

# JOB'S DILEMMA: *FIAT JUSTITIA, RUAT CAELUM*

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**Abstract.** The aim of the paper is to examine the problem of suffering in the Book of Job and the possible solution it offers. For this reason, it is structured as follows: (I) In the first section, we will analyse Job's evidential argument; (II) the second section will delve into the 'friends' and their failed attempt at a retributive theodicy; (III) finally, we shall look into God's argument and try to explain Job's answer in terms of sceptical theism.

## INTRODUCTION

Theodicy surely does not get a good press. Leibniz's optimism of evil being 'almost nothingness in comparison with the good things which are in the universe',<sup>1</sup> has always seemed rather unconvincing, especially in the light of Voltaire's *Candide's* sarcasm: 'If this is the best of all possible worlds, what are the others like?'<sup>2</sup>

Irony aside, this criticism had already been uttered by Hume in the form of the so-called 'evidential argument': rather than denying, as would Leibniz, 'the sense of human misery', one should rather think, in terms of the amount (and intensity) of evil we must endure, that 'the original Source of all things is entirely indifferent'.<sup>3</sup>

Of course one could wonder whether Leibniz is truly as Hume's 'Philo' portrays him, that is, denying human misery. There is one thing, though, where Hume appears to be right: 'Epicurus's old questions are still unanswered'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leibniz (1985: 135, n. 19).

<sup>2</sup> Voltaire (2005: 19).

<sup>3</sup> Hume (1998: 100, 113).

<sup>4</sup> Hume (1998: 100).

The purpose of this paper is to assess whether the book of Job may provide an answer to those questions.<sup>5</sup> It should be remembered that this paper sets out to question a well-established habit of interpreting the lamentations of the man from Uz as any believer's standard reaction, who is willing to patiently accept God's every decision on the ground of faith. After all, at the beginning of the account, Job seems to keep to his theistic belief: 'the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.' (Job 1:21)

But then Job protests, and what he says, in all fairness, seems closer to Hume's thought than to Leibniz's. Rather, the advocates of Theodicy are Job's 'friends', whom Job himself defines 'miserable comforters', full of 'windy words' (Job 13:2-3). All in all, we are persuaded that none of the produced arguments is truly capable of refuting Job's evidential argument. One should wonder, then, whether God can. Our assumption is that God's statement is somewhat ambivalent:

- (a) on the one side, God outlines a non-anthropocentric view of the universe, where justice follows such criteria that no man can grasp. This is, the reader will understand, the strongest argument in Leibniz's theodicy. Now, in this light the issue of innocent suffering is not solved, but simply shifted enough for the evidential argument to lose his objecting momentum: God must surely have a reason to allow innocent suffering, it is us who don't understand it;
- (b) On the other turn, God states (twice) that Job said 'what is right' (Job 42:7) about it. It may be argued that Job's issue is justified to the extent that the problem is an open one for God, too.

Now, this ambivalent situation may certainly be solved from the experiential standpoint: Job sees God and trusts again. From a theoretical standpoint, though, we think that one way remains to be explored: that of sceptical theism. As Bergmann and Rea maintained, sceptical theism is not theodicy, but rather a defensive strategy, 'an effort to rebut the evidential argument from evil.'<sup>6</sup> This is precisely what Job needs to restore his theistic belief, without censoring the reality of his suffering.

In the light of the above, the paper breaks down into three sections:

(I) In the first section, we will analyse Job's evidential argument;

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<sup>5</sup> All quotations from the bible are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

<sup>6</sup> Bergmann and Rea (2005: 244).

- (II) The second section will delve into the 'friends' and their failed attempt at a theodicy;
- (III) Finally, we shall look into God's argument and try to explain Job's answer in terms of sceptical theism.

### I. DIVINE INJUSTICE

Viewing the Book of Job as a philosophical problem means trying to answer Spinoza's famous objection: in his answer, God uses arguments that only Job is convinced about, and that are certainly not 'of universal validity to convince all men.'<sup>7</sup> Oddly enough, it is Hobbes who offered a philosophical take to the story of the man from Uz:<sup>8</sup>

yet the book itself seemeth not to be a history, but a treatise concerning a question in ancient time much disputed, why wicked men have often prospered in this world, and good men have been afflicted.<sup>9</sup>

Not surprisingly, the issue Hobbes raises is central also to Leibniz's theodicy:

How a sole Principle, all-good, all-wise and all-powerful, has been able to admit evil, and especially to permit sin, and how it could resolve to make the wicked often happy and the good unhappy?<sup>10</sup>

In the above terms, Job's problem is, according to Plantinga, too, 'really intellectual':<sup>11</sup> here, Job is not mad at God because he cannot see any reason for his suffering; rather, he protests because he thinks God is unfair or even unjustified in the evil he bestowed on him. Indeed, doubting God's reliability means doubting the validity of the following:

(T) There are goods that justify God in permitting all of the various kinds of evil that we find in the world.

First, let us see how Job came to this conclusion.

