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God-talk in the Book of Job

Keulen, Emke Jelmer

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

2007

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Keulen, E. J. (2007). *God-talk in the Book of Job: A biblical theological and systematic theological study into the Book of Job and its relevance for the Issue of Theodicy*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. s.n.

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Chapter 5

Creation, Insight, and Power: God's Answer from the Whirlwind and Job's Reply

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 General Introduction

Job's ultimate wish that God would somehow react finally comes true. At the end of the book of Job God gets up to speak.¹ He answers Job by means of an impressive speech from the whirlwind. This divine speech has an overwhelming character. It deluges Job with questions, impressions, challenges, and representations. God raises a corner of the veil of his counsel by expounding various elements of the Creation's structure and design. He focuses attention on his role as Creator and preserver. This exposition confronts Job with his lack of power and understanding. God makes it clear that God's actions and insights go beyond Job's capacities and knowledge. He disqualifies Job's words as darkening God's counsel. Thus, God's answer corrects Job's perception of God's actions. This does not answer each issue Job has mentioned, rather it refutes Job's charges more indirectly by the depiction of a counter picture. God opposes Job's charges through demonstrating that he is at the threshold of the ingenious order of the Creation, guarantees the cycles of seasons and procreation, punishes the wicked, and even provides desolate places with life. This different perspective on God's actions in the cosmos and the rejection of Job's charges result in some change in Job's attitude. After God's answer, Job admits in his reply² that he has spoken about God without having sufficient knowledge.

This fifth chapter deals with God's answer and Job's reply. First, it examines which view God presents on his actions in the Creation and on his position in relation to Job. There is special attention to how God assesses and reacts to the issues which Job has raised. For, this sheds light on the perspective in which the author wants to put Job's accusations and complaints. The fact that the author has

¹ 38,1-40,2 and 40,8-41,26. In several translations of Job 38-41, the numbers of the verses differ from the numbering of the Masoretic text in the BHS. In this study, I use the numbering of the BHS.

² 40,3-5 and 42,1-6.

placed these words in God's mouth makes it likely that he wants to give them more weight in comparison to the preceding speeches. Therefore, I assume that God's answer is intended to be a next step in the development of the thinking about the issue of how God's involvement in the existence of (innocent) suffering can be understood.³ Secondly, this chapter considers Job's reply to God's answer from the whirlwind. It explores how God's exposition, questions, and challenges have changed Job's attitude compared to the dialogue. In order to deal with these various topics, I first elaborate upon the substance of God's answer and reconstruct God's view of Job's words (5.2). Then, I consider Job's reply (5.3). and last of all I deal with the relation of God's answer and Job's reply with Job's speeches in the dialogue. This examination first concentrates on the relation with Job 9 because this chapter takes up a central position in the dialogue. Subsequently, Job's other speeches are also involved (5.4).

5.1.2 Starting Point: the Genesis of the Divine Speeches

The genesis of the divine speeches has been the subject of debate. While some scholars think that the book of Job did not initially contain any answer from God at all, others regard God's exposition as partially or completely original.⁴ Because of this diversity of opinion, it is necessary to give an account of the assumptions which are made in this study.⁵ In my opinion, several reasons favour the view that the book of Job originally contained a reaction from God's side. First, the evocative nature of Job's challenges, charges, and questions require a response. Even the mention of a reaction by God without an elaboration of its content⁶ would not be sufficient because Job's requests and appeals demand a substantial response.⁷ Second, the outcome of the book of Job would be very unsatisfactory, if

³ Pace Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 21-31. She thinks that the author of the book of Job does not take sides concerning the views of the different characters in the book and considers them as equal voices. However, such a view is unlikely, since first God's answer fundamentally criticizes the preceding speeches of Job. This indicates that the divine speech corrects the former view and reveals the problematic aspects of it. Furthermore, the fact that the author brings JHWH up in order to speak implies that the author wanted to give these words more weight. See also Fox's comment that the author of the book of Job remains in control, though Fox is of the opinion that this is done by means of the prologue (Fox, "Job the Pious", 358).

⁴ For an overview of different models and opinions see J. van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze. Eine literar- und redaktionsgeschichtliche Studie zu den Gottesreden des Hiobbuches* (BZAW 170), Berlin- New York 1987.

