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Contingency or Divine Justice: What Matters in Job's Fate? Synchronic Perspectives on Prologue and Dialog in the Book of Job

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Abstract: This article deals with a synchronic reading of the book and investigates the history of ideas such as anthropology and cosmology. It highlights the various positions within the dialog and characterizes the prologue as a prefiguration of the contributions to the debate. Finally, it outlines the internal connection of prologue, dialog and epilog vis-à-vis divine justice and human fate.

Keywords: synchronic reading; anthropology; cosmology; fate; divine justice

1. Introduction

Awareness of divine action in human life manifests itself in two different ways: either God is interpreted as being just, his creation as being good (Heb. **טוב**), and human fate is construed as the result of a divine trial; or God is assumed to be absent from human life and the course of one's life is determined by contingency and arbitrariness. The Book of Job contains both positions within the dialog, both of these being predicated on the assumption that sustained action in human life on the part of God constitutes an expression of his character. This would imply that by gaining insight into God's essence humans would be able to infer rules for divine action in human life. However, the frame story points to a third option: even if God were to act in human life constantly and one could anticipate God's action, there are single instances in the divine world which have a bearing on human life. In the following I will draw on the interaction between the frame story and the dialog to demonstrate the position of the book's author regarding the effect of God's action in human life. My concern implies a synchronic reading of the book. Nonetheless, this perspective on the text urgently requires an awareness of the book's literary evolution too. Investigations into its literary history reveal two assumptions concerning the relationship between the frame story and the dialog, both of which are possible: either the prologue is the older part and the dialog was formed in order to exemplify the ministry of Satan in Job's fate and in his friends' reasoning,¹ or the dialog is the older part and the prologue serves to defuse the tension between former sapiential traditions and the experience of fate in human life by painting a celestial backdrop.² The competition between God and Satan explains human fate as arbitrary. All sapiential rationality evaporates when celestial entities are intent on influencing human life. In other words, the order of creation as reflected in wisdom is dissolved and replaced by purposive action. The aim is to override circumstances evoked by the impact of the order of creation. This means that human insights into regularity are without any effect since the intervention on the part of celestial beings is directed against the divine order and its impact on human life. Concerning

¹ F.e. (Brenner 1989; Spieckermann 1994, pp. 433–34; Köhlmoos 1999).

² Cf. the overview in (Hoffman 1981, pp. 160–70; Heckl 2010, pp. 347–48). For synchronic readings of the book cf. further (Fleming 1994, pp. 468–82).

the literary history of the book, one aspect seems to be crucial for Hebrew Bible scholarship: the mythological scenery and the discussion of Job's fate are considered to be incoherent.³ Mythology and sapiential rationality based on life experience seem to be mutually exclusive. Yet to understand the interaction of frame story and dialog it is necessary to note the important role of mythology in ANE rationality. Mythology is the literary form by which the scene in heaven is connected with the discussion on earth. This approach does not detract from pre-existing insights into the book's literary history but tries to explain why this combination was not inconsistent for an antique reader of the book and how he would understand God's action in human life.⁴

2. What Happens in Heaven?

The mythical story, which contains a frame narrative and a sapiential discourse, begins in heaven. The celestial scenery is divided into two similar parts, both of which are introduced with the gathering of the בני אלהים. One of the sons of God is Satan, who points to the fact that there is a reciprocal connection between true faith and a blessed life. Fear of God and the personal success of being blessed by the deity are self-reinforcing.⁵ But neither Satan nor the storyteller query the *prima causa* of this interconnection—the focus is on the effect. Satan raises the question of whether Job will keep his faith when he experiences suffering. The two parts differ only in terms of the degree of sorrow: in the first one Job's property, including his house, is under attack; in the second it is his physical integrity. In both cases he keeps his faith by pointing to the fact that contingency in human life is caused by God and determines human life in terms of fate, but not in terms of faith. In the first part of the prologue Job refers to God by confessing his conviction, emphasizing the two facets of divine gifting.⁶ In the second part he replies to his wife and asks why he should not accept the divine action in both ways.⁷

Since the author of the prologue did not raise the question of the origins of faith and blessing in terms of a *prima causa*, we need to question the role of Satan within the scenery. The Hebrew term שטן means 'adversary, opponent, accuser', in this case describing an opponent to God's actions towards Job. Due to the fact that in Zech. 3:1 שטן is determined, meaning the author is describing a function and not a person, שטן appears as a proper name in Job 1–2. The name, however, also relates to his function within the divine council, which is given by several divine entities. Ellen White points to the function of Satan within the very same council: "Just like ancient Persian spies, שטן's vocation in the Book of Job was to search out the faithful and report the unfaithful to Yahweh."⁸ This is the reason why the author emphasizes in both parts of the story that Satan returns "from going to and fro in the land and from walking around in it." (Job 1:7; 2:2, cf. Zech. 1:10–11; 4:10) But other than spies in the Persian Empire, Satan is concerned with the question of the reasons for either being faithful or unfaithful. "His function is to provoke."⁹ He raises the question of whether divine action is legitimate, observing that God benefits the faithful. Following this rule, divine action is a justification of human life, therefore faith is rewarded with blessings. But how can faith be measured? Maybe with the aid of the faithful who keep the divine order without surrender? Satan himself, then, points to a proof

³ Another way to interpret the variations is presented by (Brenner 1989, p. 37): "Stylistic, literary and linguistic considerations show that the portrait of Job in the frame story is an ironic exaggeration of the concept of conventional piety". For the intuition of the frame story cf. (Bieberstein 2001, p. 16).

⁴ Other than (Fleming 1994, p. 472), who states that "[w]here elements of the narrative frame serve on the full book, they should not belong to the old tale." References to the prologue merely demonstrate that if this passage of the text was formed in later times, its author was familiar with the dialog. (Köhlmoos 1999, pp. 75–103), points to an interaction between prologue and dialog. For semantical and motivic connections cf. (Forrest 1988).

