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Beware of Behemoth and Leviatan

Miej się na baczności przed Behemotem i Lewiatanem

Key words: the Book of Job; the speeches of Jahwe; Behemoth; Leviathan; suffering.

Słowa kluczowe: Księga Hioba; mowy Jahwe; Behemot; Lewiatan; cierpienie.

Abstract. The book of Job is unique in that it is the only Old Testament book that is wholly dedicated to the problem of suffering – using Job’s suffering as a paradigm. In this respect, there are five viewpoints about suffering (those of Job, his wife, and his three friends) in the prose narrative (1:1–2:13; 42:7–17), and six viewpoints (those of Job, his three friends, Elihu, and God) in the poetic debate (3:1–42:6). Insofar as God’s response is concerned, it is often argued that God has no divine solution to the problem of (Job’s) suffering and has therefore resorted to divine intimation. This essay argues that God does indeed offer a divine perspective of the problem of suffering, and it is to be found in God’s speech about Behemoth and Leviathan (40:15–41:34) – creatures with monstrous power, capable of creating great havoc, which only God can control. Insofar as they are creatures created by God, they are not dangerous or evil in themselves. Bad experiences only occur when humans fail to ignore their potential for evil, thinking that they can fiddle with them and get away scot-free. Suffering, as a result of human disregard, is almost certain, and it has nothing to do with God.

Streszczenie. Księga Hioba jest wyjątkową księgą Starego Testamentu, która w całości jest poświęcona cierpieniu – przy czym cierpienie Hioba jest tu paradygmatem. W Prologu i w Epilogu można dostrzec kilka różnych punktów widzenia odnośnie do cierpienia. Gdy chodzi o Boga, to wielu komentatorów uważa, że nie daje On żadnego rozwiązania dla problemu cierpienia (Hioba). Pang przekonuje, że w tekście zostaje ukazana Boża perspektywa odnośnie do tego zagadnienia. Jego zdaniem można ją wyczytać we fragmencie o Behemocie i Lewiatanie (40,15–41,34). Artykuł skupia się na tym właśnie fragmencie, eksponując inny – Boży – sposób podejścia do kwestii cierpienia.

*I believe in You, God of Israel, even
though You have done everything to
stop me from believing in You ... I
bow my head before Your greatness,
but will not kiss the lash with which
You strike me.*

– Yossel Rakover¹

1. Introduction

That one does not normally suffer without displaying any emotion is clear from this honest appeal to God by Yossel Rakover. That the problem of suffering and the quest for a solution is a preoccupation in the Bible is also clear from the recurring focus on suffering in the Old and New Testaments.² In this regard, the book of Job is unique; it is wholly dedicated to the problem of suffering and the quest for solutions to a problem that has compelled Job to curse the day of his birth (3:1–26).

The problem of suffering in Job emerges out of a quarrel between God and Satan about the nature of Job's piety, *viz.* whether it is “for nothing” עִוָּה (1:9) or whether it is simply a response to the material blessings, that is blessings of tangible value, that God has bestowed on Job (1:10).³ Satan proposes a simple but effective test, based on the notion that seeing is believing, to resolve the debate—withdraw all material blessings from Job and the nature of Job's piety will become obvious; if Job curses God (1:11), then Job's piety is not “for nothing.” Otherwise, he is the kind of man God says he is, “blameless, upright and a fearer of God, one who shuns evil” (1:8). God agrees to this manner of testing Job, and Satan begins the systematic process of taking away all of Job's livestock and children (1:13–19). When the test fails to yield the result that Satan had expected (1:20–21), Satan finally takes away Job's good health by inflicting him with deadly bodily sores (2:1–7). Yet, Job persists in his piety towards God; he ignores his wife's suggestion to him to curse God for the apparent injustice (1:9–10).

¹ D.J. Harrington, *Why Do We Suffer?: A Scriptural Approach to the Human Condition*, Sheed & Ward, Wisconsin, 2000, p. 1.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 1–146.