We immediately come to know that Job 'was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil' (Job 1:1). These are the exact words God will use to speak about his servant to Satan (Job 1:8). It is difficult, then, to question his innocence. Not even Satan will: his

<sup>7</sup> Spinoza (1991: II, 86).

<sup>8</sup> The 'oddity' lies in the fact that the Book of Job is the only one in the Old Testament Hobbes views under this perspective.

<sup>9</sup> Hobbes (1994: XXXIII, 254).

<sup>10</sup> Leibniz (1985: 98, n. 43).

<sup>11</sup> Plantinga (2000: 496).

theory is that after all, Job is just ‘for nothing’, simply because nothing bad has even happened to him. God takes on the challenge and Job, after the first bout of ill-fortune, does not falter in his faith. This point is in favour of God who turns to Satan to point out Job’s innocence in spite of his suffering: ‘He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason.’ (Job 2:3) As Stump points out, this seems to prove two things:

- (i) God is ‘in full control of the evil that befell Job’;
- (ii) Evil ‘for no reason’ is not the whim of an evil deity; rather, it is something that ‘did not have anything to do with what Job merited’.<sup>12</sup>

(i) ensures God’s power; (ii) his kindness.<sup>13</sup> Though after the second bout of misadventures, things are no longer that simple: Job endures terrible (in terms of intensity) and apparently uncalled for (without any apparent reason) pain; consequently, his protest is radical: ‘Let the day perish in which I was born.’ (Job 3:3) This is a tragic archetype, similar to Oedipus’ curse (*me phynai*). Therefore we cannot construe these words as simple outrage towards someone we love.<sup>14</sup> What Job laments has rather the strength of an evidential argument. Let us analyse the structure, then.

Job is in despair, forced as he is to a radical theoretical impasse by his suffering. Kant did realise this: the story of the man from Uz provides an accurate picture of the antinomy of practical reason. ‘At peace with himself in a good conscience’, Job does not give in to the misadventure that shattered his happiness; as such, he ‘indignantly protests that his conscience has nothing to reproach him for in his whole life’<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Stump (2010: 213).

<sup>13</sup> Sure, one cannot but notice that ‘for no reason’ may be construed also from an anti-theistic angle: a God that is prone to being challenged by his creatures, without any reasons no less, becomes the direct culprit of groundless evil. This is not exactly in line with the standard theistic belief. The exegesis on this particular point in the Book of Job is rather controversial. If ‘for no reason’ means without any reason justifying God, two alternatives open up here: either Satan is right and those who want to believe, in spite of evil, must do so ‘for nothing’ (see Balentine (2003)); or Job, eventually, does not go back to his faith, but rather refuses a God that is in business with Satan (see Briggs Curtis (1979) and Krüger (2007)). We tend to prefer Stump’s view, in that it allows one to prevent this diatribe and keep delving into the issue of evil while attempting at a philosophical solution to it (theodicy or defence).

<sup>14</sup> Such is Stump’s take: ‘Job is vehemently indignant against God; but anger and indignation are one way to continue holding on to a relationship of love.’ (Stump 2010: 217) Thus, though, the radical nature of the doubt upsetting Job’s set of beliefs seems to be played down.

This gap between virtue and happiness cannot be denied. We believe it may be interpreted and described as a true symmetric dilemma. Under normal conditions, the theistic belief implies two courses of action that are morally imperative:

(A) fear God (respect his judgement)

(B) behave fairly (defend one's own moral integrity)

Let us assume two standard deontic logic principles, applicable to both Job and his 'friends', which make (A) and (B) reasonable: the Principle of Deontic Consistency (PC) and the Principle of Deontic Logic (PD).<sup>16</sup>

(PC)  $OA \rightarrow \neg O\neg A$

(PD)  $\Box (A \rightarrow B) \rightarrow (OA \rightarrow OB)$ .

(PC) simply states that an action may not be at once mandatory and forbidden. (PD) states that if A implies B and A is mandatory (morally required), the B is also mandatory (morally required). In Job's case, it is clear that following God's will would necessarily imply the moral obligation of behaving justly.

Now, the suffering of a just man causes a dilemma: either job ceases to protect his own innocence and admits that he is being justly punished by God; or God's judgement is unjust. Job, though, is not willing to give in (B): the certainty of his own integrity is all he has left. This is why he is willing to defend the justness of his condition with all means necessary, whatever the cost ('ruat caelum') and also to the point of thinking that God's justice is arbitrary: 'What he desires, that he does.' (Job 23:13) Now Job has lost, though, in that he has to give up (T): if God does what he pleases, there is no reason to justify his doing. Nor is there any good reason to keep putting confidence in it. This is the same argument Leibniz uses: to admit that God 'has a despotic power which can go so far as being able to condemn innocents', entails that 'the justice we know is not that which he observes', which means it is then impossible to believe: indeed, in Leibniz's words, arbitrary justice can 'destroy the confidence in God that gives us tranquillity, and the love of God that makes our happiness'.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Kant (2001: 32).

