

Job's Sufferance. An "Affection" and Several Interpretations

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Abstract: The purpose of the following study is to delimit some of the interpretations of the book of Job. I believe that the exposition of several perspectives does not solve the issue of the righteous' sufferance, but it opens an ampler possibility of perceiving a fundamental issue of humankind and at the same time leads to understanding that no answer is absolute, unless as seen filtered through a certain way of thinking, but every answer expresses nonetheless a definitive belief for the interpreter's conscience. The idea which coordinates the work is that the data of the historian, of the theologian, of the philosopher, of the man of letters, must not be analyzed separately, but rather all together, this being the only way that the issues questioned by the biblical work can diminish.

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Job is a character commented upon in biblical hermeneutics but also in philosophy, psychology, literature, history etc., for which I believe that Job could well be the subject of a cross-domain analysis, too. The conclusion of this book is a theological one, though, and my opinion is that only by keeping in mind this conclusion, which does not answer the issue of divine justice, but reveals the existence of the divine and Job's profound faith in God, will the other interpretations not yield weak or even false solutions, in a hermeneutic sense.

For every serious and unsolvable situation in one's existence, the biblical story of Job comes in mind. No matter what the answers that dominated the minds of philosophers, theologians and historians over the time were, the problem of human "affection" returns as something new in everyone's life. The unusual nature of the question "Why do the righteous get to suffer?" maintains an on-going mystery surrounding the test of the misery in a way that, despite the answers at-hand, definitive in certain areas of thought, we feel helpless in our doubt. The lack of data, determined by the age of the biblical book, make the job of historians more difficult, and besides this, the data itself does not help in delimiting an accurate solution to the problem of sufferance. The philosopher, who may be too preoccupied with understanding the misery of man, offers relative answers, putting aside the special relationship, founded on devotion, between man and God, or suspecting the latter of injustice. The theologian has perhaps only one explanation prepared, that is, testing the righteous man, one which is anticipated by anyone who thinks in this area of

interpretation. In the case of the latter, the open question remains first of all “Why does God need to test the righteous one when He is all-knowing?”

It is not my objective in this study to surpass the interpretations and answers already given to the parable represented by the *Book of Job*, being aware that such an intention would be exaggerated, wrongheaded and without a chance of getting to a conclusion (it would suffice to know even a few of the many writings that deal with this subject). All I wish is to give a short presentation of the various interpretations and solutions given to the situation of Job and thus understand, on one hand, which could be the stronger answer, at the expense of the others, and on the other hand, why the human being cannot hope to get a new answer to what has been said and written so far.

1. The historian’s data

Besides the place where the character known as Job lived, the Land of Uz, one has the feeling that the process of writing the *Book of Job* has a folk or religious fantasy tale as its background. There are Hebrew legends concerning Job, but also Christian and Muslim legends, one of the most famous of them being illustrated in *The Poem of Job* written by W. B. Stevenson in 1947, belonging to Islamic tradition. In the Bible, the name *Job* appears not only in *Ezekiel* (14:14, 20), but also in *Jacob* (5:11). But, if we identify Daniel from *Ezekiel* not as being the character from the time of the Exile, but as being the one mentioned in the Ugaritic inscriptions, we shall be able to set a very old date for all of the three names in *Ezekiel*: Noah, Daniel and Job.¹

It is not known when exactly the biblical character Job lived. Elie Wiesel claims that he lived in the time of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samson, Solomon, Ahasuerus, or during the Babylonian Exile.² According to this data, Job must have lived for more than eight hundred years, and not 210 as the Bible suggests. Being stateless, he pertains to several nations and to several epochs at the same time. The *Book of Job* is the only biblical text the action of which does not take place on Israeli land, the character of which is not Jewish, and in which there is no mentioning of the existence of the Jewish nation, nor of the fact that Torah was given to the Israeli people.³ Most of the texts speak of a non-Hebrew Job. The name *Iyyob* is neither typically Jewish, being mentioned among the names of the Amorites.⁴ The character Job is at first described as an Egyptian magistrate, then as a counsellor at the Pharaoh’s court and eventually as an adviser along with Balaam and Jethro. When the Pharaoh asks how to solve his issues with the Jews, Jethro is

¹ J-D Douglas (coord. ed.), *Dicționar biblic* (The Biblical Dictionary), (Oradea: Cartea Creștină, 1995).

² Elie Wiesel, *Celebrare biblică* (Biblical celebration), (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1998), 220. Sandu Frunză, “The Unspeakable: With Elie Wiesel on Philosophy and Theology”, in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 19 (2008): 3-29.

