The Book of Job in Post-Holocaust Thought

The Bible in the Modern World, 44

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David C. Tollerton

Sheffield Phoenix Press
2012

Published by Sheffield Phoenix Press
Department of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield
Sheffield S3 7QB

www.sheffieldphoenix.com

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

Typeset by CA Typesetting Ltd
Printed on acid-free paper by Lightning Source UK Ltd, Milton Keynes

ISBN 978-1-907534-53-9 (hbk)

For my parents, Christine and Anthony

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Preface

This book covers difficult subject matter. It is therefore appropriate to provide a few remarks about its origins. Though subsequently revised, the roots of this book lie with my work as a doctoral student at the University of Bristol. In 2005 my original, loosely-held idea was that this would be a largely descriptive affair—I would examine how various post-Holocaust commentators interpret the Hebrew Bible and attempt to outline why they interact with it in the way they do. Such an approach disintegrated fairly rapidly. As the work moved forward it became apparent that I was not merely describing, I was also personally engaging with the arguments put forward by the (for the most part) Jewish theologians writing on the topic. Although such interaction did not tend to involve weighing up the foundational aspects of Judaism, I was drawn into debate concerning the interpretation of biblical verses, the use of modern historical evidence, and the ethical acceptability of certain lines of thought. Readers will find that such concerns have carried over into this book. While I attempt to describe what various post-Holocaust interpreters do with Job and why, I have not shied away from proposing that certain aspects of these interpretations should be queried.

Framed in the broadest possible way it is feasible to say that this is a book about how human beings read and reshape old stories when facing contemporary and immediate concerns. But it would be a little disingenuous to understand it wholly by such terms. For I am well aware that the discussion this book enters into is of concern to the Jewish community above all others. A significant point in all this is my status as an outsider to Jewish tradition. I was not raised in a Jewish household, nor possess a wider Jewish family background. It might be tempting to sidestep this point by arguing that somehow the objective truth or falsity contained in this book remains true or false regardless of the identity of its writer. But this is not a line of thinking I wish to pursue. It should instead be recognized that the various strands of my background have influenced the content of this book in myriad ways (some of which I am aware and probably others of which I am not). My conclusion to this concern is simply to state that I understand this book to be an offering for consideration, no more and no less. Given my status as an outsider, and given the grim and extreme nature of the event I am responding to, it seems unwise to claim any greater authority than this.

Above all else, my hope is a relatively simple one: to provide a book that is deemed useful for ongoing discussion and reflection.

Bangor
September 2011

Acknowledgments

This book is based on doctoral work undertaken at the University of Bristol during 2005–2009. I am therefore grateful first of all to my supervisor Jonathan Campbell, whose patient reading and encouragement was invaluable. My thanks also go to Jo Carruthers, who stepped into Jonathan's shoes during a period of absence, and to Isabel Wollaston and John Lyons for examining the final thesis. I wish to acknowledge the support given to me by all members of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Bristol and special thanks must go to Tim Cole in the Department of History for allowing me to sit in on his classes during an early stage of my research. Of key importance has been the friendship of those undertaking postgraduate work at the same time as me. In particular, I have in mind Tom Atfield, John Halliwell, Kirsty Harvey, Steven Lovatt, Pete Naumann, Edwina Thorn, Judit Varga and Rose White. Special mention goes to Mat Collins, with whom I have talked so often about the precarious nature of the journey into academic theology and religious studies. I am grateful to the University of Bristol and the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies for each granting me scholarships during postgraduate work. While at the Oxford Centre during 2004–2005 I was especially privileged to be introduced to Holocaust studies by Zoë Waxman, and as an undergraduate student I was fortunate to be drawn into the exploration of theology and biblical reception by lecturers at the Westminster Institute of Education. Particular thanks go to Robert Bates, Philip Budd and Martin Groves. I am grateful to Liam Gearon of the University of Oxford for giving me my first postdoctoral job as an AHRC Research Assistant, and also wish to acknowledge the friendship and support of my current colleagues at Bangor University: Eryl Davies, Gareth Lloyd-Jones, Lucy Huskinson, Alex Studholme, Farhaan Wali, Garry Peel, Delyth Roberts and Jody Barnard. I should additionally give special recognition to my students at both Bristol and Bangor—they have endured me testing many ideas upon them and have responded with originality and insight. The final two acknowledgments to give are the most important. The first goes to my parents. By filling their house with books they must surely take some of the blame for my endeavours in the academic profession, and while I am grateful for the postgraduate scholarships mentioned above, I am under no illusions about the invaluable help my parents have

provided. It is to them that I dedicate this book. My final words of gratitude go to Amelia. Without her love, support and patience, the writing of this book would have been wholly impossible.

Introduction

'People concerned with the Holocaust should write about the Book of Job'.[1] These words come from Emil Fackenheim, a figure whose works of theology are commonly thought to amount to the most developed religious response to the persecution and mass murder of Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe.[2] Penned in late 2002 (shortly before his death in the following year), they are situated among the very last of his writings to be subsequently published. Fackenheim's words should make for the perfect quotation with which to begin a book on Job's reception in post-Holocaust thought. Unfortunately they do not, or at least not straightforwardly. The reason for such uncertainty relates to the sentence that immediately follows: quoting more fully, Fackenheim reflects that '[p]eople concerned with the Holocaust should write about the Book of Job. So one would think, but few seem to have done so'. It is not easy to make sense of this second comment. Perhaps he means that people have not written about Job's post-Holocaust meaning with suitable rigour and depth. Or perhaps—and this is the more natural way to read his words—he simply means that not many people have engaged with this biblical story at all. If this *is* what Fackenheim is saying, even from his perspective in 2002 it is a difficult argument to make. For if I show nothing else in this book, I wish to convey that the Book of Job *has* indeed been appealed to a very great deal in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Yet Fackenheim is not the only commentator to have seemingly overlooked earlier receptions of Job in this context. More recently, C. Fred Alford, a professor of political philosophy at the University of Maryland, published *After the Holocaust: The Book of Job, Primo Levi and the Path to Affliction* (2009). Although his bibliography is, on the whole, wide-ranging, earlier post-Holocaust interpretations of Job are largely absent.[3] And in truth most commentators who turn to Job amidst their reflections on this atrocity do not give systematic attention to older readings. This

1. Emil L. Fackenheim, *An Epitaph for German Judaism: From Halle to Jerusalem* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), p. 262.

2. Cf. Michael L. Morgan, *Beyond Auschwitz: Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought in North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 155; Isabel Wollaston, *A War Against Memory? The Future of Holocaust Remembrance* (London: SPCK, 1996), p. 70.

3. C. Fred Alford, *After the Holocaust: The Book of Job, Primo Levi and the Path to Affliction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 157-64.

observation need not necessarily be construed as a criticism, but merely a recognition that the main concerns of their discussions are issues of religion, suffering and history, rather than the careful situating of their own treatment of Job in the context of those that have come before.

It is nonetheless useful to now bring together some of the post-Holocaust receptions of the Book of Job that have emerged to date. For those studying this enigmatic biblical text, it is vital to see how it relates not only to more abstract reflections on God and suffering, but also to concrete realities of the modern world. And for those concerned with the Holocaust's religious impact, one helpful way in which to explore this impact is to consider how a well-known story from the pre-Holocaust world has come to be understood in a new light.

Seeking to convey the breadth of Job's post-Holocaust reception is not a wholly unprecedented exercise. As long ago as 1983 Robert Dedmon published an article that featured a brief overview of some selected readings that had appeared up to that date.[4] And in the recent *Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (2011) Isabel Wollaston devoted several pages to a short summary of interpretations.[5] I am unaware, however, of any earlier works that examine this topic in depth. But I should be careful before claiming that the chapters that follow this introduction are comprehensive. The post-Holocaust receptions of Job I will look at are presented, for the most part, by male theologians and cultural commentators writing in North America. This undoubtedly leaves gaps, both in terms of mediums through which the Book of Job can be interpreted and the locations from which interpretations may come. And even with those receptions I do examine, it is of course always possible to peer ever further into the background of each reading. Despite these caveats, I am confident that the following chapters convey the diversity (yet also recurring themes) of Job's use in post-Holocaust thought, as well as highlighting the extent to which religious, cultural and political agendas shape interpretation.

In the discipline of biblical studies, interest in reception of the Bible has seen a marked increase in recent years. Alongside the *Oxford Handbook* mentioned above, notable developments include De Gruyter's vast *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, Blackwell-Wiley's commentary series on interpretation history, and Sheffield Phoenix's forthcoming journal *Biblical Reception*. An examination of Job's utilization in post-Holocaust discourse in one sense fits neatly into this phenomenon.

4. Robert Dedmon, 'Job as Holocaust Survivor', *Saint Luke's Journal of Theology* 26 (1983), pp. 165-85.

5. Isabel Wollaston, 'Post-Holocaust Jewish Interpretations of Job', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (ed. Michael Lieb, Emma Mason and Jonathan Roberts; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 488-501.

But my hope is that this book will additionally be of interest to those concerned with the cultural and religious after-effects of the Holocaust. With regard to Judaism's response in North America, a key event is commonly understood to be the publication of Richard Rubenstein's *After Auschwitz* in 1966. His book emerged during a period in which the Holocaust increasingly became a focal point of discussion, a change prompted by the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 and the Six Day War of 1967.[6] However, we should not overlook Jewish responses that emerged before this. Several of the receptions of Job I will discuss in this book indeed date from the 1950s. It is nonetheless clear that the Holocaust has in recent decades come to inhabit an unparalleled place in the psyche of the Western world. It now represents, put simply, *the* commonly cited example of the very darkest potentials of modern society. Yet amidst the sense of horror it readily provokes, the complexities of the Holocaust can be easily overlooked. It was an event that took place over a large area and over several years. It featured varying forms of persecution and murder—including ghettoization, forced labour, mass shootings and death camps—and it affected individuals and communities from vastly different backgrounds.

Bringing the Book of Job into dialogue with this event and its aftermath does not immediately seem like a straightforward proposition. A simple synopsis of the text highlights this: Job is the tale of a pious and successful man who rapidly looses everything he holds dear and enters into theological debate with three friends. After lengthy argument (and the added observations of the young man Elihu), God appears to Job in the form of a whirlwind and chastises him for have spoken without true understanding. Once Job has uttered his final and ambiguous response, he is commended by God and his three friends are condemned. Only in the very final verses of the tale are Job's fortunes restored.

Even from such a bare outline of the story it is obvious that Job's suffering and that of the Jewish people during the Nazi period can be linked only by extremely loose analogy. The Holocaust centres on the mass-murder of millions, while Job is about an individual who suffers and survives. The Holocaust involved the technological and bureaucratic apparatus of the modern state, whereas the Book of Job comes to us from an ancient society in which wealth was measured in sheep and camels (1.3).

6. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), pp. 1-2, writes, for example, that the Holocaust was 'hardly talked about for the first twenty years or so after World War II'. Tom Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust* (Issues in Historiography; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 7, warns against overstating this view, reflecting that '[i]n actual fact the study of historical writings about the Holocaust between 1945 and 1955 reveals that the genocide of the Jews *did* impinge on historical consciousness, although not in ways that we might always recognise'. Emphasis original.

One key disjunction that some may feel needs addressing immediately relates to Job's identity. Set in the distant 'land of Uz' (1.1) and featuring no obvious relationship with the history of ancient Israel, there is a long tradition of understanding Job to be a gentile.[7] Does it make sense to compare such a tale of non-Jewish suffering from the ancient world with Jewish suffering in modernity? This might seem like a serious concern, but there are several ways around the problem. One is to appeal to the original text's ambiguity regarding Job's nationality. The uncertainty is such that occasional suggestions are made in rabbinic literature that Job was in fact Jewish.[8] Another solution is to propose that the Book of Job, even in its very inception, fitted into the Hebrew Bible because its protagonist's travails mirrored Israel's turbulent history in the ancient Near East.[9] Thus even if the surface of the book is about a gentile, perhaps the anguish that lies behind its origins concerns specifically Jewish experiences of history.

But to look too deeply into the detail of these arguments is to miss the point. This biblical story resonates with the concerns of post-Holocaust thought on a rather looser analogical level. Despite all of the obvious disjunctions between the experiences of Job and the Jewish people in the twentieth century, the Book of Job has been appealed to in this context because reflecting on its themes, images, and characters helps to facilitate the articulation of response to this modern atrocity. Even when commentators assert the final *in*appropriateness of linking aspects of Job to the Holocaust they still, in a sense, find it a useful tool with which to work through their ideas.

Because of the divergent viewpoints readers have brought to this biblical text and the ambiguities contained within it, the encounter between Job and post-Holocaust discourse has produced hugely varying results. Arranging a survey of them is not entirely straightforward and it would be possible to structure this book in several ways. I could, for example, have examined these receptions of Job in chronological order. However, given the extent to which post-Holocaust interpretations of Job do not tend to refer in detail to one another, there is no neat progression to convey. I have instead structured what follows along thematic lines.

7. Except when indicated or when part of a quotation, I will throughout the following use *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985). This will be referred to as the 'JPS' translation.

8. Cf. B. Bat. 15b; Judith Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counsellors: Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition* (Brown Judaic Studies, 47; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 13-14.

9. For one proponent of this view writing in response to the Holocaust, cf. Edward Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal: Crisis and Response in Jewish Life* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1991), pp. 12-13.

In the first chapter I lay out some of the groundwork for approaching the Book of Job and Holocaust memory. Both, I suggest, are characterized by significant inner-tensions that mean receptions of Job in this context are inherently bound to be diverse and conflicting. The second chapter is a short examination of one treatment of Job that conforms to a long tradition of citing Job as a paragon of patience, piety and virtue. It is a reading that, as opposed to many religious respondents to the Holocaust, asserts the need for undisrupted continuity with pre-Holocaust theology. The third chapter looks at a sequence of commentators committed to the idea that Job is not a useful resource for addressing the aftermath of Jewish suffering in the twentieth century. I propose that while their arguments provide a valuable and necessary counterpoint to uncritical alignments between Job's suffering and the Holocaust, the case they make is not entirely watertight. Among the criticisms that can be levelled against them is that they tend to overlook the more creative possibilities for reading Job. The fourth chapter consequently examines a number of the more innovative modes of interpretation to be found among post-Holocaust receptions of the tale. While we should not accept every dimension of their readings without caution, they together present a vision of a text capable of speaking to the aftermath of the Holocaust by a multiplicity of routes. In the final chapter I focus upon the widespread desire among religious thinkers to avoid a mode of response to the Holocaust that finds redemption or closure, and the extent to which their receptions of Job are shaped by this aspiration. Having for the most part acted as a commentator on interpretations of Job, at the end of this chapter I change my approach and offer some of my own suggestions regarding how this biblical story can be of value for post-Holocaust thought. My proposals centre on self-consciously highlighting the polyphonic aspects of the Book of Job, and reading it as a text that disrupts redemptive narratives of the Holocaust's meaning.

On Terminology

'It has become customary in writings on the Holocaust to begin by making amends for using the term "the Holocaust"', writes Gary Weissman.[10] Given that the controversy over the word relates specifically to the Bible (as I explain below), it seems appropriate that I also address this concern. As is already apparent, I frequently use the term 'Holocaust'. The reason why commentators often voice disquiet about this term is due to its etymological roots in the Hebrew word for a burnt offering to God.[11] To date I

10. Gary Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 24.

11. Cf. Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman. 'Why Do We Call the Holocaust "The

am yet to be fully convinced by the arguments for rejecting the term 'Holocaust'. Let me be clear: I do not believe that the mass-murder of around 6 million Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe amounted to an offering to God. But then neither do the overwhelming majority of individuals throughout English-speaking society who use the term 'Holocaust' to refer to this modern atrocity.[12] The meaning of the word has quite evidently altered. It is additionally worth bearing in mind that the most common alternatives also carry difficulties. The word 'Shoah' also possesses uncomfortable associations, with its biblical roots occasionally connected to divine punishment (see Isa. 10.3). Using 'Auschwitz' to allude to the entire event is also a common practice, but as I discuss in Chapter 3, it can sometimes lead to confusion over what is actually being referred to. In sum, there can never be a satisfactory word to encompass this grim event. Not uniquely, Weissman makes an argument in defence of using 'Holocaust' precisely *because* it is contested.[13] Given the fraught nature of the event's remembrance, perhaps the term 'Holocaust' is in this sense appropriate. Having said all of this, I am aware that for some people the etymology of 'Holocaust' will remain simply too troubling.

A related, but simpler point of clarification relates to the term 'post-Holocaust'. It has sometimes been used to designate only those modes of discourse that perceive the event as a radical disruption to earlier ways of thinking. However, I use 'post-Holocaust' to mean simply *after* the Holocaust in a chronological sense.[14]

Finally, when I use the phrase 'Holocaust memory' I am referring in general terms to the myriad ways in which the event has been discussed, memorialized and represented. I am not making specific reference to the recollections of survivors.

Holocaust"? An Inquiry into the Psychology of Labels', *Modern Judaism* 9.2 (1989), pp. 197-211.

12. Marvin Sweeney, *Reading the Hebrew Bible After the Shoah: Engaging Holocaust Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), p. 1, provides an interesting recent example of the tension between the problematic roots of 'Holocaust' and its status as the most commonly used word to denote the murder of Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. Sweeney specifically cautions against using the term 'Holocaust' and favours 'Shoah' instead. But it should be observed that the subtitle of the book nonetheless uses 'Holocaust'.

13. Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing*, pp. 25-26. A similar argument is made in Wollaston, *A War Against Memory?*, p. 2.

14. Wollaston, 'Post-Holocaust Jewish Interpretations', p. 490, briefly discusses this distinction.

1

Tensions in Text and Memory

Linking Job with the Holocaust is, as I have already discussed, hardly a straightforward matter. However, one resonance of sorts becomes apparent when considering that a loosely comparable task is faced by both the interpreter of Job and its reception history on the one hand, and the commentator on the place of the Holocaust in history and culture on the other. Both are faced with objects of study characterized by significant inner-tensions. The purpose of this chapter will be to elucidate this point more fully. Given the extent to which following chapters will merge together aspects of Holocaust studies and biblical interpretation I will, for the sake of simplicity, here deal with Job and Holocaust memory independently and in turn.

1. *Tensions in the Book of Job*

Job is a difficult book in a two-fold sense. First, its focus on suffering deals with some of the most troubling aspects of the human condition. Yet even leaving aside its subject matter, it is also notoriously difficult on a textual level. The large number of rare Hebrew words and syntactic problems are frequently commented upon by scholars, Stephen Vicchio lamenting that such issues often arise 'at precisely the most crucial points in the text'.[1] When viewed as a whole the book also possesses broader aspects of unevenness, most notably the disjunction between the prose sections that begin and end the tale (1-2, 42.7-17) and the poetry of the centre. Theories regarding the historical roots behind such tensions abound, with the clearest fault line being between those who believe that Job is the product of multiple authors and those willing to entertain the idea that a single

1. Stephen Vicchio, *The Image of the Biblical Job: A History*. I. *Job in the Ancient World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), p. 5. Cf. John Gray, *The Book of Job* (The Text of the Hebrew Bible, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), p. 92; Norman Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (The Old Testament Library; London: SCM Press, 1985), p. 22. Marvin Pope, *Job* (The Anchor Bible, 15; New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. xxv, also discusses difficulties with the way in which vowels were added to the consonantal text.

author arranged the text.[2] But my intention here is not to enter into the lengthy and ultimately irresolvable debates regarding the Book of Job's earliest origins. Given my overall focus upon modern receptions of the book, it seems more sensible to simply engage with the text and its tensions as they currently stand.[3]

There are numerous tensions within the Book of Job that could be explored, and to do so fully would easily require a lengthy monograph in itself. So in the following I will instead briefly introduce just two key difficulties with the text. Together they highlight the extent to which post-Holocaust interpreters interact with a tale the meanings of which are far from fixed.

Job's Piety and Rebellion

There are, as Robert Gordis puts it, 'two radically different Jobs'.[4] One of them is the extraordinarily pious figure of the opening prose chapters. At the outset of the story, that is, before Job's sufferings unfold, his moral character is praised by both the narrator (1.1) and God (1.8). And even after his trials begin it is repeatedly stated that he does not speak sinfully (1.22, 2.10). The attitude of our central protagonist at this stage of proceedings is exemplified by his famous reflection in 1.21 that 'the Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord'. At the beginning of the story we therefore have an image of Job as a figure exemplary in his acceptance of divine providence.[5]

2. Writing in the early 1990s, Bruce Zuckerman, *Job the Silent: A Study in Historical Counterpoint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 8, reflected that 'I find the arguments made in defense of the single-author approach to Job completely unconvincing'. Such arguments have nonetheless continued to be made. Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 16, suggests that one individual wrote the book but did so 'by juxtaposing and intercutting certain genres and distinctly stylized voices'. Newsom does nonetheless view the speeches of Elihu as an addition to the text. For other variations of the view that a single author may have deliberately created the inner-tensions of Job, cf. Katherine J. Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), p. 216; James W. Watts, 'The Unreliable Narrator of Job', in *The Whirlwind: Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse* (ed. Corrine L. Patton *et al.*; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 168-80.

3. Edwin Good, *In Turns of Tempest: A Rereading of the Book of Job with a Translation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 1-2, similarly concludes that speculation about Job's origins is not an activity completely essential for interpretation.

4. Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 219.

5. Counterviews are occasionally put forward. Athalya Brenner, 'Job the Pious? The Characterization of Job in the Narrative Framework of the Book', in *The Poetical Books: A Sheffield Reader* (ed. David J.A. Clines; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 298-313 (298), notes that '[t]here is a virtual consensus that the Job of the prologue

As most readers of the Book of Job will be aware, his subsequent attitudes during the poetic dialogues with Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are often quite at odds with this early piety. At points within the dialogues Job's anger at the seeming injustice of his situation is vividly apparent. His words in 9.22-23, in which he laments that that God 'destroys the blameless and the guilty' and 'mocks as the innocent fail', represent one of the high water marks of this indignation. Such accusations are hardly in line with the theological stoicism Job displays in the opening prose chapters. As Bruce Zuckerman candidly notes, 'forbearance might fairly be said to describe the Job in the Prologue of the biblical book (chaps 1–2), but it strains credibility to argue that Job holds on to his fortitude beyond the beginning of chap. 3. At this point, Job clearly abandons his unquestioning patience and becomes a most impatient man'.[6]

The question then is which Job to sympathize with—the pious Job? The rebellious Job? Or both? The divine speeches from the whirlwind that follow might initially seem to make the answer clear. When Job is accused by God of 'speaking without knowledge' (38.2) it makes sense to see this as a condemnation of his more rebellious phases during the poetic dialogues. But this is not necessarily the case—perhaps God is critical of everything that Job has said, both pious and rebellious. Perhaps both positions are too presumptuous for his liking.

The situation becomes especially opaque near the very end of the tale, with two verses, 42.6-7, being pivotal. The first of these, 42.6, is the climax of Job's final response to God's words from the whirlwind, translated by the JPS Bible as 'Therefore, I recant and relent, being but dust and ashes'. Often these words are understood to depict Job repenting for having earlier spoken in such an accusatory and rebellious tone. But such a reading is by no means uniform, and if there is any consensus among biblical scholars it is merely that 42.6 is linguistically difficult.[7] The net result of the Hebrew's ambiguity is that Job's ultimate reply to God, indeed his final words in the book, are hard to fully decipher. Is he finally at peace with his creator? Or is Job's attitude in the end rather more indistinct? Occasionally interpreters, such as John Briggs Curtis, have even gone so far as to assert that in 42.6 Job 'totally and unequivocally' rejects God.[8]

is presented as a piously righteous man' but suggests that this piety is in fact an intentionally ironic exaggeration.

6. Zuckerman, *Job the Silent*, p. 13.

7. Cf. Pope, *Job*, pp. 289-90; Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 576; B. Lynne Newell, 'Job: Repentant or Rebellious?', in *Sitting with Job: Selected Studies on the Book of Job* (ed. Roy B. Zuck; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), pp. 441-56; William Morrow, 'Consolation, Rejection and Repentance in Job 42.6', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105.2 (1986), pp. 211-25.

8. John Briggs Curtis, 'On Job's Response to Yahweh', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98.4 (1979), pp. 497-511 (497).

42.7 does not make matters clearer. In this verse God criticizes Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar and commends 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"'. But as with 42.6 a significant linguistic ambiguity exists. For while most translations usually have God supporting Job for having spoken properly 'about' him (or some variation thereof), it may be that God instead commends Job for having spoken 'to' him (the issue then recurs in an identical manner as God repeats his judgment in 42.8). Reviewing a range of modern commentaries on this verse Kenneth Numfor Ngwa suggests that there is no basis for finally adjudicating one way or the other.[9]

Choosing 'to' rather than 'about' opens up one religiously conservative possibility as to the message of the book. Perhaps God wants to be spoken 'to' and not 'about'. Such a reading is one that exemplifies prayer over theological speculation, relationship over theory. Yet while such a rendering may suit some readers, most translations do not follow this route, and some scholars dismiss it entirely.[10]

But if God is applauding Job for speaking correctly 'about' him, which words of Job's is he actually referring to? Perhaps he is referring to Job's final speech of 41.1-6. Given that they come immediately before 42.7 this has a certain amount of logic. But there are a couple of difficulties. First, as Ngwa notes, it is somewhat cruel for God to compare what Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar said before his appearance in the whirlwind with what Job says afterwards (in 42.1-6).[11] Given the chance they may have also reassessed their earlier theological positions. Secondly, if God is commending Job's final utterances, we are then faced again with the uncertainties noted above regarding what Job's ultimate attitude actually is.

Another possibility is that God is commending Job's piety at the beginning of the story. The obvious problem with this is that he would simply be overlooking all that Job had said since that point. To do so without explanation is plainly confusing. A further idea put forward by some commentators is that there once existed a version of the book in which Job remained pious throughout, while his friends conveyed more blasphemous ideas about the relationship between God and human suffering. By this view 42.7 is a remnant of that older story in which the friends were more

9. Kenneth Numfor Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics of the 'Happy' Ending in Job 42.7-17* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 354; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), pp. 11-12.

