According to Gerhard von Rad, the book of Job provides examples of both how the wise took the offensive against God when individual suffering attacked the trust that they put in Yahweh’s ordering of the world and how they resolved their doubts by trusting in Yahweh’s mysterious and inexplicable ways. Though von Rad’s interpretation of Job is rarely acknowledged in current anglophone scholarship, it anticipates a number of recent developments, as it places Job in a broader dialogue with Israel’s traditions beyond “Wisdom Literature” and creates a framework for reconciling Job’s defiance with his faith.

Von Rad on Job

Von Rad’s discussion of Job appears along with his reading of Ecclesiastes in the twelfth chapter of Weisheit in Israel,1 titled “Vertrauen und Anfechtung” (“Trust and Attack”). He begins by distinguishing ancient Israel’s search for knowledge from modern epistemology. As opposed to the modern “objective spectator’s role” (“neutrale Betrachterrolle”) von Rad claims that for the Israelites, objects (Gegenstände) “compelled commitment, they demanded...complete trust” (“Sie nötigen zu einer Stellungnahme, ja sie beanspruchten...das volle Vertrauen”;

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1 Hereafter abbreviated Weisheit. In-text citations throughout refer to this book.
Von Rad claims that the teachers employed various techniques to convince their pupils to embrace this trust, such as lauding its benefits, including happiness (Prov 16:20), satisfaction (Prov 28:25), and protection (Prov 29:25), or describing the evidence passed down across generations of an act-consequence order upheld by Yahweh that controls life (e.g., Job 20:4–5) (190–91/199–200).

The question driving Job was how to respond to the apparent violation of that trust in the suffering of the faithful. Von Rad observes that its author was hardly the first to raise this question, as if the teachers had previously simply been either too naively optimistic or blindly ignorant to notice it. He chastises exegetes who have taken “the easy road” (“zu leicht gemacht”) of attributing the “crudest rationalism” (“billigsten Rationalismus”) to these teachers in a “doctrine of retribution” (“Vergeltungsdogma”), which forsook Old Israel’s happy resolution of life’s anguish by means of faith in God for a doctrinaire system destined for catastrophe (195/204–5). Such a view cannot even survive a basic diachronic analysis, for every age encountered threats to life (195/205). The same can be said for an awareness of some relationship between act and consequence, particularly for great misdeeds, which would bring eventual disaster (“Unheil”) on

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2 Raymond Van Leeuwen makes a compelling case in his contribution to this volume that James Martin’s English translation of *Weisheit* frequently distorts von Rad’s intended meaning, so I have included the German for any direct quotations from the book. The first page number refers to the English translation and the second to the German. The following editions were consulted: Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1972); idem, *Weisheit in Israel*, 4th ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2013).
those who committed them. This view is evident within the prophetic proclamation of doom, as well as in cultic responses to national disasters or individual illnesses, such as the confession of sin in the “judgment doxology” (“Gerichtsdoxologie”; 196/205).

Thus, when Job’s friends attempt to reason back from his suffering to the guilt that may have caused it, they are not applying “the doctrinaire reflections of committed theologians” (“den doktinären Reflexionen engagierter Theologen”), but the same logic that drives Joshua to seek out the sin in the Israelite camp after the defeat at Ai (Joshua 7) or many of the individual laments (e.g., Pss 38:4–5; 41:5) (196/206). Thus, von Rad concludes that the wisdom teachers’ theological efforts stemmed not from their idiosyncratic thought world, but from the “Yahwistic tradition” (“Jahweglauben”) in which they too lived (197/207). What distinguished them was their pursuit of universally valid rules, which forced them to generalize, to distance themselves from individual adversities, which they related to “more as observers” (“mehr als Betrachtende”; 197/207). And yet, even in the older sentence-wisdom von Rad senses an acknowledgment of the limits of human understanding as it encounters “the ambiguity of phenomena” (“der Mehrdeutigkeit der Phänomene”; 198/207).

As a result, even in later wisdom, the teachers stopped short of offering a comprehensive understanding of the world, though, von Rad claims, Israel’s distinct beliefs in a creator God and the oneness of creation would seem to furnish them with that opportunity. Though Israel might have “a faith which encompassed the world” (“Glaubens, der die Welt umgriff”), she was “at the

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3 In this description, the teachers sound much more like the modern thinkers as von Rad describes them at the beginning of this chapter, as they take on the “objective spectator’s role.”
mercy of the adversities of life as if she were engaged in defensive warfare rather than provided with the weapon of a comprehensive idea of the world” (“auf diesem Gebiet den Widerfahrenissen des Lebens mehr wie in einem Stellungskrieg ausgeliefert, als mit der Waffe einer umfassenden Weltvorstellung ausgestattet”; 198–99/208).

This “attack” was most vicious when the Israelites attempted to comprehend individual suffering (199/209). Von Rad places Job in the midst of an increasing struggle with individual suffering starting from the end of the monarchy, evident also in the prophets, which corresponded with a growing sense of individual independence combined with a “transition on man’s part to the offensive against God” (“Übergang des Menschen zur Offensive gegen Gott”; 207/217). The “attack” in the chapter’s title is therefore multivalent: the attack of individual suffering leads to attack against God. Though von Rad claims this uneasiness is broadly evident, he argues that it cannot be considered a generalized “crisis” (“Krise”) since, particularly in later Yahwism, the religion was not uniform and the texts that struggle with these questions, including Job, involve merely individuals, standing on their own outside of any teaching tradition (207/217). One may wonder if so many individuals standing outside of the tradition and struggling with its implications in similar ways may constitute a tradition in themselves, and von Rad himself appears to revise significantly his view on Job’s disconnection from other traditions later in the chapter.
The Prose Narrative (Job 1–2; 42:7–17)

In Job’s prose narrative von Rad claims that Job’s two “confessions of faith” ("Bekenntnissen"; 1:21; 2:10) express, not “reflective, possibly mysterious truths” (“ergrübelten, womöglich geheimnisvollen Wahrheiten”), but “the quite simple, self-illuminating logic of a faith in which he was unassailably secure” (“die ganz einfache und selbsteinleuchtende Logik eines Glaubens aussprechen, in dem er anfechtungslos geborgen war”; 207/217). These statements are uttered in response to the attempt of “the accuser” (“der Verkläger”) to reveal Job as an egoist in his piety (207–8/217–18). Reading the prose narrative as a distinct entity, von Rad claims that once Job has demonstrated his genuine piety with these responses, “the case has been sufficiently clarified” ("der Fall ausreichend geklärt"), and his blessed state can be restored in the epilogue (208/218).⁴ Affirming that selfless piety exists, this didactic narrative portrays Job as “a fitting witness to God” (“eines rechten Zeugen für Gott”), though it lacks the inner struggle and theological tension that emerge when the teachers attempt to fight through the attack of suffering to faith in Yahweh (208/218–19).