⁵ Cf. (Köhlmoos 1999, pp. 85–86). The entire prologue is formed out of illusions, allusions, and literary artifices as investigated by (Hoffer 2001).

⁶ (Brenner 1989), points to the characterization of Job as idealistic (which ultimately means unrealistic).

⁷ For arguments concerning a literary tension between prologue and dialog cf. (Hoffman 1981, p. 162; Köhlmoos 1999, pp. 50–55; Heckl 2010, pp. 324–37). For the redactional layering of the Book of Job cf. (van Oorschot 1987, pp. 147–209; Witte 1994, pp. 173–221).

⁸ (White 2014, p. 112).

⁹ (Fleming 1994, p. 477).

of faith. This is described by White in the following way: “Therefore, *הַשָּׁטָן*, as the patroller of justice, continues to serve its purpose in the face of God in its attempt to determine whether the system itself is truly just.”¹⁰ Their way to support the system is to re-order its basic rule: acts of faith do not imply blessings.¹¹ Prosperity in human life is replaced by economic and physical deprivation. One should assume that the result is a loss of belief, but the author of the prologue underlines the opposite: Job keeps his faith.¹² Satan’s assumption that deprivation would evoke faithlessness is negated. Job’s conclusions in both parts of the prologue point to the following as an act of true faith. But the act of faith is not expressed as a prayer but as a debate on Job’s fate.

3. What Happens on Earth?

3.1. *Conditio Humana: Anthropological Presumptions of Job and His Friends*

The perception of fate as a matter of either contingency or divine justice depends on the presumption of the assumed conditions of human creatureliness and the common course of life. Within the first part of the dialog in chp. 3–14, Job and his interlocutors emphasize their respective points of view concerning the nature of human existence. The preconditions of the argumentation are shown clearly within the interlocutors’ first statements, starting with Eliphaz. In his first assertion in Job 4:2–5, he describes Job as a benevolent person. The intention underlying Job’s charity is not scrutinized by Eliphaz, but its function for Job’s fate becomes plausible by noting Eliphaz’s perspective on the conditions of human life, which he also shows in his subsequent speeches. In his second statement in Job 15, Eliphaz argues that all humans are categorically unclean and need to become clean and holy over the course of their lives. This insight into the *conditio humana* is based on the Holiness Code as attested in Lev. 17–26, according to which human cleanness and holiness are bound to social interaction within the community. Charity is one major aspect of keeping oneself clean and holy (Lev. 19:9–10, 18). Due to the fact that Job appears unclean, Eliphaz changes his conclusion concerning Job’s charity: Job is judged by God because he treated the poor badly (Job 22:5–9). He changes his point of view. Whereas in his first speech he takes his observations of Job’s conduct of life as the starting point of his reasoning, he focuses on Job’s fate in the third, sees him suffering and concludes that he must have acted against divine instructions. Suffering is a result of uncleanness.¹³ What we explore with Eliphaz’s speeches is a recurring rhetorical feature within the dialog. Life experiences are interpreted in relation to the *conditio humana* to describe Job’s fate. In other words, fate only becomes fate in relation to the essence of human life. Human self-awareness leads on to the interpretation of occurrences in human life as contingent, righteous, or just.

Eliphaz’s description of anthropological requirements is already a response to Job’s elucidation of human life. In contrast to Eliphaz, Job does not refer to priestly ideas but to ANE traditions. It has frequently been demonstrated in Hebrew Bible scholarship that the Book of Job is based on a wider ANE background by referring to several texts from the Mesopotamian and Egyptian traditions.¹⁴ One could say Job is pointing to world literature by questioning the sapiential world view of his

¹⁰ (White 2014, p. 113; Fleming 1994, p. 471), points to the fact that Satan wants to prove that God just receives sacrifices for human profits.

¹¹ Or, as (Schmid 2016, p. 108), emphasizes: “Er wird zum Spielball von Mächten auf einer höheren Ebene, die entweder auf seine Frömmigkeit stolz sind (Gott) oder aber diese als billig empfinden, da es Hiob ja so gut geht (Satan). Sowohl die Erzählung wie auch Gott selbst in der Erzählung halten explizit fest, dass Hiob schuldlos ist. Sein Verderben gründet nur darin, dass der Satan Gott gegen Hiob aufgehetzt hat, was Gott selbst auch explizit gegenüber dem Satan festhält (2:3).”

¹² Cf. (Polzin 1974, pp. 189–99). He points to a separation of spheres which evokes conflicts on various levels: “Before the affliction, God holds that Job is blessed because he is righteous (sphere of belief) while Satan suspects that Job is righteous because he is blessed (sphere of experience). In the same way, after the afflictions come upon Job, his friends hold that he is afflicted because he is bad (sphere of belief) while he holds he is righteous in spite of being afflicted (sphere of experience).”

¹³ Cf. (Clines 2003, p. 95): “If you believe that right-doing is always rewarded with well-being, then suffering of a right-doer, were it to happen, would be a problem.”

¹⁴ (Uehlinger 2007), presents a broad overview on religious-historical perspectives on the Book of Job. (Fohrer 1983, p. 6), already points to the creatureliness of mankind for his suffering without emphasizing ANE sources.

interlocutors. A decisive text for Job's perspective on the *conditio humana* is the *Epic of Atrahasis*. This epic—which contains the story of the creation of mankind and the sending of three divine plagues to destroy humankind, including a flood story—originates from Old Babylonian times (c. 19th/18th century BCE) and is attested in several copies extending into Late Babylonian times. Job borrows images from this epic, the most prominent one being the idea of humankind as the labour force of all divinities as expressed in the very beginning of the *Epic of Atrahasis*:¹⁵

Atr. I:1–4

When the gods were man
they did forced labour, they bore drudgery.
Great indeed was the drudgery of the gods,
the forced labour was heavy, the misery too much.