10. Cf. E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. Harold Knight; London: Nelson, 1967), p. 648; Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1978), p. 494.

11. Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics*, p. 104.

clearly deserving of criticism in comparison to Job.[12] While an interesting idea, this is obviously rather speculative given that no such text now exists.

The final possibility, supported by various commentators, is that God is commending Job's defiance in the poetic dialogues. Such a view is taken by Norman Habel:

> In the prologue the narrator announced that Job did not sin with his lips or express contempt for Yahweh (1.22, 2.10). Now [in 42.7] Yahweh's answer announces that Job's bold assertions in the dialogue speeches were likewise free from blame in spite of some rather vitriolic moments … [t]he blunt and forthright accusations of Job from the depths of his agony are closer to the truth than the conventional unquestioning pronouncements of the friends.[13]

Following this line of interpretation is to see the Book of Job as telling us that honest and forthright wrestling with God is preferable to the unsympathetic conservatism of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. Sometimes, the tale may seem to say, rebellion is better than stale submission. Yet this approach does nonetheless produce tensions. For if in 42.7 God is supportive of Job's earlier defiance, how is this to be squared with his lengthy condemnations of Job for 'speaking without knowledge' (38.2)? The divine voice would appear to be giving remarkably mixed messages regarding the value of questioning God.

The key point that I wish to convey is that in the Book of Job we do not find a simple extolling of either submissive piety or theological defiance. Each can be drawn from the text by interpreters, but neither dominates entirely. When read in post-Holocaust contexts it will be seen that commentators variously find inspiration and resonance with both Jobs, the paragon of piety and patience, and the archetypal questioner and rebel.

Retribution and its Rejection

There is a model of the cosmos frequently (though not uniformly) espoused in the Hebrew Bible that suggests that, generally speaking, people get what they deserve. One of the starkest examples of this comes in Deuteronomy 28 with its detailed lists of the blessings and curses that Israel will experience if it obeys or fails to obey divine command. Yet the Book of Job's relationship with such a theology of retribution is ultimately hard to pin down.

At the beginning of the story Job is described as both immensely pious *and* wealthy (Job 1.1-3), suggesting a reality in which individuals suffer or succeed according to merit. Such a view is rapidly undermined, however, in the portrayal of Job's suffering at the hands of a divine wager between God and the Satan (1.6-12). This is a wager fundamentally premised upon

12. Cf. Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics*, p. 103; Pope, *Job*, pp. xxiv-xxv.
13. Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 583. Cf. Gordis, *The Book of Job*, p. 494.

Job's suffering being undeserved; it is a test of how he will respond in the future, rather than being punishment for inequities in the past.[14] The poetic dialogues continue in the same vein, with the retributionist views of the friends shown to be unwarranted. Eliphaz, for example, asks 'what innocent man ever perished? Where have the upright been destroyed? As I have seen, those who plow evil and sow mischief reap them' (4.7-8). Having witnessed the wager between God and the Satan readers are well placed to see that such words are mistaken. As David Clines has noted '[w]hat the poem does, philosophically speaking, is to prove over and over again that the doctrine of retribution is wrong'.[15]

With this in mind the final prose section of the book causes a significant headache, as numerous commentators have observed.[16] When Job is first commended by God (42.7) and then restored to a condition even greater than that described at the story's outset (42.10), a cosmos ruled by retribution seems to have reasserted itself. Job is assessed positively by God and duly rewarded. As Clines sums up, '[w]hat the book has been doing its best to demolish, the doctrine of retribution, is on its last page triumphantly affirmed'.[17]

There are routes out of such a conundrum, most notably by taking the view that the restoration is not a reward at all, but rather one final unpredictable act by a God largely inscrutable to human perception. Not uniquely, Habel interprets the story this way, asserting that 'the restoration of Job's family and goods was a gesture of divine goodness, not a reward for Job's integrity or heroic persistence. God freely chooses to bless Job with good, just as he chose to afflict him with evil'.[18] While it

14. Lawrence Corey, 'The Paradigm of Job: Suffering and the Redemptive Destiny of Israel', *Dor Le Dor* 17.2 (1988/89), pp. 121-27 (121) takes a radically different view, arguing that 'the Book of Job is a meticulous exposition of *deserved* suffering' (emphasis original) based on Job's failure to follow Deuteronomic commandments. Such a reading is unusual among modern commentators. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, there is detailed midrashic discussion of how Job may have come to deserve his fate.

15. David J.A. Clines, 'Deconstructing the Book of Job', in *The Bible as Rhetoric: Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility* (ed. Martin Warner; London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 65-80 (69).

16. Cf. Pope, *Job*, p. xxviii; David J.A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (Word Biblical Commentary, 17; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), p. xlvii; Newsom, *The Book of Job*, p. 21; Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics*, p. 1.

17. Clines, 'Deconstructing the Book of Job', p. 71.

18. Habel, *Book of Job*, p. 67. Oliver Leaman, *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 23, similarly asserts that '[t]he happy ending of the Book is just that, a happy ending, but it could have been very different without in any way altering the central message of the text. An authentic relationship between God and humanity is based upon something much deeper than the

should be conceded that this reading is impossible to disprove, for some readers the proximity of Job's commendation and restoration (coming as they do only a few lines apart) will inevitably leave his improved situation *feeling* like a reward. The final prose section fails to remove the lingering suspicion that we may have returned to the territory of retributive theology.

On this issue of retributive theology in the Book of Job I wish to conclude by suggesting that there is an internal dissonance in the text. Both a view of the world based on retributive theology and a rejection of this view are held in dynamic tension. Whether this is the result of multiple authors or is an intentional product of a single mind is a line of questioning beyond the remit of the present discussion. Focusing on the form of the book as we presently possess it, we can simply say that it does not wholeheartedly endorse one view of the cosmos or the other.

The Reader's Choice

This introduction to the tensions within the Book of Job is meant only as a foundation for later discussion, and not as an exhaustive exploration of the topic. Commentaries written almost half a century ago were already observing that '[a] complete bibliography on the Book of Job is scarcely possible', and it would be unwise to assert the finality of the comments written above.[19] But having outlined the basic contours of two major aspects of unevenness in the book, it is worth reflecting on how they relate to its readers.

In his 2005 monograph Ngwa helpfully outlines two ways of approaching the tensions within the text. The first is to harmonize—to, as Ngwa puts it, 'hammer the discordant voices … into a uniform whole'.[20] As much as some modern commentators (myself included) might wish to emphasize the aspects of internal dissonance within Job, it should be recognized that a great many readers do not engage with the book in such a manner. Over the centuries interpreters have put forward many suggestions as to Job's one, centralizing message about questions of God, humanity and suffering. Reflecting on the task of producing a bibliography on the subject in the 1980s, Clines notes that he 'listed more than 1,000 books and articles that profess to state the unequivocal answers of Job to such questions'.[21] In short, the Book of Job has a reception history full of readers happy to smooth over any unevenness in the narrative.

expectation of reward and punishment'. For discussion of other scholars taking this view, cf. Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics*, p. 131.

19. Pope, *Job*, p. lxxix. Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, p. v. makes a similar remark.
20. Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics*, p. 88.
21. Clines, 'Deconstructing the Book of Job', p. 65.

In contrast, the second approach noted by Ngwa is to stress the tensions within the book. It is a 'trend that highlights the dissonances [and] tends to argue for the polyphonic character of the text and its open-endedness'.[22] Instead of attempting to paper over the cracks in the story, this method emphasizes its fragmentary nature. Among biblical scholars various forms of literary criticism have been employed to conceptualize this, such as those associated with deconstruction and Mikhail Bakhtin, and debate regarding which method is most fruitful is likely to continue.[23] However, what unites these ways of reading Job is a self-conscious resistance to providing unitary readings. Illustrative of such strategies is a comment made by Edwin Good in his 1990 work on Job *In Turns of Tempest*. He writes that '[m]y wish is not to close down options of understanding but to break them open, not to decide definitely that one alternative is to be adopted but to allow the alternatives free rein'.[24]

Readers of Job may be situated at various points between these two extremes of either harmonizing the text into a single message or stressing the tensions within it. In the context of post-Holocaust interpretation it will be seen that commentators take a variety of approaches available along such a scale.

2. *Tensions in Holocaust Memory*

Examining post-Holocaust readings of Job forces us to face not only instabilities in the meaning of this ancient story, but also tensions in the way that the Holocaust is remembered. This is because the interpreters discussed in later chapters view the event in often radically different ways. Their perspectives are not isolated to their own situations as individuals, but are connected to the diverse ways that communities have come to understand the mass murder of Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. Given the extent to which these perspectives shape interpreters' engagements with Job, it is worth here briefly introducing a few such tensions in Holocaust memory.

22. Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics*, p. 89.

23. On approaches associated with deconstruction, cf. Clines, 'Deconstructing the Book of Job'; Good, *In Turns of Tempest*; David Penchansky, *The Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in the Book of Job* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990). On approaches associated with Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the polyphonic text, cf. Newsom, *The Book of Job*; T. Stordalen, 'Dialogue and Dialogism in the Book of Job', *The Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 20.1 (2006), pp. 18-37. The presence of papers on Job focused on deconstruction and Bakhtin (by Albert McClure) at the recent 2011 International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature would suggest that discussion on this topic is ongoing.

24. Good, *In Turns*, p. 178.

Having said this, commentators have on occasion objected to such reflection on these tensions, seeing it as something of a distraction from the more pressing task of historical analysis and remembrance itself.[25] But this is to lose sight of the degree to which the event is necessarily mediated by post-Holocaust contexts. The Holocaust is not, to put it simply, an event that rests in history making its meanings and lessons self-apparent. The way communities have come to conceptualize it is instead a complex negotiation between the past and present. There is, as Michael Rothberg asserts, an 'absolutely central and unavoidable need for reflection on the means and modes of representation in all scholarly and lay approaches to the Holocaust'.[26]

In the following I will provide a short overview of three tensions in Holocaust memory especially relevant for discussion in later chapters.

The Exceptionalist and Constructivist Models

In his 2001 book *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* Alan Mintz offers a useful description of a tension present in the way in which the Holocaust has been understood. He proposes that two approaches, the exceptionalist and constructivist models, have offered distinct and opposed means for thinking about the atrocity.

The exceptionalist model presents the Holocaust 'as a radical rupture in human history'.[27] After this event everything has changed, and pre-Holocaust understandings of the world lie in shattered ruins. By such a view this episode of mass-murder is wholly 'beyond comparisons and analogies', and failing to acknowledge it as such is, ultimately, to lack the courage to face the event in its full horror.[28] Mintz suggests that to follow the exceptionalist model is to become habitually wary of comforting misrepresentations. 'It exhorts us', he writes, 'to remain loyal to an authentic but difficult truth … [and] bristles at the idea that the murder of European Jewry can be taken on anything other than its own horrific terms.'[29]

Mintz does not himself discuss Job, but it is useful to briefly apply his ideas to its modern reception. With the exceptionalist model in mind it becomes an

25. Cf. Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2007), p. 2; Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing*, p. 130; James Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 3. None of these scholars ultimately agree with such an objection.

26. Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism*, p. 2.

27. Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 39.

28. Mintz, *Popular Culture*, p. 39.

29. Mintz, *Popular Culture*, p. 41.

inherently problematic venture to use the Book of Job as a resource for articulating responses to the Holocaust. As a story carried into modernity from an ancient context, Job risks by it very nature being an inappropriate tool. It was composed in a period entirely alien to the starkly grim details of Europe in the 1940s and so when used as a prism through which to engage with the Holocaust it threatens to facilitate evasion rather than confrontation.

This line of argument is taken by Lawrence Langer, a leading literary critic within Holocaust studies, and a figure Mintz identifies as singularly emblematic of the exceptionalist approach.[30] In a collection of essays from 1995 entitled *Admitting the Holocaust* Langer views the Holocaust as a shattering and disruptive event, 'a rupture that after the war left stunned minds staring blankly at alien modes of living and dying in the monstrous milieu of ghettoes and camps.'[31] Amidst his essays he is repeatedly critical of those failing to adequately recognize this rupture and he demands that we take up a discourse that is 'honest about the nature of the ruin'.[32] When he briefly turns to the figure of Job in the second essay in his book he is dismissive of using it to articulate reflections on the Holocaust. Such usage, he contends, 'leads us from the uncharted waters of that atrocity back into the safe channels of a sheltered world'.[33] In practice Langer has not been consistently against *every* reception of the Bible in this context, and has more recently written appreciatively of Samuel Bak's artistic subversions of Genesis.[34] But the point even here is that Bak has, in Langer's eyes, successfully highlighted the *dis*continuities between the Bible and the post-Holocaust world. I will return to Langer's treatment of Job in the third chapter, but what is of note for present concerns is that an exceptionalist approach does not sit easily with post-Holocaust appeals to the story. Exceptionalism is, as Mintz describes it, an uncompromising refusal to allow any distractions from the stark horrors of the event itself.

The constructivist model, the second approach outlined by Mintz, takes a fundamentally different route. This approach is not concerned with viewing the grim reality of the history directly, but instead stresses that 'acts of Holocaust memorialization, whether in the form of museums, monuments, or days of remembrance, will always reflect as much about the community

30. Mintz, *Popular Culture*, pp. 49-84, is ultimately critical of Langer's approach. For another critical appraisal, see Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing*, pp. 89-139.

31. Lawrence L. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 3.

32. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, p. 7.

33. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, p. 25.

34. Lawrence L. Langer, 'Skeptical Visions and Scriptural Truths: Bak's Genesis Paintings', in *Representing the Irreparable: The Shoah, the Bible, and the Art of Samuel Bak* (ed. Danna Nolan Fewell, Gary A. Phillips and Yvonne Sherwood; Boston: Pucker Gallery, 2008), pp. 33-42.

that is doing the remembering as the event being remembered'.[35] For a constructivist the influence of present concerns is not a problematic phenomenon to be painstakingly isolated and removed, but rather an inevitable part of how we view the past. This model would also not be as inherently suspicious of utilizing Job to make sense of the Holocaust, because, as Mintz puts it, 'it is in the nature of individuals and institutions to perceive even unprecedented events through categories that already exist'.[36] The Book of Job may not be a perfect tool, but its pre-Holocaust origins do not preclude its usefulness by default.

Mintz's exceptionalist and constructivist models do, he admits, present a potentially oversimplified binary opposition, for few commentators occupy either extreme entirely.[37] However, it is useful to note that, to a large extent, by writing a book on post-Holocaust interpretation of Job and not wholly dismissing its usefulness in this context, I am rather nearer the constructivist end of this scale. For I will suggest that Job can be a valuable tool when responding to this event. Furthermore, as per the constructivist model, I will frequently stress the extent to which contemporary contexts have shaped how various interpreters perceive the Holocaust.

But it is worth noting Mintz's view that 'understanding is richer for the interplay between the two perspectives'.[38] Certainly not every aspect of exceptionalism should be left aside. The exceptionalist, he contends, 'insists on our being suspicious of the purposes for the Holocaust being enlisted', and in the following chapters I will periodically raise such concerns. Recognizing the inevitability of narrativization does not preclude commenting upon occasions when narratives of the Holocaust's meaning are problematic.

I will return to this point later in the chapter, but for the moment it suffices to reflect that with exceptionalist and constructivist approaches we find a deep tension in how Holocaust memory has come to be understood.

Cohesion and Fragmentation

Words like 'fragmentation' and 'incompleteness' pervade many writings on the Holocaust. Religious respondents have often reflected such a trend, the following sentences from David Blumenthal's 1993 work *Facing the Abusing God* representing only one particularly stark example:

> Caesura, brokenness, fragmentation are all we have to express the disjunction of normal discourse with the reality of the holocaust. Dissociation, rupture, a sudden veering away are all we have to preserve the holocaust

35. Mintz, *Popular Culture*, p. 40.
36. Mintz, *Popular Culture*, p. 39.
37. Mintz, *Popular Culture*, p. 38.
38. Mintz, *Popular Culture*, p. 82.

> in the midst of normal speech. Thought itself must be broken, shattered, fragmented—like a nightmare; for writing theology after the holocaust is living in a nightmare with its sudden turns, its flashbacks. To do theology is to remember, in pieces, in horrible pieces.[39]

On one level the presence of such language among commentators is unsurprising. Traumatic events, we may say in very general terms, do not often evoke feelings of completeness. Loss, by its very nature, is for an aspect of life once present to no longer be there. Yet occasionally amidst discussions of Holocaust memory appeals to the fragmentary, or incomplete, can take on a different, even quasi-positive connotation.

To explain this it is useful to turn to an idea articulated in several publications by James Young. When writing on physical memorials in his 1993 book *The Texture of Memory*, he warns that they can often portray a finalized and static form of memory that fails to engage with the fluid and dynamic concerns of later viewers.[40] More contentious sites, he suggests, can serve the function of forcing communities to consider how they remember and what competing narratives of the past are at play. Young focuses, for example, on difficulties faced by those debating what to do with the grounds of the old Gestapo and SS headquarters in Berlin in the 1980–90s. 'Left unresolved', he remarks, 'the memorial project at the Gestapo-Gelände flourishes precisely because it contests memory—because it continues to challenge, exasperate, edify and invite visitors into a dialogue between themselves and their past'.[41] Irresolution, in this instance, is not simply an outcome of trauma, but also a means of keeping remembrance alive. In his 2000 book *At Memory's Edge* Young focuses on artistic responses to the Holocaust and evokes a similar concept when referring in positive terms to 'an aesthetics that remarks its own limitations, its inability to provide eternal answers and stable meaning…that resists closure, sustains uncertainty, and allows us to live without full understanding'.[42] What ongoing remembrance requires is not, as Young puts it, 'stable meaning', but instead a mode of approaching Holocaust memory that demands ongoing and unfinalized engagement.

Yet whether incompleteness is appealed to as, on the one hand, the appropriate response to trauma, or on the other, a necessary mode of resisting static memorialization (and thereby, ultimately, resisting forgetfulness), it is a difficult route to maintain. For the very act of discourse often involves systemization and the organization of ideas. An example of this that Young

39. David R. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 9.

40. James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 14-15.

41. Young, *The Texture of Memory*, p. 90.

42. Young, *At Memory's Edge*, p. 6.

identifies relates to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. The interior of James Ingo Freed's building 'includes skewed angles, exposed steel trusses, and jagged walls—all to suggest an architectural discontinuity, rawness, and an absence of reassuring forms'.[43] In this instance a sense of the fragmentary has influenced the very physical space of Holocaust memorialization. Yet, as Young notes, the exhibition itself is unable to retain such an orientation: '[t]hough housed in a structure reverberating with brokenness and the impossibility of repair, the exhibition operates on the internal logic of orderly, linear narration'.[44] In some people's eyes this may amount to a failure on the museum's part. But viewed more practically I suggest that it merely shows the difficulty of maintaining a discourse of fragmentation. To actually convey central ideas about the Holocaust as an event, perhaps the museum simply *had* to employ an 'orderly, linear narration'.

This tension, between fragmentary and cohesive modes of discourse, reaches across a swathe of Holocaust memory.[45] As will be observed in later chapters, numerous religious respondents appeal explicitly to the need to resist finality. Theologies of incompleteness of the kind to which Blumenthal refers are gestured towards repeatedly among post-Holocaust commentators. But it is a hard undertaking. I will suggest that cohesion, even resolution, can at times appear to be seeping back into discussion. This is of relevance to my examination of Job's reception in this context as I will ultimately ask whether it is a resource that facilitates fragmentary or cohesive theologies.

Resistance and its Absence

The two tensions in Holocaust memory I have discussed are related to questions of *how* we remember. I would like to now address one more straightforwardly historical debate about *what* we remember. It is a debate, put simply, that deals with issues of what actually happened during the Holocaust.

Writing on religious responses to the event, Isabel Wollaston remarks that '[i]t is now commonplace to insist that it is possible to pray *after* Auschwitz

43. James Young, 'Memorials and Museums', in *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies* (ed. Peter Hayes and John K. Roth; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 490-506 (504).

44. Young, 'Memorials and Museums', pp. 504-505.

45. The depiction of fragmentation but also tentative cohesion is perhaps nowhere better seen than in the art of Samuel Bak. Gary A. Phillips and Danna Nolan Fewell, 'Introduction', in *Representing the Irreparable: The Shoah, the Bible, and the Art of Samuel Bak* (ed. Danna Nolan Fewell, Gary A. Phillips and Yvonne Sherwood; Boston: Pucker Gallery, 2008), p. xi, reflect that '[h]is still lives, people, and landscapes depict a world destroyed, and yet provisionally pieced back together'.

only because prayer was possible—at least for some—*in* Auschwitz'.[46] There are numerous directions of discussion that this statement might instigate, but one obvious point to make is that it reflects a feeling that theological commentary is inherently tied to the historical realities of what took place during the Holocaust. And indeed a cursory survey of the literature shows religious commentators frequently cite and grapple with eye-witness accounts. One outcome of this is that theologians and their acts of biblical interpretation can, on occasions, become caught up with conflicts regarding how Jews acted during the Nazi era. The conflict I wish to briefly address is a difficult and inherently emotive debate focused on whether it is resistance or its absence that most characterized the Jewish response to persecution.

One especially vivid example of this debate relates to the closing remarks of Martin Gilbert's vast 1986 work *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy*. Here he asserts that '[i]n every ghetto, in every deportation train, in every labour camp, even in the death camps, the will to resist was strong'.[47] Reading these words, Lawrence Langer recalls that he was '[a]t first incredulous, then perplexed, and finally exasperated' with Gilbert's assessment.[48] As I noted earlier in this chapter, for Langer the Holocaust represents unmitigated ruin. To attempt to draw redemptive narratives from it is, by his mode of thinking, to avoid facing the grim truth. The reality, in Langer's view, is that Jewish victims were overwhelmingly crushed by the extreme persecution they faced. Gilbert's commendation of Jewish bravery and resistance is consequently to be deemed distasteful and evasive.

However, debate over whether Jewish resistance should or should not be emphasized predates Gilbert and Langer's disagreement by several decades. In the mid-1960s, for example, Hannah Arendt's famous book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* caused outrage in some quarters for suggesting that Jewish leaders unwittingly helped facilitate mass-murder by cooperating with (rather than resisting) Nazi officials.[49] Given the vastness of the historical enquiry involved I have no intention here of attempting to justify either a narrative of resistance or of passivity on documentary grounds. But alongside merely noting the existence of this tension within Holocaust memory it is worth, I think, being aware of two key difficulties with this debate.

46. Isabel Wollaston, 'Religious Language after the Holocaust', in *Dare We Speak of God in Public? The Edward Cadbury Lectures, 1994–1995* (ed. Frances Young; London: Mowbray, 1995), pp. 80-89 (84). Emphasis original.

47. Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (London: Collins, 1986), p. 828.

48. Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 163.

49. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 104. For a useful summary of the controversy cf. Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, pp. 134-42.

The first is to note, as the historian Zoë Waxman does at the outset of her 2006 work on witness testimony, that '[t]he Holocaust was not just one event, but many different events, witnessed by many different people, over a time span of several years and covering an expansive geographical area'.[50] It therefore makes only a limited amount of sense to see Jewish responses to Nazi persecution in sweeping terms of resistance or passivity. Individuals and communities reacted in a vast plethora of ways.

Secondly, the very term 'resistance' can easily oversimplify a painfully complex reality. Both the threat of severe Nazi retribution and uncertainties regarding the full scope of their situation hampered the decision-making of those contemplating violent resistance.[51] Furthermore, those post-Holocaust commentators considering Jewish resistance are necessarily forced to decide what does or does not constitute 'resistance'. When discussing armed uprising the category 'resistance' seems simple. Yet when Gilbert is able to remark that '[e]ven passivity was a form of resistance' (i.e. that refusing to resort to violence is an act of dignity) it is clear that the term's meaning is liable to vary significantly among those using it.

The contentious issue of Jewish resistance will reappear several times in following chapters. Numerous religious respondents are heavily tied to particular models of thinking about Jewish actions during the Holocaust, and those models can in turn shape their receptions of Job.

Plurality and its Limits

The three tensions in Holocaust memory discussed here have been necessarily treated only briefly. Furthermore it should be stressed that there are other tensions that could be cited. The 'intentionalist-functionalist' debate (focused on when and how Nazi decisions were made regarding the Final Solution) has, for example, been given intense levels of scholarly attention in decades since the event.[52] But my central purpose in outlining the three tensions above has not been to provide a representative survey, but rather to demonstrate in an introductory manner that Holocaust memory is not a fixed or static entity. These discussions of (1) exceptionalist-constructivist

50. Zoë Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* (Oxford Historical Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 2.

51. Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 135, reflects that '[f]earful of massive German retribution, resisters everywhere waited until what they felt was the last moment—the final extinction of hope—for only then could they justify the reprisals that followed. But how was this point to be determined? Jewish communities agonized over their prospects and were divided sharply over what tactics to follow'.

52. Cf. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*, pp. 34-46; Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust*, pp. 52-85, 125-53.

models, (2) appeals to fragmentary remembrance and (3) debates about Jewish resistance, will be returned to in later chapters. But for the present, the central point I wish to make is that when examining post-Holocaust receptions of Job, we face instabilities in both the meaning of this ancient text and a plurality of narratives of the Holocaust's meaning.

Yet it should be observed that numerous scholars examining Holocaust memory have been keen to stress that although we may recognize the inevitable presence of numerous, competing narratives of the event's meaning, this plurality does not mean that just any narrative is of equal merit to every other. As Tom Lawson has recently remarked, '[t]o say that *all* interpretations are valid, that all meanings grafted onto the past are of equal interpretive value and potential, is simply an act of intellectual nihilism'.[53] The route out of such a quandary, Lawson and others suggest, is to demand that commentators relate seriously to historical evidence.[54] Evidence might allow multiple interpretations, but some are more tenuous than others.