The Dialogue (Job 3–37)

Von Rad then moves to the poetic section of the book, which he attempts to interpret independently from the narrative (226/237), since he claims they can never be satisfactorily linked

together. Warning that the poet refuses to guide the reader through the thicket of theological opinions that he allows the characters to unfold (215–16/226–27), von Rad attempts to identify the dialogue’s answer to the question of justice. Though Job echoes the ancient and universal lament over the brevity of life (7:1–4; 14:1) and recognizes like others before him that his suffering is from God, his belief in his righteousness leads him to add to these laments a unique depiction of God as a bloodthirsty enemy (Job 16:9–17) (216–17/227). This “new experience of the reality of God” (“neu[e] Erfahrung der Wirklichkeit Gottes”) was known to ancient Israel and some of the prophets (see “Prophecy” below), but was completely unfamiliar to Job’s friends, wisdom in general, or even the whole age (217/228). Job presents a radical vision of God who enters into suffering and becomes personally involved with it (217/228).

Von Rad questions the modern tendency to uphold Job’s protests as exemplary and depict the friends as joyless traditionalists (217/228; cf. 210/221). Questioning whether we can “presuppose in an ancient reader such unmitigated pleasure in a religious rebel” (“bei einem antiken Leser eine so ungeteilte Freude an einem religiösen Rebellen voraussetzen”), von Rad rejects a clear, black-and-white interpretation of the dialogues, and instead claims that the author presents

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5: To support this view, von Rad appeals to: (1.) the contrast between the submissive and rebellious attitudes of Job (cf. 312/324–25); (2.) the conflict between Job’s complaints and attacks, which God rejects in the divine speeches, and God’s praise of Job’s words (42:7); and (3.) the forced interpretations that would result from understanding Job’s suffering as a divine test, since Job rejects such a positive interpretation in the dialogues (226/237).
the limits and doubts of both the friends’ dominant position and Job’s revolutionary response (217–18/228).

The primary distinction between the two views regards different conceptions of human righteousness before God. The friends argue that no one is sinless and pure before God (15:16), that God punishes sinners to uphold the correspondence between act and consequence, and, consequently, that Job’s suffering must be the effect of God’s judgment (e.g., 8:3; 34:10, 12). Therefore, they exhort Job to repent, to “agree with God, and be at peace” and “return to the Almighty” (22:21–30; cf. 5:8; 8:20–21; 11:13–15; 36:8–11). Thus, the friends provide a ritual solution to Job’s problem, a “sacral confession” (“sakral Beichte”) as exemplified in Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kings 8, in which the sufferer acknowledges the justice of the suffering God has imposed in order to halt his affliction and return to God’s blessing (212/222).

Job, however, holds fast to his integrity (27:5) and refuses this solution. Because he is innocent, he objects that he does not deserve the divine judgment he has received (9:21; 23:10–12; 27:2, 4–6). Therefore, he demands to take up his case with God (13:3, 14–15, 18; 23:3–5). Job expresses complete confidence in the legal protection God offers to all sufferers, even if that means God has to appear as a “witness” against himself in Job’s defense (16:19). And yet, Job cannot maintain this hope, and concludes that it is “impossible to expect justice from this God” (“unmöglich ist, von diesem Gott Recht zu erwarten”) (9:22–23, 30–31) (215/226). No arbitrator, in fact, exists to mediate between God and humans (9:33) and restrain God’s free and arbitrary action (9:11–12). A peaceful relationship with God is dependent on God’s will, but, in Job’s case, God clearly appears to be unwilling (215/226).
Job claims that the rift in their relationship is God’s doing, not his. Though he does not deny that he has committed some sin, he does not believe he has committed one that would merit the suffering God has inflicted upon him. Betraying, perhaps, the Lutheran influence on his interpretation, von Rad claims Job does not put his confidence in “a counting up of moral achievements” (“ein[e] Verrechnung sittlicher Leistungen”), but “on the justificatory verdict of God” (“auf dem rechtfertigenden Spruch Gottes”), which explains the lengths to which he goes to force God to speak (218–19/229–30). Thus, “Job here is still living among specifically cultic ideas, perhaps to an even greater extent than his friends” (“Hiob in dieser Sache noch in spezifisch kultischen Vorstellungen lebt, vielleicht sogar mehr als seine Freunde”; 219/230). His cry, “Who is there that will contend with me?” (13:19) is remarkably similar to Isaiah’s Suffering Servant, who asks, “Who will contend with me?” while claiming, “He who vindicates me is near” (Isa 50:8).

However, the God whom Job is experiencing must be radically transformed if that God is to vindicate Job. Job attempts this transformation by piling up the expression “God must” in his speeches in order to force God to reveal himself in a recognizable form (219–20/230–31). By thus drawing God down into and involving God in suffering, Job “revealed an aspect of God’s reality which was hidden from his friends and probably from all his contemporaries” (“einen Horizont der Wirklichkeit Gottes aufriß, der seinen Freunden und wahrscheinlich allen seinen Zeitgenossen verborgen war”; 220/231). And yet, in his accusations against God for unjust cruelty, he “refuses to see in this God his own God” (“weigert sich, in diesem Gott seinen Gott zu sehen”; 220/231).
God’s credibility was at stake, which, von Rad argues, is the real problem at the heart of the book, not suffering. The friends’ assumption of rules which govern humans in their relationship with God, in which act corresponds with consequence cannot answer the question that Job’s unmerited suffering forces him to ask, “Yahweh pro me?” (221/232). Grasping at a solution, Job starts from his “quite personal relationship with God” (“ganz persönlichen Gottesverhältnis”). This drives him “to the limits of piety and blasphemy” (“bietet er in Frömmigkeit und Lästerung alles auf) in order to force his God out of an “ambiguity” (“Zweideutigkeit”) in which God acts in ways that Job regards unworthy of God (220/231). In so doing, Job breaks the bonds of “Wisdom” to introduce theological views not based on the experience of order but from Israel’s centuries-long cultic dialogue with their God (221/231).

Job’s faith in the midst of this test “can be explained only from the fact that Job, too, lives and thinks and struggles against a broad background of old Yahwistic traditions” (“erklärt sich nur daraus, daß auch Hiob aus einem breiten Fundus älterer Jahwetraditionen heraus lebt, denkt und kämpft”; 222/232–33). He may even be more connected to these old traditions than the friends as he appeals “to the God who, from of old, had offered himself as saviour of the poor and the sick and the defending counsel of those who had been deprived of justice” (“an den Gott, and the sick and the defending counsel of those who had been deprived of justice” (“an den Gott, and the sick and the defending counsel of those who had been deprived of justice” (220/231)).