³ Although different divine names are used in the book of Job (1:1, 6; 3:3; 5:8), “God” will be used throughout this article. Where English translations appear, they will use the divine name according to the Hebrew text.

When God's quarrel with Satan appears settled in that the test has proved that Job's piety is indeed "for nothing," Job's three friends appear on the scene with a final test for Job.⁴ Eliphaz argues that the withdrawal of God's material blessings and the suffering he experiences is the consequence of sin he has committed (4:7):

Think now, what innocent man ever perished?
Where have the upright been destroyed?

Bildad (8:3-7; 11-13) and Zophar (11:4-6, 13-17) use the same rhetoric to force Job to confess to sinful conduct. Job, however, maintains his innocence and begins to question his piety towards God in view of the friends' proposal that the way God manages the affairs of the world is based on a system of punishment for sin. He, however, does not curse God as such.⁵ Nonetheless, he demands that God states the exact nature of his sin (13:22-23) since it is for that reason that he is currently suffering, at least according to the friends' rhetoric. In the prose epilogue, God, however, rules that the three friends have not spoken that which is true of God, unlike Job, and after which God restores to Job more than his original allotment of material blessings (42:7-17).

Although the book of Job can be read as a coherent story that revolves around the nature of Job's piety and suffering, as the foregoing indicates, the fact that many textual, narrative, and thematic inconsistencies and problems are apparent suggest that it is not a literary work by a single author.⁶

⁴ The idea of a test is supported by the use of the Hebrew word *נסה* in Eliphaz's opening speech in Job 4:1. According to *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, the piel verb *נסה* means, "to put someone to the test." Many English bibles (e.g. NRSV, JPS Tanakh, NIV) translate *נסה* as "ventures." Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (39 occurrences), *נסה* is used to refer to a test (e.g. Gen 22:1; Exod 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deut 6:16; 8:12; Judg 2:22; 3:1; 6:39; 1 Kgs 10:1; Isa 7:12)

⁵ So, D.J.A. Clines *Job 1-20*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1989, p. 78.

⁶ For problem involving obscure Hebrew words and phrases, see N.C. Habel, *The Book of Job*, SCM, London, 1985, p. 22; see also R. Gordis, *The Book of Job and Man: A Study of Job*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1965, pp. 157-168; for difficulties involving language and style, name of God, the appearance and disappearance of Satan, the status of Job's sons and servants, Job's personality, the portrayal of God, and the book's subject matter, see Y. Hoffman, "The Relation Between the Prologue and the Speech-Cycles in Job: A Reconsideration," *Vetus Testamentum* vol. 31, 1981, pp. 160-170; for the juxtaposition of the divine name from the perspective of the development in Israelite religion, see M.S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 135-148.

Clines, however, has argued that the differences between the prose narrative (1:1–2:13; 42:7–17) and poetic debate (3:1–42:6) can be accounted for on literary grounds. He considers it possible that the author of the prose narrative is also the poet of the debate for „it is hard to believe that any prose tale about Job could have moved directly from Job’s patient acceptance of his suffering (2:10) to Yahweh’s restoration of his fortunes (42:10) without some intervening events.”⁷ He, however, does not deny that the *story* of Job may be older than the *book*.⁸ Clines’ analysis represents one of three ways that scholars have interpreted the relationship between the prose narrative and the poetic debate. The other two ways of interpreting the relationship from the perspective of the historical development of the book, according to Hoffman, are: “the poetic speeches were composed independently, before the prose story and the latter was shaped later to fit the former,” and “the prose and poetry were composed independently of each other and put together by an editor at a later stage.”⁹ Based on the last interpretation, the content of the book of Job could well belong to three different origins. However, some scholars have also argued that Elihu’s speech is secondary material, and if their analysis is correct, then the present form of the book of Job actually derives from four different origins.¹⁰

