

[Reports & Activities]

A Philosophical-Economic Quest for Happiness in the Old Testament: The Case of Job

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1. Introduction

The so-called Old Testament is an important religious document shared by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all of which are considered as the “world religion” stipulating and shaping day-to-day human life on a global scale. In a sense, the book merits our attention in our philosophical quest for the “happiness” concept, especially since the global-scale socioeconomic conflicts (e.g., north-south income gap and resulting demonstrations against the “unfettered” —albeit arguably—globalization) seem to be implicitly driven and dictated by the differences in how you view happiness in life. It is expected that an academic, or more specifically, a philosophical-economic, investigation into the happiness concept in the Old Testament be a starting point of creating a more peaceful global economy.

This short report makes an analysis of the “moving concept” of happiness in the Book of Job: As addressed in the Book of Job, there seem to be “relative” (this-worldly) as well as “absolute” (beyond-this-world) happiness perceptions described in the Book of Job. Correspondingly, what might be called relative perseverance and absolute perseverance seem to be the implicit yet dominant theme of Job. The main thesis of this short report is to highlight the movement of Job’s perception of “perseverance” from relative to absolute ones (to be discussed below). The next section

depicts genre and outline of Job. Drawing on Kummerow (2005), Section 3 highlights Job chapter 16 and attempts to argue that the concept of perseverance in the Book of Job is a moving one, from an earthly consideration to a beyond-the-earthly one. Section 4 concludes this report with some implication of Job's happiness to an economic peace building.

2. Genre and outline of Job

This section makes a brief overview of the genre and outline of the Book of Job, along with the course contents. While it is difficult to determine the genre of Job, some possibilities are that it may be (1) disputation, (2) dramatization of a lament, or (3) the entity in and of itself. Be that as it may, the main theme of Job is rather clearly on "suffering". Namely, how Job is going to respond to suffering is the main theme. James 5:11 (in the New Testament) quotes Job as follows: "As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy." Indeed, perseverance in the midst of trial exemplified by Job had spawned the expectation of salvation by Messiah in the New Testament.

Figure 1 shows the outline of the Book of Job. In order to highlight the prologue-epilogue matching (Dumbrell, 2002; Pinker, 2006) and a truly cosmic (panoramic) scale of the contents, the outline is shown in a panoramic shape. There are three wisdom debates (dialogues), and in these three cycles of speeches, the mechanical deed-consequence is discussed at least with passion. The problem, however, is the fact that none of these has touched upon the beyond-this-world aspect of deed-consequence linkage. This is indeed the source of suffering and hence need for perseverance for Job.

Figure 1 Outline of the Book of Job

								Yahweh's Speeches and Job's Response (38-42a)		Elihu's Speeches (32-37)																																																																																																												
The First Cycle of Speeches (4-14)								God's first speech (38-40a)		Job's response (40b)																																																																																																												
Eliphaz (4-5)								God's second speech (40c-41)		Job's response (42a)																																																																																																												
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Note: In order to highlight the prologue-epilogue matching and a truly cosmic (panoramic) scale of the contents, the outline is shown in a panoramic shape.

Source: Made by the author based on the course material.

The theme of perseverance as a consequence of any bad deeds is repeatedly emphasized by the friends' (Eliphaz's, Bildad's and Zophar's) round of speeches. It is, however, not developed, and the third cycle of speeches is not complete (lacking in the speeches by Zophar and by Job, as in the Figure), an indication that the dialogue is collapsing. Although the theme of perseverance is a major theological question, the futility of pursuing the answer to this question from an earthly perspective is implied in this imperfect literary format.

Is the Book of Job in line with the general movement toward praise, just as most lament psalms? The answer would be yes, but in a different sense than in the case of psalms. As in the course material, there are two boundary points within which the date of the book falls, i.e., an old date

thesis and a later date one. Yet the book itself reflects the patriarchal period, in which material wealth, long life as well as many children were seen to be the blessing from God. In the Prologue part of the book, Job is described as a person of integrity (in terms of his prayer and sacrifice for his children), blamelessness (not equal to sinlessness), and his response (1:20-22) is a model attitude as a believer. In the prologue, God initiates the discussion (showing his sovereignty) and Satan (accuser, adversary) responds to God (1:9-11) and makes an attack on God's character and challenges the sincerity of Job's faith.

