

Reflections on Job and Greek Tragedy

David Daube

“Of all the Greek tragedies, Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* bears closest resemblance to Job”, writes M.H. Pope.¹ If so, Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* is definitely a runner-up. Perhaps the Aeschylean parallel appeals more when one is in a Wagnerian mood, the Sophoclean when Beethoven prevails.

Philoctetes was leading a fleet against Troy. During a temporary landing midway he was bitten by a snake, guardian of holy ground. The festering wound produced a stench and fits of screaming such that his fellow-generals put him ashore at solitary Lemnos — utterly helpless except that he owned the unerring bow bequeathed to him by his mentor Heracles. In the tenth year of the war, an oracle announced to Troy’s besiegers that victory would be theirs only if they had that bow. So Odysseus, wiliest of the heroes, and Neoptolemos, the fallen Achilles’ son, sailed to Lemnos. Philoctetes absolutely refused to do any favour to the scoundrels who had abandoned him, even though a deep sympathy sprang up immediately between him and Neoptolemos — who had not yet been among the host when he was marooned. Odysseus tried hard to get Neoptolemos to obtain the bow through cunning and Neoptolemos, mindful of his duty to the cause, had already succeeded when he decided that this was wrong, returned it to Philoctetes and, indeed, offered to take him to his home, to Malis and the Spercheios, near Mount Oeta, scene of Heracles’ death by fire and ascension to Olympus. At this juncture, Zeus intervened, having Heracles proclaim from on high that, like him, Philoctetes was destined to suffer for the sake of glory: now he must go to Troy with Neoptolemos to be healed and ensure the overthrow of the enemy.

Here, then, is a hero with tremendous documentation of divine favour, the miraculous bow. He is struck — out of the blue, it appears — by a desperately painful, ugly disease. He is forsaken by his friends — save for a newcomer, a youngster, who, like Elihu,² reproves his seniors and comes much nearer the truth. The very first time he hears about Philoctetes’ plight, instead of finding it simply horrible like those who tell him, he senses behind it a farsighted effort of the powers above not to let his irresistible weapon bring about the city’s fall prematurely (191ff.). In the end, all is resolved by a *Machtwort*, a “word of might”, comprising judgment, blessing and direction which mortals can but receive in humility. At the corresponding place in Job, there follows an outline of the restored leper’s joyful second life (42). This, too, is paralleled in Sophocles:

¹ Art. Job (by M.H. Pope), in the *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962, vol. 2, p. 916.

² Job 32ff.

alas, the play *Philoctetes at Troy*, showing his cure and great deeds (though in no sense a successor to or a continuation of this play — indeed, it may even have been composed earlier), is lost.

It would be rash to see proof here of a borrowing either way, whether direct or through intermediaries. What does emerge — all the more impressively if no borrowing took place — is a profound, moving commonality of ideas on ultimate questions.

In this context an observation on the author of Job seems in order. That the universal nature of his message is of major concern to him may be gathered from the minuscule role of particularist elements and the enormous role — climaxing in the speeches of the Almighty — of symbolism embracing the entire creation, animals, plants, monsters, earth and heaven. Already in Talmudic times,³ the absence of separatist assertion led to a view, widely shared today, that he is not a Jew⁴ or at least does not think of his protagonist as one. It is, however, mainly (i.e. disregarding a few makeweight supports) an argument from silence, very weak in a case like this. The gap most probably indicates the very opposite — a milieu where Jewishness is taken for granted.

I have written so much on the havoc wrought by inattention to the self-understood and (close enough for this inquiry) the unnoticed regular that I shall just offer a little florilegium.

(1) The XII Tables call the man who leaves no will *intestatus*. When I was a student in the thirties, from this negative designation “intestate”, “without a will”, the Roman law world with a single voice concluded that even in the early fifth century BC he is the exception: virtually every *paterfamilias*, rich, middling, poor, does make a will. It painted the old Romans as defying all history, anthropology, common sense. So I pointed out that it is precisely because will-making is a remarkable act that there is a verb for it, *testari*, the perfect participle of which, *testatus*, denotes “one having made, leaving, a will”: while the ordinary man remains inconspicuous, nondescript — till the lawgiver needing a term for him resorts to the negative, *intestatus*, “one not having made, not leaving, a will”.

