

## Article

# The Suffering of Innocents, Martin Buber, and a Covenantal Reading of the Book of Job

Marcia Pally <sup>1,2</sup> <sup>1</sup> Multilingual Multicultural Studies, New York University, New York, NY 10003, USA; mp28@nyu.edu<sup>2</sup> Theology Department, Humboldt University, 10117 Berlin, Germany

## Abstract

Buber's analysis of Job, offering four responses to the theodical questions that innocent suffering raises, has been highly influential since its publication in 1942, as has been Steven Kepnes's more recent application of Buber's analysis to the Nazi Holocaust. Each of Buber's specific responses has been, at various points in history and today, taken up by sufferers and by those pondering suffering's theodical implications. Yet each response retains troubling features. This article, building on Buber and Kepnes, offers an alternate reading of the Book of Job, centering on two points: (i) a possible covenantal, rather than retributive, nature of the God-Job relationship and (ii) an understanding of God's response to Job as covenantal. This is not to suggest that such a response "solves" suffering, but it is comprehensible to Job from his own knowledge and experience of the world—an important aspect of the covenantal relationship—and is in some measure helpful. The article first reviews Kepnes's reading of Buber, discusses four aspects of it that remain theodically troubling, and then sketches a covenantal reading of Job, drawing on the work of Edward Greenstein, Moshe Greenberg, David Burrell, Bill McKibben, Susannah Ticciati, and other more recent Jobian scholars. This discussion explores the following: (i) covenant in the Wisdom literature, (ii) a universalist reading of covenant entailing human integrity, reasoned dialogue, and the validity of human knowledge within natural, human capacity, (iii) why Job's request to God is covenantal, and (iv) why God's response is as well.

**Keywords:** Job; theodicy; covenant; natural limits on knowledge; anthropocentrism; Martin Buber; Steven Kepnes



Academic Editor: Kenneth L. Waters

Received: 7 July 2025

Revised: 15 August 2025

Accepted: 17 August 2025

Published: 25 September 2025

**Citation:** Pally, Marcia. 2025. The Suffering of Innocents, Martin Buber, and a Covenantal Reading of the Book of Job. *Religions* 16: 1232. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16101232>

**Copyright:** © 2025 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

In his 1942 *The Prophetic Faith*, Martin Buber employs the Book of Job as a lens through which to explore the suffering of innocents. He suggested four responses to the theodical questions that such suffering raises (Buber 2000, pp. 188–98). Some sixty years later, Steven Kepnes applied Buber's four responses to the Nazi Holocaust (Kepnes 2002, pp. 36–55). Each of the four responses has been, at various points in history and today, taken up by sufferers and by those pondering suffering's theodical implications. Yet each response retains troubling features. The article below, building on Buber and Kepnes, offers for consideration an alternate reading of the Book of Job. This alternate centers on two points: a possible covenantal, rather than retributive, nature of the God-Job relationship, and an understanding of God's response to Job as covenantal. This understanding does not "solve" suffering—does anything?—but it is comprehensible to Job based on his knowledge and experience, an important aspect of the covenantal relationship, and it is thus in some measure helpful.

This article first reviews Kepnes's reading of Buber (where Kepnes accents ideas differently from the original Buber work, this is noted below and cited as Kepnes). It then discusses four aspects that remain theodically troubling, and sketches out a covenantal reading of Job,<sup>1</sup> drawing on the work of Edward Greenstein, Moshe Greenberg, David Burrell, Bill McKibben, Susannah Ticciati, and other more recent Jobian scholars. The discussion explores the following: (i) covenant in the Wisdom literature, (ii) a universalist reading of covenant entailing human integrity, reasoned dialogue, and the validity of human knowledge within natural human capacity, (iii) why Job's request to God is covenantal, and (iv) why God's response is as well.

Importantly, the article that follows is not a comment on Jobian and covenant scholarship generally. It focuses on the influential Buberian-Kepnes argument that in many ways has framed much theodicy since publication. The Jobian and covenant literatures are vast landscapes with a wide range of contested interpretations. The suggestions in this piece are presented on the view that multiple interpretations are unavoidable in humanities research, and that this research is not a zero-sum game. Multiple and unfamiliar readings are not only unavoidable but a boon. Varied, differing readings of the Book of Job may thus illuminate the scholarly landscape and contribute to the melee of interpretations. "It is of the essence of what we mean when we speak of something as being biblical in character," Yoram Hazony writes, "that it presents its truth by means of a diversity of views" (Hazony 2012, p. 227). So this article remains closely structured around the Buber-Kepnes material, presenting a reading of Job and covenant in play with the many others in the literature.

## 2. Steven Kepnes's "Rereading Job as Textual Theodicy"

Kepnes begins his text, "Rereading Job as Textual Theodicy," with a review of anti-theodicy, a postwar effort to respond to the Holocaust. Irving Greenberg, for instance, holds that there is no redemptive meaning in the murder of 1.5 million children (I. Greenberg 1977, p. 23). Pushing the point further, Richard Rubenstein came to a post-Holocaust syllogism: if God is omnipotent and chose Israel, God must be responsible for the Holocaust; ergo, I cannot believe in such a God (Rubenstein 1966, p. 46). In some contrast, Zachary Braiterman (Braiterman 1998, pp. 31, 171), like Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Blanchot, and others, rejects any relationship between God and suffering, any theological meaning to be gleaned from suffering, and proposes instead a world where Being perpetuates itself without meaning.

While intellectually satisfying to some, Kepnes writes, anti-theodicy is of little comfort to sufferers, as Eli Wiesel also notes (Wiesel 1989, p. 364). Anti-theodicy isn't much comfort, on my view, because while claiming to avoid classic theodical pitfalls, anti-theodicy does not escape the discomfiting theodical question of God's responsibility for evil, as captured in Hume's famous quip: "Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil (*unde malum*)?" (Hume 1990, pp. 108–9). Or as Paul Ricoeur more recently noted, innocent suffering feels like an "enigma" only with the presumption of an "ethical theology" (Ricoeur 1988, p. 10)—that is, with the presumption of a potent and beneficent divine. If God is impotent or malevolent, evil and suffering are awful but not surprising. It is only with belief in a good and omnipotent God that pain and hardship are theologically disturbing. While Braiterman's nihilism escapes Hume's potency-beneficence problem, it does so only by substituting nihilistic being in God's place. It is thus not clear that he is offering us a *theodicy*.

By contrast, Hume's decidedly theodical query assumes two ways of understanding evil and the pain of innocents: (i) there exists an omnipotent and good God, who pun-

ishes only the guilty (“God does not punish the righteous with the wicked,” Gen 18:23) or (ii) there exists only an irrational, malevolent God—or none at all—in which case, both suffering and flourishing are not only unexplained but *unexplainable*. If these are the choices, one must either blame sufferers for their hardship (God punishes only the wicked; ergo, if you suffer, you are wicked), the logical outcome of option (i). Or one must abandon God as irrational, malevolent, or non-existent, the logical outcome of option (ii). Anti-theodicy rejects option (i) as naïve and it glosses option (ii) with nihilism, leaving only meaninglessness.

In an effort to move beyond these unsatisfying options, Kepnes explores the four responses to suffering that Buber suggests in his reading of the Book of Job. Buber finds option (i), above, simplistic. The guilty are not the world’s only sufferers. But he also holds, with Kepnes, that option (ii)—divine a-rationality, malevolence, non-existence, and the meaninglessness of anti-theodicy—are inadequate to human living. To be sure, Buber does not assert a malevolent God. But he confronts the idea that God accedes to the Adversary (Satan), causing Job great pain and leaving all those who ponder suffering to wonder why a beneficent God would so act. An a-rational or inscrutable God is for Buber also inadequate to human living. Buber thus seeks to address the question: how is [Job’s] suffering *compatible* with a potent and beneficent God, with a God who indeed covenants with humanity and whose communication Job seeks precisely because of the covenantal bond? How can humanity, in the face of suffering, hold to this relationship, avoid nihilism, and retain meaning?

[A short comment before continuing to Buber’s answer. In “The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job,” Edward Greenstein notes that Job does not initially pose theodical questions but rather accepts his suffering (Job 2:9). Similarly, not all of Job’s friends pose theodical issues (Greenstein 2009, pp. 342–45). Eliphaz, for instance, suggests that the wicked eventually come to punishment and the righteous, to reward (Chs. 4:7–11, 5:7).<sup>2</sup> Job’s suffering is thus merely short-term—no theodical explanation needed. Yet while these are the initial, non-theodical remarks of Job and Eliphaz as *characters*, the Book of Job immediately poses the theodical question in the agreement between God and the Adversary who, to “test” Job’s loyalty to God, causes Job immense suffering. A God that allows such a “test” just to prove Job’s loyalty seems vain and feckless. The theodical question presents itself at once, and it is part of the problem Buber seeks to address. Similarly, while Eliphaz posits a theodical escape hatch in the idea of short-term punishment, a God that allows for gratuitous short-term suffering is either irrational and/or cruel. In any case, Job has, at that point in the narrative, suffered far more harm and for longer than Eliphaz’s “short-term” suffering. By the end of Chapter Two, the Book of Job has its theodical work cut out for it.]