The first response of Job's friends (2:11-13) was made with sympathy and they sat for seven days and mourned with Job (2:12) After this, job started to speak and it came with the following three drastic changes: (1) The poetic speeches began; (2) Yahweh, Satan, and the heavenly scene disappeared and Job and his friends took the center stage; (3) the character of Job *seems* to have changed from submissive to a questioning and protesting person. An important aspect of his cursing, however, was that Job cursed the day of his birth only (3:1), and never his creator: the key elements of the curse in 3:1-10 emphasizes darkness (the reversal of the creation account in Genesis), and it was likewise a parody of a curse (since you cannot change your day of birth even if you curse it; if he had cursed God, the story of Job would have ended). His lament in 3:11 "Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?" and onwards (up to verse 26) is different from the lament psalms in that there is apparently no movement to call for deliverance and toward praise. He also does not call for deliverance (unlike most lament psalms except for Psalm 88). And he uses the "why" questions as a continuation of the curse in 3:3-10. Death only would end his misery at this moment it looks.

In 3:23, the word "hedge" (something to protect) is used. This word

signifies protection from God, and without it, Job cannot live. But in this verse, it means “trapped”. Job is waiting on death (3:21); death is his own “savior” it looks. Job has moved to the God-centered perspective to a human-centered perspective in this passage. People’s experience can suffer their perception, including Job’s. You have to choose between God’s all-powerfulness and his goodness...this might have been Job’s perception. Given that Job is not in this miserable situation because of his own sin (the Prologue in chapters 1-2 makes this point clear), he could have stayed on (i.e., persevered). Once Job finds himself in this situation, he does not seem to be always respond the way he should be.

Chapters 4-14 comprises the first cycle of speeches. Eliphaz’ first speech (chapters 4-5) has the core thesis that Job must have done something wrong; “if you did not sow, then do not worry; but maybe you are reaping what you have sown, Job” to paraphrase Eliphaz’ point. He made no direct accusation, yet his thought was based on the general observation of “as you sow, so you shall reap”.

Job’s first response follows (chapters 6-7). In a nutshell, “my word comes out of this horrible situation. You do not understand the depth of my suffering”. And Job is struggling with his perception of God. This shows how experience can change who God is. In 6:4 Job perceives God as a hunter, as compared with 5:17 where God is perceived as the almighty who disciplines believers. And 7:17 (what is man that you make so much of him) echoes with Psalm8 (what is man that you are mindful of him), yet the nuance is different, with the former more like “leave me alone”.

Bildad’s first speech (chapter 8) justifies God’s justice, as exemplified by 8:3 “Does God pervert justice?” and 8:20 “God does not reject a blameless man”. Job is suffering, therefore he must have done something; there cannot be “righteous sufferer”, according to Bildad’s thesis (and this point

echoes with Matthew 27:43 “Let God rescue him”). Job’s response in 9-10 is based on the perception that “God is so hard to figure out”, more complex than his friends have been illustrating him to be. “Someone to arbitrate” in 9:33 (“if only there were someone to arbitrate between us”) can be translated in Greek Septuagint as “μεσίτης (mesites)”, i.e., “one mediator” (which is used to refer to “the man Christ Jesus” in I Timothy 2:5). Job needed somebody to step in as a mediator to help and deliver him, in his hopeless situation (as expressed in chapter 10).

Zophar’s first speech (chapter 11) as an interpreter of God’s way is the most antagonistic one, especially as revealed in “But a witless man can no more become wise than a wild donkey’s colt can be born a man “(verse 12). Obviously, Zophar’s speech provides little comfort to Job. Both Zophar and Job agree on the mysterious ways of God through dialogue, yet Job is starting to experience God’s true inscrutability through his own experience. In Job’s third response (12-14), he becomes so sarcastic. Eliphaz is more confronting in chapter 15. The solution is virtually “repent your sins” only.

3. A focus on Chapter 16: Hopeful or Hopeless?

Job, in 16:19, states:

מִמְלַחֵם, יִדְהָשׁוּ יָדַע מִיִּצְשֵׁב-הַיָּהּ, הֵתַע-פִּג¹

Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high.

The discussion point in this context is the word “Even” at the beginning of this verse. The adjective פִּג (gam) means “even, also” (Owens, 2001), and grammatically speaking, has the function of modifying not just a word but a clause on the whole (Kummerow, 2005). Harris, Archer, and Waltke (1980: 167) states that “*gam* denotes addition”, “[i]t is often repeated

¹ Based on Kohlenberger III, John R. (1987).

in a sentence” and “[s]ometimes gam...serves as accumulation”. These suggestions are particularly instructive, since this suggests that “in chapter 16 Job boldly realizes that his characterization of God as his violent enemy (16:7-18) needs to be radically supplemented by a second proposition” (Kummerow, 2005: 5). Job asserts that even as he has declared God as enemy and anguish (16:7-18), he should just as quickly propose God as also the God of deep friendship. Although Job is perplexed, he rephrases his characterization of God, thus a movement of his perception is observed here.

