



QUELLING WHIRLWINDS

A Collection of Approaches to the Book of Job



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Abstract

In this piece I wrestle with the historical context and literary trends of the ANE in analyzing The Book of Job. Using three different approaches to areas of the book, I attempt to address the piecemeal writing with a piecemeal approach. Because Job has a contentious history, my work attempts to establish my view that despite major differences we can rectify the lack of context through larger cultural trends. I will introduction to the text and its lack of historical context. I then cover the trend of the pious sufferer in ANE literature, followed by discussions of power in creation narratives and God's speeches in Job, and end with a discussion of dialogism and its possible existential implications for the text.

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Introduction

“There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job” (Job 1:1). The introduction to one of the most controversial books of the Hebrew Bible opens very much like a “once upon a time” fairytale. If you have read the *Book of Job* before you would know this is not a typical fairytale of princesses, magic, and quests. Although we can deem aspects of the story magical or folklore, Job offers a more disturbing philosophical outlook on life than the likes of Arthurian legends. The novelty of Job drew me to this text but trying to analyze it proved more difficult to do in an organized and succinct way. In turn I have crafted a thesis that is almost as unorthodox as the Book of Job itself. This project has allowed me to explore three different approaches to interpreting the book of Job. My hope is that throughout this paper I may convince you that these approaches are in fact not separate but necessary for understanding each other as well as the complex nature of this work.

Job is abnormal in many different aspects. The book has almost no agreed upon history--authorship, dating, context, composition. Because we have less information surrounding the book of Job compared to other biblical books, it was difficult to create an analysis that stayed within one approach. Besides being complicated historically, the book is unlike any other canonized text. Most notably the dialogue between characters is extremely long. The dialogue between God and Job (a singular human) is longer than any other account of a revelation and is distinct from revelations to prophets. We also see a conversation between God and Satan in the frame story that has its own set of problems. *Job*'s poetry is unmatched and masterful, but its content sets it even further apart. As Robert Alter, in his highly respected analysis of the book, observes,

Theologically, as a radical challenge to the doctrine of reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked, it dissents from a consensus view of biblical writers--a

dissent compounded by its equally radical rejection of the anthropocentric conception of creation that is expressed in biblical texts from Genesis onward. (Alter 3)

The radical and argumentative aspect of this book has allowed me to question other interpretations of this book. It is not often that we can examine a sustained argument between God and a human. Cherishing the inquisitiveness of the dissenting Job, I thought asking more questions was an appropriate way to begin to understand the shared concerns of modern readers and Job. Through this work I have come to understand that there are an endless number of aspects of Job that could inform someone's interpretation. I chose to look at three that I thought would complement each other well and possibly inform the chaos that lies within the 42 chapters of this work.

Summary

To begin our analysis of Job it is necessary for me to mention that Job is classified as Biblical Wisdom Literature (along with Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, some Psalms, and Song of Songs, etc.). Wisdom literature is very different in content from law books, historical accounts, or prophetic books. They are normally concerned with virtues and the divine and, as the name points out, wisdom. Now knowing that this is not a typical biblical book, here is an overview of what occurs in the book itself. The book begins with a prose section (ch 1-2) which serves as a frame story for the poetry. Here we are introduced to the blameless Job, the Satan figure, and the wager between God and Satan. 'The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil"' (Job 1:8). Job is tested by having all of his family, wealth, and possessions taken away. After suffering through this and not rejecting God, Satan returns to further the wager. God states, "[Job] still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to

destroy him for no reason.” Then Satan answered the Lord, “Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives” (Job 2:3-4). God then allows for Job to have his health taken from him, as long as he is left alive. “So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head” (Job 2:7). We see Job is tempted to rebuke God and makes his loneliness apparent. “His wife said to him, “Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die” (Job 2:9). We are then introduced to his three friends who play into the poetry sections more significantly.

The poetry begins in earnest in chapter 3 by Job asking for a swift death. ‘After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. Job said: “Let the day perish in which I was born”’ (Job 3:1-3). In response we have the first friend’s speech, Eliphaz, who tries to justify or find blame in Job. “But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed” (Job 4:5). Job then responds in chapters 6 and 7 continuing to plead for death or to understand his suffering with abstract questions surrounding life. “What are human beings, that you make so much of them, that you set your mind on them, visit them every morning, test them every moment?” (Job 7:17-18). The second friend Bildad then responds like Eliphaz who sees punishment as a result of sin. Using the example of Job’s dead children, “If your children sinned against him, he delivered them into the power of their transgression” (Job 8:4). Job then speaks for the third time about justice and creation, themes picked up in God’s speeches. “Who commands the sun, and it does not rise; who seals up the stars” (Job 9:7). Zophar, the third friend, responds in a harsher manner assuming the same thing as the other friends, “but O that God would speak, and open his lips to you, and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For wisdom is many-sided. Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves” (Job 11:5-6). In Job’s fourth speech he is fed up with arguing with his friends and says, “But I would

speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God” (Job 13:3). Eliphaz then speaks for a second time critiquing Job for his attitude and response to suffering—claiming that to be a sin itself. This trend continues through chapter 27, seen as three cycles of arguments.

Chapter 28 breaks with the previous chapters thematically as a poem abstractly on wisdom. It is not fully understood by scholars who think it may be an addition or edited section. Chapter 28 does not credit Job or any friends as the speaker (in keeping with previous and future chapters). In chapter 29 through 31 Job reflects on his past and present with language very similar to court jargon. “If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot has hurried to deceit—let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!” (Job 31:5-6). In chapter 32 a small prose section is included to tell us that his three friends give up on him and leave. This allows a new friend, Elihu, to enter and begin talking to Job. Elihu speaks from chapter 32 to 37 about wisdom and the lack of human comprehension of God. “Of a truth, God will not do wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert justice. Who gave him charge over the earth and who laid on him the whole world?” (Job 34:12-13). All of these poetry speeches from Job and his friends debate the meaning of justice. Throughout their debates theological assertions are being made about rewards and consequences.

Building off the language and themes presented by Elihu, God finally responds to Job. Most famously in chapter 38, God speaks from the whirlwind in a divine revelation of theodicy (Job 38:1). For chapter 38 to 41 God responds ominously in rhetorical questions aimed only at Job. These themes concern creation, divine justice, and omniscience. “Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?” (Job 40:8-9). Job responds once in chapter 40 and again in 42 affirming his lack of understanding and mistake in questioning God. “Therefore I have uttered

what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (Job 42:3). Then the reader is given a prose epilogue that rounds out the frame story. The epilogue concludes that Job speaks on behalf of his friends and abates the wrath of God. “And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before” (Job 42: 10). The story ends by recounting that Job lived happily into old age and eventually dies.

Issues Surrounding the Book of Job

As I earlier introduced, the book of Job is not without its problems. The book of Job is contended for a number of reasons, and scholars have been unable to truly pin down anything definite about the context of this book. These problems heavily influence the way people have interpreted the work. I will cover the basics surrounding dating, its composition, and some interpretive issues. These are not all of the issues, and there is plenty of scholarship out there if one wishes to become more acquainted with the exact details of the many problems.¹

To begin, the issue of dating the composition of the book of Job is really difficult. No one is sure when the completed book or different sections of it surfaced for public or religious consumption. There is a contentious debate surrounding large time periods in which it could have been composed. Job is often argued to have been an exilic or post-exilic composition (starting around 600 BCE with loose end dates). This span of composition does not include the likelihood of oral transmission or the assumed dating of the story or character. Some people believe Job was “alive” with the eponymous ancestors (Abraham, Noah, Jacob) –or that the

¹ See: Greenstein, Edward L. *Job: A New Translation*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2019. Print.
Hoffman, Yair. *A Blemished Perfection: The Book of Job in context*. United Kingdom, Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.
Pope, Marvin H. *Job. Introd., Translation, and Notes by Marvin H. Pope*. Garden City, N.Y, Doubleday, 1965. Print.

folktale dates itself this early.² This is a span of at least 1000 years of contested origin. Trying to interpret what the writer(s) meant, how it was received, or its general purpose is hard to conclude without knowing what religious beliefs or cultural movements were informing the author(s). A complete Job text is even further complicated by the possibility of shifting compositions of orally transmitted stories (much like the game of telephone being played with Job over multiple generations). This time gap must also consider the political and cultural developments occurring in surrounding cults and people groups at the time. One thing is for certain, Ancient Israel was not isolated but very much a part of the happenings in the ancient Near East. Scholar Marvin Pope offers us this reflection when writing on Job, “the Bible cannot be properly studied or understood apart from its background and environment which comprises the whole ancient Near East” (Pope L). Regardless of the exact date(s) we must consider what occurred before and after these possible dates.

This idea of isolation is important for our next issue. No one is positive that Job is an inherently Israelite or Jewish character. Nothing about Job is obviously Israelite, only scholars are positive that Job is portrayed as a monotheist, as well as his friends. God speaks at the end but if we think back to the equating of Job with the eponymous ancestors there is the possibility of Job being a believer amongst a different people group (like Abraham). There are also not any forms of quoted scriptures or references to ritual, etc. that establishes Job as an Israelite. Robert Alter offers that “There is little in the three biblical wisdom books that is specifically Israelite” (Alter xiv). Though I do not examine Qohelet or Proverbs, the classification of Wisdom Literature itself is important to some of my later claims. Alter offers some historical context for

² It seems later generations may have held this view as well. Ezekiel references Noah, Daniel/Danel, and Job while in exile (Rf. Ezek. 14:14)

the wider ANE, “Wisdom writing was a fairly widespread practice in the ancient Near East. The perspective of wisdom literature is international and, in many instances, one might say universalist. It raises the questions of value and moral behavior, of the meaning of human life, and especially of the right conduct of life” (Alter xiii-iv). As I mentioned in my summary, or one can perceive, these themes are present in Job as well as the other Wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible.

As I will explore more in depth in my later sections, cultural transmission is the core of my argument. It is undeniable that the Israelites would have had contact with other people groups and even descended from them.³ Israel was not an isolated nation, but one deeply influenced by the cultures it ran up against. Consistently they are rebuked by God for worshiping the gods of other peoples or disobeying the commands he gives them. Based on these events I would like us to think about the likelihood of adopted practices or counter reactions that the Israelites would have used as a means of validating their own religio-political existence. Commonalities are abundant between ANE cultic groups, only once we view the Israelite religion as monotheistic are the commonalities “swept under the rug” (often by later people of the same faith). For Job this is important for later interpretations particularly in the early Christian church. Assuming that Job is an inherently Israelite piece of literature may be detrimental in determining what exactly this work is and where it came from.