(2) Again, the XII Tables say nothing about direct damage to property though they do tell you to make good damage caused by your cattle. Many still hold that the simple case got lost. However, we find the same phenomenon in other codes of antiquity, one of them the *Mishpatim* of Exodus.⁵ This cannot be coincidence. Liability for direct infliction of damage is so obvious that there is no need to spell it out. The Romans had no difficulty, at a later stage, in focusing on it in the *lex Aquilia*.⁶ For the Tannaites, Scriptural legislation was the last word. Hence they had to find direct damage in the *Mishpatim* and did so by sub-

³ E.g. *BT* Baba Bathra 15.

⁴ Even Pope (n. 1 above), 194, says: “That the author is an Israelite is not entirely certain”.

⁵ 21:28ff., 22:4.

⁶ *Digest* 9.2.2pr., 27.5.

suming man under the category of forewarned ox.⁷ The archaic provision, that is, which ordains restitution if an ox of yours that has misbehaved already kills an ox of mine furnishes the basis for your accountability if, running around a corner, you knock into a Greek vase I am carrying.

(3) In the fifties I was handed the statutes of All Souls, Article 1 of which enjoined: "No woman shall become a member of the College". (This has now been dropped.) A few seniors to whom I remarked on it attributed it to the founders and, certainly, it does represent the medieval attitude. But in reality, it was put in during the present century as the knocking at the gate grew more audible. In 1438 it was a matter of course. Jewish and Islamic modernists ought to ponder this when claiming, for instance, that the sacred sources favour equality between the sexes in public worship. Reform Judaism: "The Bible nowhere commands the separation of men and women during public worship or assemblies".⁸ Reform Sufism: "Nowhere in the Koran or hadith can a basis be found for prescribing special rules for female worship".⁹ I am far from denying a male-chauvinist handling of Scriptural instruction throughout the centuries, but this particular argument is no good. Nowhere in the Bible, Koran or hadith are oxen and sheep and birds banned from prayer meetings. They are not recognized as participants. The unfitness is a deep-rooted given. I shall come back to it briefly when discussing an occasion when animals did join in a service.¹⁰

(4) In the whole of Scripture, no mother is said to love her child — except Rebekah, because there is something odd: "And Isaac loved Esau ... but Rebekah loved Jacob".¹¹ It is good that this has not been noticed or it might be maintained that the emotion is of little account. The correct inference is that it is a matter of course. No doubt its supreme manifestations attach to severe trial and tragedy: Hagar with Ishmael in the wilderness,¹² the mother of Moses,¹³ Rizpah with her dead sons,¹⁴ the self-denying harlot of Solomon's judgement,¹⁵ the Maccabean Hannah,¹⁶ Mary by the cross in the Fourth Gospel.¹⁷ But the basic instinct is presumed to govern all of Eve's daughters and, indeed, animal mothers too — "the hen that gathers her chickens under her wings", for example.¹⁸

(5) The ancient Greeks never speak of themselves as "polytheistic", of their religion as "polytheism". It is Philo, outsider and critic, who employs these labels. The ground was prepared in that the adjective was current long before

⁷ *Mishna Baba Qamma* 1.4, 2.6

⁸ See M. Ydit, "Mehizah", *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1971, vol. 11, 1235.

⁹ R.A. Fernea and E.W. Fernea, "Variations in Religious Observance among Islam's Women", in *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis*, ed. N.R. Keddie, 1972, 385.

¹⁰ See n. 58 below.

¹¹ Genesis 25:28.

¹² Genesis 21:16.

¹³ Exodus 2:1ff.

¹⁴ II Samuel 21:10.

¹⁵ I Kings 3:26.

¹⁶ II Maccabees 7.