The question that arises out of the preceding broad views about authorship, in relation to the overarching theme of the book of Job, *viz.* the problem of suffering, is this: are there as many views concerning the problem of suffering as there are authors? That appears to be not the case. The prologue alone offers five responses to the problem of suffering—those of Job (1:20–21; 2:10), his wife (2:9), and his three friends (2:11–13), whose views are basically consistent. In the poetic debate, there are as many responses as protagonists—those of Job, his three friends, Elihu, and God. As for the epilogue itself, there is no response to the problem of suffering as such; there is only a verdict about the rightness of Job’s speech in comparison to his friends’ (42:7–8). Returning to God’s response in the poetic debate, one must ask if God has actually offered a response since God has not directly responded to Job’s request for an an-

⁷ Clines, p. lviii; see also, D.J.A. Clines, *On the Poetic Achievement of the Book of Job*, retrieved 9 June 2009, <<http://www.shef.ac.uk/bibs/DJACcurrres/Articles.html>>.

⁸ Italics his. Clines, *Job 1–20*, p. lviii.

⁹ Hoffman, *The Relation Between the Prologue and the Speech-Cycles in Job: A Reconsideration*, p. 161.

¹⁰ J.B. Curtis, ‘On Job’s Response to Yahweh’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* vol. 98, 1979, pp. 497–511; A.E. Steinmann, ‘The Structure and Message of the Book of Job’, *Vetus Testamentum* vol. 46, 1996, pp. 85–100; M.J. Lynch, ‘Bursting at the Seams: Phonetic Rhetoric in the Speeches of Elihu’, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* vol. 30, 2006, pp. 345–364; C.L. Seow, ‘Elihu’s Revelation’, *Theology Today* vol. 68, 2012, pp. 253–271.

swer to his suffering (13:22–24). All God seems to have done, as many scholars agree, is to overwhelm Job with God's majesty and sovereign power over creation.¹¹ In this respect, this article will attempt to show that God does indeed offer a divine perspective of the problem of human suffering. This divine perspective, it argues, is to be found in God's speech about Behemoth and Leviathan (40:15–41:34) – creatures with monstrous power, capable of creating great havoc, which only God can control. God's response is only one of many viewpoints on the problem of suffering; a review of the viewpoints of the other protagonists in Job will help to frame the divine perspective.

2. Job's viewpoint in the prose prologue

Unlike the reader, Job is not given the privilege of witnessing the heavenly quarrel between God and Satan (1:6–12; 2:1–6) and their agreement about the test to be used to resolve the quarrel. Job is thus unaware of his role as a victim, as the effect of that test unfolds on earth. Job's unawareness of the heavenly quarrel as the antecedent to the loss of his property, children, and finally of his good health is a crucial element in the story. Insofar as Job is not privy to God's approval of Satan's test, he can be commended for his sanguine responses (1:20–22; 2:9–10) since it demonstrates his unwavering piety towards God. Job's responses bear testimony to his firm belief in a God who is a fair administrator of divine favours (1:21; 2:10) on earth. His response after the first instalment of Satan's test (1:13–19) testifies to this belief:

Naked I came forth from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; Yahweh has given, and Yahweh has taken away; blessed be Yahweh (1:21).

The thinking that he is no worse off now than he was before affirms his belief, which in turn shapes his response after Satan's second and final test (2:1–7):

Shall we receive the good from Yahweh, and not receive the bad (2:10b)?

¹¹ N.C. Habel, *The Book of Job*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, pp.199–201; F.I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, Inter-Varsity Press, London, 1976, pp. 268–269; J.G. Williams, 'The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job' in: L.G. Perdue, & W.C. Gilpin (eds.), Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1992, p. 218; R.E. Murphy, *The Book of Job: A Short Reading*, Paulist Press, New York, 1999, p. 89; J. Gray, *The Book of Job*, ed. DJA Clines, Sheffield Phoenix, Sheffield, 2010, p. 451; J.P. Fokkelman, *The Book of Job in Form: A Literary Translation with Commentary*, Brill, Leiden, 2012, pp. 301–311.