The speech by Bildad (chapter 18 and the short chapter 25) emphasizes: “How long till you put an end to words (18:2-3)” ? “God’s justice and Job’s suffering” is in contrast here. Job is affirming that he has not sinned. In his friend’s view, however, he must have done something wrong. This is exactly the point of the wisdom debate. In chapter 19, Job states: “In my flesh I will see God (verse 26)”. Reading from a New Testament perspective, there is hope for Job, because of the Mediator Christ Jesus. Yet in the second and third cycle, Job’s expressions are shaken, going back and forth between despair and hope. Yet the underlying perception of Job seems to be moving toward the belief that God is more complex and mysterious than his friends allow Him to be; this very “complexity” opens the hope for deliverance. Again in 16:19, “even now my witness is in heaven”, i.e., Job has a heavenly witness, someone who knows about the truth, that is, God. In 19:25 “I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth”. Job’s kinsman redeemer surely lives, and he must have held on to this belief. Job’s “perseverance (hypomonēn)” in James 5:11 means “to stay on”, “to continue” in Greek.² Indeed, Job had continued to trust in God, even in

² This word has 11 occurrences in the New Testament.

the midst of trials and shaking expressions.

The third cycle of speeches is incomplete, probably implying that the debate has collapsed (based on the course content). Then chapter 28 is a tranquil poem, highlighting the marvels of human ingenuity (28:1-11) and wisdom (28:12-19) which cannot be found or bought on the human level. Indeed, the wisdom comes only from God, and “the fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding” (28:28). This is the gist of wisdom literature as expressed by Job.

In His speech, God never tells Job the reason for his suffering. Indeed, “God is not obligated to inform us why certain things are happening in our lives, but he is more concerned with how we react to such things” (course material). Job’s suffering is an existential issue, not just philosophical consideration. In the midst of his despair, he trusted that God remained, somehow, his only friend.

What is the message of the perseverance in Job for today? In order to consider this issue, I wish to introduce a novel written in 1966 by a Japanese novelist Shusaku Endo (1923-1996). The novel is entitled “Silence”. Its motif is clearly the book of Job, and the plot goes as follows. Young Portuguese Jesuit, Sebastião Rodrigues (based on the real historical figure Giuseppe Chiara) is sent to the 16th century Japan (just before Christianity was banned by the Tokugawa warrior government) to succor the local Church and investigate reports that his mentor, Father. Cristóvão Ferreira, has committed apostasy. (Ferreira is a real historical figure, who apostatized after torture and later married a Japanese woman and wrote a treatise “against Christianity”.) Father Rodrigues and his companions arrive in Japan in 1638. There they find the local Christian population driven underground. Security officials force suspected Christians to trample on “fumie” (picture-stepping), which are crudely carved images of Christ

Jesus as “savior” for believers. Those who refuse to step on the carved images of Christ are imprisoned and killed by being hung upside down over a pit with slow bleeding from noses, ears etc. Those Christians who do step on the image to stay hidden are deeply shamed by their act of apostasy. The novel relates the trials of the Christians and increasing hardship suffered by Rodrigues, as more is learnt about the circumstances of Ferreira’s apostasy. Finally, Rodrigues is betrayed by the New Testaments’ Judas-like figure (Kichijiro). In the climax, Father Rodrigues looks upon a *fumie* and steps on it...

In Shusaku Endo’s “Silence”, the priest who came to Japan as a missionary in the midst of the Christianity where anti-Christian edicts of the Edo period prevailed. To the believers as well as those missionaries, physical and mental tortures were applied. Father Rodrigues screams, “Lord, you should break silence right now... there cannot be silent any longer... You, being just, good and loving, have to say something in order to prove that you are firmly to be relied upon”. Then the priest stepped on the litmus test of *fumie* (carved Christ), and “fell over” (apostatized). However, Father Rodrigues cries out, “Lord, you know that I have not apostatized”. This historical figure later told that he heard the voice “step on me and live”, as an invitation of grace. This “grace” might be what Job had to learn in the midst of trials.

In chapters 38-42, the Lord humbles Job by asking him a series of question about nature (Willmington, 1999). Job fully admits his insignificance. The Lord then rebukes the three friends and restores Job’s fortunes.