³ Yeshayahou Leibowitz, “Job et Antigone”, in Idem, *Israël et judaïsme. Ma part de vérité* (Israel and Judaism. My part of truth), (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1996), 330.

⁴ Carol A. Newson (art. written by), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, (MacMillian Reference USA, 2005, vol. 7), 4930.

the one who opts in favour of Moses' request to let the Jewish people leave, Balaam is the one who opposes, while Job remains neutral.¹ Another legend describes him as being settled in Canaan, long before the arrival of the Hebrews. He dies on the very day Moses' Hebrews enter Canaan, this being the reason for which they find the country deserted and mournful, the inhabitants having left to Job's funeral.² There are even some rabbi opinions that Job never existed in flesh, but that he represents a typical figure of the righteous one who is rather meant to suffer.³

The *Book of Job* is anonymous. The Talmudic tradition, accepted also by the vast majority of the ancient Christian writers, claims that this book was written by Moses. The same thing is claimed in the *Baba Bathra*. There is no objective proof to make us say with more confidence anything about the author or the time the book was written, though. Another variant, given by Petru Creția's interpretation of this book, identifies Baruch as the author, but there is not enough evidence to support this theory either.⁴ But let us make a summary of the story. After the fall of Jerusalem (594 BC), the majority of the Hebrews were deported by the Babylonians to Mesopotamia. But the author of the *Book of Job* was apparently not among those. Following this catastrophe, some of the Hebrews went towards Egypt, one of them being the author of the book – this fact is inferred from the mention of sedge, rush, the mines, the ostrich, the crocodile, and the hippopotamus, which at the time were elements typical to Egypt. The Egyptian Exile is historically established also inside some biblical passages such as *Jeremiah* (42:14). Jeremiah himself and his apprentice Baruch travelled towards Egypt, too. It is possible for a part of the Hebrews that arrived in Egypt to have left that place at about the end of the exile period and to have wandered for a while in the lands south of the Dead Sea, Edom or Idumea. Here is the place where the action in *Job* takes place and it is possible that here is also the place where the author heard the stories about Job (Iyyob, Hijob).

The location of the Land of Uz is also uncertain. The modern tendency is to set it somewhere on the border of Edom, between the deserts of Sinai and Arabia and the south shore of the Dead Sea, as there are Edomite indications in the structure of the story. Uz is mentioned in *Jeremiah* (25:20) and *Lamentations* (4:21). Job's friends are from Teman, Shuah and Naamath, all of which are places on the territory of Edom and its surroundings towards the Arab desert.⁵ Still, the Hebraic text of the *Book of Job* does not mention any tribe of the name Naamath. Just by the use of reference to the house of Job and his other two friends, it is possible to locate him in

¹ Ibid, 221. It is this neutrality to which the Midrash assigns Job's following grievances. Essential here seems to be the issue of responsibility, and not that of punishment or suffering. In times of peril, no one must be cautious, or refrain from participating, "neutrality is criminal", states Elie Wiesel.

² Ibid., 222.

³ Victor E. Reichert, *Job, The Soncino Books of the Bible* (New York: The Soncino Press, 1985).

⁴ Petru Creția (trans.), *Cartea lui Iov. Ecclesiastul. Cartea lui Iona. Cartea Ruth. Cântecul lui Solomon* (The Book of Job. Ecclesiastes. The Book of Jonah. The Book of Ruth. Song of Solomon), (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995), 15.

⁵ Ibid., 16.

Western Judea (*Joshua* 15:41).¹ The traditions that place Job's story in Hauran (Basan) are possibly true, too. Job was a very rich man, with a high social status, but the author of the book, being preoccupied with Job's position among the wise men, leaves the precise data untold.

Modern researchers dated the book as belonging to a period delimited by the history of Solomon and approximately the year 250 BC, in spite of the most frequently used dates being between 600 and 400 BC, although there is an increasing tendency of preferring the later dates. Yeshayahou Leibowitz pleads in favour of the fifth century BC in the beginning epoch of the second temple and practically at the same time when Sophocles wrote *Antigone*, in the Greek space.² The mentioning of the Chaldeans, nomad tribes that robbed (pieces of silver, *qesita*) only indicates the age of the story, but not the date it was written.³ Concurrently, the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* asserts that the story of Job dates back to the time before Moses, only the time of composing it being later on.⁴ Thus, it is understandable why the author did not choose an Israelite character, as this nation had not yet appeared on the stage of history. What is not explained, if we were to identify the time of writing the book as being close to this period, is why Edom was chosen, knowing the hostile feelings towards it in the exile and post-exile periods. Two factors indicate another later date for Job, specifically: the emergence of monotheism and monogamy.⁵ Linguistic evidence indicates centuries 6-5 BC. Jung advocates the apparition of the *Book of Job* between 600 and 300 BC.⁶ Petru Creția considers that one cannot settle on a certain date for the time of this book being written. If we should still think of a date, it is imperative to make a connection between the endurance of Job and a collective misery, that of the Jewish people, during the Babylonian Exile, in the sixth century BC.⁷