Combining the problems of dating and Israelite concerns is the overall question of composition. For one, we know nothing about the author or possible plural authors. The split in poem sections as well as the prose sections “suggests a piecemeal composition” (Pope XXI).

³ Gen 11:31-12:3

This is not an abnormal practice, many scriptures are composed over time or edited. Some areas flow more naturally and seem to not have as many literary seams, such as the poetry sections. “Critics have generally regarded the prologue-epilogue and the dialogue as having diverse authorship and origin...Most critics, however, regard the prologue-epilogue as part of an ancient folk tale which the author of the dialogue used as the framework and point of departure for his poetic treatment of the problem of suffering” (Pope XXII). Having multiple authors or multiple sources of influence complicates our understanding of Job even more. What is the purpose of combining these different sections? What is the agenda of the last author or scribe? Not knowing the dates of any section or the whole makes tracing purpose of changes, etc. more difficult. Composition also requires considering influence or type of narrative. If Job is seen as a real person who experienced this exact thing then the interpretation is different than it would be in assuming it to be folktale. “Rabbi Resh Laquish expressed the view that Job never existed and that the story is simply a poetic comparison or parable. The term is very fitting since Job is in a sense the type of any and every man who experiences the mystery of seemingly senseless and undeserved suffering” (Pope XXIX). How modern readers encounter Job requires this sense of an everyman for it to be relevant. But it could be possible that a “contemporary” of Job or someone living in the ancient world took this as a real threat or possibility. This relates to reception history which I will not cover in this analysis, but it is worth noting that historical and individual context is extremely important for interpretation. This everyman depiction is helpful for understanding why Job has retained popularity--or wisdom literature in general. Wisdom literature “[retains] an ongoing relevance in the lives of modern readers, religious and secular alike” because they ask questions many people identify with (Alter xvii).

Composition then leads us to the issue of interpretation. Subjectivity is my biggest

enemy in this analysis. Job is typically, and rightfully so, read as a narrative on suffering. Conclusions about Job's righteousness, the purpose and identity of the Satan figure,⁴ prose prologues and epilogues, and a whole list of other things are not as concrete. These aspects that set Job apart from other wisdom works are obvious points of rebuttal. As you will see in the following section, interpretation guided by historical context and literary parallels is a common starting point for many scholars. Pope points out that, "the literary parallels to Job go back to the second millennium B.C. and enhance the probability that an ancient legend or epic lies behind the biblical story and even that the Dialogue may be much older than commonly supposed" (Pope XXXII). Alter also agrees with this idea surrounding the prose folklore possibility. Though there are discrepancies between texts we cannot deny the similarities and what that may offer us in understanding. Identifying a shared source for the prose or some other commonality would solve many interpretative problems, but we do not have any. Understanding a work with so little historical context is bound to draw on other surrounding works. Importantly, Jon Levenson states that when comparing myths, "the observation that [chaos] can appear without an accompanying cosmogony is worth making because it counters the tendency of many scholars to conflate or homogenize texts and, in the process, to miss changes and developments in the history of the religion" (Levenson 12). Though we are not particularly talking about chaos in the introduction, this quote highlights the mistake of conflating texts. My goal is not to make Job out to be an exact replica or result of some other text, but to understand larger trends in Job and ANE wisdom literature. In making readers aware of these missing "facts" is to argue in the most abstract sense that making solid conclusions about the *Book of Job* is a difficult and likely a trivial task. This does not mean we should read *Job* and blindly accept its incongruences, but it

⁴ This work assumes the Satan figure is not to be imagined as the devil of the New Testament or later developments but as an adversary part of the divine assembly.

does offer us an extended reach of possible educated interpretations that other biblical books do not (due more to common interpretation rather than scholarly agreement).

A Road Map of Sorts

Now that we are informed of issues or difficulties to interpreting Job, I will lay out what is to come in this analysis. What will follow is three distinct sections that operate as lenses in which we can view Job. I have ordered them in a manner that I believe informs the next section. Their degree of relation depends on your own willingness to see the connections as I have. In the first section I will be looking at the commonalities and discrepancies between ANE literature about pious sufferers. In short, this is a parallels section that I think is important for understanding a closer analysis of specific sections of Job. Following this I take a more magnified look at the speeches of God in chapters 38-41. Beyond the common tropes of the entire book and its contemporaries or predecessors, a closer look at creation narratives may allow a different understanding of God's character and message in Job. Throughout the creation narratives of the Ancient Near Eastern cults we see the importance of supremacy (Levenson). Thus, I will attempt an abstract view of shared conceptions of power and their manifestations in Job. Finally, I will cover the dialogic implications of Job. With more time could we get into every possible view of Job and its further context problems. This odd approach is an attempt to capture all of the oddities of Job into one extended conversation.

Job and Its Ancient Near East Parallels

Analyzing Job within its historical context is not a new area of study. For over a century, since major progress was made in studying ANE languages and discovery of artifacts, scholars have been comparing biblical literature to religious, cultural, or everyday texts. These discoveries have helped inform scholars on religious practices/beliefs, cultural concerns and practices, and a wide array of phenomena going on across the Near East at the time--sacred or mundane. When looking up writings or analysis on *Job* many scholars make sure to cover its historical context and often literary parallels from other groups of people. Regardless of the stance of each scholar, many recognize that it would be a mistake to not acknowledge these texts.⁵ Many scholars, particularly those defending personal beliefs or the institutions they belong to, argue that the text of Job is not directly derived from other surrounding cultural texts. Even though there are valid counterarguments, many of these do not deny a similarity in composition structures, themes, etc. Though there are bound to be major differences, I believe the similarities between some ANE literature and Job point to some sense of literary/cultural transmission or, at a minimum, consistent themes in the region. I will attempt to convey this view by assessing some commonalities between a few works divided by the three forms of writing/deliveries in Job: Lamenting Dialogue, deities' interference/response, and the seemingly happy ending.

Overall, the parallels between Job and its ANE counterparts may be more thematic than structural. The differences may help us understand the point in reproducing a similar text or

⁵ Some publications include: Janzen, J. Gerald. *Job: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. United States, Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012.
 Pope, Marvin H. *Job. Introd., Translation, and Notes by Marvin H. Pope*. Garden City, N.Y, Doubleday, 1965.
 Print. Hoffman, Yair. *A Blemished Perfection: The Book of Job in context*. United Kingdom, Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.
 Etc.

differences in beliefs. Due to the difficulties forementioned in the introduction, it is impossible to truly locate *Job* in history and not my goal to answer. By observing more thematic similarities the overlap can suggest a relationship that missing context cannot. This seems particularly important due to the questionable integrity of Job's composition. Since some pieces likely originated separately as well as over time, a structural typology analysis becomes even harder. Determining how or if Job is related to these texts historically is an impossible task. Thus, when we compare these kinds of texts we do not have to grasp for insight out of thin air. Looking between these texts toward historical context may move us away from blindly searching for an answer in an isolated text and toward ones that acknowledge the rich literary trend it was birthed into.

The Laments

Not many people in the Hebrew Bible are praised as highly by God as Job. "That man [Job] was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1 &8). His blamelessness is a key proponent of this narrative. Without his near perfection there would be reason to assume fault and sinfulness which quickly dismisses the frame story. The writer makes sure to let readers know that even "in all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing" (Job 1:22) Job's suffering, as compared to other biblical narratives, is set apart by this blamelessness and the lack of explanation for punishment (to Job in the beginning that is). Divine justice and pious suffering are the anchors that concern ANE readers and listeners, as well as modern readers. The motif of a pious sufferer and their laments to a deity(s) is a common one in ANE literature.

Established in the prologue prose section (which aids in framing the "happy ending"), Job seems to follow a similar pattern in ANE literature where the opening of a story tells of the

heroic deeds of the main character. One source of argued influence or commonality is the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. “Like the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, and the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Gilgamesh Epic* opens with a brief resume of the deeds and fortunes of the hero whose praises it sings...[he] who brought information of the days before the flood; who went on a long journey (in quest of immortality)” (Heidel 5). Though Gilgamesh is not deemed perfect or sinless in the same way that Job is portrayed, he is part god/part human which may convey a sense of “chosen-ness” or favor. This idea of piety or favor is found in the story of Atrahasis (later linked to Gilgamesh by the name of Ut-napishtim) and later Noah of Genesis who find favor in their respective gods.⁶ Despite his many objections to the similarities of ANE literature serving as direct influences for Job, scholar Moshe Weinfeld does acknowledge “the Mesopotamian work which resembles typologically the poems of Job is the so-called Babylonian *Theodicy*. As the poetic part of Job in the Bible, so the *Theodicy* deals with the problem of the suffering of the righteous in the form of dialogue between the sufferer and his friend” (Weinfeld 222). As we can see thus far the trope of pious suffering or the suffering of understood heroes was very common. Just in reference to the typecasting of Job, it seems reasonable to argue that the book of Job would be included in this genre of literature.

Aside from narrative told from the third person, the suffering is often conveyed in dialogue or monologues (poetic or prose) conveying the severity of suffering and inability for the main character to withstand it anymore. These laments ask for relief, understanding, help, etc. establishing the reliance on and loyalty to their god(s). Job is unaware of the wager between God and Satan or the suffering inflicted by God depending on how we view the prologue. This

⁶ Dalley, Stephanie. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. United Kingdom, OUP Oxford, 2008. (pg. 1-8 & 43-44)

infliction of suffering is both similar and different to the sufferings of other heroes. For Noah and Job, the suffering and alleviation is from God alone. For Atrahasis and Gilgamesh the pantheon of deities is involved in the stories and creation narratives that frame and resolve the suffering they experience. Broadly speaking, “through the fear of the gods, through sacrifice...or other deeds of piety, the hour of death could be postponed and life could be lengthened” (Heidel 139). Though death may not be staring these figures in the face at every moment, defeat, loss, further suffering, or falling out of favor are also threatening. These can also require an appeal to a deity. For most of these stories death or destruction is looming for the individual, possibly while being inflicted on others simultaneously (like in the flood stories). For example, “At the sight of this frightful ogre Gugalmeš is terror-stricken. He breaks into tears and cries to Shamash, the sun-god. Shamash hears his prayer and from all eight major points of the compass he sends mighty winds against Humbaba” (Heidel 7).⁷ Humbaba is subdued and killed allowing Gilgamesh and Enkidu to carry on with their quest. The two could have, and likely should have, been killed by Humbaba. The appeal to a deity and a promise of loyalty/sacrifice extends or spares Gilgamesh’s life.