It is significant that such a balancing act between, on the one hand, appreciating legitimate plurality, and on the other, resisting total relativism, occurs in similar terms in the introduction to David Clines's multivolume commentary on Job:

> All readers of biblical texts, as of any other texts, bring their own interests, prejudices, and presuppositions with them. While they would be wrong to insist that the Bible should say what they want it to say, they would be equally wrong to think that it does not matter, in reading the Bible, what they themselves already believe.[55]

For Clines, readers of Job shape its meaning to a significant degree. But this does not entail that it can be credibly understood to mean just anything. When exploring post-Holocaust receptions of the Book of Job we face pluralities of possible interpretation in both text and memory. But with regard to neither is it required that we leave our critical faculties at the door.

53. Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust*, p. 5. Emphasis original. For similar remarks cf. Wollaston, *A War Against Memory?*, pp. 88-89; Tim Cole, *Images of the Holocaust: The Myth of the* 'Shoah *Business*' (London: Duckworth, 1999), p. 173.

54. Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust*, p. 5. Cf. Robert Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 238.

55. Clines, *Job 1–20*, p. xlvii.

2

The Traditionalist's Job

In his 1965 work *The Book of God and Man* the Jewish biblical scholar Robert Gordis offers a warning to those examining Job's long reception history:

> We cannot understand the influence of this powerful and disturbing book on the Western world unless we remember that most of the twenty-five centuries that have elapsed since its composition have been ages of faith. During this long expanse of time it was, by and large, the long-suffering Job of the prologue, and not the passionate and pain-wracked Job of the dialogue, who occupied men's thoughts. The vast majority of readers saw Job epitomized in his declaration of resignation, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord' (1.21).[1]

Gordis is hardly unique in proposing that perceptions of the story have been dominated by Job's most pious manifestations.[2] In Christian thought this trend is visible in the Epistle of James's reference to 'the patience of Job' (5.11). The legacy of such an emphasis can also be detected among some modern Jewish writers. The Holocaust survivor Alexander Donat observes that 'Job is usually presented as symbolizing piety and unquestioning faith in God'.[3] We could of course complain that Gordis's analysis risks being too sweeping—Job has, after all, been approached by innumerable people over the centuries. But in this short chapter I wish to briefly take up his appraisal of Job's reception history to look at one post-Holocaust interpretation of the tale that follows such a model almost exactly. Seen through the prism of Gordis's view, it represents a near perfect embodiment of the 'traditional' approach to Job he perceives.

1. Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, pp. 219-20.
2. For example, cf. Zuckerman, *Job the Silent*, p. 13; Pope, *Job*, p. xv.
3. Alexander Donat, 'Voice from the Ashes: Wanderings in Search of God', in *Wrestling with God: Jewish Responses During and After the Holocaust* (ed. Steven T. Katz; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 275-86 (282).

Michael Goldberg and Job 1.21

In the eyes of numerous commentators, the Holocaust poses a major problem for Judaism. Fackenheim, for example, asserts with reference to Ps. 121 that 'after the Holocaust, Jews cannot read, as they once did, of a God who sleeps not and slumbers not'.[4] This changed relationship with the psalm and its language of divine protection is for Fackenheim representative of an altered theological reality.

But it would be a mistake to assume that this vision of a transformed religious landscape has been universally accepted. Jacob Neusner has strongly reacted against such analysis, proposing that '[n]othing has changed. The tradition endures'.[5] Others, such as Norman Solomon and Shmuel Jakobovits are similarly critical, suggesting that these theological doubts are not really a result of the Holocaust at all, but rather reflect the slow influence of older, Enlightenment-era scepticism.[6] It is in the context of this traditionalist backlash that Michael Goldberg's *Why Should Jews Survive?* (1995) is situated. As suggested by its subtitle, *Looking Past the Holocaust Toward a Jewish Future*, this Conservative rabbi's book is about moving away from a view of Judaism shaped by the Holocaust. Goldberg's criticisms are severe—Fackenheim, he writes, offers a theology 'devoid of any real content'.[7] Others, most notably Elie Wiesel, he describes as leading a 'Holocaust Cult' comparable to the idolatry present in ancient Israel.[8]

Into the midst of this vociferous polemic comes the Book of Job. Yet it is worth first addressing what initially provokes Goldberg to turn to Job. The immediate catalyst for Goldberg's reading is an interpretation of the story presented by another Conservative rabbi, Harold Kushner, in a work of popular theology from 1981.

Kushner's book, which only addresses the Holocaust in passing, presents an idea of God without omnipotence.[9] Faced with the classic problem of

4. Emil Fackenheim, *The Jewish Bible After the Holocaust: A Re-reading* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. vii.

5. Jacob Neusner, *'The Holocaust', Zionism, and American Judaism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 81.

6. Norman Solomon, *Judaism and World Religion* (London: MacMillan, 1991), p. 199; Shmuel Jakobovits, 'A Call to Humility and Jewish Unity in the Aftermath of the Holocaust', in *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology* (ed. Steven T. Katz; New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 202-207 (204).

7. Michael Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive? Looking Past the Holocaust Toward a Jewish Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 91.

8. Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive?*, pp. 59-63. Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), pp. 129-44, is similarly critical of Wiesel.

9. On discussion of the Holocaust specifically, cf. Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (London: Pan Books, 1981), pp. 89-93.

how a God that is wholly good, all-seeing and all-powerful can allow suffering to take place, the resolution he provides involves diminishing the last of these characteristics. He writes that 'the earthquake and the accident, like the murder and the robbery, are not the will of God, but represent that aspect of reality which stands independent of His will'.[10] In search of justification for such theology, Kushner appeals to chap. 40 of the Book of Job:

> The most important lines in the entire book may be the ones spoken by God in the second half of the speech from the whirlwind, chapter 40, verses 9–14:
>
> Have you an arm like God?
> Can you thunder with a voice like His?
> *You* tread down the wicked where they stand,
> Bury them in the dust together…
> Then will I acknowledge that your own right hand
> Can give you victory.
>
> I take these lines to mean 'if you think that it is so easy to keep the world straight and true, to keep unfair things from happening to people, *you* try it.' God wants the righteous to live peaceful, happy lives, but sometimes even He can't bring that about.[11]

Among biblical scholars Kushner's way of interpreting 40.9-14 has some limited support. Athalya Brenner, for example, sees in these verses an admission that 'God is not absolutely omnipotent'.[12] Brenner does admit, however, that such an interpretation is contentious. One straightforward alternative is that in 40.9-14 God is not admitting his own powerlessness, but simply emphasizing Job's.

Goldberg is in any case wholly dismissive of both Kushner's theology and his reading of the Book of Job. Challenging Kushner's idea of divine powerlessness, he scathingly remarks that 'one wonders how his message could possibly comfort anybody'.[13] Setting his sights on Kushner's interpretation of the Book of Job, Goldberg questions whether the story truly supports the notion of a God unable to prevent suffering. One obvious difficulty is that the opening chapters of the story depict God's decisions in the presence of the Satan as the root cause of Job's suffering. Thus Job's plight is very clearly *not* a result of divine powerlessness. The image of God that Goldberg prefers is instead one in which there is divine oversight of suffering. The verse he focuses upon is 1.21:

10. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen*, p. 63.
11. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen*, pp. 50-51. Emphasis original.
12. Athalya Brenner, 'God's Answer to Job', *Vetus Testamentum* 31.2 (1981), pp. 129-37 (133).
13. Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive?*, p. 77.

> [I]t seems inevitable—and highly revealing—that he [Kushner] should overlook the book's most famous passage: 'The Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away' (Job 1.21) … when Job utters those famous words, in light of—and not in spite of—everything that has happened to him, he is acknowledging God as the Lord of everything … in acknowledging God as the ultimate source of even the most horrendous suffering, Job and Jews maintain their integrity by wholeheartedly persisting in speaking the truth. Strikingly, Job only speaks falsely when he presumes (like his 'friends') to explain why he suffers.[14]

In Goldberg's eyes 1.21 encapsulates an honest image of God as the source of both blessings and suffering. As the final sentence of this passage reflects, Goldberg's admiration for Job deteriorates markedly when it comes to the rebellious figure of the poetic dialogues. As he elaborates further, this defiance in the dialogues is far from ideal: 'in presuming that he could be in position to speak truly about God's motives, Job was in essence presuming to be God and not man. It is exactly for this false presumption, for such presumptuousness, that God rebukes Job from the whirlwind'.[15]

Seen in the larger context of his argument, the implication of Goldberg's interpretation is that those who see the Holocaust as a stark theological crisis point are, like Job, far too presumptuous in their questioning of God. The doubts of Fackenheim and others are, in other words, as inappropriate and ill-founded as Job's.

There are aspects of his interpretation that we might call into question. On a theological level, is it actually any less disturbing to describe God as a source of suffering than to describe him as powerless in the face of it? Goldberg remarks of Kushner that 'one wonders how his message could possibly comfort anybody', but to assert, as Goldberg does, that God is 'responsible even for the Holocaust' is a similarly unnerving conclusion.[16] Harmonizing the message of Job around 1.21 also leaves loose ends, for as I noted in the last chapter, some interpreters see 42.7 as a commendation of Job's defiance in the poetic dialogues. There is thus room for a more positive appraisal of the rebellious Job. Certainly, as we will see in later chapters, there are several post-Holocaust commentators who identify with Job's poetic defiance far more readily than with his piety in the prose.

Goldberg, in summary, offers a clear and straightforward post-Holocaust reading of Job, which emphasizes a stoic acceptance that God oversees a reality in which both happiness and suffering coexist. As a reading that values the pious figure of the prose and sidelines the defiant figure of the poetry, it fits well into Gordis's model of 'traditional' interpretation. As

14. Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive?*, pp. 78-79.
15. Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive?*, p. 80.
16. Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive?*, p. 77, 80.

well as asserting continuity with long-established forms of Judaism, Goldberg's relationship with Job also reflects continuity with long-established ways of approaching this biblical story.

I have focused upon him near the beginning of this book because the conservatism of his approach to both the Holocaust and Job stands in stark contrast to the orientation of many other commentators. Where Goldberg above all stresses cohesion with the past, for numerous thinkers the Holocaust's disruptive influence cannot be so readily set aside.

3

The Inappropriate Text?

There are many commentators who find in the Book of Job a valuable resource for responding to the Holocaust. But by no means does everyone agree with such a practice. In this chapter I will focus upon a group of thinkers explicitly opposed to the idea that Job is directly relevant for post-Holocaust thought. By discussing them at this point I am admittedly showing my hand a little—for if I thought their objections were entirely without fault the chapters after this one would be rather superfluous. As will become apparent, I am not content to grant these objections total authority. However, the doubts about Job's applicability they express should, I suggest, be taken seriously.

On one level discussing them at any length at all might seem a little counterintuitive—is not my overall focus upon the *reception* of Job, not the *refusal to receive*? But such an objection would be to assess the situation too simplistically, as the difference between reception and its refusal is not straightforward. This is because by articulating the reasons why Job is not relevant in this context, the commentators I will now address are nonetheless bound by necessity to *interpret* this ancient story. After all, they have to say what it is about the Book of Job that they do not like.

1. *Job as 'Virtually Useless' for Lawrence L. Langer*

As I noted in Chapter 1, Langer's exceptionalist viewpoint is inherently hostile to any alignment of Job's suffering with that experienced by Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. In his essay on the topic he writes that '[t]he Holocaust is an expression of a particular atrocity, not of prior religious or historical moments of suffering.'[1] To appeal uncritically to an ancient resource like Job is, in other words, to fail to recognize the unique horror of this 'particular' event.

1. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, p. 26.

To aid his argument Langer turns to the testimony of Abraham P., a survivor sent to Auschwitz from his home in Hungary along with his parents and brothers. Abraham P. describes his feelings of guilt for having, upon arrival at Auschwitz, inadvertently sent his youngest brother to stay with those about to be taken to the gas chamber. 'His parable', Langer reflects, 'darkens the human spirit instead of illuminating it, because it betrays the limitations of all pre-Holocaust spiritual vocabulary when it is applied to that event'.[2] To face its grim reality, we must not, according to Langer, allow our perception to be watered down by the introduction of pre-Holocaust narratives like Job.

Central to this view is the notion that the uniqueness of the Holocaust renders appeals to ancient, biblical categories an ill-considered distraction. It is an argument that I will return to later in this chapter, specifically in relation to Richard Rubenstein. But it is worth noting here that to bolster his position Langer also actively harmonizes the Book of Job's message into one that is *especially* susceptible to being deemed inappropriate in this context. This message is one of suffering as the stimulus for spiritual growth. Discussing the Joban plight alongside Christ's Passion, Langer argues that Job's experience of adversity is ultimately a positive one:

> Job … refuses to accept the justness of his suffering, insisting on his own righteousness and challenging his God to justify his ways to humanity … and is indeed rewarded by the rare experience of a direct address from the Divine Voice. In the end, we are asked to believe, Job's adversity strengthened his moral will and spiritual integrity. Like Jesus' (though with fewer theological implications), his suffering was a form of martyrdom. Today, both figures remain archetypal examples of the value of suffering for the growth of the human spirit. They also remain virtually useless in helping us to understand the Holocaust experience.[3]

The rejection of suffering as a cause for spiritual growth characterizes much of Langer's wider work. In *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (1991) he rails against '[t]he pretense that from the wreckage of mass murder we can salvage a tribute to the victory of the human spirit'.[4] Such comments lie at the core of his reputation, Weissman remarking that 'Langer has been the loudest and most insistent critic of feel-good approaches to the Holocaust which stress heroism, spiritual triumph, and happy ending'.[5]

Langer's rejection of Job has to be taken seriously. To describe the horrors of the Holocaust as 'character building' or spiritually positive would strike most people at best as absurd, and in all likelihood as profoundly

2. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, pp. 29-30.
3. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, p. 25.
4. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, p. 165.
5. Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing*, p. 98. Cf. Mintz, *Popular Culture*, p. 50.

offensive. But we might query aspects of his interpretation of Job. It seems unlikely that Langer has first read it in isolation from his wider concerns and then later found it wanting as a text to be used in a post-Holocaust context. My suggestion is that he has instead crafted Job's message into a form especially open to criticism.

We might question whether, as Langer proposes, Job is '*rewarded* by the rare experience of a direct address from the Divine Voice' because of having insisted upon his righteousness.[6] This would tend to suggest that Job's poetic defiance is exemplary and the divine speeches are not a rebuke. But as we have already seen with Michael Goldberg, some choose to read the story in a quite different manner. In Goldberg's view, Job's rebellion is entirely misguided.

Langer also asserts that '[i]n the end, we are asked to believe, Job's adversity strengthened his moral will and spiritual integrity'.[7] Yet is this definitely so? At the end of the story, as I discussed in Chapter 1, Job's attitude is ambiguous. Were we to see his final words (42.1-6) as contrition, the message of the story has the potential to deviate from Langer's interpretation quite dramatically. The Book of Job can become, to put it simply, the story of a man who, experiencing crisis, goes off the rails and needs divine intervention to be put right again. Read in such a way, Job is not a tale of spiritual growth, but of emotional breakdown and repair. And given both the ambiguity of Job's final words and his subsequent silence during the restoration of his family and property, the reader can, if they wish to do so, question the extent to which this emotional repair is a success.

My point here is not that Langer's reading of Job is straightforwardly 'wrong'. My contention is rather that he has moulded its message into one that suits his purposes especially well. His summary of the Book of Job paints it in the worst possible light as a text for post-Holocaust use. Langer may reject Job emphatically, but he actively crafts its meaning to no less a degree than Michael Goldberg.

2. *Steven T. Katz and Job's Education*

In his 1983 work *Post-Holocaust Dialogues* Steven Katz cites the Book of Job in a manner that is broadly analogous to Langer's reading of the text. Yet compared to Langer's, it is an interpretation that, when unpicked, far more readily presents the potential pitfalls of moulding Job into a message of spiritual development.

Across a range of publications Katz repeatedly voices his concerns over whether a theological response to the Holocaust is possible. After surveying

6. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, p. 25. Emphasis added.
7. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, p. 25.

a range of possibilities as part of an essay published in 2005, he concludes that despite several decades of writings on the topic 'no real advance has been made relative to the absolutely fundamental questions of theodicy'.[8] In *The Holocaust in Historical Context* (1994) he states that post-Holocaust theologies have tended to 'posit conclusions that are not epistemologically or intellectually persuasive'.[9] And at the outset of *Post-Holocaust Dialogues*, the work that I will focus upon here, Katz remarks that such theologies 'are inadequate, if not false'.[10] There is consequently a degree of logic to his repeated assertions that Job is not a useful tool in this context. For when engaging with the Holocaust's religious dimensions Katz has, over nearly thirty years, often emphasized what is *not* possible rather than what is.

Like Langer, his rejection of Job is based on a view that the story, at its heart, concerns growth in the face of adversity. Katz asserts categorically that 'as a response to Auschwitz Job is not the right model', because a 'defense of tragedy, of suffering as the occasion for growth and overcoming, has little relevance to the Holocaust'.[11] In another section that I will look at in some depth, Katz reiterates this point:

> Auschwitz is *not* punishment for sin, it is *not* divine judgement; it is *not* moral education à la Job: 'Behold, happy is the man whom God reproves … He delivers the afflicted by their affliction, and opens their ear by adversity' (Job 5.17; 36.15). As Franklin Sherman has correctly noted, the Jobean view has merit but only up to a point, for 'when (a man's) humanity begins to be destroyed, as was the case in the concentration camps, then it is fruitless to talk of the ennoblement of character'.[12]

This is, I will ultimately argue, a passage of text that on close inspection is quite remarkable. Yet keeping to its surface meaning for the moment, the intended argument Katz makes is fairly clear. The Book of Job, he asserts, is a tale about 'moral education' and 'the ennoblement of character' in the face of adversity. He argues that read in the context of post-Holocaust thought this is a message of no relevance.

Peculiarities with this passage begin to appear, however, when we follow up Katz's quotations from the Book of Job. 'Behold, happy is the man whom God reproves … He delivers the afflicted by their affliction, and opens their

8. Steven T. Katz, 'The Issue of Confirmation and Disconfirmation in Jewish Thought after the Shoah', in *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology* (ed. Steven T. Katz; New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 13-60 (53).

9. Steven T. Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*. I. *The Holocaust and Mass Death Before the Modern Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 30.

10. Steven T. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. xii.

11. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues*, p. 276.

12. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues*, p. 206. Emphasis original.

ear by adversity' is a combination of two distinct passages, and is cited by Katz in a way that suggests these words are representative of the Book of Job's overall meaning. The first part of the quotation is taken from the speeches of Eliphaz, and the second from those of Elihu. It is worth addressing each verse in turn given how unusual it is to use words from these characters as prooftexts in the way Katz does.

The precise meaning of 'Behold, happy is the man whom God reproves' (5.17) is slightly ambiguous. Read in isolation it may be interpreted as showing Eliphaz's commitment to the idea that adversity—whether deserved or not—can be an opportunity for spiritual growth. Yet some biblical scholars warn against reading the verse out of context. Gordis, for example, notes that 'the entire tenor of Eliphaz' address makes it clear that he is referring to suffering as a discipline for sins *already committed*'.[13] And indeed earlier in the same speech (4.7-8) Eliphaz lucidly outlines his view that those who suffer always deserve their fate. This is one of the key reasons why, alongside Zophar and Bildad, he tends to be viewed rather poorly by commentators.[14] Because as a reader of the story is by this point aware, Job does not suffer because of sin, but because of the wager between God and the Satan. Pope, for instance, comments that '[t]he friends would have been well advised to maintain their discreet silence in the Prologue, since the premise of their argument had already been nullified'.[15] God's direct condemnation of Eliphaz in 42.7 for speaking incorrectly only serves to further label his speeches as problematic. For Habel, the conclusion from all of this is that the friends are a device of the Book of Job's author to discredit a view of human hardship structured around divine retribution: '[t]he friends demonstrate, in the underlying scheme of the author, the folly of arguing from a limited theological perspective on reality'.[16] It may be that there are ways to partially rehabilitate the friends—the dialogues do, after all, facilitate Job's philosophical exploration of his fate. But at the very least we can say that using Eliphaz's words as a prooftext through which to identify the core message of the book is an unusual choice.[17]

Katz's appeal to the words of Elihu (36.15) is similarly problematic. Although Elihu is not condemned by God in 42.7 (as Eliphaz is), across Job's

13. Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, p. 113. Emphasis original.

14. Newsom, *The Book of Job*, p. 90, notes that 'they have fared particularly badly in twentieth-century readings. Frequently, the friends are interpreted as religiously narrow, mean-spirited hypocrites'.

15. Pope, *Job*, p. lxxiii.

16. Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 62.

17. Citing Eliphaz's words positively is unusual, but not completely unknown. To give one example: certain Gideon's Bibles placed in hotel rooms advise guests to turn to Job 22.21 when feeling anxious. Cf. The Gideons, *Gideon Bible Helps* (Lutterworth: The Gideons International, 2005), p. 6.

reception history his status has fluctuated significantly. For Maimonides and various other mediaeval Jewish commentators, his speeches reveal the core messages of the book.[18] At the other extreme, in the ancient pseudepigraphic work *The Testament of Job* Elihu is described as 'not a human but a beast' (42.2).[19] Modern biblical scholars have also tended to cast his speeches in a poor light.[20] Pope, for example, concludes that he 'represents one last effort to uphold the discredited view of the friends'.[21]

There is, in sum, cause to ask why Katz cites words from Eliphaz and Elihu as the prism through which to define what he describes as 'the Jobean view'. The explanation can be found by following up his reference to the Lutheran theologian Franklin Sherman. In the passage cited above, Katz writes that '[a]s Franklin Sherman has correctly noted, the Jobean view has merit but only up to a point, for "when (a man's) humanity begins to be destroyed, as was the case in the concentration camps, then it is fruitless to talk of the ennoblement of character"'.[22] The impression given here is that Franklin Sherman agrees with Katz's depiction of 'the Jobean view' as a message of suffering as cause for spiritual growth. But in the 1974 article from which Katz quotes, this is not in fact the case. Sherman's comments on the issue are worth citing at length:

> If the doctrine of retribution was the chief theory represented by Job's interlocutors, there was also another theory, a subordinate motif, which we may call the *theory of moral education*. In a word, suffering is good for you. 'Behold, happy is the man whom God reproves; therefore despise not the chastening of the Almighty … He delivers the afflicted by their affliction, and opens their ear by adversity' (Job 5.17; 36.15). Again, this theory has some truth to it, but only a limited truth. It is a true statement of what a man of faith can make of his suffering—but only up to a point. When his very humanity begins to be destroyed, as was the case in the concentration camps, then it is fruitless to talk of the ennoblement of his character.[23]

18. Cf. Vicchio, *The Image of the Biblical Job*. II. *Job in the Medieval World*, p. 112; Robert Eisen, *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 222.

19. 'The Testament of Job', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. I. *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (trans. R.P. Spittler; ed. James H. Charlesworth; London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983), pp. 829-68 (861).

20. John F.A. Sawyer, 'Job', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (ed. Michael Lieb, Emma Mason and Jonathan Roberts; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 25-36 (29), notes that for many modern commentators 'Elihu has nothing new to add to what has already been said by the others. He is superfluous, and his removal would make very little difference apart from shortening the book'.

21. Pope, *Job*, p. lxxiv.

22. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues*, p. 206.

23. Franklin Sherman, 'Speaking of God After Auschwitz', *Worldview* 9 (1974), pp. 26-30 (27). Emphasis original.

Katz's reliance upon this paragraph is clear. Beyond quoting the final sentence, he also refers to the same speeches from Eliphaz and Elihu. The obvious difference though relates to this idea that suffering can be educative. While Sherman only ascribes such a view to Job's friends, Katz has taken it to be normative of 'the Jobean view'.

Furthermore, Sherman goes on to explicitly deny that this view amounts to the core message of the book. The passage from Sherman reproduced above refers to two theories promoted by Job's dialogue partners—one focused on retribution, and another concerned with suffering as education. 'Neither', he continues, 'was found adequate by Job to explain his own suffering. The only answer Job receives is the theophany: an experience of the overwhelming majesty and awfulness of God'.[24] It is this last point that represents the culmination of his interpretation of the Book of Job. In Sherman's eyes Job is not about educative suffering, it is about grappling with the mysteriousness of God.

The short passage from Katz's *Post-Holocaust Dialogues* that I have discussed here was later reproduced as part of an essay he published in 2005.[25] I have poured over it at some length because it presents an especially stark example of how the attempt to harmonize the post-Holocaust message of Job can have the potential to unravel quite dramatically in certain circumstances. Neither the words of Eliphaz and Elihu, nor the appeal to Sherman's 1974 article quite support Katz's reading in the way that they should. In fact, as I have tried to show here, if anything they subvert the purpose for which they are intended.

It should be remembered that Katz's overall point remains a simple and compelling one. The idea that suffering experienced during the Holocaust can be simplistically labelled as 'moral education' is profoundly troubling. But when looked at closely, his appeal to the Book of Job appears difficult.

3. C. *Fred Alford and the Divine Speeches*

Both Langer and Katz focus their attention on the idea that Job gains wisdom from his suffering. It is a theodicy that both find inappropriate for post-Holocaust thought. A more recent variation of this is seen in *After the Holocaust*, a monograph published in 2009 by C. Fred Alford.