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6 Crenshaw finds von Rad’s argument here “surprising,” which, of course, it is for those who have adopted a wisdom/cult binary (James L. Crenshaw, Gerhard Von Rad, Makers of the Modern Theological Mind [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1978], 152).
der sich seit je als Retter der Armen und Kranken und als Rechtshelfer der Entrechteten angeboten hatte”) against the “terrible God of his experience” (“entsetzlichen Gott der Erfahrung”; 222/233).

The friends fail, then, not because their views are illegitimate or overly rigid, but because they are simply unable to understand this experience, leaving them incapable of comprehending and responding to it. In their defense, the ancient dialogue form, designed to develop opposing positions, limited the poet’s ability to show any reconciliation between the parties (222–23/233–34; cf. 40–41/42–43). Indeed, the book’s two irreconcilable pictures of Job and its unresolved dialogue, conforms to the sapiential recognition of the ambivalence of phenomena evident in the juxtaposition of contradictory teachings within Proverbs (311–12/323–24).

The Divine Speeches (Job 38:1–42:6)

This insight about the book’s dialogue form has implications for Yahweh’s contribution to the book, as even Yahweh refrains from resolving the debate. Though Yahweh condescends to respond to this “rebel” (“den Ungebärdigen”), the deity makes no reference to the justificatory verdict Job so desires and is silent regarding the broader theological debate in the dialogue (223/234). Though von Rad acknowledges the range of potential interpretations the divine speeches could bear, he claims, primarily due to Job’s repentant response, that Yahweh’s speech contains a clear rejection of Job (223/234). However, he cannot identify where precisely Yahweh blames Job of wrongdoing beyond the charges of questioning divine “counsel” (akin to Yahweh’s “providence” [“Providenz”]; 38:2) and divine “right” (akin to Yahweh’s “freedom” [“Freiheit”]; 40:8). These charges together amount to the indictment that “Job has improperly
and ‘without understanding’ interfered in God’s affairs” (“Hiob hat ‘ohne Verstand’ und ungehö-
rig in die Dinge Gottes hineingeredet”; 224/235).

The flimsy evidence Yahweh presents against Job leaves room for von Rad to ask
whether the speeches may have had a more positive purpose than simply judging Job’s presump-
tion. They cannot be interpreted simply as advocating resigned submission to God’s incompre-
hensible ways because they repeat arguments made by Elihu and the other friends, thereby ac-
knowledging the possibility of at least partial human understanding of God.\(^7\) Citing Barth’s view
that God allows creation to speak for him, von Rad argues that, instead of explaining his decrees
directly, “God makes creation bear witness to himself” (“die Schöpfung, läßt Gott für sich
Zeugnis ablegen”; 225/236; cf. 303/315).\(^8\) This is not quite what occurs, however. To the degree
that creation speaks to Job, it does so through God’s speech.\(^9\) God initiates creation’s communi-
cative potential, inviting Job to hear it speak of God’s character (cf. Job 12:7–9), and, perhaps,
even share in God’s joy in his works (cf. Ps 104:31). The rebel, therefore, withdraws his com-
plaint, finding security in the realization that, like the whole of creation, “his destiny, too, is well
protected by this mysterious God” (“sein Geschick im Geheimnis dieses Gottes gut aufgehoben”;
225/237; cf. 307/319). God’s speech is not intended simply to accuse Job but also to testify to

\(^7\) Paradoxically, the human knowledge of God that von Rad sees confirmed by the divine
speeches is that of “the incomprehensibility of the divine activity in creation,” which is

\(^8\) Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.3.1, 420.

God’s concern for a “world which despises all standards of human rationality and economy” (“Welt, die allen Maßstäben einer menschlichen Rationalität und Ökonomie spottet”; 225–26/237). By understanding this message, Job vindicates God’s faith in him.

**Job since von Rad**

In 1978, James Crenshaw claimed, “In some ways, von Rad’s penetrating analysis of man on the attack against God represents one of the most cogent interpretations of Job, Ecclesiastes, and Ecclesiasticus that has appeared to this date.”\(^{10}\) However, if index entries are an indicator of influence, then von Rad’s interpretation of Job does not appear to have greatly impacted subsequent anglophone Job scholarship. Carol Newsom’s *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, which has been influential, only mentions von Rad once, and in reference to his article on onomastica in Job 38.\(^{11}\) In his recent commentary on Job 1–21, Choon-Leong Seow also only cites von Rad once, in regard to his comparison of the prologue as a didactic tale to the Joseph

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\(^{10}\) Idem, *Gerhard Von Rad*, 151.


Interpreters rarely explain why they did not interact with certain works, so the reasons behind von Rad’s absence from recent Job scholarship can only be inferred. Two features appear to be at play. First, recent anglophone scholarship on Job has been particularly interested in the book’s final form (as the popularity of Newsom’s book, which wrestles with precisely that question, suggests), but that is a question that von Rad explicitly avoids. Second, von Rad’s interpretation of Job is focused primarily on the book’s theological significance. However, the so-called Wisdom Literature, likely due to presuppositions about its separation from Israelite theology, has...

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largely been overlooked during the recent upswing in interest in theological interpretation in biblical studies.\textsuperscript{16} In other words, the question von Rad was not interested in (the book’s final form) has been of great interest in recent scholarship, while his greatest interest (the book’s theology) has not been a primary concern in recent scholarship.

**Enduring and Emerging Questions**

Though von Rad’s reading of Job in *Weisheit in Israel* is in some ways unsuited for our time, in other ways, it was ahead of its time. He saw aspects of the book half a century ago to which scholars are just now returning for further exploration. In some cases, these interpreters appear to have arrived at those insights independently, while, in others, new developments in the field have created new appreciation for von Rad’s insight.