Within some of these narratives there is also the presence of side characters who inform the suffering or plot. As Weinfeld is quoted earlier, the *Babylonian Theodicy* has a dialogue between sufferer and friend. For Job, his friends are often trying to convince him to admit guilt or to reject God. “Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same” (Job 4:7-8). Job’s friends help us understand further the problem of comprehending pious suffering when it occurs

⁷ Interestingly, this trend of winds/tempests/whirlwinds is also found throughout texts. *Ludlul bel nemeqi* references evil winds or a “windstorm is driving me” similar to Job 9:17 (Weinfeld 220). As well as God’s speaking from the whirlwind, and wind imagery in the speeches.

amongst us and the core truths we claim. Similarly, this creates further suffering for Job who feels misunderstood and alone in his suffering. Speaking of his friends, Job laments, “they have gaped at me with their mouths; they have struck me insolently on the cheek; they mass themselves together against me” (Job 16:10). In his work Weinfeld discusses other works that create similar feelings of isolation. “The description of the suffering found in the two Mesopotamian works discussed here [Sumerian “Job” and *Ludlul bel nemeqi*] is also very similar to that of the Psalmodic literature and the poetic passages in the book of Job. The similarity is reflected mainly in two major motifs: (1) the sufferer feels a social outcast; (2) the depiction of the physical suffering” (Weinfeld 219). These points of dialogue further the story and offer the points of view we as readers likely assume as well. When reading from an “objective,” uninvolved point of view, the reader is likely to make assumptions about good and bad responses/treatment. While disagreeing with the friends, being the informed reader, one may recognize their own hypocrisy in handling the suffering of their own friends. This literary format teaches the reader a moral lesson and addresses normative connotations.

On the other hand, suffering may be related to the loss of friends in the more permanent sense. For Gilgamesh, his sidekick Enkidu is originally created to be his adversary. Once the struggle for dominance is over, the two partake in Gilgamesh’s journey for immortality together. When Enkidu dies Gilgamesh mourns over Enkidu for 7 days and nights. His loss of a best friend ties Gilgamesh’s story to the concern of mortality even more. Gilgamesh asks, ““When I die, shall I not be like unto Enkidu?”” his grief stricken spirit is obsessed with the fear of death and finds no comfort in the glory of his own accomplishments” (Heidel 8).⁸ Alone, Gilgamesh

⁸ In later tablets (unlikely to be a part of the original story) Gilgamesh even asks for Enkidu to be summoned from the netherworld to answer questions about the afterlife. This leads to further assumptions and examinations of Mesopotamian conceptions of the afterlife and its ties to religious acts while living.

continues his journey for immortality. Without any support from friends, Gilgamesh finds himself in a similar situation to Job. These extraordinary individuals are burdened to ask aloud for divine understanding of the miseries they endure.

For some pious sufferers, their isolation is due to their favor with a god. Isolation meant being insulted, in hiding, or ostracized while fulfilling commands. Though these figures were usually able to save their nuclear families, isolation from society at large still is conveyed as a difficult and painful situation to be in. When looking at the flood narratives of Noah and the likely older *Atrahasis* (which contains creation aspects as well) we see that they are spared from mass destruction due to acts of piety—laments and sacrifices. The biblical Noah righteously suffered as did other deluge heroes. These types of flood narratives are often viewed as their own ANE genre as well and their parallels are well documented. Commenting on similar works to Heidel, scholar Bill Arnold claims, “the account of Noah and the great flood resembles similar accounts in the ancient world, especially in Babylonia, where we have remarkably closer literary parallels in the famous Gilgamesh Epic” (Arnold 33). Since Gilgamesh is linked to Atrahasis, and Atrahasis is linked to Noah, it does not seem to be a stretch to look at these compared to Job who resembles Gilgamesh. Heidel, who disagrees about direct influence, does believe that the Babylonian and Hebrew accounts of the flood are ‘genetically’ related, but that the degree of relation is to be determined (Heidel 260). Gilgamesh is said to be widely known and the most reproduced text of its time. Its infiltration and influence would not be able to be traced exactly, there are obviously no biblical footnotes accrediting the unknown author(s). In critiquing two authors comparing Job to ANE Literature, Janzen makes a really important move in saying “one cannot simply move laterally from the view presented in Mesopotamian [*L.b.n*] and Babylonian Theodicy to those presented in the Book of Job” (Janzen 9). When doing reception history, there

is a chance to draw comparisons and linear assumptions where they do not belong. Cultural transmission and myth development cannot be automatically assumed as an explanation. Isolation and other forms of independent creation are also just as likely. Similarities do not necessitate a common source. This idea of ideological development and revision is extremely important in reconciling textual chronology. As I will further argue in a separate section, creation narratives, like those contained in the Babylonian Theodicy, Genesis, etc. seep into other stories as assumed background or historical context. Some scholars when looking at the history of ancient Israel read Genesis 1-11 as “primeval History” for its followers. They argue, “on the one hand, it arranges themes along a continuum using cause and effect and generally uses historical narrative as the literary medium for communication. On the other hand, those themes themselves are the same ones explored elsewhere in the ancient Near East in mythological literature” (Arnold 30-31). These themes or strains of thought were well known and shared concerns amongst groups. “The Wisdom writers of ancient Israel evince some awareness of the activity of their counterparts in the surrounding cultures” (Alter xiv). These concerns would have likely drawn people to imagine some sort of logical or rational reasoning for death, destruction, suffering, or anything else that plagues the human condition. The legitimizing process may have played off of well-established tropes or other pre-established beliefs.

The Interventions of Gods

As somewhat alluded to above, these stories are not sans religious or mythical influence as well. Gods play a major role in these stories. Though the heroes are near perfect they are still in need of assistance from the gods. These forms of help, revelations, instructions come at a price and look different amongst different belief systems. Within the interventions, visible or not, are what I see as the biggest differences amongst these texts. It is harder to draw specific parallels in

the responses of deities when the aim of the plot is very different. Though many texts are thematically dealing with death and the afterlife, the ways in which that is achieved are not the same. The presences of the deity, as it is conferred with favor or anger, is an important motif in these texts. Often the characters themselves are aware of supposed moral orders in regard to divine justice and answers to questions humans do not have access to. The laments aimed at the deities are often concerned with their assumed innocence or expectation for punishment or reward. For Job and particularly his friends these assumptions are related to punishment for the wicked and reward for the righteous. “Does God pervert justice? Or does the almighty pervert the right?...if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore to you your rightful place” (Job 8:3&6). Deities thus are a vehicle for plot and resolution. Though they may not provide the clearest answer or optimal result, their answers or actions give more clarity or kernels of truth than we had at the beginning of the story.

In a summed-up manner, the theodicy in *Job* presents itself as quite different from the rest of the Hebrew bible. I will cover more fully its attributes and what could be seen as parallels in depth in the next section. As God presents himself to Job, his rhetoric is not one that gives clear answers—as they are posed as rhetorical questions. Scholar Robert Alter in refuting some claims of belittling says, “God’s thundering challenge to Job is not bullying. Rather, it rousingly introduces a comprehensive overview of the nature of reality that exposes the limits of Job’s human perspective, anchored as it is in the restricted compass of human knowledge and the inevitable egoism of suffering” (Alter 10). This connection to otherworldly knowledge and death allows us to see thematic parallels in other stories. The author of *Job* does not end the story with the laments and questions of the pious sufferer but gives us some sort of resolution—albeit an unclear one. This too is seen in texts like *Gilgamesh*.

As I cited earlier, Shamash is known to assist Enkidu and Gilgamesh in their fight with Humbaba. This intervention is not one of theodicy but does show us what favor in the eyes of gods can do for you. Shamash's favor does not stop there. After the slaying of the bull of heaven in a separate tablet the gods decide someone must die and the lot is given to Enkidu. The interference of Shamash does not bode well when other deities are involved. 'Ellil turned in anger to the heavenly Shamash, Saying, "(the fact is), you accompanied them daily, like One of their comrades"' (Dalley 84). Though Shamash could not spare Enkidu, he does seem to offer him up rather than Gilgamesh. Enkidu forsakes Shamash in hope that another deity would protect him. Gilgamesh still finds favor in Shamash, likely due to loyalty and life sustaining offerings. This more reciprocal relationship is quite different from that of Job and his god. Without Shamash Gilgamesh would not have made it that far in his quest. These deities are integral to understanding the endings of the stories.

Similar to Gilgamesh and spoken about in Ut-Napishtim's recounting of the flood, Atrahasis has a favorable relationship with one god. In a story explaining why and how death came about for mortals, we see both a pantheon of gods and humans quite different from ourselves. The story cynically revolves around gods needing to wipe out humanity as a form of population control because they are loud, needy, and annoying. The gods created humankind to work the land and give offerings. This establishes a reciprocal relationship but one of vastly unequal power. After establishing favor through prayer and questioning, Enki breaks rank with the gods to tell Atrahasis to build a boat to save him and his family from the flood. Adad then floods the earth while Atrahasis and his family are able to secretly survive. In the end Atrahasis makes an offering to the angry pantheon of gods and is granted immortality. The gods then deliberate and opt to establish death for humans to control the population rather than mass

killings. Though this story seems out of line with the others, the characteristics of Adad here are similar to YHYW when he floods the earth in Genesis as well as the addressing of the heroes.

Connecting to some of our other sources, not all have this idea of intervention or redress. These differences may point to ideas “floating” between people groups rather than a set typological mold. For Weinfeld he still sees the connections between the idea of the righteous sufferer despite the missing intervention. Despite having no cosmic redress, “what may be learned from the *Theodicy* is that theoretical discussions about the problem of sufferings of the righteous were prevalent in Mesopotamia as well as ancient Israel, and that there are even typological affinities between them” (Weinfeld 225). Affinities and parallels go beyond near exact matches, as many of us know.

What I think may link these interventions together beyond similarities in manifestations is what they teach the hero or reader inadvertently. God, Gilgamesh’s journey in total, and/or what isn’t revealed to heroes all remind us that divine will is not often known to us. Only because we are told afterward through narrative and from the third person point of view are we let into the cosmic secret. Many of these texts remind us exactly of this aspect of the human condition. Summed up quite nicely is this point made by Weinfeld about wisdom:

Furthermore the wisdom which the sufferer professes to possess makes him forget that as a human being he will never understand the divine mind and that his arguments against God are worthless... [in the *Theodicy*] the blasphemy uttered by the alleged wise stands next to the idea about the incomprehensibility of the divine mind:

“The divine mind is like the centre of the heavens is remote,
Knowledge of it is difficult, people do not know it (ll. 256-57)” (Weinfeld 223)

Although introspection and acceptance of the human condition can give us the same insight as a divine revelation in these stories, just like the hero we too need to be led to these conclusions occasionally. Through these narratives the answers and possibly someone’s afterlife is in the

hands of a deity(s). The intervention of a god in any form is one of knowledge. This imparting of wisdom or sparing of life at its minimum grants the character and the reader existential perspective.