Alford's view that Job's experiences are a cause for spiritual growth rests on an appreciation of God's speeches:

> This is the message of Job: God reveals to Job the magnificence of His creation, thereby demonstrating the existence of an ordering principle to the universe. This is simple fact, at least for Job. What remains obscure is the

24. Sherman, 'Speaking of God', p. 28.
25. Katz, 'The Issue of Confirmation', p. 20.

> content of this principle. Accepting this obscurity, which is tantamount to accepting that human knowledge is powerless before the most important questions—the questions that quake us to the bone—means that one can finally achieve the peace of spirit that Job achieves.[26]

What Job uncovers, in other words, is not how the universe is organized, but simply that it *is* organized. Job's experience is educative not by virtue of learning precisely how 'the laws of heaven' (38.33) actually work, but by merely gaining assurance that there is meaning and purpose at the heart of creation. In this sense he is actually closer to the line of interpretation given by Sherman than to either Langer or Katz's readings. Like them, however, Alford crafts the Book of Job's message in a manner that enables him to ultimately deem it inappropriate for post-Holocaust thought.

After the Holocaust features lengthy discussions of survivor testimony that I will not address in detail here. Alford's fundamental conclusion though, is that for victims of the Holocaust there was no revelatory sense of transcendent meaning to be found:

> However great, Job's suffering was meaningful. In the end he … learned a great lesson. The lesson of Auschwitz is that extreme suffering can be rendered meaningless … This is captured in a camp guard's response to Primo Levi, who asked, '*Warum?*' when a guard snatched a icicle out of his hand just as he was about to suck on it to relieve his terrible thirst. '*Hier gibt es kein warum*', answered the guard: 'Here there is no why, no reason, no point in asking because there is no answer'.[27]

In Alford's view, there is no sense of mysterious meaning behind the suffering experienced during the Holocaust. This modern atrocity is instead meaninglessness in its purest form, undiluted by a confidence that meaning lies just beyond the reach of human consciousness. Alford warns us against a romanticized vision of the Holocaust in a manner similar to both Langer and Katz. The sheer deprivation victims experienced demands that we limit any notions of spiritual growth.

In the passage cited above, he makes reference to the figure of Primo Levi, a survivor whose works are a major focus of *After the Holocaust*. Levi's suggestion that 'there is no why' amidst experiences of the Holocaust is a central theme of Alford's book. And like Alford, Levi has also occasionally turned to the Book of Job. It is notable, however, how differently he views the divine speeches. On the relationship between God and Job, Levi remarks that '[i]t is an unequal argument. God the creator of marvels and monsters crushes him beneath his omnipotence'.[28] Job, in other words, does not gain wisdom from his encounter with the divine presence, only an

26. Alford, *After the Holocaust*, p. 101.
27. Alford, *After the Holocaust*, pp. 2-3.
28. Cited in Alford, *After the Holocaust*, p. 103.

experience of having been overpowered. As will become apparent in the next chapter, Levi is not the only post-Holocaust commentator to perceive God's speeches in this way.

Alford cannot ignore Levi's engagement with Job because both Levi and the Book of Job are central discussion points in *After the Holocaust* (both are indeed listed in the book's subtitle). But while Levi's view of the divine speeches *is* discussed in *After the Holocaust*, it is quickly sidelined. Directly after quoting Levi's comment that 'God … crushes him [i.e. Job] beneath his omnipotence', Alford simply remarks '[t]here are other ways to read the Book of Job'.[29] This is of course true, but it does nonetheless serve to show how much Alford has himself read the Book of Job in one particular way.

Yet there are indications that Alford is in fact well aware of this point. More than once he notes that Job's final words to God are textually difficult.[30] In the final paragraph of *After the Holocaust* he also refers to 'the silence of Job after his restoration, which encourages us to use our imagination to fill in the gaps'.[31] On this last page, in other words, Alford seems quite conscious that Job's silence during the final prose section of the book presents the reader with multiple interpretive routes. In the introduction to *After the Holocaust* he additionally makes the following remark:

> In the end, perhaps it is not so important to divine the original intent as it is to use (carefully) texts such as the Book of Job to speak with each other about those issues that, humans being who they are, will never go away—issues such as the meaning of suffering. For the danger in the contemporary world seems to be not so much that the Book of Job will be carelessly misread as that the issues it raises will be forgotten, as men and women invent new and ever more one-dimensional ways in which to understand themselves.[32]

It should be stressed that across the vast majority of *After the Holocaust* Alford does keep to the line that Job learns from his encounter with God, and that the Book of Job is consequently a text of only limited applicability for post-Holocaust thought. Yet I understand the particular passage cited here as suggesting that reading Job in some objectively 'correct' manner is not, when all is said and done, actually the most important issue at stake. What is more vital is to use the Book of Job to wrestle with the nature of suffering (e.g. how it can take both meaningful and meaningless forms). And it should at least be conceded that Alford has achieved this. Some might choose to side with Levi and consequently query *After the Holocaust*'s interpretation of Job, but in the end there remains a suspicion that Alford's

29. Alford, *After the Holocaust*, p. 103.
30. Alford, *After the Holocaust*, pp. 21, 87.
31. Alford, *After the Holocaust*, p. 156.
32. Alford, *After the Holocaust*, p. 21.

own harmonization of the story's message is, beneath its surface, more a self-conscious attempt to provoke reflection than an assertion of Job's precise meaning.

4. *Richard L. Rubenstein's Multiple Rejections of Job*

Richard Rubenstein is commonly described as a pivotal figure for the encounter between Jewish theology and the Holocaust. Discussing the impact of his controversial 1966 work *After Auschwitz*, Michael Berenbaum suggests that 'no one can proceed to work in the field without wrestling with Rubenstein's premises and his conclusions'.[33] Rubenstein refers to Job only fleetingly in this seminal work, but later published a more thorough treatment in a journal article from 1970 entitled 'Job and Auschwitz'.

His discussion of Job's relevance is in many ways comparable to the interpretations of the three commentators that I have just addressed (although none display any reliance upon Rubenstein). Despite 'Job and Auschwitz' predating all of their readings, I am looking at Rubenstein last because of the way that his approach touches upon so many issues already raised. Like Langer, Katz and Alford, Rubenstein is keen to stress the extent to which the Book of Job is not useful for post-Holocaust thought. 'Job does not provide a helpful image for comprehending Auschwitz', he writes.[34] His argument is closest in several respects to the line of objection offered by Langer. But like Katz's reading, Rubenstein's interpretation seems, in certain respects, to ultimately unravel. And as with Alford, there is also scope to ask whether Rubenstein's approach is self-consciously provocative. His treatment of Job has several distinct elements and it is worth addressing each in turn.

Job and the Modernity of the Holocaust

Like Langer, Rubenstein bases part of his rejection of Job's post-Holocaust value on not just the content of this biblical book, but also its very antiquity. In his 1975 book *The Cunning of History* he laments that 'whenever scholars have attempted to comprehend the Holocaust in terms of pre-twentieth-century experience, they have invariably failed to recognize the phenomenon for what it was, a thoroughly modern exercise in total domination'.[35] To uncritically use a pre-Holocaust resource is, in other words, to deflect attention from the Holocaust's status as a 'thoroughly modern' event. Five

33. Michael Berenbaum, 'Richard Lowell Rubenstein: A Renegade Son is Honored at Home', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 25.2 (1988), pp. 262-67 (264).

34. Richard L. Rubenstein, 'Job and Auschwitz', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 25 (1970), pp. 421-37 (421).

35. Richard L. Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History: The Holocaust and the American Future* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 4.

years earlier, in the article 'Job and Auschwitz', Rubenstein made a similar point, though this time more directly aimed at countering the notion of Job's usefulness:

> The Germans not only deprived their victims of their lives but stripped them of their last shred of dignity before administering the final *coup de grace*. This was a deliberate, purposeful policy towards men and women who were first dehumanized, then murdered with an insecticide, and finally disposed of through incineration as if they were so much refuse. The biblical authors of the book of Job portrayed the experience of radical misfortune as understood in their own time. Never in their worst nightmares could they have imagined a descent into hell so total yet so banal, rationalized, and bureaucratic as the twentieth century death camp.[36]

Rubenstein is uncompromising in depicting an industrialized vision of the Holocaust that is entirely alien from the context of Job's origins in the ancient Near East. In doing so he fits neatly into the category of the 'exceptionalist' I discussed in Chapter 1. Like Langer, Rubenstein is wary of any distraction from the horrors of the Holocaust.

We should not lightly put aside their objection. To assert that suffering in the ancient world is the same as suffering experienced during the Holocaust carries the risk of overlooking the particularities of modern history. But is it a risk that demands an absolute block on Job's relevance? Or is it possible to use the Book of Job within responses to the Holocaust yet remain sensitive to the event's specificities? To answer these questions is not, I believe, quite as straightforward as Langer and Rubenstein would have us believe. As I will explore in later chapters, there are a great many ways to read the Book of Job in the context of post-Holocaust thought.

It is also worth partially querying Rubenstein's depiction of the Holocaust as 'thoroughly modern' and 'banal, rationalized, and bureaucratic', as it would be a mistake to assume that he has simply chosen to objectively set aside all distractions and conceptualize the Holocaust in a direct and uncompromising manner. His language rather reflects quite specific influences. Most notable is the impact of Hannah Arendt and Raul Hilberg, both of whom were prominent during the period that Rubenstein wrote 'Job and Auschwitz'. In the article itself, he comments on finding Arendt's writings 'still the best description of the rationalized, banalized procedure' of the Holocaust, and in *The Cunning of History* reflects that '[t]hose acquainted with the literature on the Holocaust will recognize the extent of my indebtedness to Hilberg'.[37] Both commentators are responsible for

36. Rubenstein, 'Job and Auschwitz', p. 434.

37. Rubenstein, 'Job and Auschwitz', p. 434; Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, p. 98.

conveying a view of the Holocaust that is especially focused upon Nazi bureaucracy and the industrialized features of the Final Solution. I have no intention here of entering into a lengthy analysis of their respective contributions to Holocaust studies.[38] But note, for example, Lawson's suggestion that since the opening of ex-Soviet archives in the 1990s there has been an increasing emphasis upon the Holocaust as a less centralized and more regionally diverse event.[39] It was not, in other words, a purely homogenous act of bureaucratized killing. It remains likely, of course, that historical understanding will continue to evolve. My point here is not that Rubenstein's conceptualisation of the event is fundamentally faulty, but rather that it has inevitably been shaped by the time in which he was writing and the authors he was reading. Consequently we should not uncritically accept the idea of an unchanging and absolute division between those who see the horrors of the Holocaust clearly and those who do not. For Rubenstein's very presentation of the Holocaust's modernity vs. Job's antiquity is premised upon a particular kind of vision.

Job's Integrity and Experiences of the Holocaust

Rubenstein writes that Job 'retains his dignity, his clarity, and his honor… He challenges some widely accepted opinions of his time, but does so in a way that his religious life is deepened rather than perverted'.[40] This emphasis upon Job's experience as positive, as an ordeal that ultimately leads to spiritual growth, resonates strongly with those interpretations we have already seen from Langer, Katz and Alford. The notion that there is an inspiring element to Job's plight is particularly reinforced by Rubenstein's view of the divine speeches:

> The book reports that Job was not required to sacrifice his integrity. Job is overwhelmed by the sheer presence of God at the end of his trial… [h]e remains no closer to understanding than before, but at least he now has the implicit understanding that the mysterious God is not his enemy. Above all, he has the incredible satisfaction of knowing that he has not caved in, that he has taken the worst and remained his own man. Even in the presence of God there is no surrender. There is great dignity in… Job's replies to God.[41]

Rubenstein's reading is not quite the same as Alford's. The important issue, Rubenstein seems to suggest, is not that Job has learnt from the divine speeches, but rather that he has retained his dignity. In this sense his

38. For one recent overview, see Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust*, pp. 52-78.
39. Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust*, pp. 154-62.
40. Rubenstein, 'Job and Auschwitz', p. 426.
41. Rubenstein, 'Job and Auschwitz', p. 429.

interpretation bears a close similarity to Langer's view that 'Job's adversity strengthened his moral will and spiritual integrity'.[42]

Whether in fact Job does or does not keep his dignity intact is a matter open to debate. As we have already seen, Primo Levi considers Job to have been simply crushed beneath God's argument. Another survivor, Alexander Donat, has written that God 'humiliates Job' and 'degrades his value and honor'.[43] Why then does Rubenstein place such stress upon the image of Job as a dignified figure? The answer is that by portraying Job in this way he is able to establish a clear contrast with the situation faced by victims of the Holocaust:

> At Auschwitz the vast majority of Jews had no opportunity to be likened to Job because of the selection process. As new inmates entered the camp, they were divided into two groups, one marked for immediate death, the other for some form of slave labour. The greater part of those who entered were marked for immediate execution … Job sits on his dung heap and challenges God and man … [o]ne cannot liken those who were immediately executed to Job. They simply had neither time nor opportunity to come to terms with their experience.[44]

Regarding those not immediately executed, Rubenstein further argues that 'most inmates were so totally assaulted both emotionally and physically that they were incapable of maintaining a sense of their own adult integrity and dignity. It is precisely this capacity that distinguishes Job in his trial before God and man'.[45] Rubenstein, in other words, argues against viewing the Holocaust through the prism of the Book of Job on the grounds that to do so avoids grappling with the event's extreme conditions. Job, he asserts, is a model of dignity and defiance, whereas at Auschwitz we see only overwhelming subjugation.

As I have already said, this argument requires that we view Job in heroic and dignified terms that not every interpreter would agree with. But the challenge Rubenstein sets out should nonetheless be taken seriously. To demonstrate this, let us consider an example from the 2008 BBC film *God on Trial*. Frank Cottrell Boyce's drama portrays a group of prisoners at Auschwitz debating the theological implications of their circumstances. In the following section, the Book of Job makes an appearance in the proceedings:

> [Moche] We need a God who sends the angel of death to our enemies. Where, where is He?
>
> [Lieble] I don't know much about God. Maybe God never changes, maybe He does. Maybe He is not all powerful, maybe He needs us to make Him complete. Maybe that's why He made us.

42. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, p. 25.
43. Donat, 'Voice from the Ashes', p. 283.
44. Rubenstein, 'Job and Auschwitz', p. 430.
45. Rubenstein, 'Job and Auschwitz', pp. 433-34.

> [Baumgarten] It's hard to see how we could be of any use to Him in our present condition …
>
> [Lieble] What do I know? I know I don't know what He can do and not do. Have I ever given orders to the morning? Or sent the dawn to its post? Have I walked to the bottom of the abyss? Which is the way to the home of the light? Who gives birth to the frost …?
>
> [The scene is then interrupted by guards entering the bunkhouse][46]

God on Trial is a powerful work of drama and received many positive reviews.[47] Lieble's paraphrasing of Job 38.12-22 and his appeal to the mysteriousness of God marks but one of the numerous theodicies discussed by the characters in this drama. But was it historically the case that Jewish prisoners would debate theology and the Bible in this way? Or has Job been used by the scriptwriter simply to produce a more engaging, more poetic drama? If so, we should take seriously Rubenstein's warning that aligning Job with the Holocaust risks producing an image of religious debate in the midst of suffering that is more imagined than real. With specific reference to *God on Trial* this is an especially relevant point given the notable uncertainties surrounding the specifics of its relationship with history. Some commentators, from Holocaust survivors to newspaper reviewers, have thought *God on Trial* to be directly based on a true story.[48] Others, including the scriptwriter Cottrell Boyce, publically question its connection with history (although the doubts are stated nowhere in the film itself).[49] The risk of painting a theologically-loaded image of the Holocaust rather than facing the dark truth of history is well worth being wary of.

46. Frank Cottrell Boyce, *God on Trial* (dir. Andy de Emmony; BBC, 2008).

47. In the US, for example, David Wiegand, 'TV Review: Auschwitz Prisoners put God on Trial', *The San Francisco Chronicle*, November 8, 2008, describes *God on Trial* as 'an extraordinary film in every way … Frank Cottrell Boyce has crafted a brilliant script'. In the UK Paul Whitelaw, 'Frank Cottrell-Boyce—Keeping the Faith', *The Scotsman* (UK), September 1, 2008, refers to the film as '[i]ntelligent, thought-provoking, and unashamedly weighty'.

48. Olly Grant, 'God in the Auschwitz Dock', *Church Times*, August 29, 2008, features an interview with Anthony Sher, one of the actors in *God in Trial*, in which Sher states that 'several survivors of Auschwitz talk about this having happened, including the great Holocaust writer Eli Wiesel'. Tim Teeman, 'God on Trial; Lost in Austin', *The Times*, September 4, 2008, also writes that the event depicted in the film 'was supposed to have happened'.

49. Frank Cottrell Boyce, 'Losing My Religion', *The Guardian* (UK), August 19, 2008, reflects that 'I'm pretty sure now that it's an apocryphal tale, one of those stories that persists because it strikes a chord'. A fuller discussion of this and other issues regarding *God on Trial* is forthcoming in David C. Tollerton, 'Holocaust Representation and Judicial Proceedings Against God on the Stage and Screen', *Modernism/Modernity*.

Yet while Rubenstein's objection to easy identifications between Job and the Holocaust deserves respect, it is not a clinching argument. Because, as he is forced to concede, there were undoubtedly *some* in the death camps and labour camps who did grapple with religious questions in a manner akin to Job. Rubenstein refers to the well-known example of Elie Wiesel (who will be discussed in the next chapter), but there are numerous others we might point to. In January 1942 Yakov Grojanowski escaped from the Chelmno death camp and, upon his arrival in the Warsaw Ghetto, was encouraged to write a report of what he had witnessed. In his testimony he mentions a religious debate at Chelmno:

> The discussion of divine justice took place as follows: some of those present, also older people among them, had entirely lost their belief in God. They thought faith was non-sense and God didn't exist. Otherwise he couldn't simply watch our tortures without helping us. Those, myself included, whose faith remained firm, asserted that it wasn't for us to understand God's actions. Everything, we said, was in God's hands.[50]

The conversation Grojanowski recalls covers theological territory not wholly dissimilar to the Book of Job. And certainly it does not portray prisoners so psychologically crushed as to make parallels with Job wholly inappropriate. The BBC's *God on Trial* might have an uncertain relationship with history in its specific details, but it can nonetheless be said with confidence that, very broadly, events like those it depicts did sometimes take place.

Rubenstein's argument, however, is that such examples represent only the minority. He states that '*most* inmates were so totally assaulted both emotionally and physically' that to use Job in this context is problematic.[51] In contrast to this, Reeve Robert Brenner states that 'the truth is, *a great deal* of theological reflection and speculation took place in many of the camps, at the various frightfully degenerating stages—to a large extent motivated by that very unspeakable duress'.[52]

How common or how rare such theological reflection really was is a historical question that is difficult to resolve in absolute terms. But I wish to briefly note that Rubenstein has (consciously or unconsciously) attempted to fix the answer by his very framing of the Holocaust. As Mintz notes, exceptionalist responses to the event tend to focus upon death camps and labour camps.[53] The reason for this is relatively simple: if you wish to argue that the grim horrors of the Holocaust must be faced unflinchingly, it is

50. Reproduced in Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy*, p. 265.

51. Rubenstein, 'Job and Auschwitz', pp. 433-34. Emphasis added.

52. Robert Reeve Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1998), p. 167. Emphasis added.

53. Mintz, *Popular Culture*, pp. 56-63.

natural that you will emphasize some of its most dark and unique aspects. Looking at Rubenstein's rejection of the Book of Job it is clear that he is working with a model of the Holocaust dominated by the camps. This is apparent in both the detail of his argument and his pervasive use of the term 'Auschwitz'. Across Rubenstein's work as whole his use of this term carries an ambiguity with regard to whether he is referring to the Holocaust in its entirety or more literally to the complex of camps actually sited at Auschwitz. In the second edition of *After Auschwitz*, for example, Rubenstein refers to his first edition as '[m]y interpretation of the Holocaust' in a way that conflates the terms 'Holocaust' and 'Auschwitz'.[54] He is hardly the only commentator to use 'Auschwitz' in this way and it is overwhelmingly likely that for Rubenstein 'Auschwitz' always partially represents the Holocaust as a whole.[55] Yet his complaint against Job's use that I have outlined above is based on the experience of new arrivals at death camps and the psychological experience of inmates in a way that also seems to be referring literally to Auschwitz. Applied to the ghettos, or to those in hiding, or to mass-shootings, the specific detail of this argument makes limited sense.

The implicit conflation of Auschwitz and the Holocaust amidst his discussions of the Book of Job works for Rubenstein because it presents an image of the event in its most starkly industrialized and bureaucratic form. Seen in such a way it becomes easier to argue that the Holocaust was not characterized by theological anguish, but simply by the machine-like destruction of a people. Rubenstein is right, I have argued above, to sound a warning against too enthusiastically projecting onto the event an idea that its victims faced Job-like anguish at every turn. But his argument, I wish to suggest, is characterized by not only a particular way of reading Job, but also a particular presentation of the Holocaust.

Job and 'the God History'

Rubenstein offers one further reason to doubt the usefulness of Job. It is an argument that reaches to the very core of both his theological outlook and his conceptualisation of the Holocaust. Yet it is also an argument that strangely subverts Rubenstein's thoughts on Job that I have just laid out.

One aspect of the way he describes the Holocaust is the depiction of Jews as passive victims. They were, in Rubenstein's eyes, simply crushed by the onslaught. But while he is keen to stress the uniquely modern aspects of this atrocity, he proposes that the Jewish reaction lies in continuity with the past. In doing so Rubenstein's approach again bears the influence of

54. Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, 2nd edn), p. xii.

55. The bibliography contains numerous examples of this practice.

Hilberg and Arendt. Note, for example, Hilberg's comments in his seminal 1961 work *The Destruction of the European Jews*:

> Preventative attack, armed resistance, and revenge are almost completely absent in two thousand years of [Jewish] ghetto history. Instances of violent opposition, which may be found in one or another history book, are atypical and episodic. The critical period of the 1930s and 1940s is marked by that same absence of physical opposition.[56]

As I discussed in Chapter 1, narratives of the Holocaust that stress Jewish passivity have often proved controversial. But Rubenstein nonetheless takes up such a narrative, proposing like Hilberg that the Jewish failure to resist in Nazi-occupied Europe developed from a history of inaction. Rubenstein's variation of this position differs only in the extent to which he presents it in more theological terms:

> It is very likely that many Jews failed to resist because of a deeply paralysing sense of guilt. When the twentieth century catastrophe occurred, many religious Jews regarded their predicament in exactly the same perspective as had the rabbis in the first century. The Jewish people were once again punished by God for their sins. It was futile to resist.[57]

His vision of Jewish history is one of a people rendered inactive because of their adherence to retributive theology. If suffering is punishment for sin, there is no logic in resisting.

Rubenstein's rejection of retributive theology is central to his seminal work of 1966, *After Auschwitz*. In it he argues that such a vision of a God overseeing history and its sufferings must be entirely rejected:

56. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), p. 14. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 2nd edn, 1958), p. 8, writes that 'Jewish history offers the extraordinary spectacle of a people … which began its history with a well-defined concept of history and an almost conscious resolution to achieve a well-circumscribed plan on earth and then, without giving up this concept, avoided all political action for two thousand years'. Such a reading of Jewish history is contentious. David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), pp. 5-6, refutes the idea that Jewish history from 70 CE to the Holocaust is dominated by passivity, reflecting that 'Jewish history cannot be divided into distinct periods of power or powerlessness. During the ancient period of Jewish sovereignty, normally considered to end in 70 CE, the power of the Jews was severely limited by the great empires of antiquity. Conversely, the period after 70 CE was not a period of total political impotence. The key to the Jews' remarkable survival never lay in either one or the other of these two polarities'.

57. Richard L. Rubenstein, *The Religious Imagination: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Jewish Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 128. See also Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, pp. 70-72.

> Traditional Jewish theology maintains that God is the ultimate, omnipotent actor in the historical drama. It has interpreted every major catastrophe in Jewish history as God's punishment of a sinful Israel. I fail to see how this position can be maintained without regarding Hitler and the SS as instruments of God's will. The agony of European Jewry cannot be likened to the testing of Job. To see any purpose in the death camps, the traditional believer is forced to regard the most demonic, anti-human explosion of all history as a meaningful expression of God's purposes. The idea is simply too obscene for me to accept.[58]

The reference to Job here is both brief and slightly ambiguous. Is Rubenstein suggesting that the Book of Job is part of a theology of retribution? The suspicion that this is probably the case is furthered by a comment in his 1970 article 'Job and Auschwitz' in which he states that 'it is my opinion that the use of Job as a metaphor for the experience of the Jewish people and as a means of reconciling Auschwitz with the existence of the biblical God of history has at best a questionable validity'.[59] The phrase 'God of history' refers, I believe, to the same retributive deity described as 'the ultimate omnipotent actor in the historical drama' in the passage from *After Auschwitz* reproduced above. The Book of Job, he seems to be saying, should not be used to reconcile the Holocaust with retributive theology.

But does this make sense? As Rubenstein himself suggests, the Book of Job was written by people 'unable … to regard all human misfortune simply as punitive'.[60] If Job is an argument *against* retributive theology, it seems confusing to reject the book because it is also somehow *representative* of retributive theology. Commenting upon this specific aspect of Rubenstein's reception of Job, Zachary Braiterman denounces what he describes as its 'uniquely contorted logic'.[61]

Braiterman also examines Rubenstein's treatment of rabbinic literature and comes to the conclusion that he consistently emphasizes elements of retributive theology so that 'traditional' Judaism can be more easily dismissed.[62] He remarks that 'Rubenstein repeatedly obfuscates the

58. Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (London: Collier MacMillan, 1966), p. 153. Rubenstein's concerns are not without cause, for there have been some religious commentators content to describe the Holocaust as a form of divine punishment. For two discussions (and rebuttals) of such theology, cf. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Holocaust Theology* (London: Lamp Press, 1989), pp. 15-27; David Weiss Halivni, *Breaking the Tablets: Jewish Theology After the Shoah* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), pp. 3-4.

59. Rubenstein, 'Job and Auschwitz', p. 430.

60. Rubenstein, 'Job and Auschwitz', p. 423.

61. Zachary Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 104.

62. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, pp. 102-103.

heterogeneity of opinion found in traditional Jewish thought'.[63] Seen in this light his aligning of Job with retributive theology makes some level of sense. Rubenstein has weaved the story into a view of Judaism dominated by retributive theology.