¹⁷ 19:25.

¹⁸ II Esdras 1:30, Matthew 2:37, Luke 13:34, Leviticus Rabba on 19:23.

though not descriptive of a creed; and, significantly, the noun is not traceable earlier at all. Here is the passage with the adjective from Aeschylus.¹⁹ The daughters of Danaus flee from Egypt to Greece with their father in order not to be forced into marriage by their cousins. Expecting the latter to pursue them, they take refuge at the sanctuary of Argos, favoured — the father explains²⁰ — by quite a few of the mightiest Olympians; and they implore the king not to let them be dragged from this “many-godded seat”. Even for Lucian, Philo’s junior by over a century, the adjective has much the same meaning and, of course, there is no noun. Zeus worries, having presently to chair a meeting of the immortals about a fateful threat, and he is particularly unnerved by the massive attendance — “the assembly is extraordinarily many-godded”.²¹

Philo at the end of *On the Creation* sums up the five principal lessons of the story; the first two only are relevant here.²² No.1 : The Divine is and subsists — “pace the atheists”. No. 2: God is one — “pace the propounders of the polytheistic doctrine” who transfer “ochlocracy”, mob-rule, from earth to heaven. *Atheos* is an old word, figuring in the charges against Socrates where, obviously, it referred to a shocking unorthodoxy. The juniority of *polytheos* comes out neatly. Whereas *atheos* can stand by itself, functioning as a noun, “an atheist”, *polytheos* is still confined to its adjectival job: there is as yet no “polytheist”, only “polytheistic doctrine”. In *The Virtues* he argues²³ that the offspring of fine parentage may be bad and vice versa. Abraham exemplifies the latter, leaving his native country lest, if he stayed, there would also stay with him “the delusions of the polytheistic doctrine”. In *Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus*, Philo expands on Abraham’s visitors at Mamre.²⁴ He quotes the *Odyssey*²⁵ about gods appearing in the likeness of strangers, adding that Homer adheres to “the polytheistic doctrine”. R. Marcus translates “the belief of a polytheist”.²⁶ However, I assume he is rendering the Armenian version: the Greek work is almost completely lost, such fragments as survive the Loeb edition does print, and here there is nothing. Surely Philo stuck to his *polytheos doxa*. In his analysis of the sojourner of the *Mishpatim*,²⁷ this expression does occur in a stretch where the Greek is preserved. The ideal sojourner, having circumcised pleasures and passions, is distinguished by “alienation from the polytheistic doctrine and cultivation of the homage to the One and Father of all”. Dubious is the

19 *The Suppliant Maidens* 423f.

20 204ff.

21 *Zeus the Tragedian* 14: *polytheotatos*, superlative of *polytheos*. Well translated in Loeb by A.M. Harmon, *Lucian*, vol. 2, 1915, 111, “packed with gods”. He notes the allusion to Homer, *Iliad* 8.5, where a most self-confident Zeus addresses “all gods and all goddesses”.

22 61.170f.

23 39.124.

24 *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 4.2, concerning Genesis 18:2.

25 17.458ff.

26 Philo, *Supplement I, Questions and Answers on Genesis*, 1953, 274.

27 *Questions and Answers on Exodus* 2.2, concerning Exodus 22:20.

exegesis of the blood of the covenant following Decalogue and *Mishpatim*.²⁸ It symbolizes, Philo suggests, kinship in regard, not to ancestry (that exists even among animals), but to wisdom, the basis of concord-producing laws. Here Marcus's translation goes on:²⁹ "This cannot be acquired by polytheists because they put forth variant opinions ... the cause of quarrelling and fighting". Of the Greek, the two words *ton polytheon* (genitive plural) are extant. Quite likely, even here, if we had the full sentence, *polytheos* would turn out to operate as an adjective.