⁵ Understanding of the genesis of God's answer until its current shape also gives more insight into the structure of God's answer and the specific focus of the individual parts.

⁶ So Hesse, *Hiob*, 11-12.192.

⁷ See Job's questions and appeals in 3,23; 7,12.17-21; 10,2-14.18; 13,3.18-27; 16,19-22; 19,7.25-27; 23,3-7; 30,20; 31,6.35-37. See also Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 47 (note 103). Here, Van Oorschot also mentions formal and theological reasons (compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 486-487).

the stalemate in the debate between Job and his friends would not be broken through by a new perspective. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that the book of Job has always contained a divine reaction in some way.

However, several indications make clear that the divine speeches have not always existed in their current shape. First, there is a difference in style and focus between the passage about the Behemoth and the Leviathan (40,15-41,26) and the previous part (38,2-39,30; 40,2.7-14). While this previous part contains a considerable number of questions and deals with the relation between God and Job, the part about the Behemoth and the Leviathan hardly contains any questions and concentrates on the relation between Job and fellow creatures.⁸ Second, the position of 40,2 is striking because it is remarkably separated by Job's first reply (40,3-5) from its forensic context in 40,8f.⁹ Third, the position of Job's first reply can be described as curious. For, if it answered 40,2, it would be a rather early reaction because the forensic topic is mainly elaborated upon in 40,8-14. If it was meant as a reaction to 38,1-39,30, the forensic turn in 40,2 would disturb this relation.¹⁰ These three clues make it probable that 40,15-41,26 (on the Behemoth and the Leviathan) was added later to God's answer. It seems likely that the book

⁸ However, there are some questions in 40,25-31 that seem similar to the questions in 38,1-40,14. Some scholars cite this as proof of the originality of the passages about the Behemoth and the Leviathan (so e.g. Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob*, 39-40. See also V. Kubina, *Die Gottesreden im Buche Hiob. Ein Beitrag zur Diskussion um die Einheit von Hiob 38,1-42,6* (FThSt 115), Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1979, 117-119; Gordis, *Job*, 568). However, the character of these questions differs to a certain extent. While in 38,1-40,14, God keeps more closely after Job and forces him to take position, the rhetorical questions in 40,25-31 are less pressing. They do not challenge Job to admit that creative power and insight can only be attributed to God as the questions formulated with ״ in the first part do. For a further elaboration of the differences between 38,1-40,14 and 40,15-41,26, see Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 159-171. Kubina takes the divine speeches as a unity with a bipolar structure, in which the first part predominantly deals with God's ruling over nature (38,1-40,2) and the second part with the theme 'history' (40,6-41,26). She argues that the theme 'creation' does not have an independent position but is attached to the theme 'history' in the divine speeches (Kubina, *Gottesreden*, 122-123). However, this bipolar structure with dependency on both parts is not clear. While the first part deals particularly with the relation between God and Job and demonstrates that Job does not hold a similar position to God (38,1-40,14), the second part deals mainly with the relation between Job and lower beings than God (40,15-41,26). The important issue of knowledge in the first part is lost in the second one. Furthermore, it is not clear how the descriptions of the mythical beings in the second part represent 'history'. Therefore, both parts can better be taken as two separate more independent expositions.

⁹ Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 148-158. Habel considers 40,2 as a pivotal point between two balanced speeches, which are opened by an initial challenge in 38,2-3 and 40,7-14 (Habel, *Job*, 528). However, the forensic turn of 40,2 is closely related to the legal topic that is further elaborated upon in 40,8. Therefore, it is more feasible to consider it as the introduction of the legal image, after the foregoing part dealt with creative elements, than to take it as a central point between both speeches.