Yet on another level this still appears strange. For as I noted earlier, one of the ways that he rejects the book's usefulness involves portraying Job as a dignified rebel against theological injustice. Job is *so* dignified, the argument runs, that he cannot be compared to the passive and utterly degraded victims of the Holocaust. To simultaneously suggest that the Book of Job is representative of a religious tradition that extols the passive acceptance of suffering seems peculiar. Like Katz's reading of the Book of Job, Rubenstein's interpretation appears not to hold together when examined closely.

There are two ways to respond to this. The first is to conclude that, put bluntly, he is just incoherent. Among responses to Rubenstein's overall body of work such accusations would not be entirely new. Katz, for example, complains that he is 'guilty of using evocative and emotional language to obfuscate rather than clarify, to arouse rather than illuminate."[64] A more charitable (and possibly more accurate) view is put forward by Braiterman. Looking at Rubenstein's general attitude toward traditional texts, he proposes that '[m]isreading was not an accidental blemish. It constituted the very motor of Rubenstein's project'.[65] Although well aware that he is speculating about Rubenstein's motivations, Braiterman suggests that his main purpose when interpreting sacred texts is to provoke discussion.[66] 'It makes little sense to condemn such misreadings out of hand without considering the function they play in stimulating religious reflection', he writes. Understood in such a way, perhaps the aspects of unevenness in Rubenstein's receptions of Job should not lead us to sideline his critique completely. Consideration of his relationship with Job forces us to tread more carefully when bringing the Book of Job into dialogue with modern suffering. In that sense at least Rubenstein has achieved something worth grappling with.

5. *Rejecting Job*

Langer, Katz, Alford and Rubenstein all present a valuable counterpoint to easy identifications between the Book of Job and Jewish suffering in modernity. There are ways of reading Job, they rightly argue, that are problematic in this context. Yet as I have suggested, they consistently constrain

63. Braiterman, *(God) After* Auschwitz, p. 103.
64. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues*, p. 198.
65. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, p. 110.
66. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, p. 110, states that '[a]t this point I can only speculate'.

the book's meaning—usually into a message of spiritual growth—in ways not every reader of this biblical text would agree with. I have nonetheless argued, however, that their interpretations of the Book of Job are occasionally more open-ended and sometimes more self-subverting than they initially appear. And there is another query that I have not so far raised. In different ways Langer, Katz, Alford and Rubenstein all work on the premise that post-Holocaust reception of Job is based upon drawing parallels between Job's experiences and those of Jews during the Holocaust. But this need not be the case. A reader might instead draw parallels between Job's theological anguish and the religious situation facing those *after* the Holocaust. Even if we were to come to a conclusion that there was nothing Job-like about the extreme conditions of the event itself, this does not preclude us from saying that there is something Job-like facing those caught in the aftermath. Just as the Book of Job can be interpreted in more than one way, so also can it be *applied* in numerous ways.

4

Creative Readings and Retellings

The objections raised by Langer, Katz, Alford and Rubenstein have their value. They force us to be cautious about identifying connections between Job's plight and Holocaust experiences, and compel us to admit that not every reception of Job in this context will be morally palatable. But their modes of reading do show a tendency to close down interpretive possibilities. '*This* is what the Book of Job says', they tend to propose, 'and what it says doesn't work for the situation we face'. In this chapter I wish to look at several post-Holocaust readings that are more creative in their approach. They should not, I will argue, always be accepted uncritically, but in comparison to the commentators addressed in the last chapter, they have a much more fluid relationship with Job and together present a vision of the text more open to possibilities.

1. *Eliezer Berkovits and Job's Brother*

Like the interpreters discussed in the last chapter, the Orthodox rabbi Eliezer Berkovits expresses serious doubts about Job's post-Holocaust relevance. However, unlike those earlier commentators, he ultimately moves beyond these initial concerns in an innovative way.

Writing in his 1973 book *Faith after the Holocaust*, Berkovits is aware that the divine speeches in Job 38–42 can be difficult for readers to interpret: 'To this day', he writes, 'theologians are arguing about the meaning of God's answer to Job'.[1] Despite this ambiguity, Berkovits notes that God does at least make his presence known. For Berkovits, it is this very appearance in itself that should be contrasted with experiences during the Holocaust. He states that '[u]nfortunately, unlike the case of Job, God remained silent to the very end of the tragedy and the millions in the concentration camps were left alone to shift for themselves in the midst of infinite

1. Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav, 1973), p. 69.

despair'.[2] In this specific sense he denies the relevance of Job for making sense of the Holocaust.

However, Berkovits has more to say about the Book of Job, and suggests that the story *is* useful for those who did not experience the Holocaust directly. He gives them the title 'Job's brother', because although they did not suffer directly, they are nonetheless forced to grapple with the aftermath of suffering. Berkovits suggests that because of the diversity of Holocaust experiences 'Job's brother' is caught in a difficult situation:

> We are not Job and we dare not speak and respond as if we were. We are only Job's brother. We must believe, because our brother Job believed; and we must question, because our brother Job so often could not believe any longer. This is not a comfortable situation; but it is our condition in this era after the holocaust.[3]

Living in the aftermath of an event in which some victims kept their faith while others did not causes the tension that Berkovits identifies. Given that neither experience is fully accessible to 'Job's brother', he must attempt to somehow respect both conditions:

> If there were those whose faith was broken in the death camp, there were others who never wavered. If God was not present for many, He was not lost to many more. Those who rejected did so in authentic rebellion; those who affirmed and testified to the very end did so in authentic faith. Neither the authenticity of rebellion nor the authenticity of faith is available to those who are only Job's brother. The outsider, the brother of the martyrs, enters a confusing heritage. He inherits both the rebellion and the witness of the martyrs: a rebellion not silenced by the witness; a witness not made void by the rebellion. In our generation, Job's brother, if he wishes to be true to his God-given heritage, 'reasons' with God in believing rebellion and rebellious belief.[4]

The situation faced by 'Job's brother' is consequently one in which faith and the rejection of faith must stand in tension. Neither can be embraced entirely.

Several aspects of this are worth reflecting upon. Berkovits is right to suggest that there was both faith and the loss of faith during the Holocaust, as evidence can be easily found to substantiate such a claim. Reading, for example, through Reeve Robert Brenner's 1998 survey of survivor attitudes quickly illustrates this. On one page a survivor states that '[w]e who went through the different camps no longer believe in God'.[5] On another page a religiously observant respondent reflects that '[i]t never occurred

2. Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p. 69.
3. Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p. 5.
4. Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p. 69.
5. Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt*, p. 109.

to me to question God's doings or lack of doings while I was an inmate in Auschwitz'.[6] Berkovits is surely also correct to question whether those who did not experience the extreme conditions of the Holocaust can entirely understand the faith or doubt of those who did. Certainly caution is required by anyone attempting to imagine their own responses to conditions so alien from normal life.

Theologically, some will nonetheless find it difficult to accept that faith and the loss of faith can be meaningfully combined into the single, halfway category that Berkovits suggests 'Job's brother' should occupy. Furthermore, there is good reason to question whether Berkovits himself actually maintains such a balancing act. Considering the image of 'Job's brother', Wollaston asks 'is it possible to maintain this tension, without privileging one response at the expense of the other? In the case of Berkovits, it would appear that it is not.'[7] This is because, when looking at *Faith after the Holocaust* and his other major work on the Holocaust, *With God in Hell* (1979), numerous commentators have observed Berkovits's tendency to extol the virtues of those who maintained their faith.[8] Indeed, his emphasis upon defiant faithfulness in these works presents a narrative of spiritual resistance during the Holocaust that is virtually the direct opposite of Rubenstein's emphasis on Jewish passivity.[9] In the passage I reproduced above Berkovits comments that '[i]f God was not present for many, he was not

6. Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt*, p. 102.

7. Wollaston, 'Religious Language', p. 84.

8. Eliezer Berkovits, *With God in Hell: Judaism in the Ghettos and the Deathcamps* (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1979). Cf. Wollaston, 'Religious Language'; Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, pp. 123-24, 133; James M. Glass, *Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust: Moral Uses of Violence and Will* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 162; David C. Tollerton, '"A New Collection of Holy Scriptures"? Assessing Three Ascriptions of the Sacred to Holocaust Testimony within Jewish Theology', *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 14.3 (2008), pp. 61-84 (68-73, 78-79). Berkovits should be partly seen in the wider context of Orthodox responses to the Holocaust that emphasize pious resistance. For example, cf. Nisson Wolpin (ed.), *A Path Through the Ashes: Penetrating and Inspiring Stories of the Holocaust from a Torah Perspective* (New York: Mesorah, 1986); Gertrude Hirschler (ed.), *The Unconquerable Spirit: Vignettes of the Jewish Religious Spirit that the Nazis could not Destroy* (New York: Mesorah, 1981). Melissa Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 71, comments that this stress upon religious defiance has become 'an Orthodox metanarrative in itself'.

9. Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p. 80, writes that 'the overwhelming majority of the inmates did not surrender their humanity to the very end; that, on the contrary, there were not a few among them who attained to sublime heights of self-sacrificial heroism and dignity of human compassion and charity. This was the true mystery of the ghettos and the death camps'. It is difficult to imagine an assessment more at odds with Rubenstein's.

lost to *many more*'.[10] Even here it seems that the balance between faith and its loss is beginning to be eroded.

But turning specifically to Berkovits's treatment of the Book of Job, it can be seen that despite his initial doubts about its usefulness, through the creation of a new character ('Job's brother') he has nonetheless found value in the story. By not restricting himself to the biblical text's basic plotline and cast list he finds a creative way to utilize Job in the context of post-Holocaust thought.

The notion of 'Job's brother' has occasionally been picked up by others writing in the field. Deborah Lipstadt, for example, takes the image further when reflecting on the gulf between the experiences of a post-Holocaust generation and those caught up in the event itself. She writes that '[t]he generation of which I write cannot even answer as Job's brother. At best they are his nieces and nephews'.[11] Despite Lipstadt's qualification of the term 'Job's brother', it is clear that Berkovits's language has resonance.

In secondary literature an attempt has been made to identify the source of Berkovits's creative mode of interpretation. Braiterman suggests that his 'bald manipulation of the Book of Job' should be seen in the context of his similarly liberal and imaginative attitude toward Jewish law.[12] His major work on halakha, *Not in Heaven* (1983), is reported by Charles Raffel to have 'startled, if not shocked, many of his modern Orthodox colleagues'.[13] Whether or not this is at the root of his reading is difficult to say. What is clear, however, is that Berkovits shows us that with creativity it may be possible to overcome seemingly major discontinuities between Job and the Holocaust.

Yet, when all is said and done, does Berkovits's invention of a new character ('Job's brother') amount to a sustained engagement with the Book of Job's key themes and ideas? Or is it ultimately just the construction of an imaginative and evocative soubriquet? The image of 'Job's brother' does attempt to grapple with certain key tensions facing post-Holocaust theologians: the tension between belief and its loss during the Holocaust, and the tension between direct and indirect experience of the event. But for a creative reading that more fully touches upon key themes in the Book of Job, it is worth moving our attention to another interpreter.

10. Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p. 69. Emphasis added.

11. Deborah E. Lipstadt, 'We Are Not Job's Children', *Shoah* 1.4 (1979), pp. 12-16 (16).

12. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, p. 127.

13. Charles M. Raffel, 'Eliezer Berkovits', in *Interpreters of Judaism in the Late Twentieth Century* (ed. Steven T. Katz; Washington, DC: B'nai B'rith Books, 1993), pp. 1-15 (8). Cf. Eliezer Berkovits, *Not in Heaven: The Nature and Function of Halakha* (New York: Ktav, 1983).

2. Elie Wiesel and Job's Silent Rebellion

A survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, Elie Wiesel has had a major impact on post-Holocaust Jewish thought. Writing in the 1990s, Alan Berger went so far as to state that Wiesel 'is widely perceived as a *moreh hador* (teacher of the generation)'.[14] However, admiration is not completely unanimous. As I have already noted, Michael Goldberg has accused Wiesel of leading a 'Holocaust cult' because of his influential efforts to provoke reflection on the event.[15]

Wiesel has produced a vast body of work in many genres, and has shown a consistent interest in Job.[16] 'Among the masterful texts of Jewish literature', notes Jack Kolbert, 'Wiesel has an especially strong predilection for the Book of Job'.[17] Because of this I will keep my attention largely to one publication: a chapter on Job from Wiesel's 1976 book *Messengers of God*.[18] It is useful, however, to first make some broader comments about his relationship with this biblical tale.

Job appears fleetingly in Wiesel's first and most famous book, *Night* (1958). In this book he recounts his early life as a devout Hasidic Jew in the Transylvanian town of Sighet and the theological doubts that then came to engulf him during the Holocaust.[19] At one point he articulates these doubts through reference to Job:

14. Alan L. Berger, 'Elie Wiesel', in *Interpreters of Judaism in the Late Twentieth Century* (ed. Steven T. Katz; Washington, DC: B'nai B'rith Books, 1993), pp. 369-91 (383).

15. Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive?*, p. 59. For other critics of Wiesel's influence, cf. Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing*, p. 51; Helene Flanzbaum (ed.), *The Americanization of the Holocaust* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 5.

16. Wiesel's works include novels, plays, cantatas, essays, memoirs and dialogues.

17. Jack Kolbert, *The Worlds of Elie Wiesel: An Overview of His Career and His Major Themes* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2001), p. 102.

18. For a much fuller discussion of Wiesel's relationship with Job, cf. Linda L. Cooper, 'The Book of Job: Foundation for Testimony in the Writings of Gustavo Gutiérrez, Elie Wiesel, Archibald MacLeish and Carl Gustav Jung' (PhD dissertation; University of Oxford, 1994), pp. 147-202.

19. Several commentators have noted that there is actually some uncertainty over whether Wiesel is recounting theological questioning he experienced *during* the Holocaust, or is instead projecting his later doubts back onto his earlier life. Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs, 1928-1969* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 82, writes that he 'practiced religion even in a death camp. I said my prayers every day… my doubts and my revolt gripped me only later'. Cf. Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing*, p. 58; Isabel Wollaston, '"Telling the Tale": The Self-Representation and Reception of Elie Wiesel', in *Themes in Jewish-Christian Relations* (ed. Edward Kessler and Melanie Wright; Cambridge: Orchard Academic, 2005), pp. 151-69 (159-60).

> Some of the men spoke of God: His mysterious ways, the sins of the Jewish people, and the redemption to come. As for me, I had ceased to pray. I concurred with Job! I was not denying His existence, but I doubted His absolute justice.[20]

Clearly Wiesel has in mind here the rebellious Job of the poetic dialogues (the allusion simply does not make sense if he is referring to the pious Job of the opening prose chapters). Such questioning of God's justice would come to characterize many of Wiesel's publications, and led eventually to numerous commentators describing him as a Job-figure for the post-Holocaust era. For Jakob Jocz, 'Wiesel is the rebel *par excellence* … the Job of the twentieth century'.[21] Maurice Friedman similarly refers to him as 'the most moving embodiment of the Modern Job'.[22]

Yet when Wiesel comes to address the Book of Job in greater depth he is faced with a problem. The Job of the poetic dialogues might be an archetypal figure of theological rebellion, but as I have already discussed, in other parts of the book he seems much less defiant. In *Messengers of God* Wiesel grapples with this difficulty and ultimately finds an ingenious and imaginative solution.

A useful place to start is with his treatment of the divine speeches. Not uniquely, Wiesel suggests that Job learns little of direct value from God's words:

> God said nothing that Job could interpret as an answer or an explanation or a justification of his ordeals… God spoke to Job of everything except that which concerned him… And yet, instead of becoming indignant, Job declared himself satisfied… No sooner had God spoken than Job repented… No sooner had God finished His sermon than Job pulled back and withdrew his questions, canceled his complaints. Said he: Yes, I am indeed small, insignificant; I had no right to speak, I am unworthy of Your words and thoughts. I didn't know, I didn't understand. I couldn't know. From now on I shall live with remorse, in dust and ashes. And so, there was Job, our hero, our standard-bearer, a broken, defeated man. On his knees, having surrendered unconditionally.[23]

This image of Job as a crushed and humiliated man is reminiscent of the interpretations of Levi and Donat. But there are questions we might raise against Wiesel's comments. Does Job really give in so quickly? Before his

20. Elie Wiesel, *Night* (trans. Marion Wiesel; London: Penguin, 2006), p. 45.

21. Jakob Jocz, 'Israel After Auschwitz', in *The Witness of the Jews to God* (ed. David W. Torrance; Edinburgh: Hansel, 1982), pp. 58-70 (61).

22. Maurice Friedman, *To Deny Our Nothingness* (New York: Delabourte Press, 1967), p. 348. For similar comments, cf. Cohn-Sherbok, *Holocaust Theology*, p. 102; Dedmon, 'Job as Holocaust Survivor', p. 167.

23. Elie Wiesel, *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1976), pp. 231-32.

famous last response to God in 42.1-6, there is another, initial reply in 40.3-5. His reaction to the divine whirlwind, in other words, is not instantaneous. And is Job's response the clear-cut repentance Wiesel seems to suggest? As I discussed in Chapter 1, 42.1-6 can be interpreted in different ways. Yet while these are legitimate concerns, we will see that Wiesel has specific reasons for wanting to portray Job's repentance as both immediate and absolute.

Faced with this image of a humiliated Job Wiesel declares himself disappointed. Job, he writes, 'should not have given in so easily. He should have continued to protest'.[24] As a model of theological doubt and defiance Job is found wanting. Wiesel's admiration for the biblical rebel has at this point been seemingly blunted by the admission that Job is not quite all we might have hoped for. Wiesel, however, explores routes by which he might get around this problem.

One option he considers is the possibility that the end of the Book of Job is an editorial addition. He writes, 'I prefer to think that the Book's true ending was lost. That Job died without having repented, without having humiliated himself'.[25] As the word 'prefer' indicates, Wiesel is clearly aware that he is on speculative ground. But he ends his treatment of Job in *Messengers of God* by taking a different tack. He suggests that Job's repentance was *so* immediate, and *so* total, that in fact we have reason to read between the lines.

> Had he remained firm, had he discussed the divine arguments point by point, one would conclude that he had to concede defeat in the face of his interlocutor's rhetorical superiority. But he said yes to God, immediately. He did not hesitate or procrastinate, nor did he point out the slightest contradiction. Therefore we know that in spite or perhaps because of appearances, Job continued to interrogate God. By repenting sins he did not commit, by justifying a sorrow he did not deserve, he communicates to us that he did not believe his own confessions; they were nothing but decoys.[26]

Reading this passage over and again I still find myself admiring the cunning of Wiesel's interpretation. He first portrays Job as totally humiliated, but then argues that the humiliation is so extreme it can only be false. Wiesel rescues the defiant Job from the spectre of pious submission by arguing not only that Job never repents, but that he also manages to trick God in the process.[27]

24. Wiesel, *Messengers of God*, p. 234.
25. Wiesel, *Messengers of God*, p. 233.
26. Wiesel, *Messengers of God*, pp. 234-35.
27. Robert McAfee Brown, *Elie Wiesel: Messenger to All Humanity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 12, notes that in Wiesel's eyes 'Job's pious

It is a reading of the story that some will no doubt find difficult to accept. Alford's reception of the tale is, for example, entirely premised on the idea that Job submits to God having gained insight from the divine whirlwind. But Wiesel's argument cannot be disproved for the very same reason that it cannot be verified: it rests on speculating about the silent inner-thoughts of Job in a way that is largely immune from textual analysis.

Wiesel writes that he was 'preoccupied with Job, especially in the early years after the war'.[28] By reading creatively, by peering beneath the surface of the text, it is a preoccupation that he is able to maintain. Wiesel the theological rebel is able to find in Job a steadfast ally—for even at the very moment Job *appears* to be caving in, this is when his defiance of God is at its very strongest.

3. *Pre-Holocaust Creative Readings and their Influence*

While Wiesel's interpretation of Job is innovative, it should be stressed that his creativity in reading the Bible is rooted within Jewish tradition. In *Messengers of God* he cites many reflections on Job found in rabbinic midrash, commending their 'interpretation, illustration, creative imagination'.[29] We might confidently speculate that Wiesel would not feel able to look beyond the surface of the text in the way he does were it not for such rabbinic precedents.

Wiesel is not the only post-Holocaust interpreter whose reception of Job rests upon a relationship with older, pre-Holocaust readings. An even clearer example can be found in a public address given by Joseph Soloveitchik in New York in 1956. A key figure in American Orthodoxy during the period, his address focused upon suffering in the recent past and the ongoing struggles of the Jewish people:

> [W]e are living in troubled times, in days of wrath and distress. We have been the victims of vicious attacks; we have been stricken with suffering. During the last fifteen years we have been afflicted with torments which are unparalleled in the thousands of years of exile, oppression, and religious persecution. This era of suffering, this dark chapter in our history, did not come to an end with the establishment of the State of Israel. Even now, today, the State of Israel still finds itself in a crisis situation, fraught with danger, and we are all filled with fear and trembling regarding the fate of the *Yishuv*, of the struggling Jewish community in the land of Israel.[30]

assertions at the end were spoken in a mocking tone, their very orthodoxy suggesting—on the lips of one like Job—that their content is spurious'.

28. Wiesel, *Messengers of God*, p. 233.

29. Wiesel, *Messengers of God*, p. xiii.

30. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Fate and Destiny: From Holocaust to the State of Israel* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2000), p. 17.

Throughout the address Soloveitchik reflects on the relationship between the Holocaust and the threatened situation of Jews in the Middle East. It should be remembered that speaking in 1956 he could not necessarily assume that a connection between the two would be firmly entrenched in his listeners' minds. As numerous commentators have suggested, it was only during and after the Six Day War in 1967 that an association between the Holocaust and the State of Israel became fully established in the consciousness of Jewish-Americans.[31] So it is likely that Soloveitchik is being self-consciously provocative when stating that '[w]e have been remiss and our guilt is great' for not having shown enough solidarity in the past.[32] What he is specifically arguing is that, in the aftermath of suffering, greater Jewish-American assistance for the new Jewish state is now required.

To illustrate his point, he turns to the figure of Job. However, Soloveitchik does not appeal to the Book of Job directly, but rather looks at the text through the prism of traditional rabbinic midrash. He refers to several midrashim within his discussion, but I will focus on his appeal to one specific tradition: the idea of Job as a counsellor to the Egyptian pharaoh. It is a midrashic story that requires some introduction.

Judith Baskin notes that although '[t]here is no rabbinic consensus on Job', one strand of opinion was heavily influenced by retributive theology: for some rabbis, she writes, 'it was clear that Job must have done something to merit his suffering'.[33] A tradition attested to several times in rabbinic literature is the tale of Job's role in the suffering of the Israelites in Egypt. The tale runs roughly as follows: long before the events recorded in the biblical Book of Job, the Egyptian pharaoh enslaved the Israelite people as per the story told in Exodus. During this time Job acted as an advisor in the pharaoh's court and was called to a meeting to discuss the Israelites. Because he kept silent during the deliberations rather than speaking out, he stored up for himself the divine wrath that we see in the biblical book that bears his name. One version of this tradition is found in *Exodus Rabbah*:

> R. Hiyya said in the name of R. Simon: Three were summoned to that counsel—Balaam, Job, and Jethro. Balaam, who gave advice, was killed; Job, because he kept silence, was doomed to much suffering; Jethro fled and therefore his children were privileged to sit in the chamber of hewn stone [i.e. the Great Sanhedrin].[34]

31. Cf. Morgan, *Beyond Auschwitz*, pp. 79-90; Berenbaum, 'Richard Lowell Rubenstein', p. 264; Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p. 1.

32. Soloveitchik, *Fate and Destiny*, p. 36.

33. Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counsellors*, pp. 15, 25.

34. Exod. R. 1.9. *Midrash Rabbah*, III (trans. S.M. Lehrman; ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon; London: Soncino, 1939), p. 11. For similar versions of this midrash, cf. Sanh. 106a and Sot. 11a.

Soloveitchik cites this midrashic story as evidence that Job began his own trials 'lacking in that great attribute of *hesed*, of loving kindness', and argues that it is only at the end of Job's sufferings that he becomes a moral example of the kind to which we might aspire.[35] Particular emphasis is placed on 42.10: 'the Lord restored Job's fortunes when he had prayed on behalf of his friends'. The key point here for Soloveitchik is that Job has now learnt the importance of empathy for others. Through his ordeals and encounter with the divine whirlwind, Job changes from the hard-hearted man who had once been so indifferent to Israelite suffering into an individual who cares for those around him.

Applied to the situation of world Jewry in 1956, Soloveitchik finds in this narrative a clear lesson for his listeners:

> It was not easy for Job to mend his suffering. And we as well, faint-hearted and weak-willed as we are, bound in the chains of fate and lacking personal fortitude, are now called upon by divine providence to clothe ourselves in a new spirit, to elevate ourselves to the rank of the rectification of our afflictions, afflictions which are demanding of us that we provide them with their deliverance and redemption.[36]

Set in the context of his address as a whole, the meaning of this 'new spirit' is clear: his Orthodox listeners must throw their weight into supporting the new State of Israel. Like Job, they must emerge from suffering with a focus upon solidarity with others (i.e. Israelis).