2. The biblical story and its interpretation

The book under discussion consists of 42 chapters. Conventionally, this writing pertains to Hebrew lyrical poetry or to the sapiential literature that covers the space of Ancient Israel and is, in this case, related to the books of *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes* and *Jesus the Lord*.⁸ Within the framework of the Bible, the book is the third between the Hagiographs. There are still similarities between the *Book of Job* and *Jeremiah's Lamentations* (ch. 3, ch. 20), *Psalms* (37, 49, 73), passages of *Amos' hymns* (4:13; 5:8,9; 9:5,6), *Ruth*, the laws of the prophets and the proverbs of wisdom.⁹

¹ *Job*, 7.

² Leibowitz, "Job et Antigone", 333.

³ *Job*, 4.

⁴ David Noel (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Carl Gustav Jung, *Răspuns la Iov, imaginea omului și imaginea lui Dumnezeu* (Answer to Job, in the image of man and in the image of God), (Bucharest: Teora, 1997), 226.

⁷ Petru Creția (trans.), *Cartea lui Iov*, 15.

⁸ *Dicționar biblic.*

⁹ *Anchor Bible Dictionary.*

Petru Creția is under the impression that the poem should not be read as a treatise on divine justice, but rather as a dramatic work, a tragedy that develops during five acts: Job's first soliloquy, the argument between Job and his friends (which consists of three scenes), Job's second soliloquy, the intervention of God and, finally, the words of Job that make up twelve verses – the true epilogue of the drama.¹ Or, it is a matter of poetic dialogue inserted into a narrative frame, which investigates the mystery of divine justice and which interrogates upon the purpose of man's misery.

Resorting now to an excursus on the story itself, the first chapter reveals Job, the one without sin and the righteous one, “the most honourable between the eastern people” – seemingly referring to the Eastern Canaan.² At the gathering of the angels around God, Satan is also present. God praises Job. It does not take long for Satan to reply that Job is faithful and righteous thanks to having everything he needs:

1:11 But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.

1:12 Then the LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is now in your power, but on the man himself you shall not lay a finger”.³

Then, the Sabeans (a strong people from Southern Arabia, settled in the vicinity of Edom⁴) murdered his slaves and took his cattle. The fire of God fell from the sky and burned his sheep. The Chaldeans (general expression used when referring to the Canaan robbers⁵) took his camels and killed his slaves. A strong wind destroys his eldest son's house where his other sons and daughters were living. Thus, his seven sons and three daughters die. The number of his children is not coincidental, as it expresses, according to some interpretations, perfection and completeness.⁶

1:20 At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship,

1:21 And said: Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.

Chapter two presents the second gathering of the angels before God. Steady in his faith, Job is once more praised by God. And again Satan speaks:

2:5 But stretch out Your hand and strike his bones and flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face.

2:6 The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you shall spare his life.”

Therefore, the border separating “to have” and “to be” is precisely defined. Everything that Job possesses is quickly taken from him. The drama does not consist

¹ Petru Creția (trans.), *Cartea lui Iov*, 15.

² *Job*, 1.

³ All Bible citations are from the *New International Version*.

⁴ *Job*, 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

of this, it is accomplished through the essence of Job's being. The power of the divine is represented in this play by the role of man, at the level of "to be".¹ For not any pain becomes sufferance, but only the pain that uncovers the loss of any reason to live is susceptible of turning into sufferance. Pain becomes sufferance, according to a present-day interpretation, when one's being is shaken in its last meanings projected upon the verbs "to live", "to be", when one's existence becomes a problem for oneself".² Sufferance always belongs to one's being: it does not imply pure external causes as pain does; one should not only tolerate it, but one should assume it; the fact that one's possessions are taken away from him is not the only thing that matters, but, by always affecting one's soul, becomes a loss of the essence of what one thought he was.