¹⁰ See also Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 155-156.

of Job initially had one divine speech (38,1-39,30; 40,2.8-14) followed by one response from Job (40,3-5.42,2-6).¹¹ In this divine speech, among others, God's creative and preserving actions as well as Job's lack of insight into it play a role. Job subsequently replies that he is insignificant and is unable to see through God's counsel. When the passages about the Behemoth and the Leviathan were added, the divine speech and Job's answer became divided. Job's first answer was placed between the two divine speeches. The challenging question of 40,2 was placed before 40,3-5 in order to create a reason for this first answer.¹² The reason for this addition seems to be an attempt to increase the emphasis on Job's impotence. It takes the sting out of the direct contest between Job and God concerning the question of whether or not Job has divine capacities (40,8-14). Each suggestion that Job could somehow measure up to God is discounted because Job already lacks strength compared to the threatening powers of chaos that are lower than God. At the same time, this history of development makes Job's first response that he is too small and will not speak again (40,3-5) more understandable. It is a reaction following God's speech and fits in with God's challenge to be and act like God (40,8-14).

5.2 God's Answer from the Whirlwind

5.2.1 Introduction

God's answer from the whirlwind carries a rejection of Job's words. God labels Job's words as darkening of his counsel and as frustration of his justice. The crux lies in the nature and quality of Job's knowledge. God's basic point is that Job lacks sufficient knowledge in order to be able to see through the order of the Creation and the rationale behind God's behaviour. This is so because Job does not hold a divine position and lacks divine strength. God confronts Job with this fact by revealing several elements of the Creation's structure and pointing out some of his preserving activities in the world. God has constructed the earth, preserves it, and has the power to go and act in it. These are all creative activities. With the presentation of these activities, God wants to make it clear that the real coherence and logic behind his actions go beyond Job's observation. What is more, God tries to show that his actions differ from the impression Job had. While Job charges God with unjust actions, for instance benefiting the wicked, God demonstrates that he provides dead places with new life and punishes the wicked. God begins his speech with its central point.¹³ He reproaches Job for darkening (his) counsel by means of words without understanding (38,2). The subsequent questions, challenges, and

¹¹ Cf. Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 180-191; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 36-40. Both scholars also consider some verses or parts in 38,38,1-39,30 and 42,2-6 as secondary.

¹² Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 180-191. At this moment, 40,1 and 40,6-7 were added.

¹³ Compare Hesse, *Hiob*, 193: "das grundlegende Verdikt" (fundamental verdict).

depictions all have this basic thought in the background.¹⁴ They touch upon several reasons for this darkening and confront Job with his flawed impression of God's behaviour. God argues that it is impossible for human beings to have insight into God's plan. For, there is a fundamental difference between God and human beings.

God's answer broaches this message in three different ways. First, God uses questions which are formulated with the interrogative pronoun **מַי** (who). These questions emphasize that God is the Creator and origin of the earth. Secondly, God confronts Job with his lack of understanding. He wonders whether Job's insight underlies the order of the Creation and challenges Job to demonstrate some of his acquaintance with the earth's structure and design.¹⁵ Thirdly, Job is faced with his lack of strength to act creatively and preserveringly in this world. In this section, I further elaborate upon these separate topics and subsequently deal with the opening of God's answer (5.2.2), the questions formulated with **מַי** (5.2.3), the issue of knowledge and insight (5.2.4), Job's strength and capabilities (5.2.5), and the image of the lawsuit and God's final challenge (5.2.6).

5.2.2 The Opening of God's Answer

God opens his speech with a frontal attack. He wonders who it is that darkens (his) counsel (38,2). This question bears a rejection in it. Job's understanding of God's actions does not do justice to God's counsel. With this, Job is directly faced with God's central point. God gives Job the opportunity to defend himself and challenges him to provide God with evidence to the contrary.

- 38,2 Who is this that darkens counsel
with words without knowledge?
38,3 Gird your loins like a man¹⁶,
I will question you and you will inform me.

God begins his speech with an open question (38,2). Nevertheless, it is obvious that **מַי זֶה** (who is this) refers to Job because Job is explicitly addressed starting from 38,3.¹⁷ Job is designated as the one who darkens God's counsel. The word **עֲצָה**

¹⁴ Compare Strauß, *Hiob*, 356.

¹⁵ Among others, the roots **יָדַע** (to know) and **בִּיַן** (to understand) are used here.

¹⁶ Some scholars read **כְּגִבּוֹר** (like a warrior) cf. Tg. (Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 298; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 88; Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 521).