\textsuperscript{16} Zoltán Schwáb’s recent book on the theological interpretation of Proverbs is the exception that proves this rule, since it is devoted largely to justifying a theological reading of the book (*Toward an Interpretation of the Book of Proverbs: Selfishness and Secularity Reconsidered*, Journal of Theological Interpretation Supplements 7 [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013]). Scholars have not avoided theological issues entirely when interpreting Job, which its subject matter would make impossible, but few make explicitly theological readings their focus.
Job Beyond Wisdom

First, von Rad shows discomfort in *Weisheit* in Job’s categorization as “Wisdom Literature.” He writes, for example, that, though Job is involved in “‘wisdom’ questions,” the book introduces theological perspectives “of a quite different type” (“von völlig anderer Art”) into the debate (220/231), and that Job and Ecclesiastes are “comparable…only in their opposition to the didactic tradition” (“vergleichbar sind…nur in ihrem Widerspruch gegen die Lehrtradition”; 237/248–49). Recent Job research has increasingly challenged the book’s Wisdom classification.¹⁷

These interpreters level a number of valid criticisms against Job’s classification as Wisdom. In particular, they all agree that “Wisdom Literature” fails to capture its meaning accurately, since it excludes significant connections that the book has with texts in other genre categories. As Wisdom Literature, they argue, Job’s interpretation has been “hedged in” and “unduly restricted,” as the Wisdom classification “imposes an estoppal on particular lines of thought.”¹⁸

This hermeneutical limitation and canonical separation leads to theological abstraction, such that


the book is increasingly read as the philosophical treatment of a “problem.” Those who challenge Job’s Wisdom classification disagree, however, over which alternative genre best describes the book, whether parody (Dell), history (Wolfers), apocalyptic (Johnson), or prophecy (Harding). In so doing, they make arguments similar to those of von Rad’s German contemporaries, Hans Richter and Claus Westermann. Richter argued that the Wisdom category obscured the significance of legal language in the book, which led him to characterize it as a lawsuit. Westermann, however, proposed reading the book as a “dramatized lament,” akin to that in the Mesopotamian text *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi.* Each of these interpreters provide valuable perspectives on the meaning of the book, and I will return to several of them below. However, it is what these studies suggest collectively that has the real potential to transform the interpretation of Job, allowing it to grasp what von Rad began reaching toward fifty years ago.

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Each of these interpreters argue in different ways that the Wisdom Literature category is inadequate to encapsulate some feature of Job. However, by proceeding to argue that an alternative genre or blending of genres is a more fitting lens through which to perceive the book’s meaning, they only replace one limiting perspective on the book’s meaning for another. Considering several arguments like this together, then, a number of interpreters conclude that the book is best understood as *sui generis*. For example, in light of the various genres proposed for the book, Harold Rowley claims, “It is wiser to recognize the uniqueness of this book and to consider it without relation to any of these literary categories.”22 If Job is *sui generis*, however, this results not from the book’s isolation from other texts, but its connections with so many of them—its uniqueness is better recognized in its relations with multiple categories. As Crenshaw writes, “Like all great literary works, this one rewards readers who come to it from vastly different starting points.”23 Along these lines, Brevard Childs argues that the book’s “proper interpretation depends on seeing Job in the perspective, not only of wisdom traditions, but also of

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Israel’s liturgy and historical traditions.” Both von Rad’s interpretation and the alternative genres discussed above suggest that incorporating even more perspectives would illuminate the book even further. The Wisdom classification obscures the contribution of the book’s “bewildering diversity of literary genres” to its meaning, which include “wisdom, prophecy, psalm, drama, contest, lament, theodicy, history, and allegory.”

However, most of the interpreters who are willing to acknowledge Job’s links with other genres of literature simply subsume them under the umbrella of Wisdom Literature. Von Rad, similarly, includes his interpretation of Job in a book titled Weisheit in Israel. And yet, he asks a series of important questions about the Wisdom category that point to a more radical solution.

Modern Bias in Job’s Interpretation

Throughout Weisheit, von Rad repeatedly warns against reading biblical texts, Job included, according to modern presuppositions (e.g., 98, 124, 188, 190, 210, 217, 225, 232, 300–302 in the


25. Though Childs does not credit von Rad’s work for this insight, he does cite Weisheit in his bibliography for Job (Introduction, 528).


27. Wolfers, Job, 50–51. For examples, see Kynes, Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,” 159–78.
English translation). Early in the book, he applies this concern to the concept of the Wisdom Literature classification as a whole (7–8/7–8). He observes that “this whole term ‘wisdom’ as a total phenomenon . . . is by no means directly rooted in the sources” (“überhaupt dieser ganze Begriff von ‘Weisheit’ als eines Gesamtphänomens ist ja in den Quellen keineswegs unmittelbar verankert”). Instead, it “first emerged in the scholarly world” (“erst in der Forschung aufgekommen”). Therefore, he claims, the possibility exists that it suggests “something which never existed” (“die es so gar nicht gab”), which could be “dangerously prejudicing the interpretation of varied material” (“die Deutung der Einzelstufe damit nicht ungefährlich präjudiziert”). He complains that the rise of scholarly interest in Wisdom had only succeeded in making the concept increasingly unclear, and, thus, he declares, “The question is therefore justified whether the attractive codename ‘wisdom’ is nowadays not more of a hindrance than a help, in so far as it disguises what stands behind it rather than depicts it properly” (“Die Frage ist also berechtigt, ob uns heute die schillernde Chiffre ‘Weisheit’ nicht mehr im Wege steht, als daß sie uns hilft, insofern sie das, was hinter ihr steht, eher verstellt als sachgemäß bezeichnet”). Though von Rad repeatedly criticizes interpretations that rely too heavily on modern conceptions of wisdom, he never rejects the category itself. However, recent research on the Wisdom category indicates just how modern it is, and the degree to which it disguises the meaning of Job, along with the other so-called Wisdom books, rather than depicting them properly.

Though scholars appeal to purported early “vestiges” of the Wisdom category in the order and structure of various canon lists, the Solomonic collection, the recognition of common
traits between books, and the title “Wisdom” applied to several texts, no ancient collection of texts is quantitively (including the same texts) or qualitatively (defined by the same criteria) the same as the modern Wisdom category. Job is not grouped in a separate collection with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes as Wisdom Literature until the mid-nineteenth century. When Job then replaces Song of Songs, a collection connected to Solomon’s authority is exchanged for something new based on “various historical, comparative, and form-critical criteria.”

Johann Bruch is the first to draw together earlier suggestions along these lines in preceding decades into a comprehensive and systematic presentation of a distinct group of texts affiliated with “the wise” in Israel and to describe the distinct ideas that characterize these texts and the tradition behind them. The date of this “discovery” would not in itself be problematic


29. See Kynes, Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,” 60–81.


(many of the axiomatic principles of biblical scholarship were developed during this time) if it were not for the suspicious correspondence between Bruch’s characterization of “the wise” and their literature and the philosophical ideas prominent at his time. He speaks, for example, of the “non-theocratic spirit” of the wise, which “found no satisfaction in the religious institutions of their nation” and thus sought “the way of free thinking to answer life’s questions.”\(^{32}\) Though Bruch was eventually all but forgotten in biblical scholarship, his work’s widespread influence in the latter nineteenth century created a trajectory for the interpretation of the concept of wisdom in the Hebrew Bible and the texts primarily associated with it. Over time, this conception of Wisdom has acted both as a “mirror” reflecting the “image of the scholar painting her portrait,”\(^ {33}\) and an echo chamber, magnifying the type of post-Enlightenment concerns, such as humanism, individualism, universalism, secularism, and empiricism, that led Bruch initially to associate the Wisdom texts together, while muffling their connections with the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Thus, the “most striking characteristic” uniting the Wisdom Literature still remains “the absence of what one normally considers as typically Israelite and Jewish.”\(^ {34}\)

category, see Kynes, *Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,”* 82–104.