Job's name means "enmity," he is the mediator between God and Satan.³ The role of Satan, member of the heavenly court, is that of reporting the merits and the sins assumed by mortals before God. He inspects the Earth and brings forth to God the observations upon human loyalty and corruption. Satan portrays the Adversary, the Opponent, the Accuser, the Angel of Death.⁴ This scene, in which Satan provokes God, according to some historians' voices, could not have been imagined in an archaic time. The attention of the author of this poem, focused on placing it in an ancient world, in such a manner that no anachronism can be found, no topical allusion or hint to the Law and to its monstrosity, permitted the omission of Satan's introduction into the Prologue, a character who appears much later in the mental universe of the people of Israel.⁵ Before that, the Jewish people used to believe in the existence of supernatural creatures, which they called *malachim* or *bene Elohim*, "Children of the Lord" (as they appear in *Job*), among which we find a certain Satan, but who did not have the role of opponent to God, but only represented another hypostasis of the manifestation of Yahweh in his relationship with certain men. About Satan, in its common and often used sense, there is no mention in the Old Testament any sooner than in the first few years after the Exile, not long before the time it is supposed the *Book of Job* was written.⁶

Another thing that was left out, according to Petru Creția, is that Satan is missing from the Epilogue of the book. The failure of this character is no longer taken into consideration by the author – Satan no longer appears in front of Yahweh to realize his defeat. In this case, the explanation given by the afore-mentioned interpreter is that the author of the poem about Job is also the author of Satan in the Prologue, whom he later abandons within the Epilogue, as taken literally from tradition, without worrying about the coherent structure of his book.⁷

¹ Annick de Souzenelle, *Simbolismul corpului uman* (The symbolism of the human body), (Timișoara: Amarcord, 1999), 270-1.

² Reference to Ștefan Afloroaei and his work *Cum e posibilă filosofia în estul Europei* (How is philosophy possible in Eastern Europe), (Iași: Polirom, 1997), 269.

³ Souzenelle, *Simbolismul corpului uman*, 270.

⁴ *Job*, 2.

⁵ Petru Creția (trans.), *Cartea lui Iov*, 20.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*



Octavian Cosman, *Double Sun - Exodus*, 77 x 100 cm, oil on canvas on wood, 1996

The introduction of Satan leads, of course, to quite peculiar conclusions regarding God, a fact which moreover puts theological interpretations of Job under serious suspicion. The hero of the drama is shown as the victim of an extremely cruel bet. We do not know how it was possible that God needed any more proof to convince himself of the faith of his devoted servant. And if we were to accept the idea that Job must be tested to convince even Satan of his infinite power of believing, Yahweh demonstrates vanity and cruelty.¹ The peculiarity still persists in the author's relationship with God, in the way the former thinks of and describes the latter. A good man is made the subject of torment by virtue of the fact that he is good, implicitly to prove to Satan that he is unconditionally faithful. In the mind of the reader, which cannot be constrained, an idea is born: that the attitude approached by God in respect to Job is an absurd one, one that comes to mind starting from as early as the Prologue.²

Returning now to what happened to Job, the biblical text tells us that he becomes a leper. Researchers have not reached a consensus concerning the disease contracted by the hero, due to the fact that the symptoms of the disease are described in a poetic language (2:7,8). It is considered that Job was either suffering of elephantiasis, erythema, or pox. Then, his wife asks him to let go of his faith:³

2:9 His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

2:10 He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

The Bible does not mention the name of Job's wife. In *Midrash* she is called Dinah, daughter of Jacob.⁴ An apocryphal work, *Job's Testament*, states that Dinah was Job's cousin, himself being the son of Esau.⁵

The ending of the second chapter of Job introduces his friends: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They were not able to recognize him anymore, they mourned, they tore their clothes apart, they poured dust onto their heads (repentance gestures), then they sat next to him for seven days and for seven nights, without speaking to him.

Chapter three, entitled *The Lamentation of Job*, is where Job breaks the silence, in the beginning by talking to himself and cursing the moment he saw the light of day. The wish of not having been born, argues Petru Creția, or of escaping life through death, is part of the logic of a great sufferance and Job is consistent in this respect. He has only one question to ask God at this moment: why has He given him the gift of light, now to take it away from him by making him nearly blind?⁶

¹ Ibid., 21.

² Ibid., 22.

³ Job does not also lose his wife. She is not directly related to Job's being, but she is neither one of his possessions. May Satan have known that the loss of his wife would not be painful, or may this just be about the Hebrew conception, shared by the author, about women's role in the community?