### 2.1. Buber’s Four Responses to Job and the Suffering of Innocents

A. Buber’s first response, “Curse God and die,” is taken from Job’s wife’s outcry (Job 2:9). She understands Job’s suffering as the act of a perverse divine. As a character in a pre-modern text, she does not come to Hume’s intimation that God doesn’t exist but rather to the conclusion that God exists but is irrational and malevolent. (She does not know about God’s agreement with the Adversary.) We might as well curse this miserable deity and get out from under its yoke by dying. This response echoes option (ii) above, where God is irrational, malevolent, non-existent, or accedes to Adversaries, and so misery and pain are unexplained and unexplainable. Best to jump ship.

B. Buber’s second response, “Will God Pervert the Right? Will the Almighty Pervert Justice?” echoes the responses of Job’s friends. They hold to what Kepnes calls a stipulative “covenant” between God and humanity, where God stipulates certain behavior. Should humanity fail those stipulations, punishment and suffering follow. Working in reverse, if suffering is present, it means those stipulations have been violated. Edward Greenstein

too notes the “close association” in the Hebrew Bible among covenant, moral law, and retributive justice (Greenstein 2009, p. 336). Since Job suffers, his friends argue, he must be a commandment-breaker and covenant-violator. In Job 22:5, Eliphaz charges Job: “You know that your wickedness is great. And that your iniquities have no limit.” Job protests that, even if he has sinned, his punishment is disproportionate. But the friends insist on the retributive equation (Kepnes 2002, p. 44). This argument repeats in each round of discussion between Job and his friends, comprising much of the book.

This second of Buber’s responses echoes option (i) above—the omnipotent, benevolent, and just God—to the point of erasing Job’s righteousness. In the opening chapter, Job is described as so righteous that he offered sacrifices to God just in case his children blasphemed at a party and he was consistently attentive and generous to the needy (Job 29:12, 13, 15, 16). Yet, according to option (i), no matter how righteous Job had been, no matter his record of good deeds, they are naught before the determinism of God’s unerring judgment. Interestingly, such logic, which the friends also employ, obliterates their own earlier experience of Job as a righteous man.

C. Buber’s third response to Job’s suffering, “The rent in the heart of this world,” seeks to address Job’s protest against misery, both his own and others’. Regarding his own misery, Job curses the day of his birth (Ch. 3). In Ch. 7:5, he describes his maggot-filled wounds; Ch. 19:17 notes that Job is “repulsive even to his wife.” But his anger also rises against unexplained suffering more broadly and at a seemingly irrational world where the good suffer and evildoers flourish (Ch. 24). Yet, as Buber and Kepnes note, Job embraces neither nihilism nor atheism. He moves to “rent theology,” embracing the following contradiction: “Though he [God] slay me, yet I will trust him” (Job 13:15). Job maintains his faith in God “in spite of” the irrationality of suffering, as Buber repeatedly puts it. The Job of earlier times, in the years of health and prosperity, may have understood God simply, as rewarding good and punishing evil. But by chapter 13, on Buber’s view, Job understands that the relationship between God and a suffering world may require faith in contradiction or in the unknowable.

This third of Buber’s responses recognizes option (i), God punishes only the wicked, as simplistic. It recognizes option (ii)—God is irrational, malevolent, non-existent, or disturbingly causes suffering by acceding to the Adversary—as insufficient to human needs. “Rent theology” offers a contradiction instead. Yet this third response shares difficulties with anti-theodicy, offering the intellectual position of contradiction but neither a way to understand God nor a relationship with God that one embraces “in spite of” misery. One’s “relationship” to this distant God is reduced to an irrational, defiant, “I’m going to believe in you, anyway—so there.”

In short, this response proposes an irrational humanity as a response to an irrational God.

D. Buber identifies a fourth response to suffering, God’s “distributive justice,” towards the latter half of the biblical book, when Job stops asking to plead his case before God and starts wanting simply to “see” God and experience God’s presence (Kepnes 2002, p. 50). The God that Job “sees” is not the interventionist God of history but a creator God who does not intercede in the world to explain or redress suffering. This God has set up a cosmic system which is just because each “gets his due,” as Buber puts it (Buber 2000, p. 195). This is part of how Buber understands the cosmos, God’s creation and revelation, and God’s relationship with humanity. Paraphrasing Buber, Kepnes writes that such “distributive” justice may be summed up as, “we get what we can handle.” On this view, Job, an *ish tam* (a pure, righteous soul), is tested by God with an amount of suffering that Job can handle—somewhat as Abraham was tested in the Binding of Isaac/Akedah. Abraham could “handle” the Akedah, and Job can handle his lot. “God made Job,” Kepnes writes,



“potentially a person who was capable of withstanding great suffering. His suffering was therefore the just distribution of that which he was made for (Kepnes 2002, p. 51). Job’s misery is a proper distribution of divine justice.

Unlike anti-theodicy and Buber’s three previous responses, distributive justice provides a realistic recognition of worldly suffering—no simplistic option (i). And it provides a certain theological and emotional relief—no need to succumb to the confusion, despair, or nihilism of option (ii). To the contrary, distributive justice gives the sufferer the starring role in a drama where misery tests the hero’s mettle. Those who endure and remain faithful to God are heroes who have, by dint of their agony, served God. Distributive justice, Kepnes writes, “both makes sense of pain and allows people to cope with their pain” (Kepnes 2002, p. 52).

Kepnes closes his article with Buber’s charge in “The Dialogue Between Heaven and Earth.” Those who survive suffering have the “distributed” strength and fortitude to forge a better world (Buber 1951, pp. 214–25). Just as Job withstood his test, so those who have emerged from suffering “cannot only hold to the victimized status of the Job of protest, but must recognize our power and our blessings. It is indeed incumbent upon us to become active agents of God’s justice and redemption in the world... God has distributed the blessings of life and power to us” (Kepnes 2002, p. 54).

## 2.2. Four Questions for Four Responses

The Buber-Kepnes approach to pain and loss opens up further questions, four of which are noted below, focusing on Buber’s third and fourth response to evil, “rent theology” and distributive justice.

E. The non-interventionist God of distributive justice is a surprising reading of Job as God intervenes in history at the very outset of the book. God accepts the Adversary’s wager, which allows for dramatic, painful changes in the lives of Job and his family. While Job, the character, may not know this, the readers do. So a non-interventionist God seems an unlikely feature of the book. Moreover, Job himself also learns that God intervenes in world because God intervenes to talk to Job. For much of the book, Job assumes a responsive divine who will intervene to save him from misery. It is on this understanding of God that Job spends twenty or so chapters insisting on a talk with the divine.

F. Job does not seem content with seeing and “re-experiencing God’s presence” as distributive justice suggests. Job wants to be heard, as Kepnes and Buber themselves point out in quoting Job 31:35 “Oh that one would hear me” (Kepnes 2002, p. 50). Job may be unsure that, once in conversation, he would persuade God: “Indeed I know that it is so: Man cannot win a suit against God” (Job 9:2). But if Job thought God to be non-interventionist and was content with God’s *undialogic* presence, it would be unlikely he would repeatedly call on God to talk with him, as Job does in 13:3 (“Indeed, I would speak to the Almighty; I insist on arguing with God”) and throughout the book to Ch. 31.

In sum, if God is non-interventionist, applying for a conversation is incoherent. If God is irrational or malevolent, it is useless and perhaps counter-productive as it might further provoke God’s ire. But Job does not proceed on these assumptions. Rather, he assumes that God can hear and communicate with humanity and intervene in the world to right injustice.

G. The assumption of God’s responsiveness prods a question for “rent theology,” where one believes in a benevolent God though the world gives no evidence of one—indeed, “in spite of” the lack of evidence and in the face of innocent suffering and prospering evil. Yet if embracing this contradiction were Job’s response to his pain, he would not demand a conversation with God. He would accept his suffering as part of his contradiction-filled faith. But this is precisely what Job does not do. He demands a con-

versation with God, and one does not seek a talk with a silent God whom one must accept unconditionally, “in spite of” silence and suffering. Thus, given Job’s call to be heard and to talk, one may wonder if a theology of contradiction is proposed by this book.

H. Of the four responses to suffering, “distributive justice” most closely fits the circumstances of Job, who has indeed withstood, “handled,” the suffering rigged by the Adversary and permitted by God. But *surviving* hardship doesn’t necessarily *make sense* of it as Kepnes suggests it does (Kepnes 2002, p. 52). On the logic of distributive justice, there is, *ab initio*, a tub of suffering in the cosmos, which must be distributed somewhere. God identifies those most able to “handle” misery and makes them suffer it. Those of strongest faith and righteousness are, owing to their handling skills, subject to the worst brutality. In Job’s case, his initial righteousness (*ish tam*) and his faith in God qualify him for lacerating pain.

This answers Hume’s question, is God good?, with a thwacking “no.” And it returns us to the theodical questions: Why did God create a universe with a tub of suffering to be distributed? Why do the innocent have to suffer at all, as Kepnes too asks (Kepnes 2002, pp. 52, 53). Why do people have to “handle” the most misery that they can? Such a worldview indeed suggests a malevolent or irrational divine. God ended each day of creation with the judgment that the world is “good.” If a world with so much (distributed) suffering is God’s idea of “good,” do we want to know God’s idea of “bad”?

### 3. A Universalist Covenantal Reading of the Book of Job

The questions above leave Buber’s four points as somewhat unsatisfying responses to human suffering. The following section proposes a somewhat different reading of the Book of Job, one grounded in a specific understanding of covenant, which does not resolve the theodical questions, as millennia of theodicies do not. But it may—because it is understandable to Job as reasonable—be of some utility in thinking about confounding evil.