<sup>16</sup> For the ensuing definition of symmetrical dilemma, see McConnell (1987).

<sup>17</sup> Leibniz (1985: 227, n. 166; 237, n. 177). Obviously, Leibniz intends to respond to Pope's arbitrary theory, according to which 'one truth is clear, Whatever IS, is RIGHT' (Pope 1963: 515).

Job is willing to take this risk. Against his friends' theodicy, he does not tire to defend his faultless conduct: 'Far be it from me to say that you are right; until I die I will not put away my integrity from me.' (Job 27:5) Job is on a 'legal' quarrel against God and is ready to put his life at stake: 'See, he will kill me; I have no hope; but I will defend my ways to his face.' (Job 13:15) Because, according to Job, God did him wrong: 'Know then that God has put me in the wrong.' (Job 19:6) Now, his theistic belief begins to falter. We may describe the situation as follows:

- (1) OA
- (2) OB
- (3)  $\neg \diamond (A \ \& \ B)$

These three elements point to the existence of a dilemma produced by Job's suffering.

- (4)  $\Box \neg (B \ \& \ A)$  (from 3)
- (5)  $\Box (B \rightarrow \neg A)$  (from 4)
- (6)  $\Box (B \rightarrow \neg A) \rightarrow (OB \rightarrow O\neg A)$  (an instantiation of PD)

(6) is the climax of Job's inner tribulations: being compelled to defend his own integrity causes Job to accuse God of being unjust: 'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.' (Job 9:17)

- (7)  $OB \rightarrow O\neg A$  (from 5 and 6)
- (8)  $O\neg A$  (from 2 and 7)
- (9) OA and  $O\neg A$  (from 1 and 8)

(9) is conflicting with PC directly. Which means that solving the dilemma would equal, for Job, incredulity. Elifaz realises this: 'you are doing away with the fear of God.' (Job 15:4) Actually, Job becomes sceptical, to the point of requesting an unbiased request 'who might lay his hand on us both' (Job 9:33).

Now, what's interesting in this summon is the universal extent of the accusation: we believe the outcry 'Let the Almighty answer me!' (Job 31:35) implies an anti-theist thesis that transcends Job's personal case, thus doubting the accepted belief whereby God would be a thoughtful father. Sure, Job thinks God is picking on him: 'Why have you made me your target?' (Job 7:20) Not so much because God is evil, but rather – again – because it does what it wants, without any distinction: 'It is all one.' (Job 9:22) Thus, eventually, Job's case becomes the epitome of God's general lack of interest for human misadventures: 'From the city the dying groan, and the throat of the wounded cries for help; yet God pays no attention to their prayer.' (Job 24:12)

Now, this generalisation appears completely in line with Hume's version of the evidential argument, as worded by Draper in terms of 'Indifferent Deity Hypothesis' (HI):

(HI) There exists an omnipotent and omniscient person who created the Universe and who has no intrinsic concern about the pain or pleasure of other beings.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, based on (HI), (T) may not be sustained. It remains to be seen whether the 'friends' can support their theistic thesis against Job's evidential argument.

## II. GOD'S LAWYERS

The attitude of his 'friends' is absolutely clear to Job: 'will you plead the case for God?' (Job 13:8) These annoying 'religious flatterers', as Kant refers to them, behave as zealous advocates of God. Job, in turn, as Kant puts it, 'speaks as he thinks', while his 'so-called friends', on the contrary, 'speak as if they were being secretly listened to by the mighty one'.<sup>19</sup> This level of hypocrisy may also be seen in the replies to Job's lamentations. We may describe the different conversations based on two main arguments:

- (1) Elifaz, Bilad, Zofar: Retribution Theodicy
- (2) Eliu: Soul-making Theodicy

(1) The retribution argument is a traditional way to support the theistic belief: (T) is true because evil is a punishment for sin. Thus, evil as a punishment is instrumental to restoring the justice we have willingly breached. This is the same argument Augustine uses in his *Confessions* to solve to issue of the origin of evil: 'Our free will is the cause of our doing evil and Your just judgment the cause of our suffering evil.' In truth, right after that Augustine concedes that he cannot clearly understand how that would be possible: 'I could not clearly discern this.' At the end of the thought, though, all doubts have vanished: 'We have sinned, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and Thy hand has grown heavy upon us.'<sup>20</sup> Subsequently this sentence solves Job's dilemma: 'under a just God none can be wretched unless they have merited.'<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Draper (1996: 26).

<sup>19</sup> Kant (2001: 33, 32).

<sup>20</sup> Augustine (2006: 119, 136).

<sup>21</sup> Augustine (1999: 70). Obviously, this argument rests on the doctrine of original sin, according to Augustine: we all deserve to suffer because of the 'magnitude of the first sin' (1999: 336).