⁴ *Job*, 6.

⁵ Elie Wiesel, *Celebrare biblică*, 222.

⁶ Petru Creția (trans.), *Cartea lui Iov*. 27.

Eighteen speeches follow, in eighteen chapters, nine given by his three friends, and nine by Job himself. The argument of the three friends can be synthesized as follows: God is the creator of the whole universe, He is the principle of His own sufficiency and permanence, He coordinates it in even its ultimate and most insignificant reality. He is almighty, His will is the Law, and no one can stand against Him; confronted with His unequalled greatness, every creature trembles. God's plans remain unknown to human nature, the only thing that can sometimes give a glance of His thinking is intuition. God is the only one who knows perfection, all that He has created is touched by imperfection, guilt and in the end, sin. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, although situated by the author in the pre-Mosaic world, cannot absolutely separate themselves from the Law. Many of the words they use name it. Certain guilts of man are distinguished as violations of the divine will, consisting of greed for fortune, taking advantage of the poor, self-will, the excessive belief in oneself, arrogance, the feeling that one can defy God. What Job's friends thought when they saw what awful sufferance he had to endure could be identified as the perspective that there has to be a human sin to call for such a severe punishment. Moreover, they do not understand Job's pride and his unfailingness in proving his innocence. They do not understand where Job gets the powerful steadiness from.¹

“What do you know and understand that we neither understand nor know?” his friends ask him. But Job does not make any statements by which to claim that knowledge. He only claims his own innocence. The third speech of Eliphaz radically brings forth the idea of an enormity of the guilt which results from deducing it from the intensity of the punishment, which is described as a well-known reality (ch. 22). For Eliphaz, the question is: “Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?” (4:17).²

But Job believes that God has abandoned his own justice in his case, and that without doubting his infinite power. Jung asserts that, from a human point of view, the behaviour of God is so revolting that one has to ask himself whether there is a more profound reason behind it.³ In this story Yahweh violates his very own commandments given on the Sinai Mountain. From a rather theological perspective, Isidor Epstein considers that *Job* is not a philosophical work, and as such it does not imply a philosophic answer to the problem of the relationship between the man whose spirit is pure, but tormented, and the apparent injustice of the divine.⁴ If it were read philosophically, Leibowitz adds, the *Book of Job* could be considered an atheist work, as it is described, in one of her novels, by Iris Murdoch, as a book the essence of which is to demonstrate that God does not exist. But *Job* is one of the most profound religious works, a relevant text about faith (it is not by accident that the very faithful Jewish never doubted the sacred attribute of the *Book of Job*).⁵

His friends add the moral torture, instead of supporting him; they moralize, their behaviour is obtuse, depriving Job of an ultimate support, of human

¹ Ibid., 28.

² Ibid., 30.

³ Jung, *Räspuns la Iov*, 215.

⁴ Isidor Epstein, *Judaismul* (Judaism), (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2003), 93.

⁵ Yeshayahou Leibowitz, “Job et Antigone”, 331.

compassion. Actually, Job is being separated from his friends by his belief in another model of divine–human relationship. In a 1791 study, Kant shows the theoretical weakness of the arguments the friends brought in favour of theodicy. The philosopher believes that Job must have felt that he was not basing his morality on belief, but rather his belief on morality, in which situation belief, as weak as it may be, belongs to an authentic and pure man who does not want a religion of solicited favours, but a well led life. Lévinas also believes that Job opposes his friends' theodicy throughout the book. He proves, on one hand, his fidelity towards God, and on the other hand, his ethics, and that, despite the things he has to suffer.¹ His friends believe that God has the advantages, his reasons, which remain unknown to man. Job considers on the other side that man and God have the same notions concerning the values of justice and equity, which must be applied rationally in the case of both human and divine actions (both perspectives had significance and were valuable for the Jewish people).² God does not want to be fair; he praises his own power, which to him is more significant, apparently, than fairness. Still, Job sees God primarily as a moral being. Many of the verses of the poem support this idea:

6:29 Relent, do not be unjust; reconsider, for my integrity is at stake.

10:2 I will say to God: Do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me.

12:4 I have become a laughing-stock to my friends, though I called upon God and he answered: a mere laughing-stock, though righteous and blameless!

27:6 I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live.