Atr. I:177–188

Ea made ready to speak,
and said to the gods, his brothers:
“What calumny do we lay to their charge?
Their forced labour was heavy, their misery too much!
Every day . . .
the outcry was loud, we could hear the clamour.
There is . . .
Belet-ili, the midwife, is present.
Let her create, then, a human, a man,
Let him bear the yoke!
Let him bear the yoke!
Let man assume the drudgery of the god.”
Belet-ili, the midwife, is present.

In the *Epic of Atrahasis*, human beings are created as workers without the prospect of divine charity. Life means suffering and hard, fatiguing duty. Job reflects on this in chp. 7, introducing his explanation with the following words: “As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work: So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me.” For the human ministration Job uses the term *צבא* instead of *עבר*, which frequently describes human work in the Hebrew Bible. *צבא* is a translation of the Akkadian *dûllanima*. The use of the term *צבא* is unique within the Hebrew Bible and, in combination with *ימי שכיר* (‘days of the peon’), it refers to the quoted passages as well as to *Atr* I:150, where the creation of man as a workman for the deities is attested too.¹⁶ In chp. 7, Job outlines the life of such a worker. He suffers under the conditions of work without economic success. Work as service for the divine means suffering in terms of restlessness and physical decline. As long as he was wealthy, he was able to share his property with the poor and the handicapped. This beneficence could be interpreted as a consequence of a sapiential (Prov. 19:17) or Torah-oriented (Dtn. 15:7–11) life or as an act of human solidarity, as all humans have to suffer under their respective living conditions. As we have already seen, in his first speech, Eliphaz interprets Job's suffering as temporary in his first speech when he asks in 4:7–8:

¹⁵ Text published in (Lambert et al. 1999).

¹⁶ Cf. (Wagner 2015).

“Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.” But once Job has supported others, he should soon be restored to prosperity according to divine justice. Job challenges this position by reflecting on the conditions of human life. This reflection is completed in chp. 14, where Job points to the course of life as the way from birth to flourishing to suffering and finally to death. This course of life is predefined for all humans. The only unfixed point is how man will enjoy this time. Job, then, emphasizes the meaning of rest for human life after having entered the phase of suffering. Rest means the absence of God as the principal of human work, so that man can enjoy his days as a peon. This request corresponds to Job’s description of human life. Birth is marked as a transfer from restfulness to restlessness. The only time in life when a worker is able to enjoy silence is while being asleep. But during this period of time God chases man in dreams and night visions, so that he is not able to rest. The only place where he can find restfulness again is in the underworld after his death. In other words, Job describes God’s presence as a threat to human life since the prenatal and post-mortal existence in the absence of God is the time for enjoyment and silence. Finally, Job’s fate is the consequence of his existence: he enters the phase of decline which will end with his death.¹⁷ The decline is part of his *conditio humana*, even if Job still harbours hope that someday he will live in prosperity again before his sudden death. However, according to Job’s reasoning, this would happen accidentally, since redemption from sorrow does not belong to the *conditio humana* and cannot be expected by anyone. To challenge Job’s position with Eliphaz’s, fate is not a question of divine justice but a matter of contingency.

The first one to bring up the significance of divine justice for the course of human life is Bildad, and he does so as early as his first speech. In chp. 8 he asks Job whether he assumes that God will pervert judgment and justice. Since the idea of divine justice in human life has not previously been expressed, it would appear that this argument is based upon Bildad’s point of view. He divides mankind into two categories: those who are wicked or foolish and judged by God, and those who are pious and receive God’s blessings. Since Eliphaz’s and Job’s ideas on the *conditio humana* rest on assumptions of divine creation and regulation, Bildad points to the presence of a free human will and the possibility of a development from lowness after birth to great increase at the end, as expressed in Job 8:7: “Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase.” This development is a result of human action in terms of a pious course of life. In Bildad’s position we see a variation on Eliphaz’s perspective on human life: both assume that humans are born unclean (Eliphaz: Priestly) or in lowness (Bildad: Deuteronomistic¹⁸) and cultivate their lives to attain to a higher level. While both express divine action in human life as being coherent, Job points to God’s waywardness (Job 9:16). Following Job’s argument, divine judgment can be understood either as an improvement of human life or as random torture. Humans just have to suffer the repercussions, but they cannot distinguish divine intentions.

Finally, Zophar’s point of view on the conditions of human life is expressed in chp. 11. He emphasizes the position of humans within the cosmos and takes up the position that man is unable to comprehend the divine perspective. However, he does not define ‘perspective’ in terms of a substantive position but rather sees in it a relation to space. Given that he could show all spaces of the

¹⁷ The description of Job’s suffering in Job 3:25–26 evokes an intertextual relation to Deut. 28 (vs 15, 45, 60, 65–7) by which a Torah-oriented reader of the book identifies sorrow with divine punishment. Cf. (Schmid 2007, pp. 241–61). Cf. also (Witte 2013a, pp. 81–100; Witte 2013b, pp. 54–65).