The solution is rather radical and does not rule out the issue of innocent suffering, by implication eliminating the very idea of innocence. Leibniz himself went so far as to claim that Augustine, in this specific passage ‘appears obscure or even repellent’. Of course Leibniz agrees that God may use suffering ‘often as a penalty owing to guilt’. Not always, though; and certainly never in cases of innocence, in that this would make it ‘despotic’.<sup>22</sup>

Conversely, as regards Job’s ‘friends’, the retribution argument appears completely obvious, right from the theory of the universal guilt of human kind: ‘Can mortals be righteous before God?’ (Job 4:17) Hence, in a perfect Augustinian style, we believe we can identify a syllogism that should shut Job’s mouth:

(PM) ‘How happy is the one whom God reproves.’ (Job 5:17)

(Pm) ‘There is no end to your iniquities.’ (Job 22:5)

(C) ‘Therefore do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.’ (Job 5:17)

As we know, though, Job has no cause to blame himself. And if (Pm) is not true, then his suffering no longer has the value of a punishment, but becomes unjustified. Things, then, would not change if Job should admit, say, hidden iniquities in his conscience. Because the suffering he is going through is still a disproportionate punishment, especially when compared with the fact that some people are evil and happy. Then Job wonders: ‘If I sin, what do I do to you?’ (Job 7:20)

This strategy appears to be similar to Rowe’s. If we concede that Job’s suffering (JS) is an instance of a horrendous evil, which not even his ‘friends’ can deny, then Rowe’s inference may be valid if applied to Job’s situation:<sup>23</sup>

(P) No good we know justifies God in permitting JS

(Q) It is likely that no good at all justifies God in permitting JS<sup>24</sup>

The effectiveness of the evidential argument implies a rejection of the retribution theodicy. A controlling God who ‘puts no trust even in his holy ones’ (Job 15:15), is a God impossible to believe in. Not counting the inference from (P) to (Q) weakens the ‘parent analogy’ advocated

<sup>22</sup> Leibniz (1985: 166, n. 23; 284; 137, 227, 300).

<sup>23</sup> Rowe (1996: 264–265).

<sup>24</sup> Of course there is a difference between Rowe and Job in how the argument closes: in Rowe the horrendous evils of the world ‘significantly lower the likelihood of God’s existence’ (Rowe 1996: 282). Conversely, Job does not question God’s existence, rather his reliability.



by many theists. Job knows he is innocent; hence God cannot be his father, since no father would allow a son to suffer pain without reason. The refusal of God's paternity is total: rather than accepting it, Job would rather tell the sepulchre 'You are my father' (Job 17:4). Now, his 'friends' no longer know what to tell him: 'So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.' (Job 32:1)

(2) Eliu's entrance marks a change from an argumentative standpoint. The theodicy of Job's fourth 'friend' rests upon on a much more sophisticated argument than the retribution one. First of all, Eliu leverages God's unquestionable superiority: 'God is greater than any mortal.' (Job 33:13) Hence, 'he does great things that we cannot comprehend.' (Job 37:5) Complaining, then, is pointless.

Divine superiority is also used by Eliu in another instance, also shared by Leibniz, whereby protesting is an error in judgment: God is 'greater than any mortal' not only because it is epistemologically inaccessible, but rather because his goals exceed individual expectations of happiness. As Leibniz clearly states, 'God's object has in it something infinite, his cares embrace the universe.'<sup>25</sup> God has to maintain the general order of creation, at the cost of a few 'local' disorders. We should also see things from his perspective, then. By doing so we would realise – maintains Eliu – we are not that relevant to God's general picture if taken individually:

If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against him? And if your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to him? If you are righteous, what do you give to him; or what does he receive from your hand? Your wickedness affects others like you, and your righteousness, other human beings. (Job 35:6-8)

Naturally, this superiority should not be construed as sheer indifference. It is no wonder that, when it comes to malice, Eliu also resorts to the retribution issue: men are treated justly, since they are treated 'according to their deeds' (Job 34:11). As opposed to the other 'friends', Eliu is persuaded that not only is God almighty only because of the power of his law, whereby he restores the broken order of human iniquity; rather, 'he is mighty in strength of understanding' (Job 36:5). Since God is intelligent, he can use suffering according to an intent that is not retributive, but rather pedagogical: he wants to help mankind 'with warnings' (Job 33:16) to better their conduct, so to 'spare their souls from the Pit' (Job 33:18). For this reason, states Eliu, men suffer: 'He delivers the afflicted by their

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<sup>25</sup> Leibniz (1985: 206, n. 134).

affliction' (Job 36:15). So, if the salvation of the soul is the reward for accepting suffering as a divine warning, then salvation is the element that justifies the truth of (T).

Hence, we are in the presence of a complex argument, which may be traced back to two sub-arguments:

- (i) Soul-making Theodicy;
- (ii) Leibniz's principle of order maximisation.

(i) As Hick explains quite effectively, the stake is thinking of an alternative to the legal framework, thus developing a theodicy that 'does not depend upon the idea of the fall'.<sup>26</sup> In truth, Eliu does not base his argument against Job on the theory of universal guilt (though, as we said, he agrees with it). The issue is to prove that suffering is also a means to gain in flourishing, according to a similar approach as expressed by Aeschylus' chorus of the Agamemnon: 'pathei mathos.' The reason, continues Hick, is simple: 'the development of human personality – moral, spiritual, and intellectual – is a product of challenge and response.'<sup>27</sup> Hence, a world without suffering would not make sense, in that it would no longer be a 'person-making' world. Not to mention that this would eliminate a number of elements that do exist only in the relation among instances of suffering: mutual help and care.