The whole chapter 31 describes the innocent life that Job lives. In the following chapter a new character shows up: Elihu, son of Baracheel of Buz, from Ram's family. From the *Hebrew Text* we learn that Elihu means “He is my Lord”. This name is also present in the Bible in 1 *Samuel* 1:1; 1 *Chronicles* 12:20; 26:7; 28:18.³ Zerachiah follows his own theory that the whole *Book of Job* is allegoric, and so the conjecture which made the author introduce Elihu is in fact of introducing the name of God, and by calling him Ram, His Highness, he suggests superiority above Job and his friends.⁴ According to historical interpretations, the 60 verse hymn, incompatible in ideas with the assembly of the whole text, as well as the six chapters which include Elihu, appeared later. Elihu is a character of whom the text does not mention anything by then and who is neither present in the Epilogue. The style of these chapters does not differ from the rest of the text, which is the reason why many researchers thought that this section was also a part of the original text. There is only one thing that was missed by whoever inlayed these chapters: between the last words of Job and the first words of Yahweh there is a continuity that leaves

¹ Emmanuel Lévinas, “Suferința inutilă” (“Useless suffering”), in *Între Noi. Încercare de a-l gândi pe celălalt* (Between us. Thinking of the other), (Bucharest: ALL, 2000), 107.

² *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 4932.

³ *Job*, 165.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

no room for other intervention.¹ An interpretation in terms of Kabbalah finds a real purpose for these interpolations in the unity of the book.²

Within the 38th chapter, God shows himself in the middle of a storm. This fact is meant to grant some solemnity, some impressionability to the message expressed by Yahweh. Other texts that describe the appearance of God in this kind of circumstances can be found in *Exodus* (19:16), and *Isaiah* (6:4).³ The two speeches of Yahweh addressed to Job make no allusion to the cause of Job's torment, they do not discuss the guilt-punishment relationship, they are not spoken by the God of justice, but by the Almighty one, by someone who is incommensurable to man and who intends for man to understand that. There are nearly 40 questions just in the first speech which cover all aspects of reality. What kind of God can he be who speaks of man arrogantly and punitively, and of all the animals only praises the ones who are not controlled by man? – Petru Creția asks himself.⁴ For God gives a second speech in order to give praises to the Behemoth (the hippopotamus) and the Leviathan (the crocodile).

3. Answers to Job's sufferance

God only appears to Job as the Creator and ruler of the world. The issue of Job's destiny in relationship with divine righteousness and equity is totally omitted. Petru Creția believes that one cannot help being under the impression that God is actually intrigued by Job's endurance, a man that was in fact limited to the ashes he sat on.⁵

In the same manner, Creția continues with a symptomatic interpretation of Yahweh as described in *Job*. For without ever mentioning the moral issue, the dialogue being a demonstration of the divine power, the answer of Job, a clever man as the poem introduces him, is the only one to be expected. Job admits that he was the one who threw a shadow of doubt concerning the way that God had planned the world. Job realizes that he is dealing with another kind of interlocutor than he expected. His repentance in ashes constitutes the establishing of the real, normal relationship between Yahweh and man, between Omnipotence and Nothingness.⁶

Job's grand merit, the same interpreter continues, consists of the perseverance with which he keeps asking his questions and the sustained protest under the circumstance of having his interlocutors speaking and opposing as advocates of the righteous God. And then, his merit is in his silence, determined by the realization of the fact that the situation was a different one, admitting his only guilt of not having known who he was dealing with.⁷ For everything that God told him, he already knew. The wonders of the world, his creation, are never debated. Despite the severe pain, Job does not lose his faith in God. His doubt is not reflected upon the divine omnipotence. Job is aware of the fact that the one who created him

¹ Petru Creția (trans.), *Cartea lui Iov*, 17.

² Annick de Souzenelle, *Simbolismul corpului uman*, 271.

³ *Job*, 195.

⁴ Petru Creția (trans.), *Cartea lui Iov*, 33.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

in his body will not remain unjustified in his spirit.¹ Job is an advocate of the fear of God. From a theological point of view, what matters is not what God communicates to the character, but simply the fact that he spoke to him. Here is where the originality and profoundness of the *Book of Job* lies. The book aims to proclaim a God so grand that no answer is necessary. In other words, had an answer been given, it would transcend the limited human mind. Job is satisfied with the fact that God has chosen to speak to him and at the same time realizes that his idea of God was too small and thus collapsed. He now speaks words of repentance (38:1–40:5).² As Leibowitz said, the conclusion of the *Book of Job* does not solve the problem of whether there is a divine justice or injustice or not, but it reveals the existence of God.³