The politics of Soloveitchik's post-Holocaust reading of Job could of course occupy our attention for some time. But I will leave discussion of the modern Middle East's complex interplay of history, religion and politics for another occasion, and focus instead on other elements of Soloveitchik's interpretation. His reception of Job is broadly in line with the idea that suffering can lead to spiritual growth, which, as I discussed in the last chapter, many commentators have found to be unacceptable. It is also a reading that gives little weight to the credibility of Job's complaints during the poetic dialogues. Where Wiesel sees in the dialogues a figure of noble defiance, Soloveitchik finds only an imperfect man in need of correction. For all the creativity associated with his interpretation, we must conclude that it represents a theologically conservative approach. However, this is perhaps unsurprising given the period in which Soloveitchik was writing. In his 1998 book *(God) After Auschwitz*, Braiterman identifies the publication of Rubenstein's *After Auschwitz* in 1966 as the key turning point against older theological frameworks,[37] and delivering his address in 1956 Soloveitchik is working a full decade prior to this. Braiterman

35. Soloveitchik, *Fate and Destiny*, p. 13.
36. Soloveitchik, *Fate and Destiny*, p. 19.
37. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, p. 87.

consequently views Soloveitchik as a typical pre-1960s commentator: a figure unable to perceive the Holocaust as the cause for radical upheaval within Judaism.[38]

I will return to Braiterman's model as set out in *(God) After Auschwitz* during the next chapter. Returning to Soloveitchik's appeal to Job, it should be emphasized that the creativity associated with his interpretation does not of course stem from Soloveitchik himself. It instead comes from his use of older imaginative readings of the story (e.g. the rabbinic midrash on Job as a counsellor of the pharaoh). This highlights an important point regarding post-Holocaust receptions of Job: that when attempting to discern its resonance in this context, there are more resources available than merely the biblical tale itself. People have been wrestling with Job—often in imaginative ways—for over two thousand years, and there are many ways that their reformulations of the biblical tale could be brought into dialogue with post-Holocaust thought.

Another example, comparable to Soloveitchik's use of rabbinic midrash, can be found in Alan Berger's 1997 work *Children of Job*. Although this book is for the most part concerned with providing a survey of novels and films created by the children of Holocaust survivors, in his introduction Berger provides a short explanation for the reference to Job in the title. He refers here to the *Testament of Job*, in his own words 'an obscure pseudepigraphic text edited between the first century BCE and the end of the second century CE'.[39] Berger's turn to this apocryphal retelling of Job is especially noteworthy given that it has had little authority in rabbinic Judaism, and indeed Berger himself is careful to avoid suggesting that the *Testament* in any way supersedes the biblical story. 'The *Testament*', he writes, 'has neither the poetic beauty nor the theological sophistication of its biblical antecedent'.[40] Yet for post-Holocaust thought Berger nonetheless finds aspects of poignancy in the *Testament* that are absent from the biblical tale. He notes, for example, that 'the Job of the *Testament* urges his children to maintain their Jewish identity after the disaster'.[41] He does not specify which part of the *Testament* he has in mind, but is probably alluding to Job's explicit affirmation of his family's Jewish heritage (1.6) and/or the pious gifts given to his daughters at the end of the story (46-50).[42] Neither are present in the biblical version of Job's tale. Yet Berger finds resonance with the portrayal of Job's children in the *Testament* because of the way his

38. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, pp. 60-61, 72-77.

39. Alan L. Berger, *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1997), p. 6.

40. Berger, *Children of Job*, p. 6.

41. Berger, *Children of Job*, p. 6.

42. Cf. 'Testament of Job', pp. 839-40, 864-66.

own book has a recurring focus upon the children of Holocaust survivors having to grapple with their Jewish identity in the aftermath of suffering.

I have briefly turned to Berger's *Children of Job* because it demonstrates how post-Holocaust interpretations of Job can relate not only to the biblical text, but also to the creative readings and retellings spread across its long reception history. As future commentators turn to Job amidst their responses to the Holocaust, there are many older re-renderings to which they might appeal.

4. *Murray J. Haar's Midrashic Retelling*

Wiesel's willingness to assert the subversive trickery of Job's repentance is based in part, I suggested above, upon his appreciation for rabbinic midrash. In an article published in 2000 in the journal *Interpretation*, such appreciation is taken a stage further by Murray Haar. Although Haar is relatively unknown compared to the likes of Berkovits, Wiesel or Soloveitchik, his midrashic retelling of Job is so unusual, and so dramatic, as to be worthy of attention.

His 2000 article, entitled 'Job after Auschwitz', has an unusual structure. It begins and ends with sections of text written in the standard discursive form of academic theology. However, for five pages in the middle of the article, the discourse changes entirely, entering into a storytelling mode under the subtitle 'A Midrash'.[43] Haar's new midrash places the figure of Job into Poland during the period of the Holocaust: '[f]ifty years ago in the small Polish village of Krasnobrod, Job came to live among the Jews of Poland'.[44] If this seems startling it should be remembered that in the classical midrash discussed earlier the rabbis were happy to relocate Job in time and place by situating him in Egypt during the Israelites' enslavement. By moving Job into a wholly new location, Haar's midrash is not, therefore, a radical departure. Just as *Exodus Rabbah* placed Job amidst Jewish suffering in Egypt, here Job is moved into an account of Jewish suffering in modern Europe:

> One family in particular, the Lichtenfelds, caught Job's attention. They lived in a small hut, a husband, a wife, and four daughters. In many ways, they reminded Job of his own family… In silence, he stared as they were made to dig their graves. In silence, he watched as the Lichtenfelds were all shot. As he walked away in shock, Job began to see where he had gone wrong in the land of Uz, his home. He remembered that when it had come time for him to stand face to face with the Almighty he backed down before God. In the end, Job realized that he had submitted to God, not out of wisdom or renewed faith, but out of fear.[45]

43. Murray J. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', *Interpretation* 53 (1999), pp. 265-75 (266).
44. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', p. 266.
45. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', pp. 266-67.

The midrash is framed here as a sequel set many years after the protagonist's first experiences in the biblical account. But because Haar's midrash repeats key elements of the original story, it can also be seen as a retelling. As in the biblical narrative, Job begins to lament divine injustice: '"O God, I rise from my submission to speak once more to you. In plain language I approach you and demand your response to my plea"'.[46] On this occasion, however, there is a significant qualification: '[t]his time he resolved to raise better questions. This time he would do a better job of confronting God. This time he would not let God off the hook'.[47] Implicit in these lines of narration is a clearly negative appraisal of how the biblical Book of Job ends. For Haar, Job's final words in 42.1-6 represent a failure of nerve.

As in the biblical account, the protagonist's defiant words in the new midrash are met with a divine response:

> Suddenly, from the ashes of the burned synagogue, God answered Job: 'Do you still not know that I am God and you are not? Your speech is just but not wise. The blood of the children has given you the passion to speak but not the wisdom to understand.'[48]

After this initial response from God, Haar's retelling starts to deviate from the Book of Job rather more dramatically. Because '[t]his time', writes Haar, 'Job did not submit'.[49] Rather than giving the divine whirlwind any kind of victory, in the midrashic retelling it is eventually Job who wins the argument and God who repents:

> 'I am sorry, indeed guilty as charged, for having believed in my most complex creation, humankind' … And so God donned sackcloth and sat on the ashes, as Job once had, and lamented over what human beings had done, so much of it in God's name.[50]

There are various points of resonance between Haar's post-Holocaust interpretation of Job and those presented by Wiesel and Soloveitchik. Like Wiesel, Haar has endeavoured to produce an image of Job as the undefeated theological rebel. Both are initially disappointed by the Book of Job's ending, and both find a way to rework the tale into something more palatable. And although the theology of Haar's engagement with Job is clearly very different to Soloveitchik's, they share an appeal to midrashic traditions in which biblical characters can be creatively transferred into a different time and place. But it should be noted that Haar's understanding of 'midrash' is rather more open-ended than Soloveitchik's. While the

46. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', p. 267.
47. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', p. 267.
48. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', p. 269.
49. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', p. 269.
50. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', p. 270.

latter has appropriated the *content* of classical rabbinic midrash, Haar has taken up its very *method*. 'Job After Auschwitz' relies not so much on the direct substance of rabbinic midrash, but rather upon borrowing its imaginative style of interpretation.

Yet at this point I should insert a significant caveat. While Haar's approach to Job might appear to mirror certain rabbinic modes of reading, he nonetheless begins his article by framing the term 'midrash' in an extremely broad manner. He sees Third Isaiah, for example, as 'a midrash on earlier portions of Isaiah'.[51] He is even willing to conceptualize Job as a midrashic reworking of 'older Wisdom traditions'.[52] Haar's understanding of 'midrash' evidently includes far more material than the ancient and medieval rabbinic texts conventionally referred to under the term.

Particularly notable is his comment that 'much of Revelation can be considered a midrash on Daniel'.[53] In another publication he is happy to describe the entire New Testament as midrash.[54] The inclusion of Christian texts under the category of 'midrash' reflects the fact that, though raised in a traditional Jewish household, Haar for a period of his life joined the Lutheran church.[55] Indeed, to understand Haar's turn to midrash it is important to bear in mind certain currents within post-Holocaust Christian thought. While some theologians in Nazi Germany attempted to produce a radically de-Judaized Christianity, among post-war commentators there has often been a desire to stress Christianity's Jewish roots.[56] Roy Eckardt calls, for example, for a church 'delivered from pagan-Gentile distortions and returned to a life-giving Jewishness'.[57] Rosemary Radford Ruether similarly declares that Christianity must appreciate its 'original Jewish setting and so rediscover the real historical Jesus, who must ever elude an anti-Judaic Christianity'.[58] And the Episcopalian theologian Paul van Buren has likewise asserted the need to emphasize that 'Jesus was a Jew' and that 'the

51. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', p. 265.

52. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', p. 265.

53. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', p. 265.

54. Murray J. Haar, 'A Proposal for Christian Use of the Old Testament: A Hermeneutics of Listening', *Dialog* 31 (1992), pp. 165-70 (166).

55. Cf. Moshe Haar, 'Israel After Auschwitz: Four Questions about Remembering the Holocaust', in *History, Religion and Meaning: American Reflections on the Holocaust and Israel* (ed. Julius Simon; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp. 63-70 (63); Murray J. Haar, 'Self-Serving Redemptionism: A Jewish-Christian Lament', *Theology Today*, 52 (1995), pp. 108-12 (108).

56. Cf. Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

57. Cited in Geoffrey Wigoder, *Jewish-Christian Relations Since the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 44.

58. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (London: Search Press, 1975), p. 250.

movement which came to be the Christian church began as a Jewish sect'.[59] Faced with doubts about how the church acted during the Holocaust and the role anti-Jewish theology over the centuries may have played in laying the foundations for this atrocity, all of these Christian figures have come to the conclusion that the Jewish origins of their faith must be highlighted. Van Buren is especially significant for discussion of Haar given that he similarly frames the New Testament as midrash, commenting that 'the writings coming out of the apostolic communities were largely *midrashim*'.[60] For a post-Holocaust Christian such as Haar, appealing to midrash can therefore be based not only on an appreciation of its style of interpretation, but also a desire to renounce Nazi attempts to downplay Christianity's Jewishness.

Haar's turn to midrash in 'Job After Auschwitz' may, I speculate, be rooted in both his Jewish and Christian background, and it should be noted that his new midrash bears signs of sharing both Jewish and Christian concerns. With specifically Christian Holocaust memory in mind, the key element to point toward is the depiction of Job as a non-Jewish bystander. The Job of the midrash witnesses Jewish suffering but is not a sufferer himself. Clearly this resonates with Christian (in)actions during the Holocaust more than Jewish experiences of persecution.

But there are other aspects of the midrash that arguably gesture toward more Jewish concerns. To explain this point it is useful to look at a passage from Darrell Fasching's *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz* (1992), a book included in the 'further reading' section of Haar's article. Over a couple of pages Fasching briefly reflects on the different meanings of Job for Christian and Jewish respondents to the Holocaust:

> Job refuses to sacrifice his integrity to make God appear just. Job may well express the spiritual situation of Jews after the Holocaust. Job is a post-Holocaust parable for the Christian as well, and that is my primary interest here. In this respect it is not the trial of God by Job that interests me but the dialogue between Job and the comforters … The logic of the comforters is clear: God is just, therefore Job must be guilty, and he deserves his suffering. Is this not precisely the logic Christians have used to explain and justify, and indeed bring about, the sufferings of the Jews throughout Christian history? … Allegorically transposed by the event of the Shoah, the dialogue of Job and the comforters becomes the historical dialogue between Jews and Christians. Christians have claimed that the historical sufferings of Jews were a divine punishment … In a post-Holocaust world, and under the impact of critical historical consciousness, Christians too are now admitting the dubiousness of such charges.[61]

59. Paul van Buren, 'Judaism in Christian Theology', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 18.1 (1981), pp. 114-27 (117).

60. Van Buren, 'Judaism in Christian Theology', p. 125.

61. Darrell J. Fasching, *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 38-39.

While Fasching recognizes that reflection on Job's wrestling with God might be appropriate for post-Holocaust Judaism, his own Christian reading latches onto quite different dimensions of the text. Driven by feelings of guilt regarding Christian attitudes and actions of the past, he identifies not with Job, but with Eliphaz, Zophar, Bildad and Elihu. Haar's midrash is obviously quite different. While Fasching avoids conflict with God in favour of Christian self-reflection, confrontation with God is a central motif of Haar's midrash. Job's defiance against the divine is indeed so important to Haar that he is willing to rewrite what he perceives to be the protagonist's defeat in the biblical text into a victory against God in the midrash. We might consequently ask: does all of this railing against divine injustice resonate more with Jewish post-Holocaust concerns than Christian ones?

One of the clearest illustrations that Haar's 'Job After Auschwitz' addresses both perspectives is seen in the vocabulary of the rewritten divine speeches:

> God answered Job … 'You ask me why I have been silent. I ask you why you have been indifferent? I have given my Torah; I have given my Son … I had hoped that the Torah could train humankind. I had hoped that Jesus would move human beings.'[62]

The way that the Torah and Jesus are set side by side seems to gesture toward a unified Judeo-Christian theology. And this is perhaps not especially surprising from someone who has on occasion described himself as 'a Jewish-Lutheran Christian theologian'.[63] But given how differently Christian and Jewish communities experienced the Holocaust, is a combined Judeo-Christian response possible?

Just occasionally in 'Job After Auschwitz' there are subtle moments of strain. Haar refers, near the end of the article, to 'humanity whose religion, whether Christian or Jewish, failed to give many people the moral and civil courage to resist such systematic annihilation'.[64] While it is possible to discuss Jewish and Christian failures to defy the Nazis, we should be wary about conflating the two. Finding 'the moral and civil courage to resist' from contexts inside the church or inside the persecuted Jewish community would have been very different kinds of challenges.

But I do not make this point in an effort to unpick Haar's article entirely. I do so only to caution against inadvertently smoothing over the severe differences between the situations of Christians and Jews in the 1930s–40s. Overall, there is much to admire in his willingness to radically re-shape the Book of Job into a story through which post-Holocaust theology can

62. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', pp. 269-70.
63. Haar, 'Self-Serving Redemptionism', p. 108.
64. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', p. 274.

be explored. Not everyone, of course, will be sympathetic to the image of a defeated God bowing to Job's complaints. But it is a vivid image that some may find useful when grappling with their own religious frustrations and questions.

5. *Witness Testimony as the Retelling of Job*

In an oft-quoted passage from *If This Is a Man* (1958) Primo Levi describes hearing the experiences of a fellow inmate:

> He told me his story, and today I have forgotten it, but it was certainly a sorrowful, cruel and moving story; because so are all our stories, hundreds and thousands of stories, all different and all full of a tragic, disturbing necessity. We tell them to each other in the evening, and they take place in Norway, Italy, Algeria, the Ukraine, and are simple and incomprehensible like stories in the Bible. But are they not themselves stories of a new Bible?[65]

Levi's final question is ambiguous, both because of the way it hangs at the end of a subsection in his book and because his own religious scepticism means that we are left wondering about the precise meaning of his reference to 'a new Bible'.[66] But it is this idea of a relationship between witness testimony and the biblical that I now wish to discuss. For there are several instances in which the Book of Job and witness testimony have been merged together in ways that gesture towards Levi's suggestion of Holocaust accounts as 'stories of a new Bible'.

A key example can be found in *Nightwords*, David Roskies's liturgy for Holocaust remembrance. Developed incrementally since the 1960s, the version published in 2000 refers to Job several times.[67] Yet Roskies, like so many other commentators, is not absolute in his support for Job's relevance. In the introduction to the liturgy he writes that '[o]ur latter-day [i.e. Holocaust era] Job … does not conclude with a voice that answers from the whirlwind. The whirlwind alone *is* the answer'.[68] This qualification of Job's resonance is similar to Berkovits's. During the Holocaust, both assert, there was no direct equivalent to God's speeches.

65. Primo Levi, *If This is a Man; The Truce* (trans. Stuart Woolf; London: Abacus, 1987), pp. 71-72.

66. For a brief discussion of this passage and its relationship with Levi's religious scepticism, cf. Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, pp. 179-80.

67. On the development of the liturgy, cf. David G. Roskies, *Nightwords: A Liturgy on the Holocaust* (New York: The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, 2000), p. 11.

68. Roskies, *Nightwords*, p. 4. Emphasis original.

However, the poetic dialogues between Job and his human interlocutors have for Roskies a greater connectedness with his subject matter. *Nightwords* involves many participants, with each reading aloud short sections of text taken from an array of sources. During a ten-page section in the latter half of the liturgy, excerpts from the Book of Job's poetic dialogues are included. One passage from Eliphaz is used, but most are taken from Job's laments.[69] Significantly, they are intercut with passages from Abraham Sutzkever, Chaim Kaplan, Zelig Kalmanovitsh, Joseph Kirman and Israel Lichtenstein, all written in either the Warsaw or Vilna ghettos. Roskies makes clear his association between Job and these writers when reflecting (in the introduction to *Nightwords*) that 'Job brings to mind the personal testimonies in poetry and prose from the Warsaw, Vilna, Lodz, Cracow, Bialystok, and Riga ghettos'.[70] Job's voice and the voices of those in the ghettos are merged together in this liturgy.

This might be viewed quite negatively—as revealing a new form of Job that is both fragmented and radically altered by contact with the horrors of twentieth century history. But it is important to bear in mind that Roskies sees the alignment between testimony and sacred text as an affirmation of Judaism:

> Rather than allow the Holocaust to become the crucible of Jewish culture, rather than turn every day in the calendar into a day of national mourning, it is possible and preferable to make Jewish culture the crucible in which all events, no matter how catastrophic, are reforged.[71]

To reformulate the Book of Job in a post-Holocaust context does not represent for Roskies a failure of tradition. It is instead an affirmation that tradition can be reshaped and continued.

A more direct rewriting of Job through the prism of witness testimony is presented by Joseph Freeman's 1996 book *Job: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor*. This short text recounts his pre-Holocaust life in Poland, his experience of ghettos and camps, and finally his liberation and emigration to the United States. The Book of Job is of central importance for Freeman, and he aligns himself with its protagonist in various ways. Most immediately striking is the book's title, in which Job and the Holocaust survivor (i.e. Freeman) are implicitly unified. A cursory look through the text also shows that many subsections of his autobiographical account are headed with verses from Job. The passages are taken sequentially from the biblical story, so that Job's early life of plenty, his suffering, his questioning of God

69. Roskies, *Nightwords*, pp. 70-79. The passages from Job used in this section are (in order) 5.1, 16.18, 9.22, 3.6-7, 27.5, 14.7-10.

70. Roskies, *Nightwords*, p. 4.

71. Roskies, *Nightwords*, p. 2.

and his final restoration all loosely parallel the contours of Freeman's life story. Deeper within the text of *Job: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor* there are also other ways that he associates himself with Job. When, for example, a chapter mid-way through the book starts with a quotation from 19.20, in which Job laments that he has become 'nothing but skin and bones', Freeman repeats the phrase a few pages later, recalling that when being marched to Bavaria near the end of the war his 'body was skin and bones'.[72]

At no point does Freeman provide any clear description of why or how he came to use the Book of Job to frame his testimony. He mentions having studied Job at university and perhaps had a long fascination with the book.[73] Yet in all probability his motivation stems simply from his identification of broad similarities between his life and Job's.

By aligning Job to his own individual experiences of the Holocaust—rather than those of the Jewish people as a whole—Freeman is able to make connections that others are uncomfortable with. Beginning the account of his liberation and post-war life, he quotes from the restoration of Job in chap. 42 of the biblical tale.[74] As I will discuss in the next chapter, some commentators are deeply unhappy with the idea that the Jewish people *as a whole* have experienced a post-Holocaust restoration akin to Job's. But with Freeman's book we are of course dealing with one individual, and the dynamics are consequently quite different. It makes little sense to protest against his individual sense of renewal.

Freeman's text is a personal rewriting of the Book of Job. But to what extent is *Job: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor* a sacred text in the same sense as the biblical story? This might seem like a strange question, and certainly Freeman makes no direct appeal to such status for his book. But it is a question worth raising given the existence of claims that Holocaust testimonies do on some level represent sacred texts. In *Against the Apocalypse* (1999) Roskies refers to witnesses who 'were able to transmute the screams into a new and terrible scripture'.[75] Berkovits proposes that '[w]hen one day the last written messages from the ghettoes and the death camps will be assembled in an edition worthy of their truth and inspiration, mankind will possess in them a new collection of holy scriptures'.[76] There are many

72. Joseph Freeman, *Job: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2003), pp. 82, 84.

73. Freeman, *Job*, p. 11.

74. Freeman, *Job*, p. 85.

75. David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999), p. 202.

76. Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p. 78. For two other Jewish theologians describing testimony in such terms, cf. Irving Greenberg, 'Religious Values After the Holocaust: A Jewish View', in *Jews and Christians After the Holocaust* (ed. Abraham J. Peck; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 84-85; Melissa Raphael, 'Witnesses to

potential reasons why such language has been taken up by some commentators, and these have been addressed in detail in several recent publications.[77] Perhaps the major cause has been the discourse of 'holiness' that has frequently been applied to the Holocaust as a whole.[78] Wiesel, a key advocate of such discourse, has on numerous occasions referred to Holocaust memory as a 'sacred realm' or a 'Temple' at risk of desecration.[79] Amidst such language there is a certain logic to perceiving the writings of witnesses as scriptural.

Whatever the various causes for theologians and other writers to describe testimonies as sacred texts, I am personally inclined to view this phenomenon cautiously. Witness accounts vary enormously, having been written in different times and locations, from divergent perspectives and with distinct purposes in mind. To categorize all such texts as 'sacred' can risk homogenizing this diverse body of literature. With Berkovits, for example, both *Faith after the Holocaust* and *With God in Hell* reveal that when he refers to testimonies as 'holy scriptures', he has in mind accounts of bravery and piety (Braiterman reflects that 'stories of pious, even confident, Jews *fill* the pages of *With God in Hell*').[80] Reflections on deprivation and loss are implicitly nearer the edge of his canon. Certainly Roskies's treatment of testimony in *Against the Apocalypse* is decidedly more measured and his allusion to witness accounts as 'scripture' cannot be brushed aside so easily. But responding to Roskies and others, Zoë Waxman nonetheless cautions against conceptualising diaries and other documents in ways that discourage critical historical study. She warns us not to 'imbue testimony with a sacred status that prevents us from exploring it further'.[81]

I should emphasize that my point here is not to be critical of Freeman for aligning his own testimony with the Book of Job. In *Job: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor* he finds in the biblical story a narrative of value for

Presence: Reading Jewish Women's Holocaust Memoirs as Holy Texts', *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 12 (2004), pp. 103-14.

77. Cf. Zoë Waxman, 'Testimonies as Sacred Texts: The Sanctification of Holocaust Writing', *Past and Present* 5 (2010), pp. 321-41; Tollerton, '"A New Collection of Holy Scriptures"', pp. 61-84. An older treatment of this topic is Isabel Wollaston, '"Memory and Monument": Holocaust Testimony as Sacred Text', in *The Sociology of Sacred Texts* (ed. Jon Davies and Isabel Wollaston; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 37-44.

78. Cf. Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, pp. 199-201.

79. Elie Wiesel in interview with Ellen S. Fine, 'A Sacred Realm', in *Against Silence: The Voice and the Vision of Elie Wiesel*, I (ed. Irving Abrahamson; New York: Holocaust Library, 1985), pp. 185-90 (190); Harry James Cargas, *Harry James Cargas in Conversation with Elie Wiesel* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), pp. 158-59. For a critical reading of Wiesel's comments, cf. Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing*, p. 49.

80. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, p. 123. Emphasis added.

81. Waxman, 'Testimonies as Sacred Texts', p. 340.

articulating his own recollections. The outcome can be loosely understood as a personal rewriting of Job for the post-Holocaust era. Freeman makes no claim to sacred status for his account, and as far as I am aware neither have any of his readers. But it is worth bearing in mind the recent history of such attributions made to Holocaust testimony more generally and reflecting on the extent to which they are useful or problematic.

5

Job and (Ir)resolution

'Caesura, brokenness, fragmentation are all we have to express the disjunction of normal discourse with the reality of the holocaust', writes David Blumenthal.[1] As I discussed in Chapter 1, language of incompleteness and irresolution has been widespread across post-Holocaust thought. Yet such approaches can be drawn into tension with more unifying narratives. The architecture of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, for example, is self-consciously disruptive, yet its exhibition is nonetheless drawn into presenting a linear narrative. This conflict between disruption and resolution can also be seen in a range of religious responses to the event. In this chapter I will explore the relationship between the reception of the Book of Job and these competing urges toward fragmentation and cohesion.

Before this, however, I wish to briefly return to some of the figures already discussed. Among the commentators so far addressed it is Wiesel who is most associated with the desire to resist closure. Note, for example, the following response to a question posed in an interview published in 1990:

> 'You would not argue that theodicy died in Auschwitz or that providence no longer exists?'
>
> 'I certainly do not agree with those who say: faith alone exists, faith stands above all else. That would amount to saying: have faith, and that's that. But neither would I agree with the claim that theodicy is dead. The moment an answer is given, I get suspicious; as a question, I accept it.'[2]

When reflecting on faith and doubt, Wiesel is most content with questions rather than answers. Several observers have commented on this point—Berger, for example, states that 'Wiesel's thought eludes the systematic

1. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 9.
2. Elie Wiesel and Philippe-Michaël de Saint-Cheron, *Evil and Exile* (trans. Jon Rothschild; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), p. 9.

tendency of traditional philosophical and theological speculation'.[3] This resistance to a unified religious response to the Holocaust is reflected in Wiesel's treatment of Job in *Messengers of God*. As we have seen, he goes to great lengths to make Job a model of ongoing and unresolved debate with God.