¹⁸ Cf. (Schmid 2007, pp. 244–52). He emphasizes the critical point of view concerning Priestly and Deuteronomistic traditions within the Book of Job. It is a basic literary feature of the book to personify the various theological approaches to criticize them. But (Schmid 2007, p. 251), ultimately restricts his estimation: “Doch auch bezüglich der deuteronomistischen Theologie herrscht nicht einfach bloße Ablehnung vor, sondern es lässt sich eine gewisse Dialektik beobachten. Das Hiobbuch kritisiert zwar die deuteronomistische Position, lässt sie aber gleichwohl zu ihrem relativen Recht kommen, und zwar sowohl bezüglich der Vorstellung eines gerechten Gottes als auch eines zum gerechten Handeln fähigen Menschen”. (Heckl 2010, p. 358), points to the fact that the friends represent different positions when he states “in den Dialogpartnern [wurden] ganz bewusst Gruppenpositionen durchbuchstabiert.”

cosmos to Job, God becomes a possible instructor, but will not carry out this task because he knows of Job's sins. Sin seems to be Job's major concern, as he is suffering because of his own sins and feels restless because he knows that God will judge him. By behaving piously and carrying out ritual acts, though, he could erase his sins, appease God's mind and ease his own. Ritual acts are understood as self-effective in terms of the impact of sin on human awareness. With this idea, Zophar alludes to priestly traditions, especially to the idea of Yom Kippur and the release from sins.¹⁹ Self-awareness, cleansing, and divine clemency to not observe all human sins interact in terms of an improvement in living conditions. If Job avoids ritual interaction, he will be recognized as wicked and therefore be judged, as Zophar expresses with spatial depictions in Job 20. Concerning Job's lament about the elusiveness of God, Zophar highlights ritual action as the adequate form of communication.

To summarize, in chp. 3–14 Elifas, Bildad, and Zophar represent three different aspects of Biblical traditions pointing to various juridical, cultic, and sapiential positions. They all emphasize fate as the consequence of divine justice and imply that God is just. Job challenges their assumptions by alluding to ANE traditions of humankind as the labour force for the divine. Human fate is the result of God's arbitrariness, which leads on to contingency. Comparing the textual representations of the tradition to which all interlocutors point, one has to recognize that there is a form-critical distinction: whereas Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar refer to positions based on human reflection, Job points to mythological ideas in which the interaction of deities and mankind are determined by emotions and covert intentions. Hence myth dissolves the separation of God and mankind, and the spatial constellations expressed by Zophar are of special significance to the understand of the impact of mythology on the course of human life.²⁰

3.2. Spatial Constellations and the Mythologization of Human Life

Within his first speech, Zophar emphasizes ritual action as a possibility for mankind to bridge the spatial separation between God and man by means of a cultic kind of communication in which man asks for forgiveness. The priestly idea of redemption by cultic action is based on a temple theology in which the temple is understood as the place in which the human and the divine spheres coincide. This means that interaction between God and man requires the presence of both in one place. Zophar implies a permanent attendance of God within the cult. But Job refers to Zophar with the lament that God is inaccessible to man because a place of permanent presence is unknown. In other words, he challenges basic priestly insights into temple theology. Job emphasizes that the spatial separation between God and man can only be overcome by God.²¹

The two positions of Job and Zophar arise from a development in ANE and Biblical cosmology that had had an impact on the significance of the Jerusalem temple. The destruction of temples in Babylon and in Jerusalem in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE as well as the central position of the Assyrian kingship in the world order lead on to the expansion of the heavens as a divine space inaccessible to humans. The idea of the divine sphere as vertical axes between netherworld, biosphere, and heaven in the center of the world and their coincidence in the temple was expanded to a three-layered heaven, visible in the Neo-Assyrian texts KAR 307²² and AO 8196²³, where divine beings reside. The netherworld represents the opposite of heaven and is a second space for divine residence. Finally, the earth is the biosphere in which humans exist. According to KAR 307, the Assyrian king as an emanation of the war god *Ninurta* (or as the beloved of *Ištar* as attested in CAD 4R² 61 III:29–35) is the representation of the divine within the biosphere. With the loss of the idea of temples as the earthly residences of main deities in particular—which is valid for Mesopotamian deities as well as for JHWH

¹⁹ (Hoffer 2001, p. 95), points to a reference to Lev. 16 already in (Job 1:10–11).

²⁰ For the Book of Job as product of an educated circle of 'philosophers' cf. (Dell 1991, pp. 166–71).

²¹ The creation of the mythical space in the Book of Job was already expressed by (Keel 1978, pp. 51–61).

²² Text published in (Livingstone 1989, pp. 99–102).

²³ Cf. (Horowitz 2011, pp. 3–19).

who is blessed as אלהי השמים ('God of the heavens', cf. Gen. 24:3, 7; Jona. 1:9, Ezra 1:2, Neh. 1:4–5, 2:4, 20, 2Chr. 36:23) in post-exilic times—the temples increasingly became places of prayer in order to communicate with the deities in heaven. The vertical axis becomes the junction between biosphere and heaven, and prayers could ascend from the temple to the heavens. In later times, as attested in Elihu's speeches (cf. Job 32–37), celestial entities served as interpreters and mediators of human prayers, conveying them from earth to the celestial space. But Job questions the meaning of the temple as a place of prayer since he emphasizes God's unavailability. Likewise, a second aspect of ANE cosmology becomes more important for Job's mythical description of human life. Beside the center of the cosmos, with the temple as its middle point, exists a second space in which heaven and earth coincide: the outer hemisphere or the horizon. Describing the cosmic dimensions according to their perception from the center in lower Mesopotamia, the places where heavens and earth coincide are either the mountains, the desert, or the sea.²⁴ In the horizon there is a crossing from heaven directly to the netherworld and a place of entry for all divine or demonic entities to the biosphere.²⁵

The idea of transition regions occurs in various literary attestations.²⁶ A prominent example is the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which is a collection of various texts. Its earliest parts have their origins in the 18th century BCE. Its final form was attested by the library of *Ašurbanipal* in Neo-Assyrian times. The epic describes Gilgamesh's quest for apotheosis. In its final version as well as in older parts, the viewing perspective extends from the center to the outer hemisphere. Enkidu, initially Gilgamesh's counterpart and later his closest friend, grows up being raised by animals in the hemisphere and later in his life invades the center. Through his origin, he represents the chaotic and annihilative spheres to which he had belonged prior to becoming civilized. Within the story, civilization means protection of human life. The story contains a second movement: Gilgamesh's search for divinity leads on to his travel to the outer hemisphere where he comes into contact with divine and demonic entities. What we see over the course of the story is, firstly, the close proximity of the heavens and netherworld at the outer hemisphere and, secondly, the threat to human life of the transition of divine and demonic entities from the hemisphere to the center.