The following three comments allegorize two categories the Pentateuch debar from the congregation, eunuch and bastard.³⁰ The eunuch stands for him who, destroying his higher faculties, turns atheist or pleasure-hunter, the bastard for the polytheist who, like a harlot's offspring, does not know about one husband and one father.³¹ In *Confusion of Tongues*,³² Philo explains that the tower-builders are called "sons of men"³³ and not "sons of God"³⁴ or "sons of one man"³⁵ because they assume things to have many fathers, "a polytheistic array", and they consider pleasure the soul's true aim. They are no better than those born of a harlot. As he criticizes their glorification of pleasure as well as their polytheism, he should have added something like "or those who make themselves into eunuchs". It is a forgivable omission but, conceivably, the reference to pleasure is an addition to his original script. In *Migration of Abraham*,³⁶ he starts by drawing attention to the dietary prohibition of creeping things many-footed and non-footed:³⁷ the former representing an inability to look up to heaven, the latter an even worse, thorough concentration on pleasures of the belly. A little further on³⁸ he writes that, similarly, "the atheistic and polytheistic

²⁸ *Questions and Answers on Exodus* 2.36, concerning Exodus 24:8.

²⁹ Philo, *Supplement II, Questions and Answers on Exodus*, 1953, 78.

³⁰ Deuteronomy 23:2f.

³¹ The allegorizations occur in other places but without the actual words "polytheistic" and "polytheism". *Allegorical Interpretation* III 3.8: eunuch = without the soul that generates belief in God, bastard = deserter from the One God. *Unchangeableness of God* 24.111: eunuch = living for pleasure, unable to hear God. *Drunkenness* 51.213: eunuch = living for pleasure with no wisdom. *Dreams* II 27.184: eunuch = living for pleasure. *Decalogue* 2.8: the bastards = idolaters. *Special Laws* I 60.325ff. Philo first offers his literal interpretation: 23.2 bans him who makes himself a eunuch, 23.3 both the harlot and her children. Then he notes that these two provisions are particularly susceptible of figurative exposition; and finally that eunuch = denying Forms or even God, a harlot's children = affirming a multitude of rulers, a "polyarchy". Polyarchy, it will be remembered, gets bad marks from Thucydides, Xenophon and Josephus.

³² 28.144.

³³ Genesis 11:5.

³⁴ E.g. Deuteronomy 14:1.

³⁵ Genesis 42:11.

³⁶ 12.64f.

³⁷ Leviticus 11.42.

³⁸ 12.69.

doctrines, antagonists in the soul, are both registered as profane ... the atheistic one by keeping out the eunuch from the assembly, the polytheistic one by forbidding the offspring of a harlot from listening or speaking in it; for atheistic is the sterile, polytheistic the offspring of a harlot". If there were only the final clause, "for atheistic is ...", one might take *atheos* and *polytheos* as nouns, "an atheist", a "polytheist". But the preceding stretch, where they are unmistakably adjectival (with the feminine article required by *doxa*), speaks strongly in favour of "atheistic" and "polytheistic". *Change of Names*³⁹ brings us the most advanced stage of the designation in Philo: *polytheia*, "polytheism". Refused admittance to the community are, one, atheists, who are eunuchs in that they castrate their intellect and arrogantly regard man as managing on his own, two, "the adherents of polytheism, paying high honour to the polytheistic band, born of the harlot, who do not know the virtue-loving soul's one husband and father, God". Even here, *au fond*, a concrete multitude of gods is being pictured;⁴⁰ it is not on the level of abstract theory.