The Happy Endings

To conclude our discussion of Job and its ANE parallels I would like us to focus on resolutions and happily ever afters—the conclusions themselves. Despite the obvious pun, conclusions or endings carry a very specific connotation for readers in regard to what is expected. I use this phrase “happy ending” loosely. Happy endings are not always happy, they are not always fairytale equivalents, and are often just a form of wrapping up the loose ends of a story. For a story to be a story there must be an end. Often when endings are not happy we find ourselves angered or questioning the purpose of the literature we engaged with. Somewhat anticlimactically, when dealing with major philosophical questions we too still look for a neat, happy ending to our concerns. This dichotomy of mood is what I find really intriguing in regard to stories about pious sufferers. The concerns of death and justice are not easily answered through restitution and are often deeply depressing as we engage with them internally (and humankind engages with them eternally). Most of these stories have some kind of happy ending that may or may not address these concerns.

When we look at the text of Job, he is never given insight into the wager or divine justice for that matter. Job’s suffering is ended, and after acknowledging that he will never understand the cosmic design he seems content to live disengaged from those questions forever. ‘Then Job answered the Lord... “therefore I have uttered what I do not understand, things too wonderful for me... therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes’ (Job 42:1,3,6). He is not alone in this characteristic. We see in the Gilgamesh, Noah, and Atrahasis stories that this “happy

ending” requires blissful ignorance. Once these stories have addressed the existential concerns at hand, whether the answer was satisfactory or not, the story is quickly wrapped up and typically involves restitution.

The use of restitution for many of these stories restores the glory and rewards to the pious sufferer. In the case of Job, all of his family, property, etc. was destroyed in the wager. Once Job admits his ignorance and then intercedes on behalf of his friends (since their guilt is confirmed by God), his life is magically restored to its former glory—piety still intact. “...the Lord showed favor to Job. And the Lord restored Job’s fortunes when he prayed for his companions, and the Lord increased twofold all that Job had” (Job 42:9-10). This former glory is established in the prologue of the frame story allowing the entire narrative to come full circle. The early context helps us understand and justify the suffering endured because all is made well in the end. “The book ends in the folktale world of the frame-story, where everything is reduced to schematic patterns and formulaic numbers” (Alter 178). Many scholars point out that the frame story was likely a separate addition to the poetry sections.⁹ Why do we need an addition to the poetry? One may offer that readers want a happy ending, not to be left with grueling existential questions that haunt us. We may also conclude that the happy ending aligns Job more with other wisdom texts that assume the good are rewarded and the sinful are punished (cf. Proverbs). Regardless this use of happy endings is similar to other texts that grapple with similar material.

Somewhat in an opposite way, we see this play out in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Gilgamesh’s search for immortality ends in vain after he loses the magic flower on his return home. After weeping he seems to readily come to another conclusion about life and move on.

⁹ Alter, Robert. *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes: A Translation with Commentary*. United States, W. W. Norton, 2010. (pg. 5),
 Pope, Marvin H. *Job. Introd., Translation, and Notes by Marvin H. Pope*. Garden City, N.Y, Doubleday, 1965. (pg. xxi-xxviii)

“Since he cannot change the course of destiny, he decides to be content with his lot and rejoice in the work of his hands” (Heidel 10). It seems somewhat an ironic ending being that he spent so much time on this quest only to come to a conclusion that could have spared his friend Enkidu. Though this does not seem the typical happy ending where everything is restored in full, if not more, for Gilgamesh, I believe this can be seen as a happy ending. Gilgamesh is left in a tranquil, content state. He gains philosophical insight and happiness despite his trials and losses. Happy endings may serve as reconciling our expectations with our fears. These conclusions of stories about pious sufferers allows us to move on from the story. Once it ends, we can use its moral guidance in our own lives. The pious sufferer is not an easy archetype to embody but the perfection of these characters may lessen our own expectations of life.

Power as Supremacy

“If knowledge cannot guarantee itself, perhaps power is below its surface. The appeal to power acknowledges the futility of this guarantee and describes the grounding of knowledge.” (P.E.

Digester 988)

In God’s speeches lie my ultimate argument: in reading Job, it should not be treated as a complete anomaly of Wisdom Literature, but rather it should be read and debated in the same manner as the Genesis narratives—as a creation story itself. Power in creation narratives fluctuates between the many different forms of power. In the typical, more material sense of power relations a figure uses power on something or someone to get their way. For example, in Genesis 1 God uses his power to subdue the high and low waters (Gen 1:6). This use of power results in a quelling of the desires or actions of the subjugated person or object directly (or indirectly through manipulation, coercion, etc.). This direct use of power can later result in a system of power that influences the order or culture of the society. In reception history we see this through the changes in interpretation as they relate to historical context of the reader. In examining creation narratives, I have come to believe that the two go hand in hand. It seems that to establish order and a religious following (cultural/societal system of power) there must have been a direct use of power to establish “supremacy.” Supremacy is the quelling of chaos and/or other gods who impose disorder or order respectively—supremacy is a concern of power (Levenson). Without both of these elements, creation narratives lack the legitimacy needed to justify all events, claims, and beliefs that follow. Origins often serve as a source of truth and purpose for a corpus of religious texts or beliefs, like a butterfly effect of supremacy. Creation

narratives are self-legitimizing in the continued genealogical tracing that occurs through people or events.

We as readers often struggle with assuming that from the beginning, a deity is presented as a static character. If a deity was presented upfront in all of their facets, understanding scripture or myth would be a lot easier. A deity may stand outside of human time, but it would be naïve to believe that they cannot change in presentation or throughout their ‘reign.’ Reading creation narratives as an appeal to power or legitimacy does not need to showcase every aspect of a deity, only that which characterizes their irreproachable supremacy. By comparing different accounts of creation, other cosmologies, or theophanies I hope readers come to see that gods are multifaceted. Particularly God’s speeches in the book of Job develop a different interpretation of YHWH—the all-powerful, storm trope deity.

Understanding the idea of mastery or supremacy requires a look at other texts similar to God’s speeches to Job. Jon Levenson is a scholar who articulates this theme of supremacy well in the Hebrew Bible amongst its Ancient Near Eastern context. Though he argues against the more dramatic steps taken with this view, Levenson starts his book with this idea of mastery:

The creation narratives, whatever their length, form, or context, are best seen as dramatic visualization of the uncompromised mastery of YHWH, God of Israel, over all else. He alone is “the Lord of all the earth” and when cosmogonic events are complete, his lordship stands beyond all doubt...all else subordinate to him. (Levenson 3)

Levenson mostly jousts with Jewish biblical scholars who deem that YHWH stands alone in the universe without any primordial origin myth or divine counterparts—past, present or future. I agree with Levenson that the belief held by these scholars is problematic for our understanding of an array of texts. The idea of creation *ex nihilo* or *fiat creation* offered by these Jewish scholars will be covered later. Levenson focuses much of his book on primarily Hebrew bible texts, but I think that Ancient Near Eastern mythology will fit well into my discussion of power.

Putting forth my thought quite frankly, the language of creation is predicated on the language of power—the act of creation is an act of power as well.

When examining the flow of power in myth and their later developments I propose looking at Levenson's work in four steps: 1) there is some form of divine combat that occurs to establish supremacy; 2) the gained supremacy allows the divine being to give order to the human realm and possibly all of the cosmos; 3) the order must be continually threatened in some manner; 4) a genealogy of power solidifies supremacy through an appeal to 'legitimacy' that is predicated on prior power. This frame allows us to examine similarities and differences in creation narratives without getting caught up in detail. There are obviously caveats that other scholars or readers may disagree with in specific myths. I believe this frame points out larger thematic trends amongst these cultic groups. No one story is the same nor necessarily has the same aims, but by using this frame the differences allow us to understand syncretism as it plays into power in the broadest sense. Humans are creative but as redundantly made clear to readers in Ecclesiastes, 'there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said "See, this is new"? it has already been, in the ages before us' (Eccl 1:9-10). For the purpose of understanding the influence of power and legitimacy, I say we heed Qohelet's warning.

This linear look at developing power is not an unfamiliar argument in the study of religion. The forward development I propose based on Levenson's argument finds its foil in the work of Thorklid Jacobsen. Gerald Janzen engages with Thorklid Jacobsen who writes on Mesopotamian history. His view of mythological development of the metaphors/understandings of gods provides a linear view of alienating gods from direct engagement. He suggests that gods change over millenniums from (1) embodying phenomena, (2) to divine entities that are removed from toil and the earth, (3) to personal deities, (4) to monotheism/personal to national (some

polytheistic resurgence happens elsewhere) (Janzen 5-6). I find the process of alienation similar to a development of a culture of power, yet I do not completely agree with Jacobsen's work. Examining Job through this lens offers a very different view of Job's dialogue and God's response. If people felt that God was a personal god, then expecting a justification for "unjust" suffering is not surprising—especially if Job was seen as a primordial figure outside of the concurrent Israelite context of the reader. Jacobsen seems to rightly point out the entire *Book of Job* seems to struggle in presenting God consistently. Job's questioning and his friends' cursing does not align with the "infinite greatness" and cosmic dominance of God's speeches. Frank Moore Cross, who also seems to view Mesopotamian religion as a progressive abstraction or alienation places Israelite religion in Jacobsen's view of second millennium Mesopotamian cults. His comparison of God to 'El or Ba'al is a common comparison when looking at other tropes through the Hebrew Bible as well. I think this argument has authority, especially when considering Deuteronomistic history.¹⁰

Often, we are unaware of a culture of power working on us due to our emergence into its pre-existing systems. I would like to point out other thinkers do not view power in a purely progressive linear sense, but it is applicable to my frame of establishing supremacy *prior* to a dominant culture of power. This chronology feeds into my last point on genealogy, but every genealogy has an origin. Examining origins are contentious amongst scholars for a multitude of reasons. Interpretation of a deity's character is largely dependent on its theogonies. Power is relational but manifests itself in different ways, most familiarly in physical prowess.