By means of this transition of divine or demonic entities into the biosphere, the distinction between myth and history is overcome. In an ANE understanding, mythology is a narration of divine action whereas history describes occurrences caused by humans. For example, divine action in terms of creation is regularly described in mythological terms.²⁷ But with the move in Assyrian royal ideology towards a divination of the king as the representative of Ninurta, his actions are described in mythological terms too. This is the case when (for example) he expresses his martial actions against his enemies as a deluge.

Tiglath-pileser III 20

I surrounded (and) captured [the city . . .] *hādara*, the ancestral home of Raḥiānu of the land Damascus, [the pl]ace where he was born. I carried off 800 people, with their possessions, their oxen, (and) their sheep and goats. I carried off 750 captives from the cities Kuruṣṣâ (and) Samāya, (as well as) 550 captives from the city Metuna. Like tell(s) after the deluge, I destroyed 591 cities of 16 districts of the land Damascus.

Sennacherib 019

I destroyed, devastated, (and) bur[ned] with fire his cities, (and) made (them) like ruin hill(s) (created by) the deluge.

Esarhaddon 60

²⁴ Cf. the model presented by (Pongartz-Leisten 1994, p. 36).

²⁵ Within the center we also find places that demarcate the transition from the human sphere to the netherworld as fountains, grave sites, and rivers. At these places a transition from the netherworld to the biosphere is possible.

²⁶ For the spatial constellations of *Enuma eliš* cf. (Pongartz-Leisten 1994, pp. 16–18).

²⁷ For the mythologization of the biosphere cf. (Pongartz-Leisten 1994, pp. 15–16). Within the Book of Job, this becomes obvious when divine power over the cosmos is described by the defeat of Behemoth and Leviathan. For the use of Babylonian mythology cf. (Janzen 1989, pp. 109–14).

The dais of destiny, the lofty dais on which the god Aššur lives (and) where they (the gods) decree the destiny of heaven and netherworld, which the kings, my ancestors, had made of baked bricks and covered with silver, I (now) had (it) skillfully made of 180 talents of [ca]st *ešmarû*-silver. I fashioned on it (the dais) my royal image (shown) praying to their divinity (and) imploring (them) constantly to give me life, and an image of Ashurbanipal, my crown prince.

I cast from shining bronze two bison positioned opposite each other, (with) their faces looking forward and backward, to bear (the columns which support) crossbeams (forming) the cornice in (its) gate and I set (them) up in the Gate of the Path of the Enlil-Stars. I had two fierce deluge monsters made with skillf[ul] craftsmanship and I placed (them) in the Ro[ya]l Gate, to the rig[ht and] left of the gate. I (also) set up twin deluge monsters cast of shining silver [...] the Kamsu-Igīgū [Ga]te.

In a mythological context, Assyrian rulers present their kingship as divine. In the text, he describes the interior of the royal district in the capital which lets him appear as a deity located in a temple. The description of the Assyrian king's conquest of the outer hemisphere in particular elucidates the mythification of history, where the main actor in human history is divine. The outer hemisphere is a mythical space, which becomes obvious in the so-called Babylonian World Map (BM 92687)²⁸ on which the borders of the human sphere are depicted as mythic.

Through the oceans, the Babylonian World Map separates the center of the biosphere, in which the main cities are located, from the outer hemisphere. Outside the *marratu* ('ring oceans'), the map displays five *nagû* ('regions'). The depiction is partly damaged and the inscription on the opposite of the tablet mentions eight *nagû*. This points to the fact that the depiction contained eight regions in its full content. The text on the opposite side of the tablet just mentions the distances of the *nagû* but the one on top of the depiction touches on the dwellers of this space:

[. . .] and the ruine[d] gods which he set[tled] inside the sea
 [. . .] are present; the viper, sea-serpent, great dragon, anzu-bird, and scorp[on-man]
 [..moun]tain goat, gazelle, zebu, [p]anther, bull-m[an]
 [..]ion, wolf, red-deer, and hye[na],
 [monk]ey, female-monkey, ibex, ostrich, cat, chameleon,
 [. . .] beasts which Marduk created on top of the res[tl]ess sea,
 [..U]tnapištim, Sargon, and Nur-[D]agan the king of Buršaha[nda],
 [..w]ings like a bird, which/whom no one can com[prehend]

The inscription points to various entities living in the outer hemisphere. Besides terrestrial and mythical sea dwellers, different animals as well as mythological entities are mentioned. The transition from myth to history seems to be fluent since all these entities live within the same space. In addition to the animals, three persons known from former times are also mentioned. Utnapištim, Sargon, and Nur-Dagan belong to the pre-history. While Utnapištim occurs in the *Epic of Gilgameš* as the one who survived the deluge and became a deity afterwards—which means he belongs to the heavens—Sargon is known as king from the early Akkad period and Nur-Dagan as his famous opponent from a country far away from Mesopotamia. Both belong to the netherworld since both are 'historical' figures, which means they became king after the flood and therefore have a 'limited' lifespan. The fact that they are mentioned together as inhabitants of the outer hemisphere means that heaven and netherworld coincide in this space. Myth and history are two sides of one story whenever divine entities and humans have to interact.

This idea is also a basic motif of laments in Mesopotamian and Biblical traditions.²⁹ The incidence of sorrow and diseases is often described as an invasion of demonic entities or of an annihilation of human life from the hemisphere to the center or a displacement of human life from the center to

²⁸ Text and further discussion in (Horowitz 1988, pp. 147–65). Cf. also (Hartenstein 2001, pp. 12–21).