“Restoration” here, however, would not mean a perfect one here on earth: after all, his sons and daughters would not return to him. A related issue from Japan (where I live as a local citizen) is the Great East Japan

Earthquake of March 11, 2011. This has a lot to do with Job's perseverance and restoration. I was actually outside Japan when that earthquake happened, as I am now based in Singapore, spending my sabbatical year away from the university I work for (which is near Tokyo). So I am a half outsider and, as Japanese, half insider with respect to this incident. On that day (March 11), I had received a few unusual emails from my usual friends and family in Japan, all stating to the effect that "We are safe here in Tokyo area, after that fairly big earthquake in the northeastern part". Eventually the "fairly big earthquake" in Tokyo area turned out to have been an unprecedentedly big one of magnitude 9.0, since the one with almost the same epicenter and magnitude that hit Japan some 1000 years ago (an historical estimate). To date, the number of casualties (including those missing) due to this East Japan Great Earthquake is around 30,000, and what we face is an ongoing process of identifying unnoticed damages both for Japan and the surrounding region (or for the entire globe) under the physical as well as emotional stress.

We sense the fact that Japan's economy will have to be significantly "reshaped" while avoiding nuclear dependence, and that Japan's map will also have to be reshaped due to the coastal sedimentation caused by the Pacific plate-tectonic movement and ensuing tsunami (and the book of Job has the motif of "God and the Sea" in chapter 38³). These "environmental" aspects aside, we as Christians also sense the fact that the mindset of most Japanese people (the vast majority being non-Christians) is now being shaken, seeking unshaken spiritual ground, although they might not easily acknowledge such a need. Even here in Singapore, the local Japanese Christian Fellowship which I attend had welcomed several non-Christian

³ See, e.g., Cornell (2012).

Japanese expatriate workers and their family coming to the morning service (albeit just once), each of them saying “I just felt like praying to something, after that horrifying quake in Japan”.

In this story, what can be the true “restoration”? In other words, what, again, is the message of the perseverance in Job for today? Job’s story is a “non-proverbial” wisdom (Sandy and Giese, 1995): the book is not filled with short, pithy sayings directly explicating the message of this story for the readers. Yet is it an experience-based wisdom book, which makes readers *continue* to think. The Great Earthquake took place “without reason”, which is exactly focus of the book of Job. In the case of Job’s “perseverance”, he continued to “stay on”, although on the surface his remarks were shaken significantly. And the perseverance here is an *existential* issue: it is not just a theoretical concern. As an existential being and to echo the contents of the book of Job, for instance, I wish to pray to our Lord that He give those suffering people in Japan physical ease first, and then the occasion to reshape their mindset ready for acquiring true peace in Christ. This is my existential hope and prayer. To stay under recognition of the inscrutability of the Lord is itself perseverance. Of the two horizons in the book of Job, i.e, the earthly perspective and the beyond-external one, the latter horizon should be kept in mind when we read that Job’s life was blessed and that he died full of years. He had hope for the *future* beyond death. In essence, his “happiness” idea moved from an earthly to the heavenly one. To “absolutize” happiness defined through material wealth would actually not be absolute. Perceiving relative abundance as such would lead to hope. In the same vein, the recognition that “God is incomprehensible” leads to absolute hope. Job’s relative perseverance was made absolute by his recognition of his own relative (insignificant) being and God’s absolute being. Failing to take this point into account can lead readers to deny such a hope held by Job in the

very midst of sufferings. Yet, as Kummerow (2005) points out, the lines of evidence thus join to paint a consistent picture of Job as one who trusted God *even though* his world fell apart. In this sense, the “happiness” held by Job is a moving concept, away from being relativity oriented and toward beyond-external considerations.

4. Conclusion: Happiness as a moving concept in Job

As Dillard and Longman (1994) and most major commentaries point out, suffering is at the center of the Book of Job. What is the message of the passage to the original reading audience? Willmington (1998:63) lists some reasons for Job’s sufferings: (1) that Satan might be silenced (1:9-11; 2:4,5); (2) that Job might see God (42:5); (3) that Job might see himself (40:4; 42:6); (4) That Job’s friends might learn not to judge (42:7); (5) that Job might learn to pray for, rather than to lash out against his critics (42:10); (6) to demonstrate that all God’s plans for his own eventually have happy endings (42:10).

There are also various readings of the book of Job, e.g., “feminist readings of Job”, and “liberation theology reading” (Lucas, 2003). These readings are somewhat “for reasons”: for feminism, or for liberation. Perhaps we as existential beings face sufferings without reasons (Sasaki, 2011). Then the seemingly indecisive, or non-proverbial nature of the book of Job would stay on being a true hope for believers of a creator God in Judaism, Christianity or Islam. An inter-faith dialogue and economic peace-building could begin with a shared understanding on how you view the idea of happiness here on earth as well as elsewhere.

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