Procopius's *polytheia* is. In *Buildings*⁴¹ he credits the Emperor with seeing the improvement of nations still "suffering from the religion of polytheism". In his *Secret History*⁴² he depicts him as plundering the rich by charging them "with polytheism" (or with belonging to a disallowed branch of Christianity or with sodomy etc.). Earlier in the same work⁴³ he reports that Justinian ordered the Samaritans to become Christians; some obeyed, others joined the Manicheans or "the so-called polytheists", *tous kaloumenous polytheous*. Why "so-called"? Well, this is the earliest passage known to me with *polytheos* serving as a noun (in Philo we found it in "propounder of polytheistic doctrine"); and though it may well not be literally the earliest, the nominal force is recent enough to need to be "introduced". One could imagine a brief span in the Germany of the late sixties when reference was made to "the so-called greens", *die sogenannten Grünen*, on the road from "the followers of the green movement", *die Anhänger der grünen Bewegung*, to "the greens", *die Grünen*. There was exactly such a progression nineteen hundred years ago, only that the colour then evoked not the wonders of nature but a faction at the circus horse races. Josephus tells us about a charioteer "of the so-called green", *tou kaloumenou prasinou* (genitive singular).⁴⁴ The qualification "so-called" makes sense if, and only if, it has regard to the nominal force of "green" just recently come into vogue. Formerly, one had to say "of the green party", *tou prasinou merous*; and fifty years later, the helpful and slightly apologetic "so-called" would be dispensable.⁴⁵ L.H. Feldman⁴⁶ translates "of the so-called green faction", evidently

39 37.205.

40 Reminiscent of the passages from Lucian cited above.

41 6.2.15.

42 *Anecdota* 19.11.

43 11.26.

44 *Jewish Antiquities* 19.257.

45 Though the fuller form remains possible — just as in the German case. As it happens, Procopius employs it in *Anecdota* 19.11 quoted above: among the misdeeds

out of consideration for the many readers who would be puzzled by a charioteer “of the green”. However, his course demands the deletion of “so-called”, designed precisely to alert readers to “the green” equalling “the green faction”. If it is kept, they are still left with the hint at an imprecision — by now an insoluble problem.⁴⁷

To reapproach my main argument — if it were not for a solitary verse in which Jonah calls himself a Hebrew,⁴⁸ he would be ranked as non-Jewish by an even larger vote than Job: after all, he avowedly from beginning to end focuses on the capital of Assyria. Ironically, it is just this missionary thrust of the story, absent from Job, which requires a clear reference to the hero’s Jewish base. The author finds an occasion for it right at the beginning: as the lots prove Jonah to be the cause of the terrible storm, he is asked by the others on the boat to explain who he is. None of this of course arises in Job, throughout confined to a circle of friends. I hasten to add that by “missionary” I mean not desirous of turning heathens into Jews but desirous of making them worshippers of the One God of All. A well-known precedent is Elisha getting the pagan general Naaman to vow that he would “henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice to other gods but to the Lord”.⁴⁹ Jonah answers his questioners: “I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven who has made the sea and the dry land”. Whereas before this, the mixed company has “cried every man to his god” and the shipmaster had exhorted Jonah, “Call on your god”,⁵⁰ afterwards “they cried to the Lord” and, when saved, “feared the Lord exceedingly”.⁵¹ Clearly the right man to send to Nineveh. It may be added that in the section on Nineveh nothing is said about his provenance: the solemn identification in chapter 1 is sufficient.

Job is not expressly so identified. Support for my hunch, however, is provided by the striking similarity of the kind of universalism in the Book of Job and that in the Book of Jonah: an enthusiasm for everything that exists and its or his or her allotted part. In Jonah: the storm, the sea, the sun, the gourd, the insect that kills the gourd, the whale, the mariners, the Ninevites greatest and least, their cattle and so forth. In Job: Satan, family, friends, Sabeian invaders, earth, sea, stars, the wild goats, the ostrich and her eggs, unicorn, behemoth, leviathan and so forth. These are too specific to derive from different milieus. Beyond it, above all — Job shares with Jonah a message definitely Old-Testamentarian: even a death verdict from heaven must not make you abandon hope. A “simple” illustration dates from the first murder ever: Cain, banished from the face of the

for which Justinian had wealthy citizens prosecuted was support of the “green party”, *merous prasinou*.

46 *Josephus* (Loeb), vol. 9, 1965, 333.

47 Perhaps the best solution would be to put “of the so-called green” with a footnote: *scilicet green faction*.

48 1:9.

49 II Kings 5:17.

50 1:5f.