²⁹ For the Mesopotamian tradition cf. the incantation in *Šurpu* VII:1-88 (Reiner 1958, pp. 36–39), in which *Marduk* makes claims about the *dimītu*-disease which came out of the *Apsû*.

the outer regions. The first perspective is attested by Ps. 69:2–3: “I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying; my throat is dried; mine eyes fail while I wait for my God.”³⁰ The movement from the center to the outer sphere, then, is used to describe the situation of the suffering in Ps. 102:5–6: “By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert.” Job is affiliated with this tradition. Even though Job is positioned in the cultural center, his suffering is caused by God’s absence and his elusiveness (Job 29). In other words, Job laments the absence of the divine from his life, the presence of which could bring about justice as a principle for human fate. Instead of justice mankind suffers the force of demonic entities belonging to the netherworld afflicting mankind with diseases and sorrow. Job laments the effect of these forces on human life by asking for God’s responsibility and righteousness. This interaction between God, Job, and his interlocutors is depicted as a lawsuit within the dialog. But as we will see, the roles within this trial are changing frequently.

3.3. Shifting Social Roles

The interaction between divine and human entities in ANE and HB literature depends on predefined social roles. For pictorial representations in particular, the predefined roles signaled by symbols are necessary for the communication process.³¹ The same is true for texts, especially since the interrelation of actors is dependent upon the reader’s knowledge of common social roles and his ability to interpret the peculiarity of the text. With the image of God as judge, the author of the Book of Job uses one of the traditional social roles to illustrate the interaction between God, Job, and his interlocutors. This image evokes the fundamental constellation of judge, culprit, and witness. The initial situation depicts God as judge, Job as culprit, and the friends as witnesses. But this correlation changes over the course of the debate. Konrad Schmid asserts that God is displayed as judge but also as culprit. “Die Perspektive auf Gott als Angeklagten wird implizit bereits im Prolog vorbereitet, obwohl er in diese Funktion explizit erst mit der ersten Rede Hiobs in Hi 3 einrückt.”³² Job proceeds against God because God does not redeem humans from suffering by death (Job 3:11, 20). Eliphaz challenges Job’s indictment by emphasizing that God is the sovereign judge. Eliphaz confirms God’s social role as the judge. He states that God is just (Job 5:8–16), which excludes the possibility that he acts unjustly. “Anscheinend konstruiert Eliphaz die unmögliche Möglichkeit eines Übeltäters neben und außerhalb Gott: Vielleicht irrt ja Hiob, dass er sich gegen Gott selbst wendet, der nach Eliphaz *per definitionem* nur Richter und nicht Angeklagter sein kann.”³³ Job counters this argument by emphasizing God’s arbitrariness.³⁴ From chp. 7 on, he discusses God’s role as judge and finally has to admit that God cannot be judged, even though the friends are giving false testimonies to justify God’s actions (Job 13:7–8). It seems that after this statement a continuation of the debate is irrelevant, since the possibility that God acted unjustly is without effect, for no one can assert the verdict. However, the development of the debate in chs 15–21 is achieved by a shift in role constellations.

³⁰ (Jer. 51:42–43) also uses this image. Cf. (Keel 1978, pp. 57–58). The enumeration of animals in God’s second speech points to the wilderness as a space of the divine sphere of influence. For the meaning of the animals cf. (Keel 1978, pp. 63–125).

³¹ (Hoffmann 2007), points to the trial motif as constitutive for the literary form of the book. The changing of social roles within this form is a specific literary approach to develop the positions of Job and his interlocutors. (Kottsieper 2004, p. 779), emphasizes the development of the debate: “In der ursprünglichen Klage Hiobs fehlt die Frage nach Schuld und Sünde völlig; vielmehr ist es die Klage eines Menschen, der im tiefsten Leid sich nur noch den Tod wünscht. Die Freunde bringen aber von Anfang an den Aspekt des selbstverschuldeten Leidens in die Diskussion ein, wodurch zunächst nur implizit, im Fortschritt des Streites dann aber auch explizit Hiob ein Schuldvorwurf gemacht wird. Auf Grund des Augenscheins beschuldigen sie Hiob, da nicht sein kann, was nicht sein darf. Dadurch sieht sich Hiob auf einmal einer Anklage ausgesetzt, und Gott wird ihm zum Rechtsgegner.”

³² (Schmid 2016, p. 110).

³³ (Schmid 2016, p. 113).

³⁴ Cf. (Spieckermann 1994, p. 432): “Hiob fürchtet nicht Kläger und Richter, er fürchtet den hinterhältigen Gott. Hiob hat den satanisierten Gott zum Feind. Seine Gotteserfahrung hat die Entmenschlichung des Menschen zur Konsequenz.” (Heckl 2010, p. 348), points to the implicit depiction of Job as judge.

In chp. 13, Job emphasizes that he is prepared for a legal dispute with the interlocutors (v. 18). This announcement is essential for all the friends' second speeches as well as Job's counter-blasts. From chp. 15 on, Job starts a trial against his interlocutors. Subsequently, in chp. 16, he portrays his situation and eventually calls upon God as a witness against his friends—which is remarkable, since God is the one responsible for Job's situation. This invocation is predicated on a change of social roles within the debate. While God becomes the witness (v. 19) and Job is still the culprit (v. 20), his friends become the judges (v. 21). In Job 19:6–7, Job lays claim to his interlocutors being judges again: "Know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net. Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment." From chp. 22 on, God's elusiveness and its significance for human life is addressed in the debate. Job laments God's revocation of justice due to his absence. This points to God's social role as judge again (Job 27:2–4). Through the change of roles in the second sequence of the discourse, the author highlights the positions of the friends as well as that of Job. With regard to the question of whether human fate is caused by justification or contingency, the change of role raises the question of who is the one being just in human life. The fact that both sides call upon God as witness against the other side points not only to juridical forms but also to fate not just as a matter of physical integrity but also of social acceptance. Both positions are questioned with another perspective on Job's sorrows introduced by Elihu in chp. 32–37.³⁵