In both instances, Job does not see a problem in the suffering that has resulted from the withdrawal of the material blessings that God had bestowed upon him, *viz.* his large inventory of livestock, his children, and his good health. Job's responses, on both occasions (1:21; 2:10b), focus on Yahweh's giving and taking away; they do not dwell on the topic of sin. Basically, Job's view on both occasions has been coloured by his belief that God is a fair administrator; he, therefore, does not experience any apprehension throughout the ordeal.

3. Wife's viewpoint in the prose prologue

The rhetorical question *דדע קיזחמ דתמתב* that Job's wife poses to him and her subsequent suggestion to him to *ררב מיהלא תמו* points to Job's conviction about his own blamelessness or integrity (2:9).¹² They also point to her inner thoughts about Job's suffering. First, they reflect her belief in a retributive system of punishment for sin. Second, her belief naturally compels her to think about Job's morality and the possibility of a connection between some prior (sinful) behaviours of his and the withdrawal of God's blessings and the suffering that ensues. Since she cannot possibly know everything about her husband's dealings with others, she can only direct her thought to Job: „Do you persist in your integrity” (2:9a). Job ought to know, she reckons. Her suggestion to Job to „curse God and die” (2:9b) also gives the impression that she had thought about the possibility that God might have erred in punishing her husband by killing all his livestock and children (1:13–19) and inflicting him with deadly bodily sores (2:7).

Moreover, her suggestion to Job to „curse God” mirrors Satan's conviction (1:11; 2:5) that Job will curse God when he is dispossessed of his material blessings.¹³ There, the focus is also the divine withdrawal of Job's material blessings, not sin. Job's final response to his wife in 2:10a („Should we accept only the good from God and not the evil?”) clearly seeks to steer her thinking away from the topic of sin (or the possibility that God has erred); he wishes her to accept the idea that God has the prerogative to dispense both the good and bad.

¹² One explanation for the wife's blasphemous suggestion is this: “If the distraught woman could no longer endure the sight of her patient, tormented husband, and for love's sake would rather death end his misery, then her desperate remedy may be pardoned.” *Ibidem*, p. 93 n.1.

¹³ On the role of Job's wife as Satan unwitting ally or *diaboli adjutrix*, see Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 96; on a positive reading of the role of Job's wife as the devil's advocate, see Patton, C.L., & J.W. Watts, *The Whirlwind: Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse*, T&T Clark, New York, 2002, p. 136.

4. Friends' viewpoint in the prose prologue

After Satan's failure to prove that Job's piety towards God is not "for nothing" Job's three friends appear on the scene, as if in corroboration with Satan, to mete out a final test on Job, *viz.* by accusing him of having committed grave injustice against the poor, the hungry, the widows and the orphans, and for which he is now punished by God:¹⁴

You must have been taking pledges from your kinfolk without cause,
stripping them naked of their clothing.
You must have even been refusing water to the weary,
denying bread to the hungry,
as if the land belonged to the powerful,
as if only the privileged should occupy it.
You must have sent widows away empty,
you must have let the strengths of orphans be crushed (22:6–9).¹⁵

Eliphaz's accusation, which contains specific details of Job's wrongdoings, remains strictly an accusation, a claim against Job for having done terrible things to those in vulnerable positions. However, it is not possible for the friends, who do not live in the same area as Job does (2:11) and are therefore more ignorant than Job's wife of his daily activities, to know with certainty that Job has indeed committed all those terrible things.¹⁶

Although the above accusation by Eliphaz appears only in the poetic section of the book, the portrayal of the ritual they enact when „they saw him from afar" (2:12) already reflects the friends' assessment that Job has sinned and has suffered as a consequence of it. The argument for this is to be found in 2:12–13. "When the friends lift their eyes and spot a figure from afar (on the ash heap) it does not mean that they fail to recognize the person as Job (2:12a) but that they do not acknowledge or regard him as they used to do in view of all this evil that has come upon him."¹⁷ The friends' actions of weeping, tearing of robes, tossing of dust over their heads, and sitting on the ground (2:12b–13a)

¹⁴ So, "In the dialogue section Job's blamelessness and integrity are really put to the test". K.J. Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1991, p. 204.