¹⁰ Rf. S. M. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel*, xiii-22 & S. McKenzie, "Deuteronomistic History," in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*

I suggest the supremacy via divine combat as the first step due to major disagreements over origin myths for YHWH specifically. Regardless of the cultic group, some form of physical overcoming is likely to be found in creation narratives. Supremacy in Levenson's view is something that can be earned and is not always inherent. Looking at Genesis's chronological cultural predecessor, the *Enuma Elish*, creation "begins with the mingling of the subterranean fresh waters, Apsu, and the saline waters of the oceans, Tiamat" (Levenson 3-4). A theogony follows until Marduk defeats Tiamat and creates humankind. This theogony implies that Marduk is not primordial, only Apsu and Tiamat are, but that he emerges in time. Thus, "Marduk's mastery is not inherent...he does not create *ex nihilo*, but exerts his creative word upon a powerful preexistent material substratum" (Levenson 4-5). Marduk reigns over the other divine beings by gaining his supremacy in combat with Tiamat. "Ancient Israel appears to share the common creation-by-combat mythology of the ancient Near East in which the warrior deity creates by dividing chaotic waters" (JZ Smith 97). This idea of water entities being primordial characters looks a lot like water's appearance in Hebrew creation narratives. God separates the upper and lower waters in Gen 1:6, so he is either a contemporary of the similar figures of Tiamat and Apsu or their creators (but there is no link to that idea in the text). There are many directions to go in our evaluation of chaotic waters in Genesis, but the lack of defining humanlike characteristics make the waters appear lifeless to most readers in translation. Though God is divine he is described with emotions and personality traits unlike the waters who do not speak nor act directly on man by their own will. Similarly, in their murder Tiamat and Apsu do not transcend nature though they have divine creative powers (Levenson 4). They are resolved to inanimate forces or elements of nature post-mortem. Hypothetically, if we imagine this to be the

case for YHWH and his water figures, we may be able to assume a primordial sense of combat. Like the *Enuma Elish*, the waters that God separates and holds back seem to be primordial. Interestingly, there is no mention of their creation. In Genesis there is also no origin myth for God himself. We then have three figures at a minimum who have no origin myth but are present in the universe. His “we” language in the Genesis creation also seems to imply a larger cast of characters, possibly a divine assembly of subordinate beings (reference Gen 1:26 & Ps 82). This would also align with an earned sense of supremacy not one inherent to YHWH’s being. Interestingly, the Genesis story also seems to wipe any mention of the leviathan that we see mentioned in Job. The Hebrew word often used in other mentions of the leviathan is situated in Genesis when God creates the swimming and flying things (*tannîn and hattannînîm* which have roots in the word Tiamat). The leviathan has aquatic qualities: it is brought out and kept on a fishhook, it is shot with fishing spears, and swims in the sea (Job 41:24b, 7, 31). But it is not a simple fish, the leviathan, often depicted as a crocodile or a dragon, is demonized and fearsome. It seems not to be a normal animal but a chaotic, mythical one with destructive powers (Job 41:14-34). This creature is also heavily linked to the chaotic waters it inhabits. Even if we were to assume that the waters are inanimate in these depictions, the chaos and destruction they bring can be linked to the Leviathan.¹¹ This may be a revision on the parts of Genesis having a series of writers. If so, there seems to be a need to make God the only ‘primordial’ being and not one who competes with other deities and or sea monster(s). He has no opposition to face to maintain his rule, implying there is no other divine power somewhere in the cosmos (Levenson 54).

Similarly, Levenson points out that Canaanite myth helps illuminate these allusions within the biblical texts as well. “The bible offers no connected narrative of primordial divine

¹¹ “It makes the deep boil like a pot; it makes the sea like a pot of ointment” (Job 41:31)

combat...[but] having Ugaritic and similar materials, we were able to get a sense of the full dimensions of old myth and its continuing vitality in Israel” (Levenson 8). Specifically, the figure of the sea monster, aside from waters, help us understand the prevalence of combat in creation. In God’s speeches to Job the leviathan is a major figure, and it may be arguable that this is the primordial opponent of God. Robert Alter does comment that,

what is remarkable about this whole powerfully vivid evocation of Leviathan is that the monotheistic poet has taken a figure from mythology, traditionally seen as the cosmic enemy of the god of order and transformed it into this daunting creature that is preeminent in, but also very much part of, God’s teeming creation. (Alter 175)

I do agree that the Leviathan is treated as proud over all others but it being one of God’s creations is not pronounced enough for me to believe. This leviathan is never really given an origin story, he only appears sporadically as the competition or “plaything” of God. Through his exercise of might and subjugation of a wily beast God continually proves his supremacy even over the larger threats to the universal order. We never know what would happen if he lost, because God never loses to the leviathan. If we assume the leviathan to be an actual threat to God’s power and created order, the leviathan could hypothetically undo everything. This threat of chaos or destruction of reality as we know it, I believe, qualifies the leviathan as God’s combat opponent regardless of your interpretation on its origin. By not viewing the leviathan as a primordial figure that God bested, we see that “those texts tell not of chaos eliminated, but of chaos circumscribed, subjugated against its will: YHWH now plays with Leviathan in a sanitized and domesticated reenactment of what other texts describe as a violent, gory, and by no means predetermined struggle” (Levenson 26). Combat for Marduk, Ba’al, and YHWH all serve to make them supreme. All of these deities differ in story and results, but the argument that combat occurred presents a physical, undeniable account of their supremacy.

Supremacy in the wake of physical overcoming leads to constructing a worldly or cosmic order that a deity pleases but also likely helps maintain their supremacy. I view this as creating a system of values and meanings to support a deity's supremacy or creating a culture beneficial to their supremacy. The issue I find is determining whether the order is applied only to the human realm (earth) or to the divine realm as well. I question how pervasive this order can be. Does it take on a metaphysical form of truth that transcends this world? This may be dependent on each interpreter. Regardless, the cosmos seems to be affected by the creation of a new order. It seems to me that when we look at interpretations of the Genesis story, by ignoring the possible primordial structure, we may be misinterpreting the aim of the order given to humans. Viewing supremacy and power as a chronological set of events would require acknowledging what occurred first as a source of influence or inspiration. If combat allowed a new deity to claim supremacy, then they have the ability to recreate the structure of the cosmos (dependent on their individual capabilities and limits). If YHWH defeated the waters or the leviathan who may have been a part of a different, prior universal order, his subjugation of them speaks to his recreation efforts. Combat then goes beyond physical prowess. The "physical" defeat of an opponent is only step one to establishing oneself as the ruler of the heavens and the earth. Without a full suppression of your opponent there is no freedom to create or recreate. To be constantly engaged in combat would not support a claim of supremacy by one of the competitors. Only periods of control (suppressed chaos) speak to one's mastery. This does not always mean your competitor ceases to exist, but by their temporary subjugation a creator can exert their power. I see this initial combat as a destruction/deconstruction effort. To create a new structure, one must first destroy what is already in place. This point is critical to interpreting creation as an act *illo tempore*.

The effect of the created order, I believe, speaks to the need of a prior structure to overcome. There is freedom for God to do as he pleases within the order. His supremacy allows him to create, destroy, and recreate at a whim. Creation has a beneficent ordering; this may be an overlooked aspect of creation narratives. This point is extremely salient when we get to examining God's speeches to Job. God uses the language of good and evil in the Genesis creation order. If we think about beneficence in its relation to power, we enter the realm of political philosophy. Rather than a Machiavellian projection of fear to retain power, God's use of beneficent order benefits both his supremacy and humankind. There is no torturous world to endure only for the benefit of the god(s), but a mutual agreement (covenant or social contract) of gifts/blessings and sacrifice/offerings. Offerings and the lack of rebellion would contribute to the maintenance of supremacy. As we see in the *Atrahasis* story from Mesopotamia the gods rebel because of the racket caused by the humans. Empathy for the human condition often costs a god their power, consider Prometheus after he delivers fire to humans. By creating a 'good' order for the earth there is less likely to be complaints or rejection from humans, and they may reject the manipulative advances of adversaries. Often tricksters or usurpers need the support of human creation or those suppressed in the divine assembly to overthrow the god(s) in power. Marvin Pope offers that Satan may read as a non-threatening, possibly begotten, member of the divine assembly in Job.¹² "But, leaving aside the question of the origin of the Satan, the motif of the divine assembly (in which the Satan is only a member) is a feature of early Ancient Near Eastern theology encountered in Mesopotamian literature and in the Ugaritic mythological texts" (Pope XXXIV-V). Satan does not reappear in God's speeches that I am focusing on, but his presence

¹² Job 1:6 & 38:7

should be noted in the earlier dialogues of Job. Satan does not take on the later Christianized/Hellenized persona of being God's enemy, but instead he serves almost like a prosecutor in Job's trial before God. This too seems to reaffirm the power and supremacy of God who becomes in this depiction the ultimate judge. When thinking about later developments, Satan may be a useful continuation of a sparring partner figure for God that establishes his supremacy while abandoning those figures who may make us question the monotheistic reality of YHWH.

The use of good versus evil language in creation narratives help us villainize the competitors and buy into the order established by the dominant deity. Though we possess no knowledge of the intended order of the loser, we are influenced by polarizing language. This language dichotomizes good and evil as they relate to creation and power. We see through the concept of sin that the maintenance of this order and the supremacy of the god is dependent on this very dichotomy. Readers are steered away from the "evil," chaotic possibilities that are embodied in the *enemy* of the reigning deity. In all reality we have no comprehension beyond our own reality. Whatever else the order could be is inaccessible to us as long as the supreme deity is in control and uses language and knowledge that affirms their power. I believe this speaks to the lack of mention of a primordial order in the Hebrew Bible. Without it there is no questioning of YHWH's goodness, supremacy, or qualifications to rule. If YHWH himself is a usurper or trickster, we are not informed. The perceived "goodness" of his created or recreated order is solely dependent on the language of power.