In our understanding, this argument does not stand. Job's soul is far from bettered: 'my soul is poured out within me.' (Job 30:16) This is not merely a fleeting moment of psychological disappointment: Job chooses death over suffering 'for no reason'. Hence, as Sobel points out, there is a 'hard problem' that Soul-making Theodicy must face and which Job describes perfectly: 'souls are sometimes destroyed.'<sup>28</sup> Hick may try to overcome this objection only by assuming that the negative trade-off between happiness and the 'development of human personality' is upset in the afterlife: 'Without such an eschatological fulfilment, this theodicy would collapse.'<sup>29</sup>

This is a move Kant has already thought of in order to solve the antinomy of practical reason as exemplified by Job. According to Job, though, this makes no sense: even believing in the afterlife,<sup>30</sup> no reward would justify making an innocent suffer. It may come as a consolation,

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<sup>26</sup> Hick (2001: 41).

<sup>27</sup> Hick (2001: 46).

<sup>28</sup> Sobel (2004: 446).

<sup>29</sup> Hick (2001: 51).

but not as an explanation. A fortiori, the final return of 'twice as much as he had before' (Job 42:10) does not solve the problem posed by Job. And maybe this doesn't even work as a happy ending: 'At the end of the day,' – writes Balentine to this purpose – 'Job's seven sons and three daughters are still dead.'<sup>31</sup> But why must everything come down to a matter of numbers? How can God be forced to make us suffer in order to teach us virtue? If he truly wants to save our soul from the pit, why not do it without resorting to the horrible means of suffering?

Certainly a parent, a teacher or a ruler may sometimes accept and allow evil, in that it is an inevitable means to accomplish the greater good. This means-end rationality, under the condition of causal laws unrelated to one's will, is typical of non-almighty agents. God, as Mackie highlights, is not an agent of this kind: 'If omnipotence means anything at all, it means power over causal laws.'<sup>32</sup>

We have reason to think that, regarding this specific passage, Job had his doubts, too. He assumes that God cannot behave like any man would. Against Eliu, then, he may once again state the doubts he had already uttered before: 'Do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as humans see?' (Job 10:4)

(ii) Things do not improve when Eliu bends his argument in a sense that we may define as Leibnizian. Let us consider why. If God – explains Eliu – must also deal with the 'balancings of the clouds' (Job 37:16), then individual happiness becomes one of the variables in the divine scheme. God once again operates according to a means-end plan, only here the end is not to educate single creatures; rather, it is to maximise the general order of creation. Hence it may so happen that, in order to accomplish the greater good for creation, somebody has to suffer. The reason here, is not a deficit of almightiness: God could theoretically intervene every time in order to stop the suffering of all creatures, though he could do so, maintains van Inwagen, 'not without causing the world to be massively irregular.'<sup>33</sup> This is conflicting with the purpose of maximising the universal order.<sup>34</sup> Basically, this means that God acts according to an act-utilitarian standard: he is willing to guarantee individual happiness

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<sup>30</sup> This is a strictly exegetic problem, which cannot be dealt with here, in that it depends on how Job 19:25: 'I know that my Redeemer lives' is translated and construed.

<sup>31</sup> Balentine (2003: 366).

<sup>32</sup> Mackie (1982: 153).

<sup>33</sup> Van Inwagen (1996: 173).

<sup>34</sup> Adams (1987: 52).

only as long as he has a profit in it, or if – then – he keeps a positive cost-benefit balance. By assuming this much, we may express the problem in terms of functions of utility:

( $U_G$ ) function of God's utility

( $x_G$ ) basket of God's goods

$U_G = f(x_G)$  with  $dU_G / dx_G > 0$

Now, in order to maximise the harmony of creation, God may decide whether he also needs to guarantee Job's happiness; the latter, in turn, has its own function of usefulness:

( $U_J$ ) function of Job's utility

( $x_J$ ) basket of Job's goods

Hence, as long as God believes that order does not conflict with ( $x_J$ ), then

$U_G = f(x_G, x_J)$  with  $dU_G / dx_J > 0$ ,  $dU_G / dx_G > 0$

The conclusion is that Job, following Eliu's reasoning, suffers merely because his wellbeing ( $x_J$ ) has become too costly for God. God's benevolence applies to all creatures besides Job, as well as to all things inanimate. The final goal is to guarantee higher wellbeing for all, regardless of how wellbeing is distributed. If we assume, then, that God is a utilitarian agent, explains Holley, the typical situation that may happen is for someone to be treated 'very badly', in that this is instrumental to the general wellbeing of the universe.<sup>35</sup>

The problem posed by Eliu's God, then, is the following: how can one move from the standard theistic belief, according to which God cherishes everyone's wellbeing, to the idea of a God caring solely for 'aggregate welfare'? Certainly, said Leibniz, a man is worth a lot more than a lion in the eyes of God; 'nevertheless it can hardly be said with certainty that God prefers a single man in all respects to the whole of lion-kind.'<sup>36</sup>

One doubt may be raised here, which Job would be in agreement with: is general benevolence still true benevolence, even though it does not regard each and every creature taken individually?<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Holley (1993: 39).