¹⁵ Clines, *Job 1–20*, p. 538.

¹⁶ For discussion on the place of origin of Job's three friends, see *ibidem*, pp. 57–59.

¹⁷ L. Pang, *The Book of Job: Navigating Between the Two Jobs from the Perspective of Ritual*, 2010, retrieved 4 January 2012, <<http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses/>>.

are actions associated with the ritual of mourning for the dead.¹⁸ “The ritual has Job as its object of mourning; collectively, the mourning rites signify Job as ‘dead.’”¹⁹ His condition – forsaken by God and stricken with deadly bodily sores, they believe – is the consequence of sin he has committed.²⁰ The withdrawal of divine blessings and the suffering that ensues is God’s just recompense for him. Their belief in a retributive system of punishment for sin has shaped the way they look at Job’s suffering; they interpret all that they see through the filter of their belief. Through what appears to be very close to circular logic, the friends, in the poetic debate, find in Job’s suffering the irrefutable proof that God has punished him for the sin he has committed (4:1–21; 18:1–21).

5. Friends’ viewpoint in the poetic debate

Whereas Satan has failed in both attempts to prove that Job’s piety is not “for nothing” (1:6–22; 2:1–10) and to get Job to curse God, Job’s friends have managed to provoke him into casting God as a „cosmic bully”:²¹

For the arrows of the Almighty are in me,
My spirit drinks their poison,
The terrors of God are arrayed against me (6:4).

If I summoned him and he answered,
I do not believe he would listen to my voice.
For he crushes me with a tempest,
and multiples my wounds for nothing (6:16–17).

Remove your hand from me,
And do not let the dread of you frighten me (13:21).

The friends maintain that his suffering has been divinely ordained for sins he has committed against his fellow human beings (22:6–9) because God punishes those who are wicked or are not upright (4:1–21; 18:1–21; 22:6–9). Bildad reinforces this argument from the perspective of the death of Job’s children (8:4):

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 63.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 62.

²¹ J.A. Wharton, *Job*, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, 1999, p. 157.

If your sons sinned against him,
He delivered them into the grip of their transgression.²²

Concerning Bildad's logic in his argument, Childs writes:

Bildad's argument proceeds from the result to the cause: if there is premature death, there must have been prior sin. So wedded is he to the sufficiency of the doctrine of retribution as an explanation for all human fortune or misfortune that he even states the result in terms of the cause. He does not say, „Your children have died,” but „[God] has abandoned them to the power of their own guilt.” If that is the result, the cause is already obvious: they „have sinned against him.” He does not say, „If your children have died, it can only be because they have sinned against God,” but the other way around.²³

Bildad also seeks recourse in the wisdom of “bygone generations” (8:8–10) in asserting the existence of a system of retributive punishment for sin. This doctrine of retribution that Bildad firmly believes as truth has also coloured Eliphaz's assessment of the trauma that has befallen Job (3:1–26), viz. that his suffering is the consequence of the sin he has sinned (4:12–21; 15:17–35). Although there is an implicit awareness of the demise of Job's children (8:2) and the bodily sores that Job has been inflicted with (18:13), the poetic debate does not focus on whether Job's piety towards God is “for nothing” and/or whether Job will curse God upon the withdrawal of Job's material blessings. The overarching concern of the poetic debate centres on the topic of the relationship between sin and punishment. As far as the friends are concerned, there is no doubt in their mind that Job has sinned and, therefore, has been punished by God.

6. Job's viewpoint in the poetic debate

In 1:11 and 2:5, Satan predicts that Job will curse (ברך) God, and in 2:9, Job is urged by his wife to curse (ברך) God, but on both occasions, Job maintains his unwavering reverence for God. Now, at the start of the poetic debate (3:1), Job abruptly „cursed [קלל] the day of his birth.” He expresses a deep desire

²² “In v 4, there is no question but that Job's sons and daughters are dead, so the ‘if’ introduces a reason rather than a hypothesis. But Bildad does not bluntly say, ‘Your children sinned against him’; by casting his sentence in hypothetical form he strives for Jobs [sic] renewed assent to the principle of retribution.” Clines, *Job 1–20*, pp. 202–203.