From Jung's perspective, the greatness of Job resides in the fact that, faced with so many difficulties, he does not lose faith in Yahweh's unity although it is obvious to him that God is in contradiction with himself.⁴ This jealousy and susceptibility in him, that explores with uncertainty the hearts of the unfaithful and their hidden thoughts, imposed an intimate relationship between Him and them (unlike the case of Zeus, a deity more detached from humanity). Yahweh does not see Job and his real situation. He acts as though he was face to face with a powerful being who deserves to be provoked. Job is the one who has doubts. Job receives the words of God by sitting at his feet, as if he were really defeated. He thus learned his lesson, after the accomplishment of the experience of the reality of God.⁵

In all of the ancient literature, Job is the only witness to absolute sufferance. The only one to so quickly and surprisingly move from a state of happiness and spiritual peace to profound and radically disturbing unhappiness. Job's sufferance becomes hopeless, aberrant, loses its meaning. This is not about atoning some guilt, but about purification with the purpose of reaching a higher moral status.⁶ The rabbinic texts have not decided upon a consensus regarding Job's sufferance, which has most often been interpreted as a test without any connection to a previous deed of the character.⁷ The reasoning specific to Job consists of the desire to understand why he is being punished without being guilty, convinced at the same time of the fact that everything that is happening to him is the will of God and his divine choice. Job wants to understand the divine judgment, which does not reveal itself, not until the end of the poem. Job goes deep enough, up to accusing God of his incapacity to conceive and comprehend the human sufferance. He is a man, but the one whom God so eagerly calls upon. As such, any common discourse is doomed to failure.⁸

¹ Isidor Epstein, *Judaismul*, 94.

² Geoffrey Wigoder (coord. ed.), *Enciclopedia Iudaismului* (The Encyclopaedia of Judaism), (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2006), 324.

³ Yeshayahou Leibowitz, "Job et Antigone", 345.

⁴ Carl Gustav Jung, *Răspuns la Iov*, 220.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Petru Creția (trans.), *Cartea lui Iov*, 36.

⁷ *Enciclopedia Iudaismului*, 324.

⁸ Petru Creția (trans.), *Cartea lui Iov*, 39.

The author of Job digs into the issue of Evil in the world, but leaves it without a precise solution. He exceeds the Law according to which retribution must be done according to merits. But given the premise of an omnipotent and absolutely good Providence, the problem is not even possible to solve. Only two variants come to mind, both unacceptable for very well established reasons: either Job is guilty (supposition dismissed throughout the text), or God is unjust (which would contradict the Law and all theological works written so far).¹

In the Epilogue, in the manner of a not allowable, tragic irony, the author describes the fact that in the end Job receives his fortune back again, doubled, and his family which is made up of 7 sons and 3 daughters (beautiful as there were no others in the land). Job would live another 140 years to see his sons and grandsons up to the fourth generation.

4. Other “appearances” of Job

The early Christian church saw Job as an “athlete of God” who persevered in his sufferance, an antitype of Christ in the very influentially expressed interpretation belonging to Pope Gregory in *Moralia in Job*. In the Middle Ages, Job was described as a patron of the people suffering of leprosy, worms, skin diseases, or melancholy. Job attracted much attention in the Romantic period, when he appeared as the first example of the expression of the sublime in the writings of Robert Lowth (1710–1787), Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), and Edmund Burke (1729–1797). The most relevant interpretation of this period belonged to William Blake, from around 1823, in which Job appeared as an example of purifying the “gates of perception“, through the movement from a wrong perception to the true vision of God. In the 20th century, Rudolf Otto considered that Job represented a primal, profound experience of the sacred. About the end of that same century, Job was used to exemplify a certain psychological evolution (Jung, *Answer to Job*), a psychological disease (Jack Kahn, *Job’s Illness*), absurd existentialism (Robert Frost, *A Masque of Reason*, implicitly Kafka, *The Trial*), post-religious humanism (Archibald MacLeish), and an evil radical of *Shoah* (Elie Wiesel, *The Trial of God*).²

¹ Ibid., 22.