¹⁷ Wilcox argues that, here, God refers to Elihu because it violates the grammatical structure of the verse if it is read as referring to Job. This also solves the contradiction between 38,2 and 42,7 that comes into being if 38,2 is read as reference to Job, according to him (K.G. Wilcox, "Who Is This...?": A Reading of Job 38,2", *JSOT* 78 (1998) 85-95). However, Bimson convincingly refutes this view (J.J. Bimson, "Who is 'This' in 'Who is this...?'" (Job 38,2)? A Response to Karl G. Wilcox", *JSOT* 87 (2000) 125-128). An important issue of God's answer is to demonstrate that Job is the one who lacks knowledge

(counsel) includes several aspects. It occurs parallel to the word **מַחְשְׁבָהּ** (thought/plan)¹⁸, which is specified with the thought of God's heart in Ps.33,11. It can express God's decision or intention to deal in a specific way¹⁹ and is linked with such terms as wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and strength²⁰. In this way, **עֲצָה** refers to God's inner considerations, which are made in wisdom, and to God's decisions to act in specific ways that are made on the basis of these thoughts. This counsel of God was determined in the past, is definite, and will be carried out.²¹ It is different from human plans and thoughts.²² In 38,2, God's counsel refers to the thoughts and decisions that underlie the order and scheme of the Creation²³ and form the basis of God's dealings in the world. It expresses the divine intelligence with which this order came into being and with which God operates.²⁴ Kubina thinks that God's **עֲצָה** can be related exclusively to his active decree in the life of nations or individuals.²⁵ However, the presentation of parts of the Creation's ingenious construction makes it clear that the content of God's counsel goes beyond the arena of history.²⁶ It is the background of history and not history itself. God's counsel refers to the order and construction of the cosmos which God has realized and to the well-considered coherence of God's working in the world.

God blames Job for darkening this divine counsel. In Ps.139,12, the verb **חָשַׁח** *hifil* (to darken) occurs in order to express that even darkness is not able to hide from God. In 42,3, which alludes to 38,2, the verb **חָשַׁח** is represented by the verb

of God's counsel (see §5.2.4). Moreover, God's rejecting attitude is not limited to 38,2 (e.g. 40,8 (see §5.2.6)). The problem of the relation between 38,2 and 42,7, therefore, is not solved by reading it as a reference to Elihu.

¹⁸ Jer.49,20; 50,45; Mic.4,12; Ps.33,11.

¹⁹ Isa.14,26; Jer.49,20; 50,45; Mic.4,12.

²⁰ 12,13; Isa.11,2; Jer.49,7; Prov.8,14; 21,30.

²¹ Isa.25,1; 46,10; Ps.33,11. In Ps.20,5, the psalmist prays that God fulfils his plans.

²² Ps.33,10-11 (see also Prov.21,30). In the same way, a difference is made between human beings and a divine beings **מַחְשְׁבָהּ** (thought/plan). See e.g. Isa.55,8-9.

²³ Compare also De Wilde, *Hiob*, 359 and Keel, *Entgegnung*, 53: "Weltplan".

²⁴ Compare Habel, *Job*, 536. According to Habel, God's **עֲצָה** (he translates 'design') can be found in the order, mystery, and balance of creation and this design reflects the profound wisdom and knowledge of God. Hölscher particularly emphasizes the element of 'intelligence' and circumscribes **עֲצָה** as God's "Vernunft" (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 91). Fohrer defines **עֲצָה** as God's wanting and doing in the Creation and his governance of the world. It is, according to Fohrer, on the one hand the world order and on the other hand the inscrutability of God's wanting and doing (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 500). However, the component 'wanting' seems too limited. Although the word **עֲצָה** can refer to an intention or decision (Isa.14,26; Jer.49,20; 50,45; Mic.4,12), it more broadly expresses the knowledge and wisdom upon which God's right way of dealing is based. For, the ingenious construction of the Creation and God's preserving actions not only stem from his wish but are also the result of his knowledge and wisdom.

²⁵ Kubina, *Gottesreden*, 122.

²⁶ Habel calls this view of Kubina 'forcing the text' (Habel, *Job*, 528).