#### 3.1. Covenant in the Wisdom Literature

While covenant occupies a central place in Jewish thought and texts, its appearance specifically in the Wisdom literature is less frequent, and scholarly studies of its presence in that body of work are somewhat limited.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Lindsay Wilson notes that “While many of the other OT books deal with the history of the covenant, the covenant people Israel, and God’s entry into history in redeeming his people, the wisdom books have a broader, more universal concern with all of creation (Wilson 2015, p. 187). Wilson’s assumption seems to be that covenant is particularist only and thus it is of less interest to the universally-minded Wisdom authors. This stands in some tension with the universalist Noachide covenant between God and all humanity, which, as I’ll attempt to show, may be understood as background-setting for the Book of Job.

To begin, the universal covenant is *not* the sort of bond ascribed to Job by Max Rogland in his work on the issue (Rogland 2009, pp. 49–62). Rogland holds that, while the term appears only three times (Chs. 5:23; 31:1; 41:4), the arguments throughout the book follow a form of legal agreement with God, where compliance is rewarded and violations are judicially reviewed and punished (as described in Deut 11) (Kepnes 2002, p. 44). Noting the echoes between judicial proceedings and covenant, Rogland argues that, as judicial imagery runs through the Book of Job, so too the presumption of legalistic covenant. Job calls God his “judge” (מִשְׁפֵּט, 9:15; 23:7) in a trial (מִשְׁפֵּט, 13:8; 23:4). Job charges God with bringing “witnesses” (עֵדִי, 10:17; 16:8), calls on heavenly witnesses on his own behalf (עֵדִי, 6:19), and refers to his signature as if on court documents (הוֹדֵתִי שְׁנֵי יַעֲגִי וְסִפֵּר קִטָּב אִישׁ רִיבִי, 31:35). In support of this legalistic covenant, Rogland cites John Hartley:

[Job] likens his situation to a contract that God has filled with bitter stipulations. Perhaps one may think of a written covenant which contains blessings and curses. When one party fails to fulfill his side of the contract, the curses are activated against that party. (Hartley 1988, p. 228)

But so described, the relationship between God and Job is more contract than covenant (as Hartley writes) and more *quid pro quo*. As David Burrell suggests, this is a confusion between contract and covenant, where the former protects one's interests and the latter prioritizes relationship. Violation of contract terms voids the agreement and requires compensation. Breach of covenant leads to a search for reconciliation as relationship is the *telos*. In contrast to Rogland, Burrell notes that one purpose of the Book of Job is to refute the understanding of covenant as transactional or retributive: "the book's primary role in the Hebrew canon will be to correct that characteristic misapprehension of the revelation displayed by Job's friends, as their 'explanation' of his plight turns on reading the covenant as a set of simple transactions" (Burrell 2008, p. 16). Jiseong James Kwon's careful study too distinguishes between the Book of Job and a *quid pro quo* reading of covenant (Kwon 2018, pp. 49–71).

Building on this distinction, the following sections explore the possibility of a universalist, dialogic covenant in Job, beginning with a few words about this idea of covenant in the Jewish tradition more generally and then exploring covenant in the Book of Job more specifically.

### 3.2. A Universalist Understanding of Covenant: Through the Glass, Reciprocally

While covenant is among the most written-about and contested concepts in the Hebrew Bible, this section confines itself to an understanding of covenant that may be a background setting for the Book of Job. To begin, it picks up and explores further the brief distinction between contract and covenant noted above.

The instrumental *quid pro quo* is a technology for contracts, which protect interests. Covenants are a framework for relationship, the distinct integrity of all parties, and their reciprocal flourishing (Pally 2016, p. 236).<sup>4</sup> Covenant, Jean Lee writes, is the "promise with one or more counterparty under common pursuit of shared values for long term cooperation and well-being of the community." It is the shared values, long-termed-ness, and common good that are key. Lee continues, "Contracts form the basis of the market while covenants form the basis of community" (Lee 2010, p. 59). Covenant is an orientation to living with others upstream of political and legal systems. It is the background habitus or culture, if you will, for downstream or resulting constitutions and positive law that maintain covenantal regard in societal relationships and institutions. The capacity to form and sustain covenant emerges from humanity being in the image of a covenant-making God (this is humanity's nature) and from being capable of covenantal bonding, "their role in the world," as Terence Fretheim makes the distinction (Fretheim 2005, Kindle location 1294–95). Describing the God in whose covenantal image humanity is, Stephen Geller writes, the Hebrew Bible God is not so much a concept, an "ism," as a relation (Geller 2000, pp. 295–96).

It is worth noting that while covenant creates community, it does not subsume the person. In Lenn Goodman's words, "The covenant itself...rests on (and thus cannot create) the *freedom* of the covenantors" (Goodman 1991, pp. 41–42, emphasis mine). Nor is the individual sacrifice-able for the community's sake. Indeed, each covenantor has a role of value even where reciprocal covenants are forged between *unequal* parties: between the divine and human and among persons of different social status. Interestingly, Rogland, in a statement somewhat at odds with his transactional view, also argues that covenant created "kinship" among non-biological kin, bonds not only of instrumental convenience but of

moral commitment.<sup>5</sup> These bonds mark a significant worldview shift. Through covenant, Christine Hayes writes, “the pagan picture of an amoral universe of competing good and evil powers is replaced by the picture of a moral cosmos. The highest law is the will of the deity, who imposes not merely an order but a morality upon the universe” (Hayes 2012, pp. 4–5, 23).

Moral, covenantal commitments among unequals are reflected, among other places, in the biblical obligations of all persons to the enemy, stranger, and poor.<sup>6</sup> That is, covenants are forged not between lord and a lesser lord, a vassal who represents his clan, as ancient suzerainty treaties were. Covenants bond each person to God and persons to each other in direct moral commitment. This removes morality from the aegis—and whim—of human monarchs and grounds it in the transcendent, whose values cannot be tweaked to suit regnant political powers.

This opens the door to understanding covenant as universal as it is not a technology for clan, tribe, or state but for humanity. Though the Noachide covenant is an idea of the Hebrew Bible, it establishes the importance of this sort of bond with all. This covenant, Robert Bellah writes, is “a charter for a new kind of people, a people under God, not under a king... a people ruled by divine law, not the arbitrary rule of the state, and of a people composed of *responsible individuals*” (Bellah 2011, Kindle Locations 4700–1, 4864, emphasis mine; see also Walzer 1985). In covenantal reciprocity, stipulative features may arise, but covenant is not stipulative in motive or *telos*. Nor do stipulations turn covenant into contract. While unfulfilled stipulations generally void contract, unfulfilled stipulations do not end covenantal relationship, as the prophetic books repeatedly note. God may become “angry” (anthropomorphically speaking) at humanity’s covenant breaches but God always returns to restore wholeness. In covenant, motive and *telos* are relational, and relationship is the point.

Importantly, while covenant begins dyadically—God-Noah, God-patriarchs—it extends into community. Persons give to God not only by giving directly but by giving to third parties, to the poor or other persons in need (*hekdesh*, made holy) (Kochen 2008, p. 137). In this triangulation, covenantal commitment to other persons helps to constitute covenant with God, and covenant with God sustains persons in covenantal commitments to others. “Covenant is,” Eric Mount explains, “a distinctively, though not exclusively, Hebraic metaphor and model that locates the relational self in a community of identity, promise, and obligation with God and neighbor” (Mount 1991, p. 1). The expansion from dyad to community is found in the Ten Commandments, the first few of which pertain to person and God, the rest, to living among persons in community. Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Proverbs, among other writings, denounce the hypocrisy of performing religious rituals while abandoning the afflicted—as if one could maintain bond with God absent bond with the needy, one of the most oft-repeated of biblical and rabbinic ideas (see Amos 5:21–24; Prov 21:3; Hos 6:6).

As on this reading, covenant is with God and among persons, it extends to “All the nations.” The covenant with Noah embraces all humanity. The covenant with the patriarchs, thrice repeated, is “for the blessing of all the nations” (Gen 12:3; 26:4; 28:14). This provision again undergirds the biblical and rabbinic obligations not only to the domestic poor but to the enemy and stranger. Biblically, a number of tribes are exempted from covenantal regard—Amalek, for instance, as they tormented the Hebrews when they were wandering and exposed in the desert, vulnerable to any attacker. But these tribes must be explicitly removed from the general rule. The default is covenant with all nations. Moreover, God Godself covenants with non-Israelites as all persons are capable of committing to covenantal standards of relation. Emanuel Levinas calls this particularist understanding of broad commitment the paradox of “universalist singularity,” the “primordial event in Hebraic



spirituality" (Levinas 1994b, p. 44). "To be with the nations," he wrote, "is also to be for the nations" (Levinas 1994a, p. 199).

The understanding of covenant described here is not only a biblical perspective, and in the modern era, Levinas's work is an elegy to the donative commitments of covenant, though many others too have developed the idea. Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote that human "righteousness is not just a value; it is God's part of human life" (Heschel 2001, p. 255). Righteousness among persons is a moment of God's presence in our midst. I'll close this section with words from Levinas, who wrote, "To follow the Most-High is also to know that nothing is greater than to approach one's neighbor" (Levinas 1994a, p. 142)—that is, the covenantal obligation among persons. For Levinas, this is no "figure of speech" but a description of God, "who approaches precisely through this relay to the neighbor—binding men among one another with obligation, each one answering for the lives of all the others." This "relay to the neighbor" is "the highest possible theological knowledge one can have" (Levinas 1994b, p. 171). When Levinas writes that relationship with God "can be traced back to the love of one's neighbor," he does not begin with God and derive commitments to other persons from bond with the divine. Rather, the reverse: Levinas begins from covenantal care among persons and derives bond with God from there. He writes, "the responsibility for one's neighbor and taking upon oneself the other's destiny, or fraternity. The relation with the other person is placed at the beginning" (Levinas 1994a, pp. 146–47).