The invention of “Wisdom Literature,” then, is a prime example of how, as von Rad says, “By and large man creates the experiences which he expects and for which, on the basis of the idea which he has formed of the world around him, he is ready” (“Der Mensch macht weithin die Erfahrungen, die er erwartet und auf die er auf Grund der Vorstellungen, die er sich von seiner Umwelt gemacht hat, gerüstet ist”; 3/3). This, as he observes, can lead an interpreter to miss experiences “because he is incapable of fitting them into the limits of his understanding” (“weil er außerstande ist, sie seinem Verstehenshorizonte einzuordnen”; 3/3).\(^{35}\) Again anticipating features that have only recently become more prominent in biblical scholarship, von Rad emphasizes the influence of the interpreter’s location, such that what one believes to serve a didactic purpose “is dependent on a basic position which the observer has previously taken up” (“ist abhängig von einer Grundposition, die der Betrachter vorher bezogen hat”; 236/248). Nearly a generation later, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza will say nearly the same thing: “What we see depends on where we stand.”\(^{36}\)

Throughout history, interpreters have tended to define the concept of wisdom in line with the traits most valued in their context.\(^{37}\) Jews have associated wisdom with the Torah, Christians with Christ, nineteenth-century biblical scholars with post-Enlightenment philosophy, and, even

\(^{35}\) Gadamer’s influence here is obvious. See Van Leeuwen’s chapter in this volume.


today, biblical interpreters tend to apply the “Wisdom” label to “[a]ny form of knowledge that is recognized as good.”

Though he does not take into account the intellectual context in which the Wisdom category first emerged, von Rad is sensitive to this issue, and complains that “the un-critical absolutism of our modern, popular conception of reality is one of the greatest obstacles in the way of a proper understanding of our texts” (“gehört die unkritische Absolutsetzung unseres modernen populären Wirklichkeitsbegriffes zu den ganz großen Hindernissen, die einem rechten Verständnis unserer Texte im Wege stehen”; 301/313). He criticizes this mindset for imposing an external scheme on Israelite thought, in which the theological aspects of “Wisdom” texts reflect a secondary, dogmatic “theologization” of wisdom that abandons reason.

Therefore, though the affinities between the three so-called Wisdom books cannot be denied and the gains the category has provided for understanding Job are worth acknowledging, it cannot be applied to the book uncritically. Genre designations (“Gattungszuweisungen”) are also reading instructions (“Leseanweisungen”) that restrict a reader’s interpretive horizon. The texts that various genre designations draw into comparison with Job depict its essence and cultural profile differently; a drama reads differently than a philosophical dialogue, a lament differently.


40. Witte, “Gattung des Buches Hiob,” 123; emphasis original.
than a sapiential disputation. Therefore, Markus Witte argues, and von Rad would agree, interpreters must take into account, not merely questions of *Sitz im Leben* (“setting in life”) and *Sitz im Buch* (“setting in the book”) when evaluating Job’s genre, but *Sitz in der Welt des Lesers* (“setting in the world of the reader”), as well.\textsuperscript{41} In this regard, classifying Job as Wisdom Literature imposes modern restrictions on its meaning.

**Reading Job Intertextually**

Once Job is freed from the confines of the Wisdom category, the book’s similarities with texts and concepts across the canon become easier to recognize. Beyond the category’s constraints, far more intertextual insight waits to be incorporated into the interpretation of Job. Here again, von Rad was ahead of his time. According to Crenshaw, von Rad considered his opposition to the “evil” of “the excessive atomization of Old Testament scholarship” as one of the distinguishing concerns of his career.\textsuperscript{42} Von Rad argued that Job’s author “lets Job and the friends voice their concerns entirely in the forms of expression of their time” (“läßt Hiob und die Freunde ganz in den literarischen Ausdrucksformen ihrer Zeit ihre Anliegen aussprechen”; 209/220). Indeed, like the friends, “even Job is deeply rooted in the thought-forms of his day” (“auch Hiob ist in die Denkform seiner Zeit tief eingebunden”) (210/220). Von Rad, therefore, incorporated lament, hymn, prophecy, and history into his interpretation of Job. However, von Rad was also a child of

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 122.

\textsuperscript{42} Crenshaw, *Gerhard Von Rad*, 27.
his time, and, thus, rather than being intertextual, his response, as the previous quotations indicate, was tradition-historical, and thus continued to atomize the text.\textsuperscript{43} We can only imagine what his work would have looked like if it continued beyond the intertextual turn in biblical studies that followed the publication of Michael Fishbane’s \textit{Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel}.\textsuperscript{44} Perhaps, though, in the recent flurry of studies on intertextuality in Job, we get a glimpse of what might have been, particularly as they develop aspects of von Rad’s interpretation of Job in \textit{Weisheit}.\textsuperscript{45} In Edward Greenstein’s new translation of Job, for example, he demonstrates throughout the degree to which the book’s author shows “his deep and wide familiarity with earlier works of Hebrew literature,” as he engages with texts across the classical Hebrew corpus, “not only the so-called wisdom texts…but works of narrative and prophecy as well.”\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 32.

\textsuperscript{44} Will Kynes, \textit{My Psalm Has Turned into Weeping: Job’s Dialogue with the Psalms}, BZAW 437 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 13.

\textsuperscript{45} See, for example, Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, eds. \textit{Reading Job Intertextually}, LHBOTS 574 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013). For a survey of intertextual work on Job, see Kynes, \textit{Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,”} 159–78.

Ritual

Traditionally, Wisdom and ritual are considered separately. However, von Rad argues that Job’s debate with his friends is focused on a ritual question, whether Job must perform a “sacral confession” (see “The Dialogue” above). Recently, without citing von Rad, David Lambert has returned to ritual aspects of the book. As he does so, he challenges the common assumption of modern Wisdom interpretation that Job stands in opposition to Israelite religion, including its ceremonial practices. Like von Rad, he sees a modern bias in this interpretation, which sets over against the book’s endorsement of ritual conformity, the “modern impulse to canonize revolution, to embed a certain myth of individual innovation and defiance within Scripture itself.” Lambert argues that by tearing his robe, shaving his head, scraping or cutting himself, and sitting in ashes (1:20; 2:8), Job is signaling his entrance into a ritual state of mourning. His friends, then, take on the ritual responsibility to “comfort and console him” (2:11) and move Job on from his mourning ritual into a ritual reentrance into community and a normal state of being, signified by feasting and gift-giving, as eventually occurs in the epilogue (42:11–12). However, the dialogue recounts Job’s refusal of his friends’ efforts at consolation, even charging them with


48 Ibid., 575.

being “miserable comforters” (חנמ עמל; 16:2; cf. 21:34). The friends’ ritual failure is rectified by Yahweh, whose speeches lead Job to declare that he has “been comforted” (יתמחנ רחמתי; 42:6). Putting Lambert’s ritual interpretation into dialogue with the traditional Wisdom reading comprehends the complexity of the book better than either would alone, highlighting its tensive presentation of Job as both an internally conflicted individual sufferer and a performer of external, communal ritual.