²³ Ibidem, p. 203.

for his death to have occurred at conception (3:3–5) or at the point of birth (3:11–12). Although he does not actually curse God, he has, however, „set himself against God.”²⁴ In his later speeches, he even accuses God of behaving like a „cosmic bully” (6:4, 16–17; 13:21) and of mismanaging the affairs of the world by not punishing the wicked (21:1–34; 24:1–25). This portrayal of Job is at odds with the Job of the prologue who utters no word of displeasure despite experiencing great suffering. In the prologue, the withdrawal of material blessings is met with his sanguine responses (1:20–22; 2:9–10); in the poetic debate, the friends’ accusation that his suffering is divine retribution for his wickedness (e.g. 18:1–21) ignites his angry responses. His argument that the wicked are often left unpunished (21:1–34; 24:1–25) is also an argument for refuting the charge against him for moral wrongdoing and for which he now receives God’s punishment.

Throughout his speeches, Job makes no reference to the loss of his livestock, children, or his health. His preoccupation in the poetic debate is with the charges that his friends have hurled against him. The only decisive way to resolve the matter, in Job’s view, is for him to have a personal audience with God and to hear from God the exact nature of the charges against him:

Then summon and I will answer,
Or I will speak and you reply to me,
How many are my iniquities and sins?
Make known to me my transgression and my sin (13:22–23).

Job desperately wants God to corroborate his claim to righteousness (9:20; 11:4; 12:4; 27:5–6; 33:9); otherwise, it is really his word against his friends’. Clines explains Job’s urgency to resolve the issue while he is still alive (19:23–27):

... if he is dead and his children too, and his property remains destroyed, how will anyone be able to believe that Job was an innocent man after all, even if God were to broadcast it from the whirlwind [...] vindication *in heaven* is not Job’s aim. Though God must be the one to testify to Job’s innocence, it is “on earth” among the company of humans that Job’s righteousness must be acknowledged if vindication is to be worth anything; for it is in the eyes of humankind that he has been defamed by God.²⁵

²⁴ Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 102.

²⁵ Clines, *Job 1–20*, p. 461.

7. Elihu's viewpoint in the poetic debate

A short prose narrative (32:1–5) explains Elihu's abrupt entry into the debate after Job's final rebuttal against his friends' accusation.²⁶ His decision to enter into the debate is provoked by Job's attempt to justify himself rather than God (32:2) and by the friends' failure to get Job to repent and to admit that he is not as righteous as he makes himself out to be (32:3). Elihu begins his discourse about Job's suffering by establishing the credibility of his forthcoming speech. Wisdom, he argues, does not necessarily come with age. Despite being young himself, Elihu claims to have the „breath of the Almighty” in him, which gives him a special insight into the operation of God (32:6–10).

His entire uninterrupted discourse centres on the idea that Job's suffering is God's disciplinary grace for him. Yet, he does not seem to offer anything significantly different from Job's friends. According to Fox, „Elihu's speech might just be a rehash of the friends' words with just slightly different points of emphasis.”²⁷ Firstly, Elihu also believes in a system of retributive justice (34:10–12). Thus, Elihu debunks Job's claim that he has been an innocent sufferer at God's hand (33:9–12; cf. 36:7–12). He claims that God's chastisement comes to a person as a warning for wrongdoing, but the person will not die if an intercessor prays for that person, and he may return to good health and be thankful to God for the gift of new life (33:14–22). Thus, Elihu's speech mirrors Eliphaz and Bildad's views about the disciplinary character of God's punishment:

See how happy is the man whom God reproves,
Do not reject the discipline of the Almighty.
For he wounds, but he binds up;
he strikes, but his hands heal (5:17–18)

If you seek God and implore the Almighty's favour,
If you are pure and upright,
He will arouse himself for you,
and will restore you to your rightful place (8:5–6).