### 3.3. Universalist Covenant in the Book of Job: Human Integrity and Reasoned Dialogue

With this brief sketch of covenant as broad commitment, this section turns to the Book of Job. Simply put, Job's friends mistake covenant for contract in their retributive justice argument: God punishes evil; Job is punished; *ergo*, Job is evil. That is, Job has violated contract stipulations and is thus punished. Though Elihu notes that God speaks to humanity in dreams and visions, which sounds dialogic and covenantal (Job 33:13–16), he holds that God speaks not for the sake of relationship but for top-down chastisement: to tell persons what they have done wrong or to warn against future wrongdoing. But imagining bond with God as unidirectional and chastening is to see God as the more powerful party in contract negotiations. It is also the retributive justice error, which Job does not make. Job knows that his suffering cannot be just punishment for sin as he has not so grievously sinned. Thus, retributive justice cannot be what is going on in this case.

Rather, Job insists on relationship and conversation with God. While God may be the unfathomable creator of the universe, God, on Job's covenantal understanding, owes Job a conversation. By demanding a talk—not a prosecution but a conversation where God accounts for God's conduct to Job—Job is assuming and insisting that God is the God of covenant, of dialogic relationship. Were God the irrational or malevolent deity of Job's wife or "rent theology," demanding an audience and a reasoned accounting would be fruitless or perhaps provoke a new bout of irrational divine rage.

Moshe Greenberg notes, contra Rogland, that the frequent allusions to trial imagery do not cast God as a retributive, "moral accountant" (M. Greenberg 1987, p. 300). Rather, Job so much assumes covenantal reciprocity that he feels God is obligated in what Greenberg calls a "covenant lawsuit in reverse: man accusing God, instead of God accusing man" (M. Greenberg 1987, p. 296). It's worth noting that such a reverse covenantal lawsuit is available to all as Job's non-Israelite status attests (Job 1:1) along with the absence of Jewish rites or texts in the book. Job, in his humanness, has the confidence to say: "Indeed, I would speak to the Almighty, I insist on arguing with God," אֵלֹהִים אֲנִי אֶל־שֹׁעֵי אֲדַבֵּר וְהוֹכֵחַם (Job 13:3).

This is Job taking covenantal, dialogic reciprocity seriously, demanding a response from God rather than following the logic of his friends, who, Burrell notes, never talk to God but only about God's retributive, *quid pro quo* requirements: "Everyone and everything is leveled by their [the friends'] relation to the Almighty, yet Job alone dares to address him ... He [Job] moves leagues ahead of them precisely by seeking a personal audience." Discussing God's whirlwind speech, Burrell repeats the point: "What the voice from the whirlwind commends is rather the inherent rightness of Job's mode of discourse: speaking (however he may speak) to rather than about his creator" (Burrell 2008, pp. 33–34, 39, 109).

### 3.3.1. Human Integrity

To Burrell's point about humanity's dialogic relationship with God, Greenberg adds the idea of human integrity. "Job," Greenberg writes, "despite his ruined state, will stand up to God, convinced that God must recognize integrity" (M. Greenberg 1987, p. 290). Like dialogue, recognition of the other's integrity—not the other's obsequiousness, instrumentalizability, or dismissibility—is a feature of covenant. And integrity is precisely what Job demands in Chs. 27:5 and 31:6, among other places. Greenberg quotes Job 13:16: "Through this I will gain victory; that no godless/impious man can come into his presence" (M. Greenberg 1987, p. 291) *וְגַם-הוּא-לִי לִישׁוּעָה כִּי-לֹא יָבֹא יָדָו הַגֶּר*. The Hebrew *הַגֶּר*, taken literally, means not impious but flatterer, a person of insincerity, or trickery, obsequiousness, or lacking integrity, perhaps someone who would try to flatter God into relieving suffering. In this sentence, Job maintains (1) that while the impious and flatterers may not come into God's presence, he can as he is neither godless nor insincere but Godfearing, (2) that being sincere and Godfearing sets him in a relationship with God so that he may come into God's presence and argue his cause, and (3) that in this conversation with God, God will grant Job "victory," the truth of his case—as God in fact does in Ch. 42. This is an understanding of God not as irrational or malevolent but as covenantal, dialogic, and cognizant of the integrity that must inhere in humanity in order to be covenantal partners with God.

Job's statement in 13:16 is made in the first conversation with his friends, at the end of which, Greenberg writes, Job is left "longing for renewed intimacy with God" (M. Greenberg 1987, p. 291). Intimacy is not *quid pro quo* but covenant, which the friends miss each time they insist on a retributive God. "The errors of the three friends" Joseph Tham writes, "lie in speaking of God in the abstract and detaching Him from the context of life circumstances. The three friends err in not listening to Job in his peculiar state but impose on him a preconceived idea of a retributive God" (Tham 2013, p. 87). That is, the friends err twice: first in imagining a retributive God to begin with, a God whose relationship to humanity reduces to mechanistic application of reward and punishment. Second, in applying the retributive mechanism to Job regardless of the particular circumstances of Job's life, thus annihilating his specific personhood and integrity.

Job holds to a God who recognizes Job's integrity and covenantal relationship not only in the first conversations with his friends but even after several debates. In 31:1, Job specifically invokes covenant and gives an example of the righteous behavior that follows from it (abstaining from ogling young women). The next sentence, Ch. 31:3, may sound *quid pro quo*: "Calamity is surely for the iniquitous; Misfortune, for the worker of mischief," but the following sentence reveals that recognition and relationship are the core of the divine-human relationship: "Surely He observes my ways, Takes account of my every step." The general rule may be punishment for wrongdoing, but God knows Job's righteousness and integrity personally, from their relationship through Job's "every step."

### 3.3.2. Reasoned Dialogue

In addition to the covenantal content of Job's argument, its reliance on rational form—reason and evidence (from Job's life, Ch. 29)—reprise Job's conviction that he is in a relationship of reciprocal regard with a reasonable divine (Clines 1989, pp. xlv–xlvi). He is not subject to the whims of the irrational god of Job's wife and "rent theology" or to the nastiness of a god who distributes the most suffering to the righteous who can handle it. For if that were the case, a groveling, flattering, or histrionic tantrum begging for mercy might be the better tactic to cajole such a god into relieving Job's suffering. This obsequiousness is precisely what Job does not perform. While one may, in a "rent theology" mode, declare loyalty to an irrational or incomprehensible divine, one doesn't demand reasoned responsiveness and dialogue, as Job does.

### 3.3.3. Is There Something "More" than Covenant, Integrity, and Reasoned Talk?

Susannah Ticciati impressively turns the argument from covenant on its head, finding that the Deuteronomic covenant is broken at the outset of the Book of Job. God does not reward Job's righteousness, as deserved, but rather allows the Adversary his cruel test. Having dispensed with covenant early on, Ticciati ponders what is beyond it. "What is still there once the Covenant has been broken—the nature of this deeper dimension or 'more'" than covenant? she asks (Ticciati 2005, p. 356). In answer, she holds that, by pushing the legalistic framework (ריב) to its limits (Job 9), the book exposes the inherent injustice of a mere mortal up against an omnipotent God, whose power may be just but also arbitrary. The exposure of God's dual nature, just but arbitrary, is, on Ticciati's view, key to Job's claim to something "more," to something extra-legal, indeed to the recognition and integrity that Greenberg describes (above). But in Ticciati's work, recognition and integrity are followed by one more redemptive step: the realization that, as an innocent, Job is elected by God. "The truth that Job is elected by God is one to which Job gains access only by way of wrestling with the law in challenge of the arbitrariness of God."

Job, on Ticciati's view, comes to understand election by working through and exhausting legalism, which inevitably ends in God's arbitrariness. Once Job grasps this, he also grasps that his dialogic relationship with God, including his suffering, cannot be grounded in such legalism but in something more, in election. Election is the reason for Job's suffering and is what gives Job his standing before God. Job's friends err in failing to see not covenant but election: "by reducing this to the doctrine of retribution," Ticciati writes, "they deny not only God's arbitrary transcendence of the law, but thereby also their gratuitous election by God, and hence their own true being" (Ticciati 2005, p. 364).

Ticciati's approach finds some echo in Buber's distributive justice in identifying a "bigger picture" that gives meaning to hardship. In Buber, the state of the cosmos itself involves God's proper distribution of justice and suffering. In Ticciati, the bigger picture is election. The two ideas share similarities and differences, advantages and disadvantages. For some, election, and for others, being part of God's distributive justice system, gives meaning to suffering and grants the sufferer not the degraded role of a sinner but an elected, chosen role or embeddedness in God's just world. Still others will find that election and distributive justice leave humanity with the disturbing notion of a God who imposes—or allows for—harsh suffering on the righteous.

But perhaps one need not seek something "more" beyond covenant—neither testing nor election—because covenant wasn't insufficient in the first place. Job, as described above, knows he is in covenant with God. It is in this context that he demands a conversation and a reasoned explanation of God's conduct. And indeed, he is given one. God's explanation, given in covenant, entails neither irrationality nor punishment for wrongdoing, neither the unresponsive God of "rent theology" nor distributive theology's doling out

of the worst to the best. Rather, it entails reasonable recognition of human understanding and its limits.