² As for the issue of radical evil, I shall refer to a few articles about Elie Wiesel in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, mainly the one mentioned earlier, which belongs to Sandu Frunză. In the synthesis, Wiesel is distinguished from other philosophers among the interpreters of Judaism in dealing with the issue of evil. Martin Buber or Emmanuel Lévinas go in different directions, Lévinas being rather inclined towards rationalism, while Wiesel's approaches are closer to mysticism and Kabbalism. Furthermore, Wiesel is convinced that it was the pushing of rationalism to extremes that led to the Holocaust in the first place. He puts the issue of evil under the sign of the Inexpressible. The human mind cannot comprise the Jewish tragedy in a coherently explicative rational system. The radical evil has permanently defeated any theology of love, according to *Shoah*. It is Wiesel's belief that a sense of responsibility – which determines quitting the indifference towards other people's suffering – suffices. The root of evil is not the lack of love, but the state of indifference towards the injustice other people are subjected to. The role of theology, as well as that of literature or philosophy, is not in this case that of perpetuating the illusion of love, but it should be rather pointed towards the community and its needs.

In theological criticism, Job is understood as being “the evil in theodicy” (Terrence Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy*) and in a liberationist perspective in the example “how to speak to God” (Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*). René Girard sees Job as the scapegoat (*Job, the Victim of His People*).¹ As for what concerns the ritual, the Talmud says that the Great Priest was reading the *Book of Job* when he expressed the collective repentance of the people, before Yom Kippur. The Ashkenazi ritual does not require any reading throughout the year, while at the same time the Sephardim can read in it on Tisha be-Av, the fast that commemorates the destruction of the two temples. Furthermore, the *Book of Job* is one of the few biblical texts whose reading is allowed in times of mourning.²

Consequently, the mourning of Job has not ceased ever since. It continued to gain popularity in the history of the Jewish people, along with every man who was unjustly sacrificed. Job can ultimately be considered a symbol of the suffering of the inhabitants of Judaea, during a long time of cruel experiences. Job can be ultimately considered a symbol of sufferance of the Jewish during the time they traversed, as well as a symbol of the force of humankind. Emil Cioran asserts that “Son énergie, Job l’a transmise aux siens; assoiffés de justice comme lui, ils ne fléchissent point devant l’évidence d’un monde inique”.³

4. A question with four “definitive” answers

As a conclusion, the question “why has the righteous man to suffer?” can be given four “definitive” answers, as expressed by a present-day interpreter and considered to be components of a tetrad of our reason and understanding, contrary to the provocative aspect of the book which seems to be defending it from any definitive interpretation.⁴ If we cannot find an absolute answer, we can still admit absolutism inside a certain mode of our conscience.

The first answer is to be learned from the Upanishad tradition (and then Buddhist), in which there is mentioning of the explicit presence of sufferance in man's life through *karma*, the law of the deed. What for the present seems incomprehensible, can be interpreted as a consequence of our deeds in a previous life. In this way, the general impression is that the world is a stage with the same actors and happenings, only the roles changing, the roles being different from life to life of the same character. This answer pertains, though not exclusively, to the oriental tradition.⁵

The second answer comes from the reading of the Greek tragedians, in whose works the power of destiny is invoked. Destiny is viewed as a sequence of happiness and sufferance, but not accidental. The experience of suffering is

¹ Information gathered from the work *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 4933.

² *Enciclopedia Iudaismului*, 325.

³ E.M. Cioran, *La Tentation d’Exister*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), 95.

⁴ Referring to Ștefan Afloroaei, *Cum e posibilă filosofia în estul Europei*, 269.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 270.

necessary to moments of fulfilled happiness, the unhappy moments must redeem the happy ones.¹

The third answer is given by the interpreters of the testamentary books, and is maybe the most wide-spread. Especially, Augustine and Maxim the Confessor mention in their writings that the more the man seeks God, to get close to him, the more God puts the man through tests. The erudite Christian holds human sufferance in high esteem. The soul of the faithful has to undergo difficult tests of unhappiness in order to be able to tell how many are those that can withstand the various trials.²

The modern thinkers finally offer the fourth answer, by which we enter a world of events, contingency and relativity. What is going on is interpreted by Hume and Schopenhauer, simply as a hazard, lack of law, without aiming at the unpredictability of certain given situations. For the modern man, a superior sense is no longer more important than the contingent, what becomes important is accepting what is happening to oneself here and now.³

The four answers are defining for certain types of human consciousness and sensitivity. The difficulty of reaching other answers besides these four, according to the interpreter, is owed to the difficulty of thinking of other “concepts of limits to our existence”. These four, having become paradigmatic, cannot be judged in terms of true or false, righteous or not. They are only definitive in the history of the problem of Job's sufferance and it was only these determined an entire exegetic criticism.⁴

¹ Ibid., 270.

² Ibid., 271.

³ Ibid., 272.

⁴ Ibid., 273.