<sup>36</sup> Leibniz (1985: 188, n. 118). Speaking of lions, we will also see that God, in his reply to Job, uses the same anti-anthropocentric argument: 'Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert?' (Job 38:39-40)

For Job, and anyone else, feeling treated as means to the general good of creation is in conflict with the basic moral inferences on what fair behaviour should be like. Even more so when it comes to God's behaviour: how can one believe in a God that 'trades off our happiness to secure the most variety and order'?<sup>38</sup>

Things being as they are, Job is right to believe that God is not interested in the personal fate of single creatures. The evidential argument is unscathed. Now, let us analyse God's answer.

### III. GOD'S THEODICY (OR DEFENCE?)

It would be too much, as Morrision does, to infer that, in his reply to Job, 'God doesn't even seem to care much for the species.'<sup>39</sup> To the point that we should accept that the world is not only lacking an anthropocentric teleological structure, but it is also dysteleological. The symbol of this general 'negation of purpose' would be, according to Morrision, the ostrich, which 'leaves its eggs to the earth' (Job 39:14). After all, God did not bestow intelligence on it, to the point that the animal does not even realise its negligence. Still, God did not leave the ostrich without skills. As stupid as it may be, no one can run as fast as it does.<sup>40</sup>

God, then, has general order in mind, where everything, even the ostrich, has a part to play. Obviously, mankind is included though it is not at the centre of the stage. On the contrary, God puts Job at the same level as non-human creatures: 'Look at Behemoth, which I made just as I made you.' (Job 40:15) Not even Leibniz supports such an egalitarian God: if it is true that the happiness of mankind is not 'his sole aim', Leibniz thinks that it is at least 'the principal part of God's design'.<sup>41</sup>

Job's God does not seem to have this particular preference for human happiness, nor does he mention Job's suffering. The structure of this reasoning, though, is radically different from the theodicy of his 'friends': God does not accuse Job and does not believe – as Eliu inferred – suffering to be pedagogical. In short, God does not create any connection between his goal of maintaining the general order of creation and the existence of evil. Hence, there is no such thing as an argument in favour of the truth

<sup>37</sup> See Zagzebski (2007: 144).

<sup>38</sup> Blumenfeld (1999: 400).

<sup>39</sup> Morrision (1996: 348).

<sup>40</sup> 'When it spreads its plumes aloft, it laughs at the horse and its rider.' (Job 39:18)

<sup>41</sup> Leibniz (1985: 188, n. 118).

of (T). In this light, this a defence, not theodicy, so much that we believe divine egalitarianism to be enough to reject the evidential argument in two moves:

- (i) weakens (HI)
- (ii) stops the (P) to (Q) inference

(i) If the creator of the universe ‘provides for the raven its prey’ (Job 38:41), he may be concerned with the suffering and happiness of his creatures. Consequently, his rule may not be, as Job believed, completely arbitrary. On the contrary, this is what God struggles the most to clarify to Job: ‘Will you even put me in the wrong?’ (Job 40:8) God openly defends his own justice, since he does not want to be misunderstood on this matter. His defence, though, as opposed to the theodicy of Job’s ‘friends’, does not serve the purpose of proving Job’s fault to silence him. What God wants is to stop Job from being put in the position to defend himself against the Almighty (‘to his face’ (Job 13:15)). Hence God must give Job (and Leibniz) that divine justice, as unfathomable as it may be, such that it may not be incommensurable with human justice.<sup>42</sup>

This consistency hypothesis is validated in two ways. First, God keeps the cosmic forces of chaos (symbolised by Behemoth and Leviathan) in check and fights against human injustice (Job 38:15). Second of all, God punished the ‘friends’ and acknowledges Job’s justice:

My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. (Job 42:7)

If being just matters to God, too, then (HI) loses validity. Not even the Almighty, then, may punish an innocent, since this would cause gratuitous suffering, or pointless evil, one being logically inconsistent with justice (human and divine alike). Since God punishes the ‘friends’, Job cannot accept God’s justice without giving up his innocence.

Now, the problem is that God does not say what reasons would explain innocent suffering. He is ‘content’ with ruling out the anti-theist theory, expressed in the form of the (P) to (Q) inference, which Job also used during his protest. Our belief is that the divine strategy is comparable to the Wykstra vs. Rowe strategy. Which leads us to the second divine move against the evidential argument.