The explanation of (limited) human nature is a gift from God to help Job understand himself in his world. The features of God's covenantal gift—both the validity of human reason and its limits—are explored in the section below.

### 3.3.4. Covenant and the Validity of Human Knowledge: Greetings from Job's Daughters

Precisely because Job is in a covenantal relationship, he may—perhaps must—insist on the validity of his own experience, reasoning, and knowledge. Recognition of the viewpoint of the other, like dialogue and integrity, is a condition of covenant and reciprocal regard. Though God may be omniscient, the nature of the divine-human relationship is that God listen to Job. Job's friends mechanistically argue for the retributive tenets of their tradition. Job argues for real back-and-forth with God based on what each knows.

Thus, the validity of human reason and experience as a condition of covenant is key to the Book of Job. Greenstein describes it this way:

“the book presents a philosophical argument about how our knowledge is warranted or justified. Job's companions stubbornly cling to the claim that all worthwhile knowledge has been transmitted and learned from tradition... Job, on the other hand, bases his claims on his personal observation... Job takes pride in his absolute commitment to speaking only truth (see 27:3–4)”. (Greenstein 2004, Kindle Location 1494)

In support of this position, Greenstein notes God's rejection of the friends' worldview, their reliance on traditional formulae over their own knowledge—over their own memory and experience of Job's righteous life. Job 42:7 states: “the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘I am incensed at you and your two friends, for you have not spoken the truth about Me as did My servant Job.’”

וַיְהִי אֲחֵר דָּבָר וַתָּקֹה אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵי־אִיּוֹב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אֱלִיפָז הַתֵּמָנִי חֵרָה אִפִּי בָּךְ וּבִשְׁנֵי רֵעֶיךָ כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כַּעֲבָדִי אִיּוֹב:

Greenstein concludes,

“Job may not have arrived at the truth, but he had reason to believe in what he was saying, as it came to him honestly, unlike the words of the companions, who merely repeated uncritically the wisdom they had received. Seen this way, the book of Job promotes honesty in theological discourse and rejects a blind reliance on tradition”. (Greenstein 2004, Kindle Location 1494)

Greenstein's point about the validity of human knowledge and honesty in dialogue with God is reprised throughout the Book of Job. As early as Ch. 9:20, Job twice tells God what Job knows, “I am blameless,” and in 10:7, Job reprises “You know that I am not guilty.” Rogland also correctly notes the biblical link between blamelessness (תָּקִים) and covenant, notably with Avram in Gen 17:1: “יהוה appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am El Shaddai. Walk in My ways and be blameless’” (see also Deut 18:13). While the reader is aware that God knows of Job's innocence and its associations with covenant (see, Job 1:8), Job is not given this inside information. He asserts his innocence from his *own* knowledge and experience, presuming that this (human) knowledge is valid in a conversation with God. Job concedes that he doesn't know why he suffers but he does know that it cannot be punishment for sin. For even if he committed wrongs, his punishment is disproportionate to them.

Job also knows from experience that his situation is not unique: the righteous frequently suffer while evil flourishes: אֶחָד הֵיאָ עֲלֵינוּ אֲמַרְתִּי תָם וְרָשָׁע הוּא מְכַלָּה: “It is all one; there-



fore I say, ‘He destroys the blameless and the guilty’” (9:22) (see also, Job 21 and [M. Greenberg 1987](#), p. 292). With this knowledge, Job stands firm:

בְּצִדְקָתִי הִחְזַקְתִּי וְלֹא אֶרְפֶּה לֹא יִתְּרָה לִבִּי מִיָּמִי:

“I persist in my righteousness and will not yield; I shall be free of reproach as long as I live” (27:6).

Ironically, Job’s friend Elihu also—if unwittingly—makes an argument for the validity of human knowledge. But he fails to realize that, by doing so, he is handing the point to Job. In Ch. 34:4 Elihu proposes, “Let us [the friends] decide for ourselves what is just; Let us know among ourselves what is good.” He is claiming that the friends can, using their knowledge and experience, condemn Job. But Elihu is hoisting himself on his own petard. If he and the other friends can determine, from their knowledge and experience, what is right and just, so may Job. If they can make truth claims, so can Job. In short, Elihu is conceding the value of human reasoning and experience even in matters of righteousness and sin.

At the end of the book, Job is restored to health and wealth and has seven sons and three daughters. The daughters, unusually for antiquity, are given independent inheritances (as are each of the sons), and their names, unusually in the Bible, are individually mentioned. One understanding of this norm-breaking oddity is that Job has learned not to unquestioningly follow received wisdom, as his friends do, but to give credence to his experience of the realities at hand. His daughters, he might have observed as they grew up, are persons with intellects and talents that warrant support as do those of his sons, and so he gave it to them. Though this is a modern (and fanciful) projection onto the text, the passage on its face marks Job as a breaker of convention in giving his daughters independent inheritances. It suggests the validity of human experience and knowledge as constituent of dialogic covenant, in this case, between parent and child.

In sum, one way to understand the Job narrative is as follows: throughout, Job takes a consistent position—even if, owing to his maladies and his friends’ belligerence, he is periodically more and less robust in his claim. He holds that God, as the Creator of all existence, is responsible for his suffering. “Should we accept only good from God and not accept evil?” (Job 2:10). Yet this God is also the God of covenant, which requires mutual attention, dialogue, and respect for the knowledge of all parties. Job’s consistent claim to talk with God, who must account for God’s actions, relies on such a covenantal understanding.

At the end of the Book of Job, God offers Job such a covenantal moment.

### 3.4. *God’s Covenantal Response to Job’s Claims of Covenant*

God’s confirmation of the covenantal relationship appears first in the fact that Job gets a response at all. God could certainly ignore Job. Yet this God is not the irrational God of Job’s wife, or the unrealistic retributive God of Job’s friends, “rent theology’s” unresponsive God whom one nevertheless follows, and not the non-interventionist God of distributive justice, whose ab initio system distributes misery to the most righteous. Rather, the event of God’s answer indicates a responsive deity who offers Job as much understanding as possible about the workings of the world. Job is granted “the immediacy and directness of divine presence,” Samuel Terrien writes ([Terrien 1971](#), p. 498), through which God explains not only Job’s immediate situation but the ways of the cosmos ([Alter 1985](#)). Interestingly, Burrell notes that Aquinas made a similar argument: the point of the whirlwind speech is God’s ungraspable command of the cosmos, but this can come only through true dialogue with Job: “It is,” Burrell writes, “the actual speaking—God’s responding to Job—that offers the dramatic point of the poem: the determination by divine authority” ([Burrell 2008](#), p. 93).

Second, in addition to the fact of God's reply is its tone. In his careful study of God's whirlwind speech, T.C. Ham notes that God's interrogatory *מי זה*, "who is this?" is the not the belligerent phrase, "Who are you (that you dare bother me)?" Rather, it "brings the reader's attention properly to Job as the recipient of the divine response. Rather than being a harsh reproof, the very beginning words of Yhwh resolutely focus on the person of Job" (Ham 2013, p. 532). Ham continues, "The interrogative form allows God to remind Job of divine wisdom and power 'with compassion and gentleness, albeit stern gentleness'" (Ham 2013, p. 532; see also Fox 1981, p. 59). God calls Job "my servant" six times (in 1:8; 2:3; 42:7, and three times in 42:8) and addresses him with the politeness form *נא*, please/if you wouldn't mind (Ham 2013, pp. 532–33). Terrien notes that it "could not pass unnoticed by a discerning audience ... how gently God cautions Job" (Terrien 1971, p. 502; cited also in Ham 2013, p. 534).

Third, covenant is evident in God's attention to Job's specific query: why am I suffering disproportionately to my wrongdoings? God understands covenantal commitment to include an answer to Job's particular complaint. The text uses the verb "ana" *ענה* (answer/reply) in response to Job's cry, *הֲיִשְׁמַע יְהוָה שְׁעִי וְעֲנֵנִי*, "O that Shaddai would answer/reply to my writ" (31:35). The same verb root is employed for both the call from Job and God's response, as if to underscore the dialogic directness, particularity, and personal nature of the event. Ham notes that the close exchange between Job and God—the call-and-response—is evident in the chapters that bookend and frame the Book of Job, Job's call in Ch. 3 and God's response beginning in Ch. 38. These chapters share thematic, imagistic, and lexical echoes, notably the motifs of light/darkness, creation, and birth/death, as well as the repetition of the word *גבר*, adult male, which God expects Job to be as covenantal partner in understanding God's command of the cosmos (Ham 2013, pp. 535–36, 537–40).<sup>7</sup>

Fourth, in covenantal response, God explains that there is much about the complex cosmos—including suffering—that cannot be grasped by any creature or species. There are indeed "more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy." The Wisdom literature, notably Job and Ecclesiastes, precede the Bard by a good many years to teach this lesson. Epistemological humility is part of being human. After all, even the reader does not know why God agrees to the Adversary's bizarre idea of testing Job. In the strategy of the Book of Job, the reader experiences the same theodical frustration as Job does: why do innocents suffer? And the reader learns the same lesson of species limitation.

Finally, in his willingness to answer Job, God affirms not only the covenantal relationship but also the validity of Job's knowledge (though limited by human nature). God explains the workings of the world through Job's perceptual capacities and experience, through argument and evidence that Job can grasp and check. Ch. 39 is a cascade of questions posed to Job based on Job's knowledge of the world: do you know, mark, count, make, clothe, rely on, etc. God is asking Job to draw from Job's own experience rather than commanding Job to blindly accept God's dicta. It is reliance on his own sensory and mental capacities that allows Job to understand God's point.

