was arrogant. Whatever else the Theophany means, it certainly seeks to induce humility, and it is no surprise that it has this effect on Job⁷². Not all readers are affected that way, but that does not mean that Job was not.

It is true, as often noted, that God's answer to Job is not quite satisfactory. It does not address Job's complaints or explain his suffering. But if it did, the book would not be relevant to others who do not receive a theophany to address their case. Hence God points out facts that Job (and anyone else who shares his cultural assumptions) can see or know, namely God's powers in creation and providence. It must be said that many religious sufferers do just that: they see a meaningful order in the world and when that seems violated they allow themselves to trust God's wisdom even when it is not manifest.

Still, Job's complaints and demands are not satisfactorily answered. He will never know why he has suffered, and he may remain dissatisfied. This is, after all, the common lot. But this must

flection of this intention". I find it doubtful that the author took the readers this far merely to offer a list of possibilities (why just three?) from which they can select whichever fits their preconceptions. Morrow is conflating exegetical uncertainty with literary indeterminism.

⁶⁹ WILLIAMS, "You Have Not Spoken Truth of Me", 247.

⁷⁰ ROBERTSON, "Book of Job", 468.

⁷¹ Thus LÉVÊQUE, *Job*, 154, 247. Lévêque observes that "Job n'a pas transgressé des préceptes, mais les limites de sa finitude" (271).

⁷² By God's questioning, "[l]'hybris s'est changée en audace de la foi, mais de cette mutation YHWH a été l'artisan, par une grâce de révélation analogue à celle qu'il réserve à ses grands serviteurs" (LÉVÊQUE, "L'interprétation", with reference to Exod 19,19 and Ezek 1,4). This interesting comparison reminds us that Job is YHWH's servant (1,9; 2,3; 42,7) and that what he received *is* prophetic revelation. Job's vision consisted of facts available to anyone, but this is true of much of prophecy.

be the way things are, by the book's presuppositions. For only in the absence of full knowledge of God's intentions, and only in the awareness that some of his ways are unjust, is it possible to fear God gratuitously and to disprove the Adversary's insinuation that this is humanly impossible (1,9).

XI. The Reader

The book of Job is not for Job; it is for its readers. Readers, who observe Job's world from above, and who, unlike Job, have read the Prologue, are allowed a privileged, superior perspective and are even given insight into the mind of God.

The Prologue lays down the book's presuppositions. One of them is that God wants human fidelity, not only their obedience but also their unconditional faith in his goodness. God's desire for human fidelity suggests a deep need, for he is willing to abandon justice in some cases to make this possible. It is not necessary that justice be absent from the world in order for faith to be unconditional; it is enough that execution of justice not be certain. The possibility of injustice can also be a comfort to sufferers, for they can know that their pain is not proof of guilt. The lament psalmists do this ⁷³, Jeremiah does this (15,15-18; 20,14-18), the author of *Ludlul* does this, and Job does as well (13,6.16; 19,26; and above all, 31,6, in which he is convinced that God judges justly when he judges) ⁷⁴. To be sure, Job's professions of faith stand uneasily alongside his accusations of God and his expressions of despair. Job is inconsistent, but so is God ⁷⁵.

⁷³ This is the meaning of human silence in the psalms, including complaint psalms: not a confession of guilt, but a complaint about suffering together with confidence that God will save them. Examples are Pss 38,14; 39,3; 50,21; 62,6; 131,2. There are sharp differences between Job and the psalmists, of course, notably in the psalmists' expression of hope and trust in God's eventual goodness. Still, Job's silence in 40,4-5 may connote, or at least allow for, a measure of hope, since he has been reminded of God's care for his creatures.

⁷⁴ See also NEWSOM's *Book of Job*, 183-199, fine description of the "working rhetorical world" into which Job invites the reader in chapters 29-31. She observes that "[a]gain and again, Job warrants his own behavior in relation to the expectations and judgments of God, who is the source and sustainer of this moral world" (196).

⁷⁵ Job's inconsistency is matched by Jeremiah's. Jeremiah has accurately

None of this is to say that this resolution is satisfactory, only that it is the one the Book of Job offers. Faith, though often held in esteem as a value in itself, is only as admirable as its object, and many readers have wondered whether the God of Job has earned such trust. Some readers have found Job's submission unsatisfactory, because it is not really warranted ⁷⁶. Though it is true that he spoke in ignorance, he still had full knowledge in the most relevant matters: his own suffering and his innocence. But whether Job should have repented or not, that is what he does. He is as his author made him.

Job and his friends agreed on human wretchedness, but they were, ironically, wrong. Humans have in their power the ability to give God something he deeply desires: unbought human loyalty, a stance of unconditional faith, even in the face of divine injustice. It may be, as Eliphaz says, that God does not place trust even in his angels (4,18; 15,15), but he *does* trust humans. He has no choice.

University of Wisconsin, Madison
1220 Linden Drive
Madison, WI 53706, USA

Michael V. Fox

SUMMARY

The current understanding of the Book of Job, put forth by M. Tsevat in 1966 and widely accepted, is that YHWH implicitly denies the existence of divine justice. Retribution is not part of reality, but only a delusion. The present article argues that the book teaches the need for fidelity in the face of divine injustice. The Theophany shows a God whose care for the world of nature hints at his care for humans. The reader, unlike Job, knows that Job's suffering is important to God, as establishing the possibility of true human loyalty.

been called "a polyphonic response to suffering" (Louis STULMAN, "Jeremiah as a Polyphonic Response to Suffering", *Inspired Speech* [London 2004] 302-318). This response which puts forward three dissonant strategies for interpreting Jerusalem's suffering: moral order amid the chaos; Jeremiah's suffering and moral chaos; and divine silence and divine absence. The Book of Job has deep affinities to these strategies, and not only to the second.

⁷⁶ See above, notes 60, 61.