3.4. A New Perspective

Diachronic investigations demarcate chp. 32–37 as secondary passage. It is conspicuous that God mentions only three friends as being wrong concerning their points of view on the course of Job's life (Job 42:7).³⁶ An examination of the redactional layering of the book is beyond the scope of this paper, however. What is more striking is the aspect that Elihu, as the youngest interlocutor, bases his reasoning on a later stage of ideas on Israelite religion. He introduces himself as someone with deeper or, one could say, more modern insights which link his reasoning more closely to the prologue. In ch. 33, he highlights the basis of his position, referring to the Biblical account of creation in Gen. 2 and describing himself as being created out of clay and gifted with divine breath. Humans as creatures are distinguished from their creator, but God bridges the ontological gap by turning towards man in dreams and through interpretations. This argument connects Elihu's speech to Job's idea on the meaning of dreams as one of God's ways of torturing man, as expressed in chp. 7. Elihu challenges this position with the idea of dreams as the didactical method of discipline.³⁷ A pious course of life is also visible in human interaction in cultic affairs. The faithful individual becomes a role model for all other humans and makes manifest the significance of human action for his relationship with God. Since God demonstrates the misdoings of man in dreams and nightly pains, a second entity comes into play to advise man. Interpreters appear as divine messengers to instruct man on how to behave and to act. Besides giving instructions, they act as mediators between God and man by beseeching God to confer mercy and justification upon them. Elihu asks Job to pray to God and ask for mercy, referring to the friends' calling of Job. He correlates the experience of man being able to suffer diseases and recover his full strength with the idea of a mediation between God and man on the part of celestial beings. The existence of celestial beings is never taken into account in the first part of the dialog and seems to be the more modern idea Elihu presents. In reaction to Job's lament that the

³⁵ For the social roles within the speeches of God in (Job 39–41) cf. (Schmid 2016, p. 126): "Dass Gott—wie wörtlich hervorgehoben wird—'antwortet', bedeutet offenbar, dass er zunächst formal auf der Ebene als Angeklagter, nicht als Richter agiert."

³⁶ Essential positions concerning literary layers are depicted by (Köhlmoos 1999, pp. 56–62).

³⁷ For the new perspective and its theological implications cf. (Wahl 1993, pp. 132–42). "Mit Eliphaz teilt er die Grundansicht, daß Leiden der Läuterung dient. Über ihn hinausgehend entfaltet er eine Lehre von der erziehenden Funktion des Leids. Elihu versteht Leid als gnädige Zuwendung Gottes, das auf die Umkehr des Strauchelnden abzielt und nicht auf dessen Tod. Gott ist schon von jeher der Redende, der jeden Sünder in unterschiedlichsten Formen zu seiner Bekehrung anspricht." (p. 133)

pious are forced to suffer divine torture and the wicked can live their lives in prosperity, irrespective of merit, Elihu emphasizes the temporal aspect by which he describes the suffering of the righteous as temporary and as an act of education, while the wicked will immediately end in death if they start suffering. Considered from the outside, recovery is understood as an act of piety while incurability is caused by a foolish misinterpretation of divine education. In other words, wickedness is foolishness and fear of God is not an act of mental effort but an instance of parenting by God and other celestial beings. Thus Elihu appraises Job's actions as foolish, but other than his predecessors he points to the indeterminacy of divine mercy, since a confession of sins does not consequently lead on to forgiveness. Afterwards, Elihu highlights a deficit in hymns of divine praise but an overload of laments. Praising God and arguing with him about the circumstances of human life are not mutually exclusive. Elihu finally concludes that Job will be saved by God if he stops.

Following Elihu's reasoning, the course of a human life is a depiction of a man's relationship with God and decisive for his social position. Sorrow in social relationships results from a divine corrective in human life. A social role is an expression of divine justice. This assumption, however, is marked as wrong within the Book of Job—God does not reply to it at all. But does God see in Job a just man and does he justify his position towards Satan's provocation?

3.5. And What about God?

God, with his utterances in front of Job, concludes the dialog and confirms Job's position, which is rooted in the ANE tradition.³⁸ God avoids bringing to light his involvement in Job's suffering by pointing to his force. In chp. 38–41, God just asks questions about Job's competences in terms of creating and dominating the cosmos. He polemically alludes to Ps. 8³⁹ and the endowment of man with grace and honor in Job 40:10 and questions one of the basic anthropological images of the Biblical tradition. Furthermore, several concerns raised in the debate between Job and his friends are inserted into God's statements. God confirms the movement from the outer hemisphere as the banishment of chaotic waters to the underworld, the creation of dawn as a force to relegate the foolish and their actions from earth, the creation of the stars and their constellations as well as the feeding of animals living outside human civilization. God asks Job about his capacity to create and understand the outer hemisphere, but then limits himself and his presence to this area. He expresses his power as a dominion over chaotic forces, as is evident from *Enuma elish* IV and Marduk's acquisition of power. Through all these demonstrations, God emphasizes that the attempt to judge him is simply senseless. He confirms Job's statement on the absurdity of asking him for a discussion about righteousness, as the kingship of God cannot be questioned.⁴⁰ Therefore, he possesses no intention to limit his power. The need of humans to ask for retribution concerning the conditions of human life expressed within the quarrel between God and Job seems to be redundant. Job was fearful of this in ch. 9 already, and in turn this matter is addressed by God. Fear of God, which seems to be identical with faith, is limited to the acceptance of God's power and his ability to banish chaotic influence on earth.⁴¹ The questions about whence human suffering originates if foolishness is characterized as chaotic and banished by divine judgment or if it is simply a part of the *conditio humana* are not answered within God's speeches. Job finally resigns when he concedes in Job 42:3 that he is without insight (בלי דעת Job 42:3), which indicates a realization that his attempt to defy God for a trial had no chance of success. One has to ask, however, what the insight is that he is lacking, since he himself points to God's power over creation and chaotic forces at the very beginning of chp. 9. Job is just lacking two aspects: the reasons for the

³⁸ For God's critique against the three friends cf. (Kottsieper 2004).