In sum, on this reading of the Book of Job, God, in covenant, seeks to communicate with Job, recognizing human reason but also explaining its limits—not because humanity is sinful but because all creatures are limited. In accepting God's explanation of cosmic complexity, Job isn't recanting his earlier demand that God respond to him, as Kepnes and other suggest (Kepnes 2002, p. 53). Rather, God has in fact responded, and Job accepts God's response because God has appealed to Job's sense perception, experience, and reason. With this, Job's knowledge and integrity are respected as is appropriate to a covenantal relationship.

This understanding also sheds light on the brief and somewhat strange passage near the end of the book where Job prays on behalf of his sinful friends (42:8). It might simply evince Job's enduring righteousness but it might also explain how one person is able to pray for another. Job has been affirmed in covenant with a God who engages him, and it is because of and through this dialogic back-and-forth that Job may address God, including on behalf of his friends. That is, Job can pray not because God has distributed appropriate misery to him, setting Job in God's distributive plan. Job can pray because Job understands—by dint of God talking with him—that he is indeed in covenantal dialogue with the divine, through which prayer is possible. Whatever one makes of Buber's distributive justice, this view of dialogic relationship with God is consistent with his thought on suffering and the overall corpus of his work.

#### 4. The Natural Limits of Human Knowledge: The Jobian Argument, Discussed

In Bill McKibben's words, the whirlwind lesson in epistemological humility makes it plain that, "We are not bigger than everything else—we are *like* everything else, meant to be exuberant and wild and *limited*" (McKibben 2005, p. 66, emphasis original). The dialogic God communicates with Job, and the theme of this particular communication is humanity's natural constraints. It is a covenantal, almost parental, communication, helping Job to understand how the world works and thus how to live less frustratedly in it. Even as we rely on our own observation and knowledge, humanity has certain sense receptors and specific mental capacities that give it access to some but not all knowledge of the universe. Most intuit this from the experience of living—as does Job. Indeed, Job intimates the idea of human limitation in Ch. 28:12–14 before God's elaboration in the whirlwind speech. Greenberg summarizes Ch. 28 this way: "Man knows how to ferret precious ores out of the earth; he conquers the most daunting natural obstacles in order to obtain treasure. But he does not have a map to the sources of wisdom... God alone, whose control of the elements of weather exemplifies his wide-ranging power, comprehends it" (M. Greenberg 1987, p. 294). Humanity perceives and knows limitedly.

The Jobian assertion of human limitation is grounded, among other places, in Exodus 33. Moses, traditionally seen as possessing more of God's wisdom than any human being, could nonetheless not see God's *kavod* (כְּבוֹדָה, Exod 33:18) or God's "face" (פָּנֵי, Exod 33:19). Even Moses had no direct access to God's essence or (anthropomorphically) "thought processes." Moses learned inductively, from God's "ways" (דְּרָכָה, Exod 33:13), the results of God's actions in the world (nature), and from God's "goodness" (טוֹבָה, Exod 33:19). Goodness again refers to the ways of creation/nature as God in Genesis declared creation to be "good." Even if one assumes a traditional reading of the Exodus text, where God directly gives to Moses either the Ten Commandments or the wisdom of the entire Torah, Moses must now study the compressed dicta and narratives, unravel their meaning, and communicate their lessons in ways understandable to ordinary people. Moses does this by observing God's "ways" and "goodness"—that is, how the world works as the outcome of God's creation. Come down from Sinai, Moses uses his observation and experience in full recognition of their limited powers. Both the capacity to learn about the world and one's limitations are the natural outcome of being human. In this sense, Exodus 33 is a compact form of the whirlwind message, conveyed to Job in covenantal relationship.

A lengthier and more explanatory discussion of (limited) human intellect is found in Moses Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed*. In 3.20, Maimonides writes, "the selfsame incapacity that prevents our intellects from apprehending His essence also prevents them from apprehending His knowledge of things as they are" (Maimonides 1963, p. 482). Humanity cannot have God's knowledge in general and in particular about good and evil, righteous-

ness and sin—the topic of the Book of Job. Persons, on Maimonides’s view, tend to judge events by the effects on themselves rather than on the effects in the cosmos. Maimonides writes, “Every ignoramus imagines that all that exists, exists with a view to his individual sake... And if something happens to him that is contrary to what he wishes, he makes the trenchant judgment that all that exists is an evil” (Maimonides 1963, pp. 441–42). The compendium of phenomena—“the effects in the cosmos”—is too vast and complex for humanity to grasp, so humanity’s judgements, bound to local and personal events, are often misguided.

This, Maimonides continues, is what Job learns in the whirlwind speech. The crux of the Job parable—and Maimonides insists it is a parable—is noetic, an explanation of divine knowledge that humanity may strive towards but never attain. “Good inclination is only found in man when his intellect is perfected” (Maimonides 1963, p. 489). This requires lifelong training in physics, metaphysics, and Torah and is only asymptotically achieved as one strives to attune to the Active Intellect (the lowest of the ten, downward spiraling divine spheres in Maimonides’s Aristotelian understanding of the cosmos, and the only one that humanity may near). Knowledge of the reasons for suffering may be among the unachievable. Maimonides discusses suffering as the inevitable decay of material creatures (illness, death) and as the result of human actions that cause hardship to the actors themselves and to others (Guide 3.12). But the *reason* why God created a universe where decay and harmful action can occur is unknowable. Seemingly unwarranted suffering may, on Maimonides’s view, have a pragmatic function as a model for acting righteously even under duress. Guide 3.24 states, “Know that the aim and meaning of all the trials mentioned in the Torah is to let people know what they ought to do or what they must believe” (Maimonides 1963, p. 498). Beyond this pragmatism, human knowledge of the reasons for suffering hits a natural wall.

To support his point, Maimonides reads together Job, the Adam and Eve narrative in Genesis 3, and the famous *pardes* (orchard) parable. As Josef Stern explains, Genesis 3 tells of Adam and Eve’s banishment from Eden for undue knowledge (eating from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge). In the *pardes* parable, only Rabbi Akiba leaves the “orchard” of knowledge alive while others are overwhelmed or stunned and collapse. Refracting these knowledge-narratives, Maimonides finds that Job and Rabbi Akiba survive because they understand the limits of human knowledge. Adam and Eve overreach, and the other “orchard” visitors seek knowledge beyond humanity’s ken. The “inner parabolic” import or deepest meaning of Maimonides’s analysis, Stern concludes, is that while humanity’s highest achievement is noetic, the truly wise also know the limits on knowledge imposed by humanity’s material, finite nature. The highest reaches of knowledge recognize the end of its reach, the lesson of the Jobian whirlwind (Stern 2013, pp. 183–85).

To this epistemological emphasis, Greenstein raises the objection that God in the whirlwind speech never expresses care for the creation/nature through which we are supposed to learn about the world or about limits on human learning. Nor is nature just or kind (Greenstein 2009, pp. 354–56). Greenstein lists the animals described in the whirlwind, which include ostriches, who lay their eggs where other animals can trample them, birds of prey who rip their (innocent) victims limb from limb, and the wild beasts, Leviathan and Behemoth (Job 40:15–32). In Job, these brutes are identified as God’s “first” creation in contrast, for example, to Prov 8:22, where humanity is created as “first.” The mayhem of the beasts rather than compassion and care gets top billing. What, Greenstein asks, does humanity learn from that—noetically or otherwise?

Yet perhaps this is the point of the Book of Job. God in the whirlwind does not explain the cosmos as hospitable—or as humanity would understand hospitality—or even as comprehensible. Rather, the opposite: in covenantal regard, God explains that the cos-



mos is understandable by humanity in limited ways, and humanity cannot fully grasp the meaning of what appears chaotic or brutal. In his reading of the Book of Job, Jon Levenson notes that hardship may not be punishment for wrongdoing—as Job correctly intuits. But humanity is also not in a position to fully grasp what the reasons for hardship are (Levenson 1972). Echoing Levenson and answering his own question, what does humanity learn from Job?, Greenstein writes that Job’s God is capable of good but also of evil “for his own reasons” (Greenstein 2009, p. 361). Indeed, the point of God’s whirlwind is that humanity cannot properly assess divine “good and evil” because God’s “own reasons” are precisely what we cannot comprehend.

### *Anthropocentrism, Hopefully Dislodged*

In addition to dethroning humanity’s epistemological hubris, frustrating and dangerous to humanity itself, the whirlwind speech takes aim at anthropocentrism more generally. This is a second theme of the whirlwind, important for humanity to learn and communicated by God in dialogic relationship. The rain falls, God explains to Job, in places without regard for humanity’s needs (Job 38:25–26). In this and other examples, McKibben writes, “God is describing a world without people, a world that existed long before people, and that seems to have its own independent meaning” (McKibben 2005, p. 27). As noted above, it is not humanity but the Leviathan and Behemoth that rank “first.” The onager’s dwelling is described as a “mishkan,” God’s dwelling-place (Job 39:6), which rather takes human temples down a peg.