With some of the other commentators I have addressed, theological tensions are combined with gestures toward resolution. Haar may have Job challenge and ultimately defeat God, but at the end of his midrash they are nonetheless reconciled. He concludes that 'God and Job must forgive each other to remain sane before such absurd evil'.[4] Berkovits's creation of 'Job's brother' is framed around a desire to respect both the faith and doubt of Holocaust victims, but as I have noted, observers have repeatedly highlighted his tendency to prioritize the former. To read his two major works on the topic is ultimately to be left with an image of the event dominated by faithfulness.

But weighing up the elements of irresolution and closure among religious respondents to the Holocaust is not straightforward, and there are sometimes disagreements in secondary literature. Braiterman's *(God) After Auschwitz* argues that Rubenstein, Berkovits and Fackenheim radically departed from traditional theodicies during the 1960s-70s and were united in 'refusing to justify, explain, or accept' any settled relationship between divine will and the horrors of the Holocaust.[5] By contrast, in his 2003 work *Interrupting Auschwitz* Josh Cohen concludes that the same three theologians were ultimately unable to avoid theologies of reconciliation between God and suffering.[6] I will not attempt my own absolute adjudication here, but rather stress that aspects of both resolution and its rejection can be found among many post-Holocaust theologies, and in several instances the appeal to Job becomes noticeably intertwined with this phenomenon.

3. Berger, 'Elie Wiesel', p. 372. Richard L. Rubenstein, 'Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi', in *Perspectives on the Holocaust: Essays in Honor of Raul Hilberg* (ed. James S. Pacy and Alan P. Wertheimer; Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 145-65 (146), similarly comments that Wiesel 'does not address the agonizing question of God and the Holocaust by attempting to create an elaborate philosophical or theological system'. Wiesel's non-systematic discourse has led to debate over whether or not he can be described as 'a theologian'. For example, cf. Wollaston, '"Telling the Tale"', p. 164 n. 14; Fred L. Downing, 'Autobiography, Fiction and Faith: Reflections on the Literary and Religious Impact of Elie Wiesel', in *Remembering for the Future*. II. *The Impact of the Holocaust on the Contemporary World* (ed. Yehuda Bauer *et al.*; Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989), pp. 1441-455 (1450).

4. Haar, 'Job After Auschwitz', p. 273.

5. For a summary of this, cf. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, pp. 3-4.

6. Josh Cohen, *Interrupting Auschwitz: Art, Religion, Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 9-18.

1. *Emil L. Fackenheim and Job's Children*

Among religious respondents to the Holocaust Fackenheim is widely regarded as a figure of major significance. His theology represents, according to Morgan, 'the richest and most developed' engagement with the event.[7] He turns to the Book of Job on numerous occasions, though it should be admitted that his references to it are often fleeting, and when viewed as a whole they are difficult to draw into focus. One aspect of the book that he does nonetheless return to several times is the status of Job's children. I will address his comments on this point below, but it is useful to first focus upon the elements of irresolution and redemption in his theology.

Fackenheim at times appears to be very direct in his rejection of any understanding of the Holocaust that brings resolution. He asserts that '[n]o meaning, redemptive or other, religious or secular, will ever be found in the Holocaust'.[8] Elsewhere he writes (in emphatic italics) that '*where the Holocaust is there is no overcoming; and where there is an overcoming the Holocaust is not*'.[9]

However, there are also times when Fackenheim's thought does appear to be partially redemptive. In *To Mend the World* (1982) he focuses upon spiritual resistance during the 1940s as a moral example for post-Holocaust Judaism.[10] Out of suffering, in other words, there are instances of defiance from which we can learn. And as with Berkovits, this theological privileging of resistance has drawn criticism from some quarters.[11] Probably more famous, however, is the emphasis upon Jewish survival encapsulated in his '614th commandment'. It states that 'Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish'.[12] Two key consequences emerge from this focus on continuing Jewish life. The first is an unequivocal allegiance to the Jewish state—at 'the heart of every *authentic* response to the Holocaust', he writes, 'is a commitment to the autonomy and security of the state of Israel'.[13] The

7. Morgan, *Beyond Auschwitz*, p. 155.

8. Emil L. Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections* (Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1997), p. x.

9. Emil L. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2nd edn, 1994), p. 135. Emphasis original.

10. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, pp. 201-314.

11. Cf. Wollaston, 'Religious Language', p. 85; Cohen, *Interrupting Auschwitz*, pp. 17-18.

12. Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History*, p. 84. Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Holocaust and Its Legacy* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1987), p. 319, write that '[p]robably no passage written by a contemporary Jewish thinker has become as well known as this'.

13. Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History*, p. xxv. Emphasis original.

second is the granting of special significance to Jewish children born in the aftermath of the Holocaust. In the following passage from *To Mend the World*, Fackenheim addresses both concerns:

> One asks: *After* Auschwitz, why, individually, do Jews continue to have children, in a world in which, since one Auschwitz was real, another is not impossible?… Jewish couples who are survivors tend to have more children than those who are not; and after Auschwitz came the rebirth of a Jewish state … both are equally astonishing … these two Jewish commitments, the individual one through the children, and the collective one through the reborn state, are unique. For the survivors, hope died in Auschwitz. So it did for the Jewish people as a whole. *In the children individually and the state collectively, the murdered hope is, again and again, every year, every day, being resurrected.*[14]

Fackenheim's language is charged and evocative, but the message is fairly straightforward: Jewish statehood and childrearing are signs of hope in the face of despair. Despite his stated belief that with the Holocaust 'there is no overcoming', some critics have questioned whether there are elements of redemptive closure to such comments about Israel or children.[15] Cohen, for example, complains that 'the meaning of the State of Israel is precisely *not* open-ended or contestable' for Fackenheim.[16] But the issue I wish to look at concerns the significance given to children born after 1945. Although references to Job among Fackenheim's writings on the Holocaust are often brief and disconnected, he does return to issues concerning Job's children several times.

Job's first children die in 1.18-19 as part of the rapid downturn in the protagonist's fortunes, while the birth of his second children (42.13) comes amidst the restoration at the end of the book. The idea that after the suffering of the Holocaust there can be a comparable replacement of children is rejected by Fackenheim in *God's Presence in History* (1970). He states that '[t]o Job children were restored; that the children of Auschwitz will be restored is a belief which we dare not abuse for the purpose of finding comfort.'[17] In *The Jewish Return into History* (1978) he similarly comments that for Job 'children are restored' but that 'children of Auschwitz will not be restored'.[18]

A more sustained treatment of this point is found in *The Jewish Bible after the Holocaust* (1990). He again turns to Job and asks 'what if no lost

14. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, p. xliii. Emphasis original.
15. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, p. 135.
16. Cohen, *Interrupting Auschwitz*, p. 18. Emphasis original.
17. Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History*, p. 76.
18. Emil Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return into History: Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), p. 40.

child can be replaced?… But *are* children irreplaceable?'[19] The open-endedness of this second question is a significant development as Fackenheim ultimately begins to contemplate the idea that post-Holocaust Jews *can*, in some sense, be understood as comparable to Job's second children. He writes that they 'begin to understand themselves as being of the children of Job … the second sons and daughters who were given to Job in place of the first'.[20] But Fackenheim is nonetheless hesitant, unwilling to assert this point too completely:

> The living children cannot—dare not attempt to—replace those who died; yet in writing a new page in Jewish history—*through* founding a new Jewish state but, note this well, not *in* it alone—they can, do, must take their place.[21]

Read logically, this passage is contradictory. Post-Holocaust Jews 'cannot—dare not attempt to—replace those who died' but 'can, do, must take their place'. Assuming that to 'replace' and to 'take their place' are synonyms, this is a straightforwardly paradoxical statement. But it is a contradiction that reaches to the heart of Fackenheim's post-Holocaust thought. He is avowedly committed to the notion that there can be no redemption and no closure after the Holocaust. But he also writes passionately about the significance of Jewish survival and children born in the aftermath of the event. Job's second children, and those reared after 1945, are consequently granted an ambiguous status. They both do and do not represent an overcoming of suffering.

2. *Irving Greenberg, the Divine Whirlwind and the State of Israel*

Another post-Holocaust theologian concerned with irresolution is the Orthodox rabbi Irving Greenberg. I will concentrate on an address he delivered in New York in 1973 under the title 'Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire'. It is, according to Katz and others, Greenberg's 'most important statement' on the Holocaust, and also contains his most sustained engagement with the Book of Job in this context.[22]

Like Fackenheim, Greenberg is uncomfortable with any simple alignment between Job's restoration and the post-Holocaust fortunes of the

19. Fackenheim, *The Jewish Bible*, p. 93. Emphasis original.
20. Fackenheim, *The Jewish Bible*, p. 94.
21. Fackenheim, *The Jewish Bible*, p. 94. Emphasis original.
22. Steven T. Katz, *Historicism, the Holocaust and Zionism: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought and History* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p. 225. Morgan, *Beyond Auschwitz*, p. 121, similarly describes this address as Greenberg's 'most revealing account' of his ideas on 'the Holocaust and its religious and moral implications'.

Jewish people.[23] He asserts that '[t]he ending of the book, in which Job is restored and has a new wife and children, is of course unacceptable … Six million murdered Jews have not been and cannot be restored'.[24] It is worth briefly noting, by way of aside, that such a parallel has not been universally denounced. In *Crisis and Covenant* (1992) the British Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, has suggested that Job's restoration does have meaningful resonance:

> To some readers this epilogue had seemed unconvincing, as if Job's sufferings could be unwritten by a happy ending. To a post-Holocaust generation the epilogue is disclosed in its full profundity. Job has no answers, but he has been lifted beyond his personal tragedy by the knowledge that he can speak and be spoken to by God. This gives him the strength to go on living and have children after catastrophe. That is the kind of faith manifest in traditionalist responses to the Holocaust. Rather than engaging in theological reflections on the Holocaust, the survivors of Chassidic and *yeshiva* communities of Eastern Europe concentrated on having children to replace a lost generation and rebuilding their shattered townships and institutions in Israel and America, as if to say that death is redeemed only in new life.[25]

Sacks's message is in some ways comparable to Goldberg's. What is most important, he seems to say, is not theological speculation and questioning, but a continuation of Jewish tradition. Goldberg has honed in on Job 1.21, while Sacks has turned to the restoration in chap. 42, but the result is nonetheless very similar.

However, returning our attention to Greenberg, it is important to stress that while he is uncomfortable with Job's new fortune and family, he does find post-Holocaust meaning in another aspect of the book: the divine speeches. It is an interpretation, I will ultimately argue, that reflects

23. The Christian theologian Henry Knight, 'Facing the Whirlwind Anew: Looking Over Job's Shoulders from the Shadows of the Storm', in *Remembering for the Future: Papers and Addenda. I. History* (ed. John K. Roth and Elisabeth Maxwell; New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 745-59 (755), voices similar doubts: 'a new family is given. And Job is blessed with a long and full life. Survivors may recognize that some of this can be appropriate. Many of them have been able to rebuild their lives. Some have even thrived. However, anticipating the protests of the Jobs of more recent times, we must draw the line and reject the easy notion of a replacement family. Job's first ten children remain lost. After Auschwitz, with over a million children lost to that long night, the ten lost children of Job cannot be dismissed as ciphers in a story'.

24. Irving Greenberg, 'Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity after the Holocaust', in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust* (ed. Eva Fleischner; New York: Ktav, 1977), pp. 7-55 (34). Though of only minor relevance to Greenberg's main point, it is worth noting that the text of Job does not suggest that the protagonist has a *new* wife in chapter 42.

25. Jonathan Sacks, *Crisis and Covenant: Jewish Thought after the Holocaust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) pp. 46-47.

his fundamental desire to resist theological finality. The key passage from 'Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire' is as follows:

> [Job's] suffering is not justified by God, nor is he consoled by the words about God's majesty and the grandeur of the universe surpassing man's understanding. Rather, what is meaningful in Job's experience is that in the whirlwind the contact with God is restored. That sense of Presence gives the strength to go on living in the contradiction. The theological implications of Job, then, are the rejection of easy pieties or denials and the dialectical response of looking for, expecting, further revelations of the Presence. This is the primary religious dimension of the reborn State of Israel for all religious people. When suffering had all but overwhelmed Jews and all but blocked out God's Presence, a sign out of the whirlwind gave us the strength to go on, and the right to speak authentically of God's Presence still.[26]

For Greenberg the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 is comparable to the divine presence experienced by Job at the end of the biblical story. As I have already noted, the divine speeches can be interpreted in several different ways. Unlike Alford, for example, Greenberg does not believe that Job finds anything useful in the content of God's words. No wisdom regarding the nature of the universe can be gleaned from his poetic utterances. And unlike Levi or Wiesel, Greenberg does not convey an image of Job as crushed and humiliated by the divine whirlwind. His reading lies somewhere in between: Job receives no intellectual 'answer' to religious questions about undeserved suffering, but he does gain the comfort of direct contact with God.

This willingness to countenance the reassurance of divine presence, but not philosophical resolution, reflects a balancing act attempted through much of 'Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire'. Important phrases in the passage reproduced above are 'living in the contradiction' and 'dialectical response'. Elsewhere in the address Greenberg declares that '[t]he Holocaust offers us only dialectical moves and understandings—often moves that stretch our capacity to the limit and torment us with their irresolvable tensions'.[27] A key element of this irresolvable tension is Greenberg's notion of 'moment faiths': '[w]e now have to speak of "moment faiths", moments when the Redeemer and vision of redemption are present, interspersed with times when the flames and smoke of the burning children blot out faith—though it flickers again.'[28] For Greenberg, this idea of a fragmentary, fleeting faith is of central importance: as recently as 2006 he described the idea of 'moment faiths' as summarizing his response to the Holocaust.[29]

26. Greenberg, 'Cloud of Smoke', pp. 34-35.
27. Greenberg, 'Cloud of Smoke', p. 22.
28. Greenberg, 'Cloud of Smoke', p. 27.
29. Irving Greenberg, 'Theology after the Shoah: The Transformation of the Core Paradigm', *Modern Judaism* 26.3 (2006), pp. 213-39 (213).

For some the idea of 'moment faiths' is likely to be appealing. It incorporates religious doubt and fervour under a single loosely framed category and attempts to avoid privileging one at the expense of the other. The idea of 'moment faiths' perhaps better matches the changeable nature of lived religious experience than more static theological models. But some respondents have voiced disquiet at the notion that there are periods akin to Job's theophany, but others when the dark episodes of history 'blot out faith'. In reply to Greenberg, Katz complains that 'holding, or claiming to believe, two contradictory propositions simultaneously is *not* a fruitful theological procedure'.[30] You cannot, in other words, both believe and not believe.

Deciding whether or not Katz's protest is fair seems to ultimately boil down to questions about whether religious faith/doubt should be coherent. But even if we declare such questions irresolvable, it is worth querying how well Greenberg actually maintains the theological balancing act he promotes. At one point he states that the equivalent to the divine whirlwind in the post-Holocaust world—the creation of the state of Israel—amounts to 'renewed testimony to Exodus as ultimate reality, to God's continuing presence in history'.[31] Terms like 'continuing presence' and especially '*ultimate* reality' have too great a feel of finality to sit easily with fragmentary, momentary faith. This does not wholly invalidate Greenberg's *attempt* to find post-Holocaust irresolution, but it does illustrate the extreme difficulty of such an enterprise.

Greenberg's 1973 address would ultimately go on to become most well known for its 'working principle' that '[n]o statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children'.[32] This dictum has occasionally received (in my view justified) criticism, but it encapsulates Greenberg's demand that post-Holocaust theology remains tentative and unfinalized.[33] The Book of Job's divine speeches

30. Katz, *Historicism, the Holocaust and Zionism*, p. 240. Emphasis original.

31. Greenberg, 'Cloud of Smoke', p. 48.

32. Greenberg, 'Cloud of Smoke', p. 23.

33. Katz, 'The Issue of Confirmation', p. 52, makes the obvious complaint that the principle is in practice rather subjective: 'what is "credible" depends on one's prior theological commitments, the very issue at stake. Accordingly, the argument becomes circular'. On the last pages of his book, Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing*, pp. 215-16, uncompromisingly responds to Greenberg's 'working principle' with the comment that 'no statement better captures the sanctimonious veneration of horror that so often serves to curtail rather than encourage critical thinking about our present-day relationship to the Holocaust. Such statements, it seems to me, promote a kind of dishonesty under the guise of virtuousness. Certainly, in the presence of the children who were thrown alive into the crematorium furnaces or burning pits at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944, no abstract statement, theological, philosophical, or theoretical, would be appropriate—including, of course, Greenberg's own working principle. But this is precisely not the context in which we make statements about the Holocaust, and pretending

resonate for him because he sees in God's words a momentarily reassuring presence. Importantly, however, this presence conveys no explanation in the face of suffering.

3. *David R. Blumenthal and the Abusive God of Job*

In the introduction to his 1993 work *Facing the Abusing God*, the Conservative rabbi David Blumenthal refers to Greenberg's 'working principle' and concludes that after the Holocaust '[t]hought must be broken, shattered, fragmented'.[34] His book goes on to reflect this in its very structure. Its form 'seeks to break the flow of thoughtful deliberation … [and] intentionally tries to disrupt and fragment the smoothness of the theological discourse'.[35] This is achieved through the insertion of responses by other contributors and the inclusion of multi-strand commentaries on Psalms 27, 44, 109 and 128.[36] Compared with Blumenthal, there can be few theologians writing on the Holocaust so self-consciously committed to resisting finality.

To understand how the Book of Job fits into this, it is worth considering how Blumenthal conceptualizes God's 'personality'. He explicitly rejects any idea that God exists on a level beyond character traits, instead proposing six features we might discern from Jewish tradition:[37]

that it is limits and distorts understanding of how present concerns shape the historical past'. These are admittedly harsh words, but I have some sympathy with Weissman's concerns.

34. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 9, alludes to Greenberg's dictum when asking '[h]ow *can* one do theology in the presence of one million burning children?'. Emphasis original. Note the heightening of the emotional stakes through the addition of 'one million' to Greenberg's formulation.

35. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 9.

36. Cf. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, pp. 67-189, 195-232. Tod Linafelt, 'Reading the Hebrew Bible After the Holocaust: Toward an Ethics of Interpretation', in *The Holocaust: Lessons for the Third Generation* (ed. Dominick A. Iorio *et al.*; New York: University Press of America, 1997), pp. 135-47 (140), notes that through his treatment of Pss. 27, 44, 109 and 128 'Blumenthal has constructed an intertextual field of exegesis reminiscent of the Talmud … Each Psalm is presented both in the original Hebrew and a new English translation. There follows a verse by verse commentary in four different voices: a philological commentary ('Words'), comments from the hasidic tradition ('Sparks'), an emotional-spiritual commentary ('Affections'), and a counter-reading of the texts in light of the experience of abuse or the Holocaust ('Con-verses'). On each page the four voices surround the biblical text, vying for space and the reader's attention. Sometimes one voice dominates, at other times another voice does'.

37. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 7, states that a 'transpersonal God, as in some eastern traditions or in certain philosophical understandings of Judaism, is, in my opinion, an incorrect reading of the texts of God's Presence. It contradicts the tradition, as well as common Jewish experience.'

1. God must be fair.
2. God addresses, and can be addressed by humankind.
3. God is powerful but not perfect.
4. God is loving.
5. God gets angry.
6. God chooses; God is partisan.[38]

Most theists are likely to find some of these traits more immediately concerning than others. That 'God is loving', for example, is probably reassuring; that 'God gets angry' somewhat less so. But the situation Blumenthal describes is more complicated than this. Even the most seemingly positive of attributes, 'God is loving', has for this theologian some darker edges: '[l]ove is not smooth. It wrenches, it drags one along, it demands. And love frustrates; it causes deep anger'.[39] His most radical theological claim, however, is that God is sometimes an abusive deity:

> [T]o the six personalist attributes listed … I must now add a seventh: *God is abusive, but not always*. God, as portrayed in our holy sources and as experienced by humans throughout the ages, acts, from time to time, in a manner that is so unjust that it can only be characterized by the term 'abusive'. In this mode, God allows the innocent to suffer greatly. In this mode, God 'caused' the holocaust, or allowed it to happen.[40]

This is a startling claim, and the notion of God as an abuser has, unsurprisingly, not always been well received.[41] Goldberg, for example, responded by stating that if this 'does not count as blasphemy, then we have no category of blasphemy'.[42]

Blumenthal nonetheless claims to see in Jewish tradition and history ample evidence for divine abuse. Reflecting on the voice from the whirlwind in Job, he suggests that 'God overwhelms and threatens'.[43] He concludes that 'the ending of the book of Job according to the poetic section reveals a God Who is an abuser'.[44] As we have repeatedly seen, Job 38–41 can be read in numerous ways, and Blumenthal's interpretation appears to align most closely with those who say that Job is simply crushed by his experience of the whirlwind.

38. These summaries are based upon the titles in Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, pp. 15-19.

39. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 17.

40. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 247. Emphasis original.

41. David R. Blumenthal, 'Theodicy: Dissonance in Theory and Praxis', in *The Fascination of Evil* (ed. David Tracy and Hermann Häring; London: SCM, 1998), pp. 95-106 (100), reflects that criticism of *Facing the Abusing God* 'has been vehement beyond the usual scholarly rigour'.

42. Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive?*, p. 150 n. 12.

43. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 254.

44. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 255.

Facing the Abusing God is not, however, merely a lament at God's imperfections. It proposes a course of action in response, one referred to in the book's subtitle, *A Theology of Protest*. While devoting considerable discussion to modern embodiments of theological protest—most notably Elie Wiesel—Blumenthal declares that '[t]he theology of protest goes back to the Bible and is present most forcefully in the Book of Job'.[45] In the Job of the poetic dialogues he finds a figure that encapsulates this need to question a sometimes abusive God:

> Job … never questions God's existence, nor God's power to do what God is doing. Rather, Job questions God's justification, God's morality, God's justice. Throughout, Job rejects the moral panaceas and theological rationalizations of his friends, as does God in the end. No pat answers; rather, the repeated assertion of his innocence and the recurring questioning of God's justice.[46]

In Job's archetypal rebellion Blumenthal has uncovered a significant precedent within Jewish tradition for his 'Theology of Protest'. Put simply, God's abuse should be recognized, but it should not be accepted.

It would be easy to draw a line under his treatment of Job at this point and conclude that Blumenthal's interpretation is essentially a variation on those presented by Wiesel and Haar. All three find themselves drawn to the defiant Job of the poetic dialogues, and each of them is uncomfortable with the tone of the divine speeches. But there is another aspect of Blumenthal's reading that should be addressed. And to do so involves bearing in mind that *Facing the Abusing God* gestures towards a partial reconciliation with the divine.[47]

For all his discussion of divine abuse, Blumenthal writes that 'there can be no religious healing without some openness to the love of God—tentative, hesitating, even suspicious and distrustful; but present'.[48] This language of 'hesitation' is typical of *Facing the Abusing God*. In a manner reminiscent of Greenberg's 'moment faiths', Blumenthal's book oscillates

45. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 250. His interpretation of Job is intercut with a discussion of Elie Wiesel, *The Trial of God (as it was held on February 25, 1649, in Shamgorod)* (trans. Marion Wiesel; New York: Schocken Books, 1979). For my own discussion of the latter, cf. Tollerton, 'Holocaust Representation'.

46. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 251.

47. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 3, states that '[t]o be a theologian is … *to speak for God*. It is to have a personal rapport with God'. Emphasis original. With such a definition in mind, some kind of partial reconciliation with God (however abusive) seems unavoidable from the outset. David R. Blumenthal, *The Banality of Good and Evil: Moral Lessons from the Shoah and Jewish Tradition* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999), p. 106 similarly declares that '[t]heology is the art of seeing the world from God's point of view'.

48. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 258.

between faith and doubt, one of the clearest examples of this coming on the book's final page. Addressing God directly, he writes 'You were the Abuser; our sins were not commensurate with Your actions', but a few lines later reflects that '[i]n spite of all this, we will gather our strength and support one another… We will believe in You, we will place our hope in You'.[49] Such lurching from anger to reconciliation is representative of Blumenthal's commitment to an approach based on resisting organized and finalized thought.

Responding to his emotionally charged theology is not straightforward. Is such fluctuation between rage and resolution a valuable means by which to engage with the complexities of post-Holocaust belief? Does Blumenthal correctly recognize that there must be some manner of ongoing (but fragmentary) hope in God? Or is the very suggestion of reconciliation with an abuser who '"caused" the holocaust, or allowed it to happen' morally reprehensible?[50] Readers of *Facing the Abusing God* have come to different conclusions.[51]

For my concerns it is important to observe that this emphasis upon a continuing relationship with God ultimately qualifies Blumenthal's enthusiasm for the Book of Job. This is because while the poetic dialogues present a figure of rebellion with whom he identifies, the ending of the story falls short of presenting the kind of fragmentary reconciliation he also proposes:

49. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 299.

50. That Blumenthal's notion of partial reconciliation with an abusive God is ethically questionable is an idea occasionally put forward by respondents whose words are reprinted in *Facing the Abusing God*. Diane writes, '[i]f God is an abuser, the adult non-sick response should be to turn away permanently from Him' (198). Wendy similarly reflects that '*I can't imagine worshipping an abusive father*. Psychologically, it is neurotic and ethically it is immoral… You are like someone counselling the abused wife to be a good, obedient wife and take her beatings passively' (221). Emphasis original. Blumenthal, 'Theodicy', p. 101, suggests that such complaints 'are rooted in the idea that God must be omnibenevolent'. I disagree with Blumenthal on this point. Refusing to worship an abusive deity need not be based on the idea that God *must* be good. It can be merely founded upon the idea that a hopeful and ongoing *relationship* with an abuser is unhealthy.