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<sup>42</sup> As Grover quite aptly explained, for theism the price of incommensurability is too high. First, because it would no longer be possible to talk about God as a perfectly good being. (Grover 1998: 663)

(ii) If the world is not the product of divine will, then we would admit the existence of a reason governing creation, both at the 'macro' ('the foundation of the earth'(Job 38:4)), as much as at the 'micro' (even clouds are wisely numbered (Job 38:37)) levels. This reason, though, is not in our grasp. To conclude that there is no reason just because we cannot see it, would mean following a 'noseum inference', that Wykstra knowingly attributes to Rowe, based on the 'Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access' (CORNEA).<sup>43</sup>

This is also Plantinga's position with reference to the Book of Job: the fear of God not having any reasons that could explain innocent suffering rests on the fact that we actually don't see any such reason. Though, asks Plantinga, 'can we just see that he doesn't have a reason?' Since it is likely that 'God might have reasons we cannot so much as understand', we must expect instances of 'inscrutable evil'.<sup>44</sup>

Now, 'inscrutable' does not mean, as already reported, incommensurable. This being the case, the definition would merely be a wording trick to avoid the expression 'pointless': evil would not be comprehensible because God does not act for a reason or follows 'reasons' that have nothing in common with our rational criteria. This would make trust impossible. Conversely, in Segal, 'inscrutable' may be defined as follows:

x is an inscrutable evil =df x is an evil, and we have thought really hard and we know of no good that would justify an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good being in permitting x.

If evil is 'inscrutable', then its justification is not for us to understand:

x has beyond-our-ken justification =df there is some good g that would justify an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good being G in permitting x, and either the existence of g, g's being a good, or the connection between x and g, is beyond our ken.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, 'inscrutable' is a measure of the disparity between the human and divine vision, which God ironically explains to Job: 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?'(Job 38:4)

We believe, though, that Job knows something in the end: he knows that disparity cannot mean, even for God, a waiver to the basic principles of justice as we know it, such as fighting evil and, in spite of everything,

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<sup>43</sup> Wykstra (1996: 126).

<sup>44</sup> Plantinga (1996: 73, 76).

<sup>45</sup> Segal (2011: 86).

behaving justly. Save for these principles, which God, if he truly is God, follows, Job may postulate the existence of a reason capable of explaining innocent suffering. To this purpose, Leibniz writes: 'A certain what it is ( $\tau\iota\ \epsilon\sigma\tau\iota$ ) is enough for us, but the how ( $\pi\omega\varsigma$ ) is beyond us, and is not necessary for us.'<sup>46</sup> We may say, following in Leibniz's path, that Job knows his suffering is not a punishment, nor is it random misfortune; he knows not, though, how else to explain it. The issue remains open, then. In the meantime, the stakes become: if ' $\pi\omega\varsigma$ ' goes beyond our comprehension, but is not irrational, then ' $\tau\iota\ \epsilon\sigma\tau\iota$ ' is enough to believe. This is why, eventually, we think Job's position is closer to sceptical theism. Now we may attempt at some conclusive remarks.

#### CONCLUSION: IS JOB A SCEPTICAL THEIST?

Obviously, we cannot open the controversial and much-debated issue of sceptical theism here. We can only assess whether it makes sense to assume it from Job's standpoint, without forgetting, of course, some objections moved against the sceptical theist strategy.

The sceptical theist, according to Bergmann and Rea, would be at the same time a theist as well as an advocate of the three following theses:

(ST1) We have no good reason for thinking that the possible goods we know of are representative of the possible goods there are.

(ST2) We have no good reason for thinking that the possible evils we know of are representative of the possible evils there are.

(ST3) We have no good reason for thinking that the entailment relations we know of between possible goods and the permission of possible evils are representative of the entailment relations there are between possible goods and the permission of possible evils.<sup>47</sup>

Now, to accept ST1-ST3, means that the evidential argument no longer holds. Sure enough, some instances of evil will continue to appear unjustified, and we may also say that they will have 'a much stronger seeming state'<sup>48</sup> as compared with ST1-ST3. The point, though, is that ST1-ST3 will exert such an epistemic effect that we can no longer conclude from the appearance of unjustified evil to the belief that they really exist.

<sup>46</sup> Leibniz (1985: 104, n. 56).

<sup>47</sup> Bergmann and Rea (2005: 244).

<sup>48</sup> Matheson (2011: 330).



More specifically, Job will continue to be under the impression that his suffering is a pointless evil: the awareness of his epistemic distance from God is enough to stop believing that such pain is truly pointless.

Now, this seems the right moment to introduce the first objection:

If noseum inferences are bad, then the sceptical theist is right about the failure of the problem of evil, but she can't know that there are no tricky leprechauns who are constantly deceiving us.<sup>49</sup>

All in all, scepticism would be a double-edged sword, which would eventually turn against the same theistic thesis: how can one believe in a God who operates completely out of our understanding? Who can guarantee, thus, that in truth God is not a malicious creature? This is precisely Job's doubt: if his 'friends' are right, then we are doomed to live under the constant threat of a 'tricky God'.