In sweeping detail after detail, humanity’s ostensible dominion over creation (Gen 1:26, 28) is replaced by the feral grandeur of the animal kingdom. God listens when raven chicks cry for food (Job 38:41) and admires the high-flying eagle and its chicks that gulp blood (Job 39:30). Pressing the point, Gene Tucker notes that “the vision of the cosmos here,” “is even wider than that of the Priestly Writer in Gen 1, and the breadth and diversity of the landscape far beyond that of the Yahwist” (Tucker 1997, p. 14). Similarly, Barry Huff writes, “Job 39 describes the Deity’s delight in the freedom and wildness of these animals. YHWH loosens the onager’s bonds (Job 39:5) and emphasizes the futility of human attempts to control the aurochs (wild oxen) (Job 39:9–12) (Huff 2019, p. 250). Huff continues, the animals of the whirlwind mock even the fanfare and show-of-force of royal hunts:

Job 39 ridicules the royal hunt by depicting wild animals laughing at humans’ attempts to hunt, dominate, or domesticate them. Instead of an assault on animals, the divine speeches assault anthropocentrism—a human-centered perspective—by portraying humans as the laughingstock rather than the crown of creation. (Huff 2019, p. 249)

Echoing McKibben and Huff, William P. Brown writes, “God describes each one [creature] with such evocative detail that Job is afforded a point of view that lies utterly beyond himself, a perspective that is God’s, but one that the animals also share” (Brown 2010, p. 128).

Strategically, the whirlwind presents this perspective by using Job’s own words, making the point unavoidable. Job had accused God of hunting him “like a lion” (Job 10:16), and the whirlwind upends this accusation by admiring the very lion Job had maligned (Job 38:39). Whereas Job had moaned that his miserable condition made him “a companion to ostriches” (Job 30:29), the whirlwind notes that “The wing of the ostrich beats joyously” (Job 39:13).

Anthropocentrism, out of step with God’s universe, is put in its place by a God whose relationship with Job brings God to explain this lesson. Greenberg writes, “The God of Job celebrates each act and product of his creation for itself, an independent value attesting his

power and grace. Job, representing mankind, stands outside the picture, displaced from its center to a remote periphery” (M. Greenberg 1987, p. 298). At the periphery, Job understands that he has no perch from which to assess God’s creation. God rhetorically asks how Job could manage all the minute-by-minute occurrences of the cosmos and thus be in a position to grasp and judge God’s decisions. “Would you impugn My justice? Would you condemn Me that you may be right?” (Job 40:8) As managing the cosmos is clearly beyond humanity’s ken, Job understands—from his *own grasp* of the whirlwind examples—that God’s actions are beyond his grasp. God is not only teaching Job the content of God’s communication; God is teaching Job how to learn.

André Lacocque makes the interesting argument that God’s purpose in the whirlwind is to reveal *God’s* limits—not humanity’s. The “astonishing panoply of creatures” reveals not the world’s complexity but its “unfinished” and “not-good” status. God is not the “pantocrator of religious ideology,” Lacocque writes (Lacocque 2007, pp. 87, 90, 93), but in battle with dark forces as God suffers with humanity in a world God does not control. “God’s struggle, patching, as it were, multiple leaks lest the vessel sink altogether” (Lacocque 2007, p. 90). On Lacocque’s view, God in covenant reveals this dire situation to Job to persuade Job to join God in the battle against evil. It’s God and Job together against the aggression and senselessness of animals of prey, the Behemoth and Leviathan, the neglectful ostrich, and the rain that falls where humanity cannot use it. On this view, humanity, granted free will, may act against God’s vision, but worse, the natural world itself is brimming with violence and stupidity beyond the control of its Creator.

Much as I appreciate Lacocque’s effort to support the God-Job covenant in cooperation against evil, nowhere in the whirlwind speech are animals and natural forces described as unfinished or evil. They live and die just as they are meant to. Contra Lacocque, Robert Alter emphasizes God’s “ability to impose order” as a key point of the whirlwind speech (Alter 1985, p. 90). Even the Adversary must ask God’s permission to test Job. God is in control and has the final word, even if humanity can never fully grasp it. Indeed, by coding the whirlwind’s descriptions of nature as dangerous or stupid because they seem so to humanity, Lacocque partakes of the anthropocentrism that the Book of Job seeks to deflate.

## 5. Elihu’s Errors: God’s Last Affirmation of the Covenant with Job

Elihu’s first error comes to this: the grandeur of the universe is self-evident to him, but dogmatism blinds Elihu to the de-anthropocentric point. Even as he gazes at the wide cosmic canvas, Elihu notices only those aspects of God’s creation that affect human living (Job 36:24–33). The reality that much of the cosmos neither pertains to nor is perceptible by humanity goes unnoticed. In Ch 37:6–7, he declares:

כִּי לְשִׁלֵּג יֹאמַר הָאֱלֹהִים מִטֶּר וְגֶשֶׁם מִטְרוֹת עָזוּ:  
בְּגִזְלֵי-קֶלֶאֱתָם יִהְיֶה לָעֵת קֶלֶאֱתָשִׁי מִעֲשָׂהוּ:

“He [God] commands the snow, ‘Fall to the ground!’ And the downpour of rain,  
His mighty downpour of rain, Is as a sign on every man’s hand, That all men  
may know His doings.”

Elihu fails to see that rain and snow fall where people do not reside—as “signs” or otherwise—but as part of a divine creation humanity does not fully grasp, as the whirlwind explains.

In his second error, Elihu also misses covenant. Just as he interpreted God’s appearance in dreams not as covenantal communication but as God’s unidirectional chastening, Elihu interprets the cosmos’s grandeur as the unidirectional, punitive nature of a retribu-

tive God (Job 35:4–9; Ch. 36). God acts controllingly and nastily upon the world. Ch. 37:12 describes this frightening, indifferent deity:

הוּא מְסֻבּוֹת | מִתְסַבֵּר בְּתַבּוּלָתוֹ לַפְעֻלָּם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יִצְלָם | עַל־פְּנֵי תִבְלַת אֶרֶץ:

“He [God] keeps turning events by His stratagems, That they might accomplish all that He commands them/Throughout the inhabited earth.”

The term *תַּבּוּלָּה*, meaning God’s stratagems, schemes, or manipulations is a harsh word. The notion that God employs them is an ugly view of God and stands in contrast to Job’s dialogic divine. Ch. 37:19–20 closes with Elihu’s powerful but distant, uncaring deity:

הוֹדִיעֵנוּ מִה־נֶּאֱמַר לָךְ לֹא־נִעְרָד מִפְּנֵי־חֹשֶׁךְ: הֲיִסְפַּר־לָךְ כִּי אֶבְדָּר אִם־אֶמַּר אִישׁ כִּי יִבְלָע:

“Inform us, then, what we may say to Him [God]; We cannot argue because [we are in] darkness. Is anything conveyed to Him when I speak? Can a man say anything when he is confused?”

Elihu does not know what to say to God or whether God listens. These are the worries of a man who doubts whether he is in relationship with God or who perhaps does not see the divine-human connection as reciprocal or relational to begin with. Elihu, with his retributive God, feels himself to be in darkness, not in covenant.

In the very first sentences of the next chapter, God rejects Elihu’s complaint, chastening Elihu for replacing his experience of Job’s righteousness with the safety of traditional utterings about retributive justice (Greenstein 2004, Kindle Location 1494). Elihu and friends repeat the mistake even when Job reminds them of their own memory and experience of Job’s righteousness. Unlike Job, they do not feel they are in a covenantal relationship where each party’s knowledge is to be taken into account. They opt for conformity to tradition, not living relationship. God asks Job: *מִי־הוּא וּמִהֲשִׁיר עֵצָה בְּמַלְיִין בְּלִי־דַעַת*, “Who is that who darkens counsel, speaking without knowledge?” (Job 38:2). The query comes at the beginning of God’s response to Job, giving pride of place to God’s rebuke of Elihu. But God is also answering Elihu’s question: “Is anything conveyed to Him [God] when I speak?” The answer is the “yes” of dialogue and relationship—against Elihu’s doubt and steadfast clinging to an uncovenantal God.

As we come to the end of the Book of Job, Job’s request to talk with God is heard, and God responds, speaking at length with Job. Elihu’s retributive formulae are also conveyed to God, who responds with the same lack of relationship that Elihu brought to the table. In 42:7, Job’s three other friends get their comeuppance as well:

וַיְהִי אֲחֵר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶת־הַסְּדָבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶל־אֱלִיָּאִיב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אֱלִיפָז הַתִּימָנִי חֲרָה אַפִּי בָּךְ וּבִשְׁנֵי רֵעֶיךָ כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדֵי אֱלֹהִים: {ס}

“After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘I am incensed at you and your two friends, for you have not spoken the truth about Me as did My servant Job.’”

God here reminds Job’s friends that covenant is living and reciprocal, and if one doesn’t do one’s part, if one opts for conformist niceties, one won’t have it.

Job seemingly retreats in Ch. 40:3–5, saying that he’s too insignificant to continue the conversation with God—an understandable impulse by someone grappling with anthropocentric deflation. Yet God persists in talking to Job, in relationship and in helping Job understand the world in which he lives.