I bring up the interpretation and stability of order as a result of combat to specifically address the idea of recreation. Levenson implies by referencing the Noah flood story that "the endurance and stability of nature is not intrinsic, it is only a corollary of God's faithfulness"

(Levenson 14). This idea is most manifest in the Noahide covenant. An earth-shattering flood is anything but stable. The reality of nature is dependent on God's desired order or lack-there-of. He uses a chaotic natural phenomenon to destroy humanity and all their creations. Humans were then aware that returning to a state of chaos was possible, or one that may mimic the primordial makeup of the universe. The lack of adherence to his decrees by humans and their "sin" drives God to wipe them out and recreate the world. Most importantly this event occurs early on in the history of humanity (according to the Hebrew scriptures). If this is a fictional event, it is still a prominent warning. Noah's proximity in time to the other eponymous ancestors removes from certain questions of truth or legitimacy. This seems to allow God to flex his ability to destroy and recreate without having to do this act consistently over many generations of people. The myth or event of Noahide flood is warning enough. God's covenant promises to never repeat the great flood. If we see chaos as the foe of order, "The reversion of creation to chaos at the divine command in Genesis 6-9 suggests that YHWH's control of the great foe is not always a blessing" (Levenson 27). YHWH's goodness could be called into question, but not necessarily his supremacy. This punishment of man is done through a possible foe, or use of extensive powers (all-powerful, perhaps?). God's faithfulness also speaks to his supremacy. Though there is a covenant involving two parties, the true threat only comes from God. Humanities ability to act poorly is null compared to the destructive ability of God. This threat of instability also brings up the idea of mortality and the human condition. I will offer later that this lens should be applied to understanding Job within the context of existentialism and creation. For now, I would like to continue the thought that creation is not static nor permanent. Ordering occurs many times in creation, destruction, and recreation. It can also be practiced in renewed covenants or liturgical practices. When looking at myth and the human and divine efforts to recreate, "Recreation serves

to strengthen and revivify the cosmos, society, and the individual” (JZ Smith 96). When examining the flood as a recreation story we may start to get the idea that recreation happens more frequently than we think. Levenson offers this idea more thoroughly in his book when looking at the temple and holiday practices (a microcosm for recreation). I will steer away from this in the paper solely for the sake of space, though Mircea Eliade’s beliefs on origin time may also be informative to certain practices in modernity or upon reflection. Returning to my earlier point, recreation and ordering allow gods to change as earthly or cosmic events occur. This maintains a culture of supremacy and the many faces of power. Without an established, beneficial, and controlled order there is a lack of legitimized supremacy.

This idea of combat, as I earlier referenced, persists in the established order. It seems that supremacy allows chaos to linger as to create fear of it bursting forth at any time. Chaos may be literally universal chaos, opponents from combat, other gods that could rise to challenge you, sin, a plethora of threats to the stability of one’s rule. The villainization of chaos helps establish the beneficence of order. Without the threat of chaos, the goodness and stability of a deity’s creation can be questioned (as can their power). But a deity that possesses the ability to wreak chaos or create stability sounds like a quite powerful entity. I suggest that there is no power if chaos is infinitely subdued, “thus chaos, in myths, is never fully overcome” (JZ Smith 97). Power requires subjugation, but of an entity that can overthrow and resist. Without opposition there is no alternate entity to instill fear or to prove the necessity of the order created by the “winner.” The cycle could start over with a new foe but strife for supremacy is legitimized in the continuity or genealogy of a similar force (evil or not is up to myth).

Earlier I discussed the lack of transcendence of Apsu and Tiamat in their defeat. They are completely reduced to inanimate figures. Levenson offers that “often the waters of chaos are

presented as surviving, only within the bounds that define creation” (Levenson 14). Once defeated, chaos can only be present in its designated realm. The Leviathan is often pictured as stuck on a fishhook or banished to stay confined within the chaotic waters. In the possibility of establishing order, it seems that God made a covenant with the leviathan “to be taken as [his] servant forever” (Job 41:4). In this battle with the leviathan God has won and established a pecking order. God is the master of the leviathan and the nature of the relationship was agreed upon in a covenant or pact. This constant threat helps establish meaning to the established order of the universe. Keeping at bay the chaos still present in the cosmos adds to the “costs” of your humanity. Chaos in the most general terms threatens our very understanding of the universe. Creation narratives subdue and explain away the threat of chaos by locating us within an existing narrative. Without the threat of chaos or opposition we may lose the meaning attached to the “goodness” of order. The language of power helps us locate this existential fear of chaos and universal instability by creating language of good and bad, right and wrong. The establishment of a culture of power requires language and an opposing force for its legitimacy and continuation. Chaos offers us a relatively universal threat to any established order, regardless of specifics within a myth.

Returning specifically to the notion of creation, I think Levenson’s point that “the confinement of chaos not its elimination is the essence of creation” is really convincing (Levenson 17). Instead of debating specifically why God’s creation is done *illo tempore*, as this could compose a completely separate work, I would like to just assume this may be the case for my analysis of threat to order. If so, God is not creating the universe out of nothingness but is establishing a life sustaining order for mankind by subjugating his foes. This suppresses chaos and all the negative “what ifs” the primordial world has to offer. By looking at chaos as the

original soup from whence the universe came, any lack of order would be a 'regression.' There seems to be some teleological aim in creating order in a chronological manner. These steps I have highlighted would mean that order is not inherent but progressive. Power and supremacy are the result of conquering chaos repeatedly in different manners. This point reveals that "YHWH's mastery is often fragile and in continual need of reactivation and reassertion, and at times, as in the laments, painfully distant from ordinary experience, a memory and a hope rather than a current reality. It is, in short, a confession of faith" (Levenson 47). Humanity's belief in a deity's supremacy is fully contingent on its persistence. The god(s) seem to be fully aware that humanity can lose faith. Costs to disbelief would either be divine punishment or the implementation of a negative order. Or a god could lose life-sustaining sacrifices or purpose for ruling an ungrateful batch of humans. Consistent in all of these options is chaos lingering. The threat of chaos, nothingness, or meaninglessness may constitute a bigger fear than a Satan figure or a sea monster. Only once we recognize their embodiment of chaos and destruction do we understand the thematic elements of power within creation narratives. We have no hero, not good nor evil, without an enemy.

Moving into the last, but most pervasive, step we come to the necessity of recorded history or the genealogy of power. In this sense genealogy takes on two definitions that are interrelated. Genealogy as it relates to genetics is very prevalent, particularly in the tracing of heritage back to the creation of man or other eponymous ancestors. These family lines seem to connect humanity, and particularly God's chosen people, directly back to God and Adam. Genesis is filled in almost every chapter with the continuation of this original line of humanity. There is even an effort to connect Noah to Adam in Genesis 5 to make sure the flood does not wipe out Adam's bloodline. Genetics/genealogy are used through the Exodus forward as it

connects to the establishment of Israel the nation. Most importantly we see King David's bloodline connected back and forward in the consequences and rewards of Judah and Israel in the book of Samuel and Kings. This connection to creation is continued in the Gospel of Matthew which connects Jesus, as the son of God, to King David and Abraham. It is also taken farther back to legitimize Jesus in the Gospel of Luke which connects Jesus to Adam who is connected to God via Eden.

Moving away from the more literal connotation of genealogy, we have the genealogy of power. Genealogy as tracing of power back to a time of uncertainty but also of decidedness of the "creator" god or the supreme god that reigns. As I mentioned previous, all the Kings of Judah and Israel are connected in some way to King David. This is a prime example of power and legitimacy. Without a bloodline, the monarchy would not be as strong or powerful. The connection efforts to origin and God himself also reaffirm God's hand in reigning. This monarchy is not legitimized without the anointing by God. This was a normal cultural phenomenon in the region, the Sumerian kings list was traced back to their creation narratives and the gods themselves or other cultural heroes.¹³ This effort solidifies the intention and legitimacy of their rule over humans, the divine connection also plays into political aims I covered previously.

It seems that genealogy is the proof that a narrative of supremacy was effective. Without earning the title of 'most supreme' and supporting it thoroughly and consistently, there does not seem to be a way for these deities to create a lasting culture of power. As mentioned in step 4: A genealogy of power solidifies supremacy through an appeal to 'legitimacy' that is predicated on power. This itself seems to be a recreative act, one that reminds us who is in charge. For

¹³ Dalley, Stephanie. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. United Kingdom, OUP Oxford, 2008. (pg. 40-49)

example, womb and birth language are used in Job 38:28-29 in reference to fathering the rain, the act of begetting, wombs, and giving birth. Since he is responsible for the creation of all events and things, God seems to be establishing his right to power as the respected father figure. Cultural power in its pervasiveness is long lasting. Without myth(s) that highlights good and evil we may fail to remember the God who battled valiantly to protect and/or create the sacrality of humanity. Only through power which controls the narrative or language of reality and creation do we know what is legitimate and powerful. JZ Smith on Eliade's work offers, "he may speak of myths which, for him, reveal the inner dynamics of Reality expressed as the creative activity of the gods... these myths of supreme creativity provide the blueprint for all creativity" (JZ Smith 92). The reality of these myths are the systems of power we find ourselves in. The creation myths help establish political rule as well as orientation in the world. They help us make sense of our being and, particularly in Job, our reason for suffering. In a world so influenced by the Judeo-Christian beliefs and morals, these systems of power 'established in creation' are still at play. The supremacy of the Judeo-Christian God still stands, and even when it is deemed to be useless and mythical, we will still be intertwined with these systems of power. The effectiveness of supremacy is seen in the cultural persistence and our lasting order in society.

Job and Dialogism

Why do we suffer? This is a tremendous and complex question. Though I have stayed in a more historical lens of examining Job, it is not lost on me that this book is one of deep pain, loneliness, and confusion. In fact, the reason I am drawn to this research is the existential value it holds for the modern reader. Unjust suffering has never left the human imagination no matter what moral system is in place. Every person has likely questioned why something bad has happened to them, even if they acknowledge imperfection and sin. These issues of justice, punishment, and reward are all deeply intertwined with the way we live our lives.

In this sense, Job offers a compelling narrative for examining existential expression. It would be inaccurate to describe the experience of Job in the terms of Existentialism, the 19th century philosophical movement. Existentialism in this sense is a concern with mortality, the afterlife, and how it affects our interactions in the world. Job is existential in terms of his contemplation of justice, moral order of the universe, and his pleas for death and/or understanding. At its core existentialism is to understand why the world is the way it is and how we as people, individuals, fit into it. It is hard to keep Job contained to historical understandings because we know so little about its history. Without knowing who wrote this book and when it was written makes addressing its core religious beliefs difficult. The vagueness surrounding the text invites us to analyze the concerns that are not so easily answered.

In reading Job it is apparent that death and creation are big themes (“that it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off?” (Job 6:9) & “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?” (Job 38:4)). These themes come to a climatic quasi-end in God’s Speeches at the end of the Book of Job. Here we see a prolonged dialogue between two characters in a very tense situation. As quoted earlier throughout this paper, God mostly talks to

Job in rhetorical questions until he demands a response of Job. Job's "dialogue" would mostly consist of his laments earlier that we assume God was actively listening to, and then the shorter responses within the speeches of God. What occurs in Job is somewhat abnormal in that God's message is delivered by himself rather than an emissary, not the act of conversing or asking questions. Job is asked to respond, an invitation to speak with his god. For this consideration of dialogue, I have turned to Martin Buber, a Jewish Existentialist of the 20th century. Though Buber has not directly addressed Job, other commentators have used Buber to analyze Job in the past. For Buber, "dialogue, then, is a relation one enters into by an existential decision and commitment to realize a truth that is not contained by conceptual knowledge of the phenomenal world" (Mendes-Flohr 241). Thus, continuing on in this paper existentialism refers to the defining of one's self in the world.