There is also a second objection: sceptical theism leads to moral scepticism. If, given our cognitive limitation, we should concede that every instance of evil could be logically connected to a good (unknown to us) that would be otherwise impossible, then it is not worth it, if not morally detrimental, to fight it. This would explain why none of Job's 'friends' does anything to soothe his pain, since in their view, that condition is a just (hence, beneficial) punishment. But is such a moral based on the impossibility of stating that suffering is truly an evil, 'all-things-considered' (ATC), sustainable?<sup>50</sup>

Here's an attempt to reply to the two objections above. First, the 'tricky leprechaun' theory makes sense only by separating ST1-ST3 from the theistic theory. Then, it is clear that the sceptical way loses consistency even with common knowledge. Still, as Bergmann and Rea maintain, 'obviously enough, the sceptical theist strategy will not be deployed in a vacuum. Sceptical theists, after all, are theists.'<sup>51</sup> Therefore, there exist some background beliefs that save sceptical theism from radical scepticism.<sup>52</sup> Such assumptions, though, should not be mistaken for the

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<sup>49</sup> McBrayer (2012: 11-12).

<sup>50</sup> Hasker (2010).

<sup>51</sup> Bergmann e Rea (2007: 244).

<sup>52</sup> To a similar extent, argues Beaudoin (2002: 299): 'Defensive sceptics are not committed to radical scepticism because all they need is to argue that although God has the power to make our beliefs radically in error, we have independent philosophical reasons to believe he does not do so. And defensive sceptics can enlist in this service whatever anti-sceptical considerations are available to anyone else, so long as they meet the following conditions: they neither entail nor make it likely that theism is false, and

argument: the sceptical theist strategy does not leverage on the theistic assumption to contrast the evidential argument (which, evidently, would turn into a circular argument); as we said, the argument is restricted to ST1-ST3 (a theory that atheists may also accept) and is exclusively instrumental to prevent the P to Q inference (and certainly not to refute atheism). The theistic assumptions are justly deployed to stop ST1-ST3 from leading to radical scepticism.

In Job's case, we tend to share Bergmann and Rea's position. Indeed, Job eventually comes to the conclusion that God must be almighty and just, according to a measure of justice that is compatible with the one he himself advocates. Such an agreement between the justice of human moral conduct and justice of divine doing is a good reason to believe that God has its reasons to allow this suffering, in spite of the unbearable impression of senselessness: 'I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.' (Job 42:2) In short, if God is just, then his almightiness is reliable and he may not be the irrational judge as it would appear from the 'tricky leprechaun'. Still, since Job comes to the conclusion that God is reliable starting from his personal experience, as such this is not valid as an argument. Nevertheless, this reasoning may be generalised to the extent in which we assume that every theist has similar background beliefs to Job's, which may be gained through philosophical reasons being independent from one's own faith.

As regards the second objection (from sceptical theism to moral scepticism), here, too, the best response appears to be to reduce the extent of the sceptical component. Clearly, ST1-ST3 is not applicable as such to Job. Job's ignorance has to do only with God's purposes relating to innocent suffering: 'I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.' (Job 42:3) Job knows well that, if he wants to preserve his own moral integrity, he must fight what is clearly identifiable as evil ATC by human reason. For the same reason, it would be unacceptable to consider his own suffering as good ATC. His scepticism, hence, is compatible with the moral obligation to provide assistance to the suffering.<sup>53</sup>

In order to retain consistency with Job's position, we believe the sceptical theist strategy should be formulated once again, as suggested by Trakakis and Nagasawa. Given an instance of evil E, then

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they are not based on our failure to imagine any good reason God could have for so misleading us.'

(1) Our knowledge of God's purposes is very limited.

From this, it can be inferred that

(2) For all we know, there are goods beyond our ken G which justify God in permitting E.

But, clearly, it does not follow from (1) that

(3) For all we know, there are goods beyond our ken G which justify us in permitting E.<sup>54</sup>

Now, as Anderson points out, there is no inconsistency between stating that an event is 'bad ATC' (and as such to be fought against) and purporting that, as far as we know, God's non-intervention is not 'gratuitous'.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, we believe that, within the above boundaries, sceptical theism gives a fairly accurate account of the reason why Job can desert the evidential argument without renouncing his conscience: for being righteous, in spite of evil, is the position Job holds before the issue of innocent suffering. This takes us back to a famous note by Kant: Job's argumentative strength does not lie in his faith (which he is willing to lose); rather, his argumentative strength is moral. Thus, the theistic belief he effortfully reaches in the end, is based on his 'good life conduct', which God also had to acknowledge as a principle of universally binding justice. This, according to Kant, is the 'authentic theodicy'<sup>56</sup> that Job seems to suggest, beyond his personal experience.

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<sup>53</sup> The duty of charity that, as Schnall reminds us (2007), in Judaism is strengthened by God's own commandment (see, for instance, Deuteronomy 24:19).

<sup>54</sup> Trakakis and Nagasawa (2004)

<sup>55</sup> Anderson (2012: 37).

<sup>56</sup> Kant (2001: 31).

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