## 6. Concluding Thoughts

Moshe Greenberg holds that the author of the Book of Job “rejects the covenant relation between God and man with its sanctions of distributive justice” (M. Greenberg 1987, 299). The “sanction” reading is certainly one traditional look at covenant. But it might

be the contractual *quid pro quo* that Job's author rejects. On this view, covenant—the dialogic commitment that undergirds Job's many-chaptered call for a talk with God and God's response—endures through anthropocentric deflation and epistemological limits. Humanity, though limited in understanding and situated in nature, nonetheless is in dialogic commitment with God. Said another way, even though humanity is but a natural, created being and limited, it is in covenant with God. God's praise of Job, who insists on covenant, and reprimand of his friends suggests that humanity, even with constraints, is also responsible for maintaining it.<sup>8</sup>

At the end of the book, Job understands and accepts both covenant and human limits. It is with this understanding that his relationship with God is at its strongest and most sophisticated. To accept humanity's limits is not to embrace the despair of Job's wife, the harsh and unrealistic retributive God, the contradiction of a “rent” God, or the non-interventionist, suffering-dispensing distributive God. It is to move beyond self-absorption and toward some grasp of the cosmic range. Job learns this not from his time of suffering but from the whirlwind, from his relationship and exchange with God. Had Job only suffered and not been brought into dialogue with God, there would be only puzzlement and pain, with little learned by Job or readers of the book.

The idea that the cosmos is endlessly multifaceted and ungraspable may not relieve the sufferer or those pondering suffering's theodical implications. In that, it is not a “solution” to the issues raised by the Buber-Kepnes reading of Job, which spurred this discussion. But it might go some way toward setting aside the problem of an irrational, malicious, or non-existent God or one who accedes to nasty Adversaries. One may perhaps move beyond Hume to the uncomfortable, unsatisfying, frustrating truth of cosmic complexity and humanity's constraints. It is, in any case, the suggestion of this article that such is a possible, alternate reading of the Book of Job.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** This article does not require ethical board approval. None of the circumstances requiring such approval were involved.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** No clinical trials or data collection pertain to this article.

**Acknowledgments:** I would like to thank Adriane Leveen and Jason Kalman for their insight and help in my thinking through the issues discussed in this article. Thanks also to the participants in their “Job” seminars, whose comments and questions did much to further my thinking.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> All translations from the Hebrew into English are from [Tanach: The Holy Scriptures](#) (1985).
- <sup>2</sup> This position on suffering is discussed as well by Saadia in his *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, 5.3.
- <sup>3</sup> Though Scott Hahn's literature review found no studies on covenant in Wisdom literature between 1994–2002, two related and fine studies are found in, [Schultz](#) (1997, pp. 271–306) and [Hahn](#) (2009, pp. 2–22).
- <sup>4</sup> For a more detailed discussion of covenantal reciprocity, see [Pally](#) (2016, part II, chap. 6).
- <sup>5</sup> Rogland builds on [Cross](#) (1998, pp. 3–21).
- <sup>6</sup> Enemies are protected by “just war” criteria (Ps 7:4–5) and, importantly, by the requirement that peace be sought prior to any aggression (Deut 20:10). Captives must be properly cared for (2 Kgs 6:22–23); enemy nations may not be oppressed even during war (2 Chron 28:8–15), and truces and peace agreements must be honored even if the enemy breaches them (Josh 9:18). Requirements to aid the stranger were extensive (Exod 22:21; Lev 19:34; Lev 23:22). Mandates to aid the domestic needy were so substantial that the emperor Julian remarked: “it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg ... all men see that our people lack aid from us” ([Stern](#) 1980, pp. 549–50, n. 482). A sampling of biblical poor laws includes: shmitah and Jubilee debt cancellation (Lev 25:4–6, 8–13; Deut 15:1–2); distribution of food to the poor (Deut 24:19–22); tithing for all others (Deut 14:22);



prohibitions against the return of runaway servants (Deut 23:15–16); and manumission of servants after six years of work, when they must be not only freed but outfitted with livestock, grain, and wine (Exod 21:2; Deut 15:12–14).

<sup>7</sup> For an alternate view, wherein God evades rather than answers Job’s cry, see, von Rad (1972); Burrell (2008, chaps. 7, 8), where Burrell holds that God evades Job to deepen, not minimize, the relationship.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the implications of covenantality for individual conduct and societal norms and institutions, see Pally (2016).

## References

- Alter, Robert. 1985. *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bellah, Robert. 2011. *Religion in Human Evolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Braiterman, Zachary. 1998. *(God) After Auschwitz*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brown, William P. 2010. *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Buber, Martin. 1951. The Dialogue Between Heaven and Earth. In *On Judaism*. Edited by Nahum Glatzer. New York: Schocken, pp. 214–25.
- Buber, Martin. 2000. *Job*. In *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies by Martin Buber*. Edited by Nahum Glatzer. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, pp. 188–98.
- Burrell, David. 2008. *Deconstructing Theodicy: Why Job has Nothing to Say to the Puzzle of Suffering*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press.
- Clines, David J. A. 1989. *Job 1–20*. WBC 17. Dallas: Word.
- Cross, Frank Moore. 1998. *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Fox, Michael V. 1981. Job 38 and God’s Rhetoric. *Semeia* 19: 53–61.
- Fretheim, Terence. 2005. *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Geller, Stephen. 2000. The God of the Covenant. In *One God or Many? Concepts of Divinity in the Ancient World*. Edited by Barbara N. Porter. Maine: Casco Bay Assyriological Institute, pp. 273–319.
- Goodman, Lenn E. 1991. *On Justice: An Essay in Jewish Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Greenberg, Irving. 1977. Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust. In *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* Edited by Eva Fleischner. New York: KTAV Publishing, pp. 7–55.
- Greenberg, Moshe. 1987. *Job*. In *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. Edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode. Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, pp. 283–304.
- Greenstein, Edward. 2004. *Job*. In *The Jewish Study Bible*. Edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 1437–87.
- Greenstein, Edward. 2009. The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job. In *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment in Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay*. Edited by Nili Sacher Fox, David A. Glatt-Gilad and Michael J. Williams. University Park: Penn State University Press, pp. 333–62.
- Hahn, Scott. 2009. *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ham, T. C. 2013. The Gentle Voice of God in Job 38. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132: 527–41. [PubMed]
- Hartley, John. 1988. *The Book of Job*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Hayes, Christine. 2012. *Introduction to the Bible*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hazon, Yoram. 2012. *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heschel, Abraham Joshua. 2001. *The Prophets*. New York: Harper Perennial Classics.
- Huff, Barry R. 2019. From Societal Scorn to Divine Delight: Job’s Transformative Portrayal of Wild Animals. *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 73: 248–58. [CrossRef]
- Hume, David. 1990. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Edited by Martin Bell. New York: Penguin.
- Kepnes, Steven. 2002. Rereading Job as Textual Theodicy. In *Suffering Religion*. Edited by Robert Gibbs and Elliot R. Wolfson. London: Routledge, pp. 36–55.
- Kochen, Madeline. 2008. ‘It Was Not for Naught That They Called It *Hekdesh*’: Divine Ownership and the Medieval Charitable Foundation. In *The Bar-Ilan Conference Volume*. Edited by Joseph Fleishman. Jewish Law Association Studies. Liverpool: Jewish Law Association, vol. 18, pp. 131–42.
- Kwon, Jiseong James. 2018. Divergence of the Book of Job from Deuteronomical/Priestly Torah: Intertextual Reading between Job and Torah. *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 32: 49–71. [CrossRef]
- Lacocque, André. 2007. The Destruction of Job’s Fundamentalism. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126: 83–97. [CrossRef]
- Lee, Jean. 2010. The Two Pillars Paradigm: Covenant as a Relational Concept in Response to the Contract-Based Economic Market. Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK.
- Levenson, Jon. 1972. *The Book of Job in Its Time and in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Levinas, Emanuel. 1994a. *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*. Translated by Gary D. Mole. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Levinas, Emanuel. 1994b. *In the Time of the Nations*. Translated by Michael B. Smith. London: Athlone Press.

- Maimonides, Moses. 1963. *Guide to the Perplexed*. Translated by Shlomo Pines. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McKibben, Bill. 2005. *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation*. New York: Cowley Publications/Rowman & Littlefield.
- Mount, Eric, Jr. 1991. *Covenant, Community and the Common Good: An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press.
- Pally, Marcia. 2016. *Commonwealth and Covenant: Economics, Politics, and Theologies of Relationality*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1988. The Reaffirmation of the Tragic. In *The Book of Job*. Edited by Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, pp. 7–20.
- Rogland, Max. 2009. The Covenant in the Book of Job. *Criswell Theological Review* 7: 49–62.
- Rubenstein, Richard. 1966. *After Auschwitz*. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill.
- Schultz, Richard L. 1997. Unity or Diversity in Wisdom Theology? A Canonical and Covenantal Perspective. *Tyndale Bulletin* 48: 271–306. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Stern, Josef. 2013. *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Stern, Menahem. 1980. *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism: From Tacitus to Simplicius*. Jerusalem: Academy of Sciences and Humanities.
- Tanach: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation*. 1985. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
- Terrien, Samuel L. 1971. The Yahweh Speeches and Job's Responses. *Review & Expositor* 68: 498–509.
- Tham, Joseph. 2013. Communicating with Sufferers: Lessons from the Book of Job. *Christian Bioethics* 19: 82–99. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Ticciati, Susannah. 2005. Does Job Fear God for Naught? *Modern Theology* 21: 353–66. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Tucker, Gene. 1997. Rain on a Land Where No One Lives: The Hebrew Bible on the Environment. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116: 3–17. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Von Rad, Gerhard. 1972. *Wisdom in Israel*. Translated by James D. Marton. London: SCM.
- Walzer, Michael. 1985. *Exodus and Revolution*. New York: Basic Books.
- Wiesel, Eli. 1989. An Exchange. In *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications*. Edited by John Roth and Michael Berenbaum. New York: Paragon House, pp. 349–69.
- Wilson, Lindsay. 2015. *Job*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.