Dialogue is Between Two

When directly looking at the book of Job, scholars, like Jauss, refer to this book as a dialogue between God, Satan, and Job. So, understanding Job in a philosophical sense of dialogue is not a stretch. Though Mendes-Flohr does not directly cover the book of Job in his article, the concept of truth and dialogue are abstractly important to understanding Job in its existential lens. It is important for us to understand that God and Job had a personal relationship, despite God being confined to a seemingly different realm of existence. Job could have been yelling at the sky for 37 chapters, but God replies—albeit from a whirlwind. A conversation with a god would probably have aspects or revelations that are not comprehensible within the phenomenal world. Here alone, existence is made out to be something that transcends the experience of materiality. However, I will concede that one does not need to believe in metaphysics to understand that human connection, or conversation can move us beyond the

material realm. Conversation implies the act of listening as well as vulnerability. This personal connection is of the utmost importance in Buber's work. He posits, in his book *I and Thou/Ich und Du*, that there is emotional and existential value attached to 'Du' the personal form of you in German. Personal relationships, ones of intimacy, are the only relationships that have the potential for truth. In knowing someone through conversation there is the ability to address our own being/becoming in relation to others when vulnerable. Who is Job without all his earthly pleasures and rewards for living righteously? It seems he addresses these losses and their implications about his identity through emotional laments to God. His relationship with God is also one that can help him determine who he is, or who he is not. The sudden loss of everything reveals the instability of existential identity when tethered to finite things. Through dialogue with God Job has the potential to understand himself, or discover a truth, or even change.

At this point I would like us to think of what the composition of dialogue requires. Dialogue is a conversation between two parties: I and a You. For our purpose of examining this relationship, "the Hebrew Bible presents God...not as an object of rational reflection but as an independent subject, the "I am," as a partner in dialogue" (Mendes-Flohr 251). God is also an 'I' who is only discoverable to someone through conversation. Here I would like to prematurely state that there is heavy existential value in the concept of an "I," an individual that is self-proclaimed. This 'I' complicates reading ourselves into other people's stories or having a complete understanding with another person. Our lived experience is not theirs or vice versa. Job is a person not a vague cast-type or archetype of a sufferer. Job has distinct characteristics that make it more difficult to read ourselves into his position, yet we do it anyway. In his distinctness, Job is less a paradigm but made out to be a real person in our real-time history despite his perfection. God's address of Job then allows us to imagine a direct redress of our grievances

from the presumed source. “In revelation, God addresses each and every one of us by our first and last name, acknowledges the particularities of our finitude, of our finite, embodied existence in particular distinctive bodies bracketed by particular distinctive biographies,” as he does for Job (Mendes-Flohr 244). In this sense, God individualizes those he speaks with and has a personal relationship with each.

This individuality is not dependent on a conversation with God per se. One is aware of their “I”-ness when they begin to grasp their mortality (God given or not). One is aware that all people will die, yet each die alone. In the same vein this autonomy in death affirms the similar situation in life. Though we all go through it, it is wholly separate from the experience of other. Individual mortality is a concern of existentialism no doubt. “Death is but the ultimate signature of one’s singularity. One’s death is experienced by anticipation and by the realization that one dies utterly alone, even if blessed with friends and family. It is in the light of this brute existential fact that we must live our lives as single, finite beings” (Mendes-Flohr 242-3).

This seems to be the issue for Job. After losing his family, friends, and material possessions that helped define him he is utterly alone in life. This individuality is exacerbated by the “bad” friends who do not understand Job and then the humbling of God’s revelation. Individuality is a learning and doing process. As Nietzsche says, “Each is furthest from himself” applies to all of eternity—we are not “men of knowledge” with respects to ourselves’ (GM 15). For Nietzsche this means claims of knowing truths about things and the world does not mean people really understand themselves. Understanding humanity, and ourselves as human, is part of the existential struggle. In the Nietzschean sense people are never done learning who they are. This process is related to the becoming and overcoming that constitutes living. If this is the case

then through reflecting on the process of defining one's self through dialogue, people are also constantly changing in how they relate to others and vice versa.

Creating and Expectations

Relationships bound by dialogue are developed by accumulated knowledge of the other. This investment in conversation requires understanding and context. Stories of relational origin and its constitution are common when speaking of the other to another person (the same way we would speak of our best friend to another friend). The importance of truth and knowledge here are the foundations for trust. Trust allows for vulnerability and codependence—and love for some. Trust means that there are expectations that allow the relationship to persist.

For as Buber noted, God is the ontological ground of trust—trust that the created order is not intrinsically hostile to human existence. Accordingly, the biblical term for faith ('emunah) means precisely trust, confidence in God's benevolent presence. God is the Eternal Thou, the Thou that is always present—a presence that is refracted through and sustains all I-Thou encounters. (Mendes-Flohr 239)

The trust or faith that one puts in God, who controls the order of the universe, would be incomparable to any other relationship humanly possible. There is an obvious recognition of subservience and powerlessness in this relationship, but it can be mutually beneficial. Omniscience and omnipresence mean that in any moment of need dialogue can occur, and assistance can be granted. I believe it is arguable that this is the basis of God and Job's relationship. God trusts that Job will not renounce him, and Job believes that God will not treat him unjustly.

Justice itself is a really complicated notion, and any perception of justice is likely to find rebuttals. The rebuttals themselves may help us understand that justice may be subjective and personal. However, that has never stopped people from claiming its objectivity and universalism.

For the book of Job or the whole Hebrew Bible in general it is a necessary question to ask, what is justice or what does God/other parties deem just? Perspectivism would at a minimum show us justice in the case of genocide or war is definitely not agreed on by the enemies of God. To even assume what the moral order of the world is for Job is complicated by our lack of knowledge of its origin. Some argue that Job is not even necessarily an Israelite and may have different beliefs. These contemplations aside, due to Job's response to suffering it is obvious that there is some form of presumed moral order. This moral order is one built on trust and power. If we think back to my earlier discussion on the steps of establishing supremacy, one step allows a god to define the parameters of the universe. Since God is Job's god the understanding of the moral order of the universe is dependent on the parameters set by God. These parameters are not disclosed to us as readers, but we are told that Job is a blameless servant who has followed these parameters.

Similarly, I would like us to consider the role of dialogue as it relates to creation narratives. If we are to read God's speeches in Job as a creation narrative, then we have at least two direct Biblical references to this event. Yet, there is no confirmation that the creation story is imparted to Adam like it is to Job. God does not make an effort to relay the 'secrets' of creation and his process to Adam. This may mean there is a different significance to the Job creation story. Was Job the first human to receive divine confirmation of what occurred in/on the primordial earth? The Genesis story is compelling but God's speeches in Job make the revelation of creation factual for the recipient. Tied to a need for existential understanding, these myths may have been used (and are in the case of Genesis) allegorically to inculcate humanity. To note, this pacification of mankind through revelation is a trend throughout the Hebrew Bible but less relevant to the topic of this section. Again we see that Job is defining himself, as well as God defining their relationship, through a conversation. The parameters set in creation offer an

identity scaffolding for how Job is to see himself in comparison to the other (God in this instance). Readers see proof of this at the end of the poetry section,

Then Job answered the Lord:
 2 “I know that you can do all things,
 and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
 3 ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’
 Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
 things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
 4 ‘Hear, and I will speak;
 I will question you, and you declare to me.’
 5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
 but now my eye sees you;
 6 therefore I despise myself,
 and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:1-6)

As I have pointed out in a separate section, chaos is inherently a part of any order of the universe. Power does not wipe it away only subjugates it for a time being. This villainization of chaos does two things: it keeps us dependent on the implemented order (reinsuring power of the deity) and makes us rationalize away chaos when it breaks through the order. When perceived chaos makes its way into Job’s life, he is quick to question why God would let this happen to him. While Job sticks to his assumptions about the moral order and his innocence his friends chastise him for probable guilt or charge him to reject the order. “The anxiety arises because Job’s predicament puts them face-to-face with moral and epistemic chaos, as it calls into question all their own beliefs about cosmic justice” (Rosner 290). To face chaos is to face the nothingness that defines it, or its lack of definition or reason. A lot of pain and loathing occurs before God answers Job. If the moral order is supposed to be ‘good’ then suffering would be perceived as the breaking down of the order—and likely trust. If we are to think about power and order it requires an antithesis. For many thinkers’ chaos is what helps us define or create meaning. Nietzsche claims, “the total character of the world, however, is in all eternity chaos” (GS 168). Only by creating meaning ourselves is the chaos quelled. God would be the agent that

created meaning and order for Job. Job is then the powerless, passive recipient of creation or created order.

Job and his friends' passiveness relegate them to stay within the parameters of order due to fear of punishment. Many modern existentialists would likely agree that this is not "living" or, to take it a step farther, that religion (passed down valuations) is antithetical to active living. Fearing chaos is not bad in and of itself, but to master it is to live. Waiting for a reductionist answer to the chaos we may face is an act of self-deception through reason. "Perhaps religion itself is a sort of unconscious, mass self-deception on the part of humanity to guard itself from the abyss of chaos and meaninglessness ever hovering in the background" (Rosner 289).¹⁴ Chaos forces a person to reckon with the discomfort that mortality and individuation causes them. Reason is attached to the idea of truth or stability within order. Unjust suffering is not reasonable, yet as we see, every human character in Job tries to use reason to end the agony.