51 1:14, 17.

earth and the face of God and liable to be slain by anyone, at his penitent request receives protection.⁵² Any reader of Scripture will recall a host of parallels — each with a note of its own, and not a few far from simple. The King of Gerar, taking Sarah into his harem, hears God himself declare, “You are to die” (or “You are dead”) — to be reprieved on pointing out that as Abraham introduced her as his sister, he was not to blame.⁵³ Or King Hezekiah, falling ill without having done a particular wrong, and informed by Isaiah in the name of God that he will die, prays — and has fifteen years added to his reign. What is more, this reversal of the original shattering announcement is communicated to him also by Isaiah — not in the least embarrassed.⁵⁴

In my Oxford lecture on *Esther* I discuss the rhetorical “who knows but ...”, used by the steadfast on such occasions. Mordecai in a desperate situation urges Esther to call on the king, despite a law making this a capital crime unless he holds out his sceptre to her. “Who knows but for a time like this you have attained to royalty”.⁵⁵ The Almighty’s grace is not confined within the bounds narrow reason may assign it. The expression comes down from David.⁵⁶ The prophet Nathan advises him that his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband will be punished by the death of the son she has borne him. The son does fall ill and David fasts, weeps, lies on the earth, paying no heed to his entourage who try to distract him. They are amazed, then, on the son’s death after a week, when he calmly resumes his routine. His explanation: nothing he does now can any longer affect the outcome whereas before, “I said, Who knows but the Lord may be gracious to me and the child may live”. Not the least outstanding feature of the answer is that it is given after he has failed — yet given as no less valid for that. True, the Lord did not relent, did stand by the dire prediction he had Nathan convey. David’s trust remains no less firm: in a similar situation he would throw himself on his mercy again. The phrase is taken up by the king of Nineveh.⁵⁷ Jonah at God’s bidding foretells the destruction of the wicked city within forty days, whereupon the king calls for a thorough mending of ways. He himself, his subjects whether adults or children, and indeed the cattle, too, are to fast, wear sack-cloth and cry to God — the inclusion of the mindless intended as a plea of ignorance: they should be let off, all of them, because they did not know what they were doing.⁵⁸ This is the passage adverted to above, with animals joining in a service: signifying not their promotion to the rank of humans, but a demotion of the latter so they may not be held responsible for their misdeeds. The appeal ends: “Who knows, God may... turn from his fierce anger and

52 Genesis 4:13f.

53 Genesis 20:2ff.

54 II Kings 20:1ff., Isaiah 38:1ff. In II Chronicles 32:24ff. Isaiah does not appear. The king falls ill, prays and recovers.

55 4:14. The lecture, delivered in 1989, was published by the Yarnton Trust for the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies in 1995.

56 II Samuel 12:13ff.

57 Jonah 3:9.

58 4:11: “the great city wherein there are sixscore thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and much cattle”.

we may not perish". In this case, confidence is rewarded: "God repented of the evil that he had said he would do and he did it not". None the less, there is a loser: Jonah who, disavowed by God,⁵⁹ will henceforth count as one of those doomsayers you need not take seriously. The circumstances are very different from when Hezekiah's end was postponed. As he fell sick, God had Isaiah, an intimate of his, tell him that the sickness was fatal, so he could make the appropriate dispositions, "set his house in order".⁶⁰ However, he implored God to reconsider, God was moved, and he sent Isaiah back to bring the good news — good for everybody. Jonah has no ties with the Ninevites prior to his gruesome oracle. Nor any ties after it. God simply, responding to their change of heart, refrains from action on it. A humiliation of the prophet — with a marvellous twist to it. The king is not the only figure here with unshakable belief in God's mercy: "Who knows but ...". Jonah himself, when he complains to God about his treatment, confesses that right from the start he foresaw what would happen: "I knew that you are a gracious God ... and repent yourself of the evil (threatened)".⁶¹ That was in fact why, on being first ordered to go to Nineveh, he took that boat to carry him far away: he did not like what was in store for him. I shall not enlarge on Joel who, amidst a plague of locusts and threats of worse to come, calls for submission to the Lord: "Who knows, he may return and change his mind".⁶² Nor on an off-shoot in Paul's exhortation that a convert ought not to renounce a non-converting spouse willing to stay on: "For what do you know, wife, but you may save your husband, or what do you know, husband, but you may save your wife".⁶³ Let us look at Job.