51. Isabel Wollaston, 'The Possibility and Plausibility of Divine Abusiveness or Sadism as the Premise for a Religious Response to the Holocaust', *Journal of Religion and Society* 2 (2000), pp. 1-15 (11), comments that 'if there is a weakness in Blumenthal's emphasis upon healing and remaining in relationship with an occasionally abusive God, it lies in the confidence with which he asserts that this is the way forward. It is not *the* way forward, it is *a* way forward, and while it clearly works for David Blumenthal, it clearly does not work for Diane, Wendy and Beth [the other commentators in *Facing the Abusing God*]. The importance lies in ensuring that all four voices are heard, as indeed Blumenthal recognizes in incorporating such contradictory voices into his text.' Emphasis original.

> At the end of this tirade [God's speeches], Job responds in the most enigmatic of texts [42.1-6] … Does the enigmatic last sentence [42.6] mean that Job was so terrified that he repressed his question completely? Or does it mean that Job had a religious, or mystical, experience which transformed his question and his spiritual being to a higher plane? … The prose ending to the book of Job (42.7-17) is no easier to understand … did Job simply take up his relationship with God again, with no after-effects? Did Job accept his second blessing without question? Did he resume his pious life without reservation? … [the Book of Job is] silent on the religious nature of life after suffering … abuse has traumatized the text into a deep silence. But what *would* constitute a proper religious response to abuse in a life lived while healing from abuse?[52]

Blumenthal provides an answer to this last question over the following pages. He asserts that there is a need to '*acknowledge the awful truth of God's abusing behaviour*' and '*adopt a theology of protest and sustained suspicion*', but that this needs to be combined with a willingness to '*open ourselves to the good side of God, painful though that is*'.[53] Looking specifically at Blumenthal's treatment of Job, it is notable how acutely aware he is of the ambiguities of Job's final chapter. He consequently finds that it falls short of offering the kind of partial reconciliation with an abusive God that he endorses. After the Holocaust, he argues, there must be fragmentary healing. But the Book of Job is too unclear on this point to be a valid model.

Although Blumenthal is, like Fackenheim and Greenberg, uncomfortable with Job 42, it is remarkable how different his motivations are for feeling this way about the text. With Fackenheim and Greenberg, the end of Job presents a restoration that should not be too readily compared to post-Holocaust Jewish life. For Blumenthal it presents a restoration not explicit enough in describing Job's psychological condition in the aftermath of suffering. In other words, while for Fackenheim and Greenberg the Book of Job says too much about life after trauma, for Blumenthal it does not say enough. Yet as with these two theologians, Blumenthal's reception of Job is shaped by a desire to balance irresolution and redemption. *Facing the Abusing God* puts forward a fragmentary, multi-voiced theology that contains both anger and hope. In the Book of Job he finds a valuable articulation of the anger, but an insufficient model for the hope.

4. *Edward Feld and the Guilty/Innocent God of Job*

Edward Feld, an American rabbi associated with the Conservative and Reconstructionist movements, is the last commentator whose post-Holocaust reception of Job I will discuss. Although his 1991 book *The Spirit of Renewal*

52. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, pp. 254-56.
53. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 259. Emphasis original.

is by several degrees less provocative and less controversial than *Facing the Abusing God*, Feld does nonetheless share Blumenthal's appeal to a fragmentary form of religious response to the Holocaust. Note, for example, the following passage taken from the final lines of his book:

> *Having borne rage, having known violence, having witnessed fratricide, we have no expectations for what will come. What will be is a gift. We shall treat it as a mysterious treasure. Perhaps that is the secret of our humanity. Perhaps that is what is meant by the sacred… Such thoughts can only last a moment … And then the terror, the emptiness will be upon us again…*[54]

This passage is, I should stress, certainly one of the more poetically framed sections of *The Spirit of Renewal* (many other parts read more like a traditional theological text). But it exemplifies the conscious irresolution that lies at the heart of Feld's orientation—thoughts of redemption 'can last only a moment'. Even the punctuation (the ellipses are original to the text) reflects a desire to resist finality. As with Fackenheim, Greenberg and Blumenthal, this reluctance to find closure ultimately comes to influence his reception of the Book of Job. To explore this further it is useful to work through some of the sections in *The Spirit of Renewal* where Feld's attention is drawn to Job.

I will start with a sequence that comes midway through the book, where Feld is prompted to discuss Job in relation to remarks published by Martin Buber several decades earlier. It is worth briefly discussing the reflections of this hugely influential philosopher before returning to Feld. Buber did not often write about the Holocaust, but in the closing pages of an essay entitled 'The Dialogue Between Heaven and Earth' (first delivered as an address in New York in 1951) he momentarily turned his attention to the event.[55] He asks 'how is a life with God still possible in a time in which there is an Auschwitz?'.[56] In search of an answer Buber appeals to the divine speeches in Job, and in a manner similar to Greenberg, stresses the comfort Job gains from God's presence:

> Job… receives an answer from God. But what God says to him does not answer the charge; it does not even touch upon it. The true answer that Job receives is God's appearance only… Nothing is explained, nothing adjusted; wrong has not become right, nor cruelty kindness. Nothing has happened but that man again hears God's address.[57]

54. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 167. Emphasis original. The reference to fratricide relates to this passage being immediately preceded by a quotation from Genesis 4.

55. Cf. Fackenheim, *An Epitaph*, pp. 263-64; Steven Kepnes, 'Job and Post-Holocaust Theodicy', in *Strange Fire: Reading the Bible after the Holocaust* (ed. Tod Linafelt; The Bible Seminar, 71; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 252-66.

56. Martin Buber, *On Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p. 224.

57. Buber, *On Judaism*, p. 224.

Those familiar with Buber's thought will immediately hear echoes of his famous exploration of an 'I-thou' relationship with God.[58] Feld, however, reads this passage suspiciously:

> [A]fter the Holocaust, we have to ask if Buber has not said too much. Is not something still being papered over? What is restored by simply hearing God's address again? Does God's mysterious return solve anything? Perhaps Job's tale can end with a reconciliation between God and the sufferer achieved through God's reappearance and the restoration of Job's fortune, but that ending cannot work for us. For us there can be no restoration, no easy reconciliation. The hurt remains, nothing can make up for the vastness of the destruction.[59]

Buber's post-Holocaust appeal to God's mysterious presence is viewed by Feld as an evasive refusal to grapple with the weight of theological turmoil faced by those living in the aftermath of the event. Unlike Greenberg, he is not willing to countenance the comfort offered by restored contact with the divine. And as he rightly goes on to observe, Buber's essay 'The Dialogue between Heaven and Earth' does not actually end on a triumphal note of confidence in God's post-Holocaust appearance from the whirlwind. Buber instead asserts that 'we *await* His voice, whether it comes out of the storm or out of the stillness that follows it'.[60] The tentativeness of this hope is viewed more favourably by Feld. He writes that 'Buber recognizes that something fundamental has changed in our understanding of God, that the reconciliation of our own time cannot be the same as the one in Job.'[61]

Feld's portrayal of the religious landscape after the Holocaust is here at its most bleak. It is also during this section that he is most clearly dubious of the Book of Job's usefulness in this context. But as I noted above, *The Spirit of Renewal* does gesture toward a fragmentary hope. And elsewhere in the text he views Job quite differently. There are two more aspects of his interpretation that we must consider.

The first concerns his appreciation for the Job of the poetic dialogues. He writes that 'Job is the hero of the book because he is willing to face God openly and directly'.[62] Like many other post-Holocaust readers of the tale, Feld is sympathetic to the questioning figure of the dialogues. This image of Job, he suggests, resonates with those confronted by the religious upheaval of the Holocaust's aftermath. In one section of *The Spirit of Renewal* Feld reflects that 'we feel a remarkable closeness to the man Job.

58. Cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (trans. Ronald Gregor Smith; London: Continuum, 2nd edn, 2004).

59. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 104.

60. Buber, *On Judaism*, p. 225. Emphasis added.

61. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 105.

62. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 19.

His questions are so like our own'.[63] During another he remarks that like Job we must 'continue to argue about the meaning of the sacred in our lives'.[64] Feld does not, however, stress Job's defiance against God to quite the same degree as Wiesel, Haar or Blumenthal. He takes God's commendation of Job in 42.7 as divine approval for his impious doubts during the dialogues, stating that 'God applauds his untrammelled insistence on speaking the truth, his inability to accept pious verities as answers, his absolute honesty in attacking theological problems'.[65] Feld's Job is therefore not quite the consummate theological rebel given that God actually endorses his poetic defiance.

The next note of appreciation for the Book of Job found in *The Spirit of Renewal* relates to God's poetic speeches. This might initially seem strange given Feld's doubts about Buber's appeal to a post-Holocaust restoration of contact with the divine. On several occasions in the book, however, he does nonetheless make more positive remarks about Job 38–41. Feld does not stress, as Buber or Greenberg do, the importance of God's very presence, but instead gives weight to the *content* of his words. It is an interpretation of the divine speeches that hinges on the descriptions of the Leviathan and Behemoth (Job 40–41):

> Caught up in the whirlwind, Job is overwhelmed not only by God's power, but by God's acknowledgement of these evil forces … God's own potency is not some absolute, existing outside of time and the world, but forms the cosmos in relation to these other forces.[66]

Elsewhere in the text Feld applies this understanding of God to the Holocaust:

> Job learns that there are limits to what he can expect of God, that the justice we demand of the universe is unreasonable. We, too, have discovered that left to its own devices there can be a terrible cruelty at the heart of humanity.[67]

For Feld, Job learns from the divine speeches that God is not all-powerful, and that there are elements of the cosmos that lie beyond his control.

We are in one sense now back where we started: the first commentator that I discussed, Michael Goldberg, wrote in direct response to a reading of Job akin to this. It was Harold Kushner's suggestion that, based on God's speeches, we should question the idea of divine omnipotence that first provoked Goldberg's counter-reading.

63. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 19.
64. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 164.
65. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 19.
66. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 18.
67. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 163.

Returning to Feld though, we must ask whether the interpretation of the Book of Job in *The Spirit of Renewal* actually makes sense. As I have outlined, he at one point states that after the Holocaust there cannot be a comforting sense of divine presence akin to Job's experiences because '[t]he hurt remains, [and] nothing can make up for the vastness of the destruction'.[68] There should not, in other words, be any complete reconciliation between God and humanity after the Holocaust. Yet elsewhere Feld proposes that the universe contains within it destructive elements that are outside divine rule. Why, we might ask, hold God to account for events that lie beyond his control? Why resist reconciliation with a divine being *unable* to prevent suffering?

There are, I wish to propose, two lines of partial explanation for this unevenness in Feld's thinking. The first relates to the nature of *The Spirit of Renewal* as a text. Looking back at the quotation that ends his book, we should perhaps ask whether demanding logical coherence from Feld is appropriate. In the passage (reproduced more fully above) he writes '*we have no expectations for what will come … thoughts can only last a moment … And then the terror, the emptiness will be upon us again …*'.[69] Perhaps it is better to understand his treatment of Job, and indeed his theology as a whole, as the exploration of multiple, sometimes conflicting directions of argument. *The Spirit of Renewal*'s interpretation of Job, when read as a whole, seems to view God as both guilty *and* innocent of causing human suffering. But it also promotes religious questioning akin to Job's so that we might, as Feld puts it, 'continue to argue about the meaning of the sacred in our lives'.[70] Theological finality and resolution are, in other words, not of paramount importance for his post-Holocaust outlook.

The second issue to bear in mind is that, of all the commentators I have discussed, Feld gives the strongest disclaimer regarding his own interpretation of Job. Near the end of his longest discussion of the biblical book he abruptly inserts the following warning:

> But have we been saying too much? Are we overrepresenting a twentieth-century perspective and obscuring the author's voice? Are these indeed the resolutions the book has been striving for, or are we engaged in a contemporary misreading of the book? The gaps in time that separate us from the author of the Book of Job make it difficult for us to reconstruct his voice. The book is the most difficult of all the poetic works of the Bible.[71]

Here Feld is making two points about the complications of reading Job: first, that the book is ambiguous and 'difficult', and secondly, that it is hard

68. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 104.
69. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 167.
70. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 164.
71. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 19.

for us to hear the author's original voice. My own view is that the first concern is more serious than the second. The important point, however, is that these comments lend a measure of conscious provisionality to all that Feld says about Job. By appealing to this biblical story as often as he does in *The Spirit of Renewal*, it is clear that he perceives it to be a worthwhile dialogue partner for the exploration of the Holocaust's religious implications. But it is evidently a dialogue partner that he is not sure we can interpret with absolute confidence.

5. *Reading Job as Disruption*

As I noted in the introduction, my main purpose in this book is to illuminate the rich variety of ways in which the Book of Job has been interpreted by those responding to the Holocaust. At this point, however, I wish to change direction and offer up my own suggestions regarding the reception of Job in this context. They are, I should stress, no more and no less than *suggestions*. As I noted in the preface, I am not claiming to speak as a voice of authority from inside the Jewish community. I make such suggestions at the end of this particular chapter because, like those commentators discussed immediately above, I am sympathetic to the idea that there is value in resisting theological resolution in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Before commenting directly on Job it is worth justifying this point.

The Holocaust and Irresolution

It may be possible to muster numerous arguments in defence of post-Holocaust irresolution, but I will focus on two particular issues.

The first point is essentially ethical in character. To find a cohesive theological 'solution' to the Holocaust risks making suffering, in the final analysis, something that is acceptable. If God can be reconciled with the darker aspects of twentieth century history, we might ask what future horrors may become justifiable. The idea that evil is allowable so that humanity can be suitably chastened, or be educated as to the grim potential of freedom, means ultimately rendering such evil a form of good. As Feld rightly asks, '[w]hat ultimate plan could justify the death of so many millions? … Does one really want to be with a God who has such "answers"?'[72]

The second issue concerns the nature of remembrance. Earlier I discussed James Young's notion that contentious sites of Holocaust memory, although divisive, are valuable in that they provoke *ongoing* questioning of the event's meaning rather than forgetfulness. In *At Memory's Edge* he speaks positively of a mode of response 'that resists closure, sustains

72. Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal*, p. 104.

uncertainty, and allows us to live without full understanding'.[73] In religious discourse this translates into an aversion to theological resolution. If the Holocaust is an event deemed to be of continuing importance for theology, what is required is not a singular widely-embraced 'answer', but a means of facilitating unfinalized discussion.

There are admittedly objections that can be raised against each of these points. Perhaps in the aftermath of trauma some religious communities and individuals do not need ongoing disruption, but instead a cohesive resolution to the matter. I am willing to concede that for some people this may well be the case. It might also be protested that some of my comments above assume working with a notion of divine omnipotence. Perhaps God was simply *unable* to prevent the Holocaust. If so, there is no ethical case for resisting reconciliation with such a God.

These are both valid concerns. However, I contend that *one* route we might take is to assert the value of unfinalized and ongoing discussion of the Holocaust's theological ramifications. As this chapter as a whole has shown, this is not an especially novel move on my part. However, I wish to link the Book of Job to such an orientation in a way that is different to Fackenheim, Greenberg, Blumenthal and Feld.

The (Potentially) Disruptive Text

One of the reasons for discussing Blumenthal and Feld last among the interpreters I have addressed in this book is that, more than most commentators, they draw explicit attention to the ambiguous, even perplexing aspects of the Book of Job. It is this characteristic of the text that I wish to focus upon.

In the first chapter I discussed Kenneth Ngwa's proposal that there are two approaches readers can take: one is to harmonize Job's meaning around a central message, the other is to stress the internal dissonances within the story—to 'argue for the polyphonic character of the text and its open-endedness'.[74] Looking back at the various post-Holocaust interpretations of Job I have discussed in this book it is not possible to neatly situate all of them at one end of this spectrum or the other. However, I suggest that there is, loosely speaking, more of a tendency toward harmonization than against it. Goldberg sees the message of Job as one of pious acceptance. Others, such as Langer, Katz and Alford find in this biblical tale a presentation of suffering as the opportunity for spiritual growth. Wiesel and Haar go to great lengths to convey an image of Job as the undefeated rebel against divine injustice. As we have also seen, for numerous post-Holocaust readers the core message of the book is based upon making sense of the divine

73. Young, *At Memory's Edge*, p. 6.
74. Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics*, p. 89.

speeches. For some the speeches reveal a cosmos beyond human control, or even God's control. For others the key issue is not what God says, but merely his very presence. It is much too simplistic to say that all post-Holocaust interpreters harmonize the message of Job to the same degree, but I do wish to propose that there is a broad *tendency* in this direction.

Those at the other end of Ngwa's scale are liable to display displeasure at such a tendency. Note, for example, the following passage from the opening page of David Penchansky's *The Betrayal of God* (1990):

> Most readings of Job are deficient because they attempt to harmonize, compelling the book to say only one thing … Often, the goal of interpretation has been to stabilize a text by making it conform to an ideological point of view, which is usually the interpreter's view of reality. However, such attempts at harmonization inevitably do violence to the text.[75]

While I have some sympathy with these comments, I am nonetheless reticent to unequivocally apply such criticism to the interpreters I have discussed in this book. This is because, in practice, those who harmonize Job's post-Holocaust meaning do so not (necessarily) because they are unreflective readers, but rather because they are *using* the biblical story to make a broader point about theology and suffering. When Katz, for example, cites the words of Eliphaz and Elihu as evidence that the Book of Job is a story about moral education, we at least should recognize that his main purpose is not to read Job as sensitively as possible, but rather to reject a certain mode of religious response to the Holocaust. In the context of addressing this modern atrocity, I am keen to preserve some space for the practice of harmonizing Job's message as a means for constructing arguments.

Nonetheless, I propose that there is also another route available. This is to move to the other end of the spectrum Ngwa outlines, and self-consciously read Job as a polyphonic and disruptive text. Interpreted with a willingness to highlight rather than deemphasize the book's tensions, the story comes to be appreciated as a deeply ambiguous and uneven tale. Read in this way the Book of Job represents a mode of thought that resonates with the aspiration to avoid finalized narratives of the Holocaust's religious meaning. Job can be a subversive force within theological consideration of the Holocaust—a story which through its own resistance to resolution questions whether a unitary outcome to the problem of undeserved suffering is possible, or even desirable. To consider the genocide of European Jews an event of theological importance and significance demands *ongoing* remembrance, reflection and debate. The Book of Job, read as disruption, is a text drawn from tradition that can be an ally to this approach.

75. Penchansky, *The Betrayal of God*, p. 9.

Another way to frame my suggestion is to propose understanding Job's significance at the interface of issues raised by two specific verses. The first is 16.18: 'Earth, do not cover my blood; Let there be no resting place for my outcry!'. These words of Job's lament have often been cited within reflection on the Holocaust. The verse has been engraved on memorials and quoted in liturgy, works of theology and as the epigraph for an anthology of Holocaust poetry.[76] The reason for the perceived relevance of Job's words is not difficult to discern. They resonate with a desire to not allow the Holocaust's significance to be forgotten. Amidst the diversity of Holocaust memory Wollaston notes the pervasiveness of this urge: '[o]ne thread that does remain constant is the insistence that the dead must not be forgotten'. But as she notes, such an insistence quickly leads onto questions about how to remember, for 'any answer to the question "why remember?" is inevitably influenced by perspective'.[77] Thus explanations as to why and how the Holocaust should not be forgotten can vary considerably. But as I have already discussed, this should not in itself be viewed as an inherently negative phenomenon. Dynamic debates about remembrance may themselves help preserve the Holocaust as an event of significance for modern thought.

A second verse to highlight, and one that has also often been quoted in this context, is 13.15. The well-known difficulty with this verse relates to a tension between the kethib and qere, the outcome of which is that the Hebrew can be translated in two radically different ways. One is to present Job as utterly despondent in the face of divinely sanctioned suffering. He laments 'He [i.e. God] slays me; I have no hope'.[78] The nature of the Hebrew wordplay nonetheless allows a quite different translation, and a correspondingly altered image of Job. This time he is faithful even in the face of his fate. He cries out 'Though He slays me, yet will I trust in him'.

76. Memorials quoting 16.18 are at various sites, including the Belzec death camp, the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, and the location in Warsaw from which Jews were transported to the Treblinka death camp. It was also considered as a text for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and for a new memorial at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Cf. Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Penguin, 1995), p. 98; Jonathan Webber, 'Creating a New inscription for the Memorial at Auschwitz-Birkenau: A Short Chapter in the Mythologization of the Holocaust', in *The Sociology of Sacred Texts* (ed. Jon Davies and Isabel Wollaston; Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1993), pp. 45-58 (48). With regard to liturgy, cf. Roskies, *Nightwords*, p. 71. For theologians citing 16.18, cf. Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return*, p. 132; Kepnes, 'Job and Post-Holocaust theodicy', p. 252. The verse is used as the epigraph for Hilda Schiff (ed.), *Holocaust Poetry* (London: Fount, 1995).

77. Wollaston, *War Against Memory?*, p. 6.

78. Here I deviate from the JPS translation, which reads: 'He may well slay me; I may have no hope'.

In post-Holocaust thought commentators frequently appeal to 13.15, but do so in different ways. Some cite only the pious, faithful variation of the verse, while others linger over the tension between the two options available.[79] My own view is that the contradiction between the variations of 13.15 is a microcosm of the tensions within the Book of Job as a whole. The story shifts indeterminately between faith and doubt, between hope and despair, and between piety and rebellion. Just as the meaning of each translation of 13.15 interrupts the other, so too do the multiple theological angles of the book disrupt one another.

With 16.18 we are faced with the desire to resist forgetfulness in the aftermath of suffering. 'Earth, cover not my blood; let there be no resting place for my outcry' speaks to an idea of Holocaust memory as ongoing and unresolved reflection. With 13.15 we are faced with an unstable text that mirrors the theological tensions and ambiguities at the heart of this biblical book. Reading Job at the interface between the issues posed by these verses is a route I propose has value for post-Holocaust thought. It is not the only option—as we have seen repeatedly in this and preceding chapters it is possible to harmonize Job's message and marshal it as evidence for one line of argument or another. But understood as an uneven and disruptive text, I propose that the Book of Job is a more nuanced dialogue partner in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

79. Examples of those referring only to the hopeful qere include Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, p. 30; Dedmon, 'Job as Holocaust Survivor', p. 175; Edward Alexander, *The Resonance of Dust: Essays on Holocaust Literature and Jewish Fate* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1979), p. 196. Those more concerned to highlight the contradiction between the kethib and the qere include André Neher, *The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981), p. 197; Alford, *After the Holocaust*, p. 20.

Conclusion

Writing in the recently published *Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, Wollaston reflects that '[p]ost-Holocaust hermeneutics emphasizes the fragile, ambiguous, contested character of biblical texts, and interrogates the text, as well as the reader or interpreter, asking who is speaking and for what purpose'.[1] On one level this matches my approach in this book rather well. As the closing section of Chapter 5 illustrates, I am keen to stress the polyphonic and uneven nature of Job. And when reflecting on the reception of Job in the aftermath of the Holocaust, it is, I have emphasized, vital to see interpreters as coming to the biblical text not in isolation from their other concerns, but with specific agendas at play.

But I am nonetheless cautious about this understanding of 'post-Holocaust hermeneutics'. For it is important to bear in mind that most of the commentators I have discussed in preceding chapters do not usually engage in 'post-Holocaust hermeneutics' in the terms Wollaston describes.[2] Many of them do not emphasize the ambiguities of the text, but rather harmonize its meaning so that it can be used to back up certain arguments. And although they sometimes refer to older post-Holocaust receptions of Job amidst their own, the analysis of earlier readings tends to be sparse (or entirely absent).

By providing a sustained assessment of the range of interpretations of Job in this context my hope is consequently to have provided something new. For various reasons, however, this is far from the final word on the matter. I say this first because the survey provided in this book cannot realistically claim to be *wholly* comprehensive. Furthermore, with regard to those thinkers that I have discussed, it is surely possible to delve near-endlessly into the background of their receptions of Job. It should also be noted that writers on the Holocaust—especially theologians—often use evocative but ambiguous forms of discourse. It is consequently possible that their comments about Job and the wider contexts of their arguments can be understood in

1. Wollaston, 'Post-Holocaust Jewish Interpretations', p. 493. Wollaston is particularly influenced by the work of Tod Linafelt. Cf. Linafelt, 'Reading the Hebrew Bible', pp. 135-47.

2. Probably the clearest example that matches Wollaston's description of 'post-Holocaust hermeneutics' is the treatment of Pss. 27, 44 109 and 128 in Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, pp. 67-189, 195-232.

multiple ways. And the final disclaimer is of course that, judging from the recent past, it is overwhelmingly probable that future respondents to the Holocaust will continue appealing to Job. Any survey is thus unavoidably provisional in nature.

But one point that can be presently stated with some certainty is that exploring the breadth of Job's post-Holocaust reception in North America is not about trying to discover the Book of Job's core, timeless meaning. It is instead about appreciating that this biblical story is ripe with possibilities for engaging with readers who bring to it myriad religious, historical, political and cultural concerns. The outcome is not a static text, but a shifting and multiform entity that changes its contours upon encountering each receiver.

This does not mean that we have to like every interpretation of Job that has been presented among those responding to the Holocaust. As I have highlighted, there are at times ethical or theological difficulties to be wary of. Readers may also feel that amidst the receptions I have discussed, there are some that simply stray too far out of the realms of what they deem 'reasonable' interpretation. Yet to grapple with the range of appeals to Job in this context is, I contend, a worthwhile endeavour. It demands ongoing reassessment of how textual tradition is to be made sense of after the Holocaust, what our own presuppositions are about interpreting the Bible, and most importantly, how human beings should understand the nature of suffering and its aftermath.

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