This reasoning takes a theoretical form for us today as the "just world hypothesis." Defined by the American Psychological Association as "the idea that the world is a fair and orderly place where what happens to people generally is what they deserve" ([APA](#)). This form of reasoning seeks to justify an event by blaming guilt on someone or something. For Job he does not admit guilt or wrongdoing which frustrates his friends as comforters. They "began to engage in patterns of rationalization and self-deception. They repeated platitudes in order to convince Job and themselves that what happened makes sense. But from the human perspective, the tragedy that befell Job doesn't make sense and perhaps never will" (Rosner 287). Being unable

¹⁴ This thought process may help us understand the need to edit original portions of Job. If we are to perceive that the prose sections were once separate, and possibly God's speeches as another addition, there may be some kind of existential reckoning with what that would mean. Why could there not be a stand-alone section of poetry on suffering? Truthfully, if it was meant for public consumption, then I would assume it has to do with the fact that no one enjoys sad endings. There is also the possibility that writers disagree about what these kinds of stories say about God.

to prove his innocence through tangible reward, Job is angered by his friends and angry at God. The relationship of trust and reciprocity is failing Job while he holds us his end of the deal. When looking at the intimacy levels between Job's relationships with others we can understand the disappointment and loneliness caused. It would seem that no one cares for Job or knows him despite the vulnerable dialogue. "As an existential phenomenology of *duzen*, Buber's *I and Thou* is an exploration of the mutual trust that is achieved and marked by this familiar address... Humans...tend to devise various strategies to protect themselves from the threat of being misunderstood and abused by others" (Mendes-Flohr 238-39). Job continually pushes his friends away for misunderstanding him and pleads innocence to seemingly deaf ears. Their understanding of Job is complicated through dialogue, "so these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes" (Job 32:1). Their reasoning aligns with the just world hypothesis all while destroying the trust established in dialogue. At the cost of intimately and truthfully knowing themselves in relation to Job they chose to rationalize suffering. With God's speeches, and the end of Job's suffering, the limits of human knowledge are questioned. Job and his friends are chastised for claiming to know the ways of God.¹⁵ The rhetorical questioning that occurs in God's speeches is also an act of dialogue. The questions are meant for Job, but he is stopped from answering prematurely, or without self-reflection. This self-reflection seems to help Job conclude that,

"Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know," (Job 42:3)

¹⁵ "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2), After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. (42:7)

and then he repents and mourns his ignorance. Through his dialogue with God, Job seems to understand some truth about himself. Job is able to give into the chaos knowing that God is “in control.” Trust is regained only through establishing an I and You once again. Order here is then better understood to be chaotic occasionally while simultaneously reinforcing dependence on God. Reason can then be used to conclude that sometimes there is not a good reason for the phenomena that occurs in the world. “Although the world may often seem to exhibit no discernable moral order, this does not mean that this moral order does not exist. We just cannot know what the moral order is...The point of God’s speech at the end of the book is that divine ways are inscrutable and beyond mortal comprehension” (Rosner 291). His power is not to be questioned. The act of creation and supremacy help reify the superiority of his order and subdue the anxiety that accompanies doubt that believers, like Job, may face.

Creating and Valuation- Will to Power and its Cast of Characters

As readers we should ask why we are concerned with what Job’s experience means for us? Plenty of people are not particularly religious and do understand that they cannot control everything that happens to them. This thought process is really important to one 19th century existentialist in particular, Fredrich Nietzsche. As quoted earlier, chaos is everywhere in the universe and the only way to cope with it is to posit your own order. One Scholar, Jauss, uses Nietzsche and some other Existentialists to examine Job as well. Nietzsche’s concept of the will to power as it relates to God and Job is helpful. If we are to live according to Nietzsche, we cannot passively accept life as it comes at us. This would probably drive us to nihilism or suicide. If Job can carry on through his suffering there is likely something, we the readers can learn from him, as well as the response and characteristics of God.

God

God as he is presented in the *Book of Job* is complicated in its Nietzschean interpretation. He is not the overman to which we are supposed to aspire. Rather, if perceived as a real actor, may look more like a noble man. His power over humanity is further complicated as they accept what he has told them is good and they refuse to break from it (looking like a herd mentality or aesthetic ideal). God is served by these humans who are dependent on him for value.

When thinking about the claims of objectivity and subjectivity in the world, Nietzsche claims that universal objectivity is not real. In this case God's order is inherently subjective in that it comes from his own perspective, though claimed to be all-knowing. There are no other beings to confirm its truthfulness, and as it is posited onto a created group it gains "objectivity" only because at some point it was revealed or commanded as so. Yet it is later considered an ascetic ideal as it becomes the shared value system for a large portion of the world. The order is said to be good and rewarding. But Nietzsche argues that, "a man's virtues are called good depending on their probable consequences not for him but for us and society" (GS 92). In this case it is the 'good' determined by God during creation. Though these virtues have been previously beneficial for Job amongst his society, they have also helped maintain society. God is the true benefactor by this society ordered at his whim. He retains the power of justice as well as 'peace' amongst those who worship him. God's act of creation does not go unnoticed. Power or life is predicated on creativeness. The will to power affirms one's own existence. God creates the meaning of the world, and as long as he continues to will it forward it could be deemed an effort of the will to power. Creating meaning is a large charge for humanity from Nietzsche.

If considering my earlier work on power, the relationship between God and the Leviathan helps affirm God's supremacy. God will continue to face chaos only to overcome it again and again. As a creator his efforts of ordering never cease. When questioned about his character (being/becoming) he belittles Job who does not interpret and experience the world the way he does. For one scholar, "[a] most remarkable speech of God with its enigmatic descriptions and hymns to Behemoth and Leviathan goes so far beyond its function of reprimanding by means of the annihilating question "Are you the creator?" that another god, mythical and comparable to the nature god Ba'al, unmistakably appears behind Jehovah, God of history and the just lord of Israel" (Jauss 194). Yet God is uniquely himself in this sense. Though I feel that this quote assists my earlier assumptions on Near Eastern tropes, God in this sense is also affirming his differences. In God's battles with the Leviathan, we are assured of his mastery and his commands. Thus, God's speeches at the end of Job's crying out can be construed as a promise for now and the future. A promise of security that uses imagery of that unconceivable to even a blameless man. If God can defeat the Leviathan and order the habitable earth, there is no reason to assume one's suffering is out of his control. Through his creative powers we are aware of his destructive ones as well. As we saw with the recreation process of the Noah flood, creators are also able to destroy. This concept flows well with the Nietzschean concept of creativity and overcoming, "we can only destroy as creators" (GS 122). For people to overcome themselves they must destroy old value systems and create their own. In recounting these feats to Job in dialogue, we again see that God is defining himself in contrast to Job. The rhetorical questions, regardless of the question of God's tone, do remind Job of how insignificant he is in comparison. God can speak about others (i.e., the Leviathan or anthropomorphized natural occurrences) to

Job with some assumed sense of “objectivity.” He is telling Job how it is, where Job can only refute God if he had access to a wider array of knowledge.

Job’s friends

The outliers in this story, yet integral, are Job’s friends. I will keep this brief due to the extensive covering of Job’s friends in the Rosner piece. When reading about the just world hypothesis I was reminded of the side characters in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. These people are constantly trying to stick to passed down notions of morality and values. Job’s friends act like teachers of existence so Job cannot laugh at his situation or continue to **live** despite losses (laughing as the Nietzschean coping with mortality and life). Rather they choose guilt or in Job’s case they inflict pity, which is abhorred by Nietzsche.

“Our personal and profoundest suffering is incomprehensible and inaccessible to almost everyone; here we remain hidden from our neighbor, even if we eat from one pot. But whenever people notice that we suffer, they interpret our suffering superficially. It is the very essence of the emotion of pity that it strips away from the suffering of others whatever is distinctively personal” (GS 269).

We are incapable of sitting with our suffering. Our desire for comfort points to a lack of will to power. Job’s friends try to help yet are incapable due to interpretation and assumptions about the moral order. In the same way Job will never understand his friends. The pity clumps Job into the moral value system that they possess. They are made uncomfortable by suffering due to its opposition to their perceived order. Pity and guilt help them cope with the ups and downs of life. Despite assumed vulnerability through their friendships, the establishment of an I and a You in the cycles of arguments deteriorate their relations. For Buber this would be a mismeeting of individuals in conversation.

Job

Job is a man of faith (Job 1:8). Faith is what makes Job a bad example of living through the eyes of Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, “Faith is always coveted most and needed most urgently where the will is lacking; for will, as the affect of command, is the decisive sign of sovereignty and strength” (GS 289). In Job’s suffering he lacks a will. In his mourning all Job can do is question God. He does not work, or attempt sacrifice, etc. Though he insists he is innocent he does not move on from his losses but is continually faithful that God will act on his behalf. Here Job does not seem to trust that God has his best interest in mind. Though he does not reject God he does not embrace what has occurred as a just act of God. The ironic part of this piece of literature is that faithfulness is the entirety of the wager between God and Satan. Will Job remain faithful? It seems he does, but this too does not seem to fully please God (due to questioning). It seems fair to ask what would have pleased God? One can venture to say that maybe he desired Job to keep living despite the suffering and praise him.

Returning to the just world hypothesis, it seems that Job also buys into this theory but knows his innocence which complicates the results. Punishment does not need to be the reason for suffering. “All events in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous “meaning” and “purpose” are necessarily obscured or obliterated” (GM 77). The goal is not to dominate or rule society but to free yourself of its values. Becoming requires change and should include the respect and desire for others to overcome as well. Nietzsche points out that for modern man suffering is a cure for boredom. “I realize they must have a craving to suffer and to find their suffering a probable reason for action” (GS 117). Yet people do not need suffering to act, and in Job’s case it is debilitating. Job himself has every ability to carry on with his life day

after day (though it is obviously very understandable that he would be mourning). Here we see a continuation of suffering rather than an active participation in living. In modernity the boredom we face should be enough to encourage us to create, to live. Of course, we will all suffer, but that is not the end or opposite of life. It is part of living. We must will ourselves forward and show gratitude that we can feel the wide array of emotions that accompany being human.

Job is not an overman, but his questioning of justice still resounds with us in modernity only we do not require “God” to exist.¹⁶ In a sense we use these value systems passed down to us, like the just world hypothesis, and still expect them to be True without a cosmic actor orchestrating them. Job does break from his herd friends by openly questioning God.

As we see exemplified through the conversations that occur in the Book of Job, dialogue serves as more than an advancement of plot. In reading Job, and particularly God’s speeches it is apparent that this book has an unclear meaning and purpose. Whether someone chooses to acknowledge it as a narrative on a pious sufferer, a creation story, or another odd example of ANE wisdom literature, some questions pertaining to existence emerge. For Job, dialogue abates his suffering, and the lack of dialogue makes him question his identity. When reading Job with others it seems that people are caught off guard by the questions surrounding mortality and creation. Aspects of this narrative still puzzle me, but without a doubt, there seems to be existential concerns abounding. My hope is that even when analyzing the historical or literary trends surrounding Job people will make time to consider the commonalities we share with Job—the person who suffers and is aware of the human condition.

¹⁶ “Nietzsche’s “The Madman” in *The Gay Science* (Sec. 125) is a notable, although up to this point apparently unacknowledged, witness for the thesis that Job’s questions continued to provoke reactions after the theodicean answer had, historically speaking, ceased to function” (Jauss 203).

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