³⁹ Ps. 8 serves as one metatext of the dialog to which the author refers frequently. The first connection occurs in (Job 7:17–18). Cf. (Köhlmoos 1999, pp. 171–73; Frevel 2004, pp. 257–68; Schmid 2007, pp. 258–59).

⁴⁰ (Keel 1978, pp. 154–55). Cf. also (van Oorschot 1987, p. 201): "Die Gottesrede weist solche Antworten auf die Fragen nach der Ursache oder dem Zweck des Leidens zurück."

⁴¹ Cf. (Köhlmoos 1999, p. 96): "Gottesfurcht auf menschlicher Seite ist keine sittliche Haltung, sie ist eine Kategorie der (An-)Erkenntnis Gottes."

conditio humana and the circumstances in the heavens and the netherworld. They can only be answered by knowing about the occurrences in the celestial sphere.

3.6. The Correlation of Prologue, Dialog, and Epilog

At the very beginning of the epilog, Job's position is characterized as right while his friends are said to be wrong in their reproaching Job for being unfaithful or wicked. With this statement, the author connects the final part of the book with its very beginning. Satan's assumption that Job will lose his fear of God if he is forced to experience suffering and sorrow is rebutted since arguing against God is not a matter of disbelief. The compensation of his material loss proves that the reciprocal relation of faith and blessings is not nullified. But this confirms the friends' position that faith directly leads on to prosperity. This is one side of the *conditio humana*, since humans can receive prosperity and health as a divine blessing for being faithful. The only position of theirs that is disproved is their conclusion that Job denies his misconduct and accuses God of being unjust or arbitrary. After the end of Satan's operations, nothing else is said about Job's fate. But this does not likewise mean that suffering is a sign of an absence of faith. Suffering can be the consequence of a wicked life and torture by God—this is the rule—but it can also imply that a unique event in the celestial world, such as the trials of Satan and God, influences human life and causes suffering.⁴² The prologue only points to Job's inquiry as a reason for his fate and confirms God's argument that Job is without insight. Besides malady and social unacceptance, a lack of knowledge is a third source of human suffering.

In terms of a synchronic reading of the book, the presupposition in the prologue is necessary for the reader's understanding of it since the impression of divine anger as judgment against chaotic forces and the assessment of human life as righteous or wicked could still remain, even after God's speech.⁴³ Satan's attempt to change the reciprocal system of acceptance and blessings has failed. It still works in the same way and all we learn is that God can judge foolishness. However, the obverse of this is attested by the *Epic of Atrahasis*: even if humans are introduced as a labour force for divine needs, *Atrahasis* himself, who is the only devotee of the god of wisdom *Ea*, receives the blessing of his deity while the rest of mankind is eradicated by the deluge. He survives the divine assault, so he flourishes as much as Job does after the trial with God. Nothing else happens when Satan tries to influence Job's faith by changing his living conditions. The prologue leads us on to an understanding of the entire story as an exceptional situation, while the dialog asks for general rules for human life, expressed in cultic orders and sapiential conclusions. The interaction of prologue and dialog shows that mythological occurrences are not necessarily perpetual, which would also mean that human insight into the world order is relative to the duration of occurrences in the divine world.⁴⁴ Both Job and his friends try to generalize the observations they have made during their lives so as to question whether these might coincide with the law or sapiential insights into the coherence of human life. But since the friends expect God to act righteously when men's actions comply with or disobey the divine rules, Job reckons that God's waywardness is the decisive factor for his actions. They all exclude the possibility that divine actions might be situational and unique, as is emphasized in the prologue. Due to their roles as interpreters and mediators, Elihu finally declares the mediation of the situation on the part of celestial entities to be a decisive factor for understanding the reasons for divine and human action. They help humans to acquire the knowledge they are lacking on divine action. Here we get an impression of what myth is about in an ANE understanding: myth describes divine action in terms of everlasting states of affairs and therefore points to (for example) creation as a battle against and defeat of chaotic forces as well as in terms of single, temporary occasions in the celestial world that

⁴² Cf. (Hoffman 1981, p. 167), outlines Job's unknowingness concerning the reasons for his suffering as an ethical problem.

⁴³ For textual strategies in prologue and epilog cf. (Köhlmoos 1999, p. 103): "Die entscheidende narrative Struktur der Hiobdichtung liegt indes im Zurücktreten des Erzählers hinter seinen Akteuren und seiner Handlung, d.h. in der Darstellung der Handlung als Dialog zwischen Personen. Dies setzt sich in der Dialogdichtung fort."

⁴⁴ The spatial dimensions of prologue and epilog are mentioned by (Köhlmoos 1999, p. 89).

affect human life in unpredictable ways. Prologue and epilog just outline Job's righteousness but in interaction with the dialog a sophisticated image of human fate arises. Divine action is characterized as a blessing of human life since God battles chaotic forces affecting human life and blesses the life of the pious with personal integrity and economic prosperity. But human fate is also depending on the effect of demonic entities causing diseases as well as on social circumstances depending on human interaction. The debate about Job's fate implies different points of view concerning the *conditio humana* which is relevant for measuring the course of an individual life. All three aspects have a bearing on human fate. Through the combination of prologue, dialog, and epilog the author of the book highlights comprehension of the relevant factors for an individual's life as an act of true faith. The course of an individual life in which humans experience their fate is dependent on various aspects such as their piety, the accidental presence of demonic forces, and their social interaction. To understand fate as a matter of contingency is an act of ignorance. Finally, the book of Job states two main aspects: God is just and affects the life of the pious in positive ways, but human fate is the result of the interaction of all entities present in the world.

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