²⁶ D.J.A. Clines, 'Putting Elihu in his Place: A Proposal for the Relocation of Job 32–37', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* vol. 29, 2004, pp. 243–253 argues that Elihu's speech in Job 32–37 originally precedes Job 28.

²⁷ M.V. Fox, 'Job 38 and God's Rhetoric', *The Book of Job and Ricoeur's Hermeneutics. Semeia* vol. 19, 1981, pp. 53–61.

8. God's viewpoint in the poetic debate

God finally answers Job out of the whirlwind in 38:1–41:26 in response to Job's request in 31:25. God's response appears as two speeches (38:1–40:2; 40:6–41:26) with an intervening reply by Job in 40:3–5. The first speech consists of short verses dealing with God's creative activities, which Murphy has succinctly summarised:

In this speech the Lord reels off an impressive array of his activities, creating the world, dealing with the Sea, providing light, covering the depths and breath of creation, providing snow and rain, concerns about the planets and the storms and various inhabitants of the animal world [...] this is a hymn of praise, ultimately, and it is the Lord who is praising himself, as he draws attention to his marvels!²⁸

God's first speech, however, does not respond to Job's request for a list of specific charges against him (13:23). God's second speech focuses on Behemoth and Leviathan and also seems to show no regard for Job's concern about the nature of his suffering. In this regard, Brenner writes:

God's answer to Job (chs. xxviii–xli) is, at best, enigmatic. It seems to raise problems instead of solving them. Placed as it is after Elihu's speeches, and not directly following the dialogues of Job and his friends, how does it relate to those cycles of arguments and counterarguments? In what way is the answer relevant to Job's problems as he himself defines them with the main body of the book? Does it provide a satisfying solution?²⁹

Brenner seems to think that it does; the solution, she argues, is to be found in 40:7–14. The tone in this key passage, she says, is commonly defined as "sarcastic" and interpreted accordingly as: "you, Job, do you claim that you can destroy wickedness? If so, please do, and let me know how you manage!"³⁰ Brenner, however, proposes that the passage be viewed from a different perspective, *viz.* to view the passage "as a straight-forward, although partial, admittance of divine failure?"³¹ According to this interpretation, God is admitting to the inability to dispose of the wicked and of evil, at least no more than Job

²⁸ Murphy, *The Book of Job: A Short Reading*, p. 90.

²⁹ She lists a number of literary studies that deal with the topic of God's response in Job 38–41. A. Brenner, 'God's Answer to Job', *Vetus Testamentum* vol. 31, 1981, pp. 129–137.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 133.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

can.³² Insofar as Behemoth (40:15) and the Leviathan (40:25) are concerned, they “are symbols of evil subdued, albeit not annihilated, by God.”³³ Thus Job is right in that evil persists in the world and is a source of grievance and of unnecessary suffering.³⁴ Brenner is not alone with the above interpretation; Hoffman himself has argued along the same line, *viz.* “that God himself is unable to give a suitable solution to the problem of suffering of the righteous.”³⁵

Here, we would like to offer a different viewpoint concerning God's dealing with human suffering. The issue is not God's inability to deal with suffering as such but more to do with God's ineffectiveness to deal with people who fools with things that have the potential to bring about evil and suffering.

After overwhelming Job with divine creative activities in 38:1–39:30 – for which Job has no response to – God finally deals with the question of evil and suffering in the world. God asks Job to consider Behemoth and Leviathan and the danger associated with meddling with these monstrous creatures (40:15–41:26).

For a start, controversy surrounds the precise meanings of “Behemoth” and “Leviathan” (40:15, 25) – are they mythological or zoological in character?³⁶ In this regard, they are commonly associated with the hippopotamus and crocodile, respectively.³⁷ “Leviathan” is also associated with a seven-headed dragon that is found in Canaanite myths.³⁸ Murphy suggests, and rightly so, that “it is better to recognize the role, rather than the minute descriptions and identities of the animals. They are symbols of chaos.”³⁹ They are also symbols of great danger. The depiction of Behemoth as a monstrous creature with strength in its loins (40:16a), muscles in his belly (40:16b), bones like tubes of bronze (40:18a), and limbs like rods of iron (40:18b) spells danger for those who attempt to snare or tame it (40:24).⁴⁰ Even God acknowledges its potential

³² Ibidem.