Prophecy

Lambert’s reading links Job with prophecy through the parallels between Job’s complaints and Jeremiah’s, for which the prophet similarly does not repent, and the divine “consolation” proclaimed by Second Isaiah (Isa 40:1; 51:12). Von Rad also noted prophetic resonances in Job. He claimed that both Eliphaz (4:12–17) and Elihu (chs. 32–37) speak of receiving divine revelation, which recalls and even exceeds language used of prophetic inspiration, and which points to the integration of reason and religion in the Israelite perception of reality (56/60, 61/65–66, 292/304). Further, by applying the act-consequence relationship to Job’s case, he claimed, the

50. Lambert, “Book of Job,” 563, 566. Lambert is somewhat evasive on how he would translate the interpretive crux in 42:6. Thomas, however, provides a thorough analysis of the interpretive options and the Hebrew semantics involved to make a compelling case for the translation: “Therefore, I reject and am comforted regarding dust and ashes” (Job’s Rejection,” 173).


52. Ibid., 563, 569.
friends were following the lead of the prophets, who similarly used this principle to proclaim disaster on both individuals and nations (196/205, 220/231). Job’s grappling with this principle also appears amongst the prophets (Jeremiah 12; Ezekiel 18; Malachi 3) (206/217), as some of them shared his experience of the “incalculable and fearful” (“Unberechenbarkeit und Furchtbarkeit”) reality of God (217/228). 53 Though von Rad concluded that the prophets differed from the wise men, in that God spoke to humanity through the prophets, while the wise sought the truth about humanity without recourse to a divine commission (309/321), this generalization about the traditions does not negate these specific similarities between them.

Early interpreters similarly highlighted connections between Job and the Prophets. Job was grouped together with them in Ben Sira’s Praise of the Fathers (49:8–10), James’s praise of their shared “endurance” (Jas 5:10–11), Josephus’s canon list (Contra Apionis I, 8), and the rabbinic debate over Job’s prophetic status (b. Baba Batra 15b–16a). This underscores common traits extending from the heavenly council in the book’s prologue to the divine speeches at its end. 54 Thus, in light of the stylistic and theological influence of prophecy on the book, “the continuity between Job and prophecy cannot be denied.” 55 Susannah Ticciati, for example, notices

53. Von Rad does not mention specific prophets here, but, like Lambert, he likely has Jeremiah in mind, at least.


55. James L. Crenshaw, Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect upon Israelite Religion, BZAW 124 (Berlin:
several indications of the book’s “indebtedness” to the prophets, including Job’s legal dispute
(וְיִרָיבּ) with God, his desire for a prophetic חיכומ to intercede between God and humanity (9:33),
and the foundational role of the Deuteronomic Covenant in his arguments. James Harding,
however, argues that, like Jonah, Job is a “metaprophecy,” which wrestles with the assumptions
underlying the prophetic books, such as the “nexus between divine revelation and theodicy” that
grounds the prophetic confidence in entering the divine council and hearing the word of God.
Others have joined in drawing prophetic parallels into their interpretation of Job, such as those
with Isaiah 40–55, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, and Habakkuk.

*Lament*

de Gruyter, 1971), 108.

56. Susannah Ticciati, *Job and the Disruption of Identity: Reading beyond Barth* (London: T&T
Clark International, 2005), 58–59, 120–37, 156–57

57. Harding, “Metaprophecy,” 528. See also Konrad Schmid, “Innerbiblische Schriftdiskussion im
Hiobbuch,” in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf
dem Monte Verità vom 14.–19. August 2005*, ed. Thomas Krüger et al., ATANT 88 (Zurich:
Theologischer Verlag, 2007), 253–58.

58. See the chapters on Isaiah (Kynes), Jeremiah (Dell), Ezekiel (Joyce), Joel (Nogalski), and
Amos (Marlow) in Dell and Kynes, eds., *Reading Job Intertextually*. For Habakkuk, see Donald
E. Gowan, “God’s Answer to Job: How Is It an Answer?” *HBT* 8 (1986): 85–102. See also,
Von Rad also observed that, in the dialogue, Job adopts both the style and subject-matter of the laments psalms down to the details, though, by shifting their emphasis to fit his experience, he radicalizes them into “something completely new and unique” (“etwas völlig Neues und Einzigatiges”) (209/219). Lambert, too, notes the similarity between Job’s protests and the lament tradition in the Psalms, which he calls “mourning verbalized.” Though Lambert does not argue that Job is explicitly alluding to that tradition, he notes the shared language in Job 7:11 and Ps 77:3–4, where both sufferers cry, “I complain [חשא]” in the bitterness of their affliction.

Once again, early interpreters, such as those who grouped Job with the Psalms in the Sifrei Emet collection, anticipated this interpretation. In addition to a range of significant allusions to the Psalms in Job (e.g., Ps 8:5; ET 4 in Job 7:17; Ps 107:40 in Job 12:21, 24), interpreters have noted that Job appears to “dramatize” the lament genre so prominent in the Psalter (see “Beyond Wisdom” above). This intertextual comparison highlights the “numerous formal, thematic, and lexical affinities between parts of the book of Job and the laments of the Psalter and Lamentations.” It therefore provides new exegetical insight into the book, such as the way the lament is “subverted” to make God, not the deliverer from enemies, but the enemy himself (e.g.,


60. See Will Kynes, “Reading Job Following the Psalms,” in The Shape of the Ketuvim: History, Contoured Intertextuality, and Canon, ed. Julius Steinberg and Tim Stone, Siphrut 16 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 131–45.

61. See Idem, My Psalm Has Turned into Weeping.

62. Seow, Job 1–21, 57.
13:24; 16:9; 19:11). Job’s resonances with the Psalms may also inspire its interpretation within groups of texts that share similar traits, such as with the lament psalms and Ecclesiastes, which are characterised by Unglück or “misfortune,” or with Lamentations, the Confessions of Jeremiah, and Psalms 73 and 88, which all wrestle with the failure of divine justice.