This decent man's piety is first tested by the loss of his wealth, then by the loss of his ten children and ultimately by his becoming a living corpse through a ghastly form of leprosy.⁶⁴ As readers of the tale, we are aware that God, when allowing Satan the last, most terrible attack, by a special clause prohibited him from actually killing his victim⁶⁵ — at least a small pointer to a tolerable outcome. But the victim is not aware. So there he sits among the ashes, symbol of penitence and mourning, his wife telling him to curse God and die (or the text could mean "and be dead", i.e. really),⁶⁶ the friends who come to visit him at first not recognizing the devastated creature, then lamenting, weeping, rending their mantles, sprinkling dust, sitting on the earth with him in silence seven days and nights — all rituals attaching to death.⁶⁷ The virtual equation of his state with death recurs again and again: "My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves (are ready) for me".⁶⁸ Nor is he at all patient in the sense of non-

⁵⁹ I mean the French *désavoué*, a common *Fremdwort* in German, *desavouiert*.

⁶⁰ II Kings 20:1, Isaiah 38:1.

⁶¹ 3:9, 4:2.

⁶² 2:14.

⁶³ I Corinthians 7.16.

⁶⁴ 1:8ff.

⁶⁵ 2:6.

⁶⁶ 2:9.

⁶⁷ See e.g. A. Dillman, *Hiob*, 4th ed., 1891, 20f.

⁶⁸ 17:1.

questioning, *ergeben*. In fact, the plaint with which he opens the debate with his callers⁶⁹ is the most sustained raging against life on record — and, compared with Jonah, shockingly extends the range of damnation. Jonah intensely longs to die.⁷⁰ Job, in addition, longs to never have lived. The latter wish goes much farther and is of much later origin in the evolution of human feelings. It is evidenced in Brahmanism and early Buddhism; in the *Odyssey* though not yet in the *Iliad*; and as far as the Old Testament is concerned, apart from Job only in Jeremiah and Ecclesiastes — the “man of contention” being its progenitor. He voices it after a cruel degradation, a beating up by the governor of the Temple and confinement in the stocks overnight.⁷¹ Job curses his birth not only before God — “Wherefore hast thou brought me forth out of the womb? oh that I had given up the ghost and no eye had seen me”⁷² — but also, sustainedly, one gruesome execration after the other, in that initial elegy to his visitors.

And yet — at the close of a speech bewailing his desertion by God and the world, with the desperate “the hand of God has touched me”,⁷³ he can provide Händel with the magnificent “I know that my redeemer liveth”.⁷⁴ At this moment he outdistances the dying octogenarian in Schiller’s *Hoffnung: Noch am Grabe pflanzt er die Hoffnung auf*, “Even at the grave he plants the banner of hope”. Job does it in the grave. I am not claiming that similar developments are inconceivable in the ancient pagan Near East; nor that outside influence is not noticeable in many places in the Book of Job. In fact, altogether the indebtedness of Old Testament thought to spiritual “ancestors in the mist” — not only mighty Egypt and Mesopotamia but also Midianites, Moabites, Phoenicians etc. — is still underrated. However, the core of Job is too tied up with a specific, continuous inner-Jewish quest to be relocated elsewhere.⁷⁵

University of California at Berkeley

69 3:1f.

70 4:3, 8f.

71 20:1ff.

72 10:18f.

73 19:21.

74 19:25.

75 This article has benefited from the acute criticisms of Professor Tom Rosenmeyer. He will be very aware of how few of them I have actually incorporated in this final version, because of age and ill health. Still, to join in a public tribute to Abraham Wasserstein I count a blessing even so.