³³ Ibidem, p. 134.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 135.

³⁵ Y. Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection: The Book of Job in Context*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1996, p. 248.

³⁶ Gordis, *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job*, p. 301; Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 558; N. Whybray, *Job*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1998, 168–169; Gray, *The Book of Job*, p. 480.

³⁷ For a discussion on the qualities of Behemoth and Leviathan, see MV Fox, ‘Behemoth and Leviathan’, *Biblica* vol. 93, 2012, pp. 261–267.

³⁸ Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 289.

³⁹ Murphy, *The Book of Job: A Short Reading*, p. 97.

⁴⁰ Contra. Fox, *Behemoth and Leviathan*, p. 263.

for harm in that God approaches it with a sword in hand (40:19). Likewise, Leviathan spells great danger for those who attempt to draw out Leviathan with a fishhook or press down its tongue by a rope or to put a ring through its nose or pierce his jaw with a barb (40:25–26). Like Behemoth, Leviathan is described as a monstrous creature with “impenetrable natural armour” (41:5–8).⁴¹ It even spits fire (41:11–13). Leviathan is so fearsome that even gods become wary in its presence (41:17). Swords, spears, darts, lances, arrows, sling-stones, clubs, and javelins are of no avail when confronting Leviathan (41:18–21). A passage in 40:32 serves as a clear warning sign for those who think they can mess around with Leviathan and get away scot-free: “Lay a hand on it and you will never think of battle again.”

God’s viewpoint concerning the problem of suffering in 40:6–41:26 may be summarised as follows. Insofar as Behemoth and Leviathan (by inference) are creatures created by God, they are not dangerous or evil in themselves. Bad experiences only occur when humans ignore the ‘warning sign’ and fiddle with things that have the potential for evil, like attempting to catch or tame Behemoth or Leviathan. Even its creator is wary of Behemoth and has to approach it with a sword (40:19)! Leviathan stands ever ready to respond to those who are „lofty” הַבָּג and “proud” הַאֲשֵׁר (41:26) and who have no regard for things that have potential for evil and suffering.⁴² Suffering, in this scenario, is almost certain, and it has nothing to do with God.

Conclusion

In the epilogue, God announces the divine verdict concerning Job’s dispute with his three friends (42:7).⁴³ There, God declares that Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have not spoken the truth about God; Job, on the other hand, has spoken what is right (42:7–8). Based on this verdict, the friends have been wrong to accuse Job of having committed grievous sins against his contemporaries and for which God has punished him. The friends have failed to recognise that their viewpoint (4 & 5) about a tight correlation between sin and suffering is only one of many possibilities (2, 3, 6, 7, & 8). When God rules against Job’s friends, God actually declares that Job’s suffering has nothing to do with sin. This would explain why God did make specific reference to Job’s charges in the divine speeches. Thus, Job has been right in maintaining his innocence and for

⁴¹ Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 226.

⁴² This is akin to the modern idiom, “Play with fire and you will get burnt.”

⁴³ It is not entirely clear as to why Elihu’s name is excluded from the verdict. It seems to suggest that Elihu’s speech is a relatively late text.

disputing his friends' line of reasoning, which uses the doctrine of retribution as its starting point.

What about the suffering that he actually received and endured? How should it be explained? Nowhere does the book of Job suggest that he has brought suffering on himself by meddling with Behemoth or Leviathan, so to speak. His suffering occurs as a result of a quarrel between God and Satan. He suffers as a mere victim of an ironical test, devised by Satan and approved by God (1:11–12; 2:5–6), that does not consider the whole gamut of negative outcomes (1:12; 2:6) – both physical and psychological suffering and suffering that does not affect only Job but also his wife, children, servants and livestock.

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