Job and Theology

While advocating for his ritual reading, Lambert asks, “Is it possible to read Job outside of a modern framework of individual subjectivity, the ‘single mind’ thinking or feeling—even if it is one radically open to the diversity of positions—to move away from seeing Job as a theological tract, even while not denying its theological implications?” To think of theology as “individual subjectivity” is itself to apply a modern understanding to the term. As Lambert seems to indicate by the final words of his question, ritual acts are thoroughly theological, as they both reflect and shape beliefs about God. The ritual readings of Job that both Lambert and von Rad have proposed demonstrate this. Lambert’s reading hinges on Job finding the consolation necessary to set aside his mourning ritual in a direct encounter with God, while von Rad’s brings to the fore the

63. Ibid., 58.


pressing question of divine justice—whether Job is obligated to undertake a sacral confession ritual—that drives Job’s debate with his friends and God.

Ultimately, whether excluding this ritual insight, or that of the prophetic or psalmic interpretations discussed above, the Wisdom category constricts the theological significance of the book. However, as von Rad observes, this reticence to wrestle with the theology of Job is hardly unique to biblical scholarship, since “neither Job’s questions nor his theology were really taken up and used by the church” (“weder Hiobs Fragestellungen noch seine Theologie von der Kirche wirklich aufgenommen und verarbeitet wurden”; 239/250). The history of Christian interpretation, even before the Wisdom category was developed, supports von Rad’s conclusion. Christian interpreters have consistently struggled to reconcile the protesting Job of the dialogue both with the piously submissive Job of the prologue and with Christian faith. As I have argued in more detail elsewhere,67 some attempt to ignore or deny Job’s protests against God, such as Ambrose, who refuses to consider Job’s most vigorous complaints actual challenges to God’s behavior, or Gregory the Great, who reads Job’s accusations of God as self-accusations or humble enquiries. Others mitigate the force of Job’s attacks, such as Aquinas, who argues that Job is actually directing his questions rhetorically at his friends, or John Calvin, who claims Job is merely improperly carrying out a “good case.” Still others acknowledge Job’s defiance of God, but claim this wrong is not beyond God’s graceful absolution, such as Martin Luther and Karl Barth, who

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both saw in God’s acceptance of Job despite his complaints evidence of the *simul iustus, simul peccator* relationship humans may have with God, and Søren Kierkegaard, who claimed Job was proved to be in the right “by being proved to be in the wrong before God.”

On the other hand, modern readers, as von Rad notes, have a tendency to valorize Job’s protests (see “The Dialogue” above). Job is said to have the “courage to doubt,”68 to respond, “as he must,” with cynicism to Yahweh’s bullying,69 to have “made a valiant effort to speak his mind honestly,”70 and responded to God with “defiance, not capitulation…parodying God, not showing him respect,”71 such that in Job’s speeches “a great man has taken advantage of a chink in the armor of the orthodox doctrine of retribution in order to drive a wedge into it.”72 Though they favor the dialogue’s protests rather than the prose’s submission, these readers similarly resist the unified form in which the book presents its protagonist.

*Defiant Faith*


Von Rad, himself, is unable to integrate the book’s two depictions of Job. Even so, his interpretation includes elements that could be repositioned to form the foundation for a theological reading that holds Job’s pious submission and defiant protest together. Von Rad quotes Roland de Pury’s observation that Job does not appeal to another God, the God of his friends or another higher authority, “but to the very God who is crushing him” (“sondern bei diesem Gott selbst, der ihn zu Boden drückt”; 221 n. 39/232 n. 38). Later, he observes that the book’s rejection of dualism prevents Job from explaining his suffering as the effect of some evil power outside God. This leads to an insight upon which Von Rad claims all who have sought to understand how to restore order in the face of “life’s great misfortune” (“der großen Störungen des Lebens”) agree:

Only God is competent to deal with it. The world has no contribution of its own to make. The world is not a battlefield between God and any of the evils found in it (Ist immer nur Gott zuständig. Die Welt kann dazu von sich aus keinen Beitrag leisten. Sie ist ja nicht das Kampffeld Gottes mit einem ihr einwohnenden Bösen). (306/318)

Whether or not that sentiment is truly universal, the perplexing appeal to God against God, the practice of a type of pious protest or defiant faith, is more common both in the Hebrew Bible and in the historical communities shaped by it than those who would opt either for piety or protest may realize.

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73. See note 6 above.

74. Michael Fox similarly claims that Job’s bitter complaint is “founded on trust” like that of the psalmists (“The Meanings of the Book of Job,” JBL 137 [2018]: 11).
Job joins the heroes of Israelite faith, Abraham (Gen 18:17–33), Jacob (Gen 32:6–12, 22–31), and Moses (Exod 32:1–14), the psalmists who dare to cry “Why?” and “How long?” and prophets such as Amos (e.g., 7:1–9), Jeremiah (e.g., 20:7–18), and Habakkuk (e.g., 1:2–4, 12–17) in confronting God and demanding that the deity make things right. Beyond the Bible, this tradition appears, for example, in the spirituals sung by enslaved African Americans, which demonstrate “a dialectic of doubt and trust in the search for meaning.” For example, the spiritual “Wrestle On, Jacob” presents “a paean of hopeful strife,” as W. E. B. Du Bois puts it, in which enslaved people sang “I will not let you go, my Lord” and explicitly associated their spiritual struggles with the Israelite patriarch in the moment he earned the name “wrestles with God” for his people. Their cries are echoed in those of Jews who have faced suffering, including the

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horror of the Holocaust, with “faithful defiance”78 and “pious irreverence.”79 Some in both of these communities undoubtedly stifled their protests with piety and others defiantly discarded their faith. But, for those who saw protest as an expression of faith, their defiant faith reflected the comfort they found in a God good and great enough to make things right, and therefore to deserve complaint when they were not.

Trust

Defiant faith is a ship on a stormy sea. The trust that motivates protest may suddenly be capsized by doubt. In Job 40:8, God warns Job that his use of the legal metaphor is drawing him into a dichotomous, win-lose understanding of his relationship with God,80 which undercuts the trust nec-


ecessary to cope with his suffering. A way exists in which Job can be in the right without God being in the wrong, but it will involve Job acknowledging the mysterious freedom of God. He will have to trust without understanding. As von Rad puts it, “The presupposition for coping with life was trust in Yahweh and in the orders put into operation by him” (“Voraussetzung für ein Bestehen des Lebens war das Vertrauen auf Jahwe und in die von ihm in Kraft gesetzten Ordnungen”; 307/320).

That solution may be unsatisfying for the modern reader. But von Rad levels a similar warning at those readers. Whereas biblical wisdom involves a receptivity to “the feeling for the truth which emanates from the world and addresses man” (“ein Gespür für die Wahrheit, die von der Welt herkommend den Menschen anspricht”), the modern approach bases truth on reason (296–97/309). This, he claims, is “an experience of power” (“ein Machterlebnis”), which “produces an ability to control” (“ermächtigt zu einem Verfügen”) and “is in opposition to the receptivity of wisdom and equally hostile to any attainment of trust” (“entgegengesetzt der Rezeptivität der Weisheit und geradezu feindlich gegen jede Vorleistung des Vertrauens”). For the wise, von Rad argues, reason “is surrounded by the insurmountable wall of the inexplicable” (“ist umstellt von den unübersteiglichen Mauern des Undeutbaren”), as they describe both what can be known and what cannot (293/305). In words attributed to Job, “Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?” (Job 26:14; cf. 35:5, 14, 15–19, 23; 36:26–29; 42:2–4; Sir 43:32).

The divine speeches, then, coax Job to run headlong into that wall of mystery (108/114). His response, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, is adoration (42:2–5). He joins the teachers as “hymnists of the divine mysteries” (“Hymniker der göttlichen Geheimnisse”; 293/305), and declares, “Therefore I have uttered what I do not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I do not know” (42:3). Appealing to Goethe, von Rad claims this acknowledgement of human limitations in the face of divine freedom is “a comforting doctrine” (“eine tröstliche Lehre”; 106/112). Whether or not modern readers would agree, this correlates with Job finding “consolation” (שםחנה) in it (42:6). Recently, without citing von Rad, Michael Fox has come to a similar conclusion: “God’s first teaching to Job, and the author’s message to the readers, is faith: to trust in God’s goodness, even when knowledge fails and goodness is not visible.”

Though it may be difficult for modern readers (including von Rad) to comprehend, the book of Job need not be read as an incoherent amalgam of two Jobs, one piously submissive, the other rebelliously defiant. Rather, this mixture of trust and protest consistently appears throughout those Yahwistic and cultic traditions on which von Rad claims Job relies. The laments, with which von Rad, following Westermann, sees close similarities in Job, demonstrate a similar sequence from affirmation of trust to complaint to restoration and praise as appears in the book of

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81. Translation mine. Though the NRSV translates понимаю (“I understand”) and знаю (“I know”) in the past tense, their imperfect forms more frequently indicate a continuing or future sense, such that Job acknowledges a persisting ignorance of these mysteries.

Job as a whole. Though these radical, often abrupt transitions from one response to the next led modern scholars to divide the lament psalms into originally separate poems, the fact that the Israelites repeatedly joined them together (whether in the psalms’ original composition or later redaction) suggests that this progression made sense to them. For the Israelites, faith appears to motivate protest and Yahweh’s repeated positive responses to those protests reinforces faith.

The similarity between Job and the psalmic laments solves another problem in the book that von Rad’s interpretation reaches for but fails to grasp in light of his failure to read the book as a whole. Von Rad observes that Job sharpens the language of lament to force God to vindicate him, because that is what he believes his innocence and God’s justice requires (219–20/230–31). And yet, von Rad overlooks the significance of the vindication that God finally provides Job, when he declares that Job, unlike the friends, has spoken of him what is right (42:7–8). Von Rad claims that God is referring here to Job’s confessions of faith in the prologue (226/237), but the friends do not speak in the prologue, so the contrast between Job’s speech and theirs must include the dialogue. Like the psalmist in the psalms of innocence, Job’s complaint has won him a divine justificatory verdict, and, with Job, the lament tradition itself is vindicated.

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84. Seow, Job 1–21, 92. Von Rad notes the similarity between Job’s cultic commitment to earning God’s approval and the psalms of innocence (219 n. 38/230 n. 37), but fails to connect that to the verdict Job eventually receives.
The prologue presents the book as a test of Job’s credibility. Whether or not that concept continues into the dialogue (von Rad demurs, 226/237), the book becomes, in fact, primarily concerned with the credibility of God, as von Rad observes (221/232). Job, experiencing an attack on his trust in God and the order of the world, attacks back at the object of his trust. But his purpose all along is not to defeat or reject God. He longs for the vindication that he knows only God can provide and the restoration that he believes Yahweh, the God of Israel, will supply, if, like the psalmists, he can only convince this God to pay attention to him (see 220–21/231–32). Von Rad is unable to see how the vindication (42:7–8) and restoration (42:10–17) Job does receive actually fits his complaints when viewed in this broader perspective.

The author (or editor) of Job has set for himself a daunting challenge. For God to win the wager with the Satan, Job must express his faith ונה, “for nothing” (1:9); receiving a reward for faithful suffering would seem to invalidate that. However, a God who would allow such unjust suffering to go unrequited is hardly worthy of faith. Arguing, like von Rad, that the book hinges on the question of God’s credibility, David Clines remarks, “It is quite a problem, naturally, to believe in a God who you think is at fault.”85 The solution the author provides is to have Job, first, express his faith explicitly in his initial confessions, then express it through calling God to act according to God’s just character in his protests, and, finally, through setting aside his mourning after encountering God in the divine speeches but before his restoration (42:6). This vindicates the faith God put in Job, and allows God to restore Job, thereby vindicating the faith Job put in God’s justice, without invalidating the wager. This is why God cannot explicitly address

Job’s situation in the divine speeches. Not because God is implicitly asserting “that he has not undertaken to act justly, that the world is not ordered according to principles of justice,” as Clines argues, but because either to explain the wager or to promise to restore Job if he will remain faithful would be to make Job’s faith contingent on God’s reward and invalidate the wager altogether. All God can communicate to Job within the constraints of the wager is that God is worthy of Job’s trust. Job may stop questioning God’s justice, not because he has given up expecting God to be just (pace Clines), but because, trusting God, he has given up expecting to understand the justice of God’s actions. Whether the book’s author ultimately succeeds or not, he has sought to vindicate both Job’s credibility and God’s, rather than forcing the reader or the characters themselves to side with one over the other.

Conclusion

Though hardly as ambitious a goal, this chapter has attempted something similar: to vindicate the credibility of von Rad’s interpretation of Job, which has faded in current scholarship, while highlighting some of the credible developments on his views in recent research. Von Rad recognized that Job exceeded the boundaries of the modern Wisdom Literature category and explored the book’s connections with other biblical traditions and genres, including ritual, prophecy, and lament. As interpreters follow early readers in appreciating Job’s intertextual engagement with

86. Ibid., 104–5.

texts across the Hebrew Bible and beyond, they open up new possibilities for understanding its meaning, including its theological significance. This, one of the strengths of von Rad’s reading, could be strengthened further by reading the book and its complex presentation of Job’s pious and yet protesting faith as a unity. This draws Job into a tradition of defiant faith that stretches across the canon and through history, as the afflicted trust God enough to complain to the deity about the injustice they face.