על (to hide). In 38,2, God reproaches Job because his interpretation of God's behaviour obscures the real order and logic which underlie God's actions. According to Driver-Gray, God rebukes Job for obscuring the fact that a divine purpose underlies the constitution and maintenance of the world, what should be plain.²⁷ However, God does not reproach Job for denying the existence of such a purpose as such but for depicting a specific purpose that does not correspond with God's real counsel which is the basis of God's actions. Job has drawn the conclusion that God deals unjustly because God lets him suffer innocently. This conclusion is based on the concept of retribution. But now God judges that this explanation darkens his counsel. It does not do justice to the real basis of God's actions. The cause of this darkening is a lack of knowledge (38,2b). Job's interpretation of God's actions appears to be inadequate due to insufficient insight into God's counsel.

The question arises whether or to what extent God's counsel is knowable for human beings. Is it completely unknowable²⁸ or does God expound (parts of) his counsel²⁹? God's answer presents a certain paradox.³⁰ On the one hand, it exposes several elements of the Creation's order and God's actions in it. God wants to make it clear that a good and well-considered structure underlies the Creation and God's preserving actions. On the other hand, Job's lack of understanding of this structure is one of the crucial points in God's answer. God hammers away at Job's inability to see fully through the coherence of the cosmos and of God's behaviour. Thus, Job's lack of insight into God's counsel becomes clear by revealing several aspects of this counsel.³¹ However, human beings are unable to have a view on God's complete counsel because of their limited strength and their inability to adopt a position from which they can observe God's actions.

God challenges Job to show his discernment in God's counsel (38,3). This adds strength to God's reproach in 38,2. God starts his interrogation by calling on Job to prepare for a strong dispute.³² The expression 'to gird the loins like a man' is a call

²⁷ Driver-Gray, *Job*, 326. So also Keel, *Entgegnung*, 54.

²⁸ For example, De Wilde states that the עֲצָוָה consists of a number of mysteries. Among other, these mysteries are the issue of the origin of suffering and evil, the issue of the world's origin, the laws of the world, and the animal instincts (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 359).

²⁹ So, for example, Habel. According to Habel, God shows that paradox and incongruity are integral to the world's design (Habel, *Job*, 534-335).

³⁰ Compare Fohrer, who thinks that God points out to Job the paradox of a meaningful order and its utmost unfathomableness. According to him, this paradox is a unity in God and is cancelled out in the personal community with God (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 500). However, whereas it is true that there is such a kind of paradox, God does not make clear how such a paradox constitutes a unity in himself.

³¹ In §5.4, I argue that the depiction of several elements of the Creation's order and God's actions provide a counter picture in order to let Job realize that his impression of God's actions is incorrect.

³² This verse returns in 40,7.

to get ready for a strenuous or difficult undertaking.³³ It is, for instance, an appeal to someone to gather the necessary strength in order to speak on behalf of God (Jer.1,17) or run (1 Kgs.18,46).³⁴ In 38,3, God summons Job to gather all his power and courage in order to reply God's questions and challenges adequately. Job suggested that God should call and Job should answer, or that Job should call and God should answer (13,22). God now chooses the first option. He challenges Job to disclose his knowledge by answering God's questions. Whereas Job asked God to inform (עֲרַף; hifil) him about his transgressions (13,23), God now summons Job to inform God (38,3). Offering this opportunity to refute God's reproach sharpens God's assessment of Job's words. As long as Job is not able to refute God or to provide him with additional information, God's assessment that Job has darkened God's counsel with words without knowledge persists.

After this opening statement (38,2-3), the interrogation begins (38,4ff). Whereas the remainder of God's answer deals with issues such as insight, strength, and the question of who acts creatively, the first question (38,4) mentions Job's presence at the moment that God created the earth. The construction of the earth is the first topic that God addresses. Its structure and design stem from God's counsel. Understanding of this counsel is related to primordial wisdom. If only Job had been present at the time when the earth was founded, he might have some knowledge of God's counsel. Therefore, God asks whether Job kept him company in those days.

38,4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell it, if you have understanding!

The motif of the primal human being is combined with the issue of knowledge. This primal human being was present before the Creation of the world began and could watch God's actions and considerations. In Prov.8,22ff, wisdom existed before all time. Eliphaz sarcastically inquired whether Job was first born of the human race, attended the council of God, and limited wisdom to himself (15,7-8). God now takes up this motif again.³⁵ The combination יָסַד אֶרֶץ (to found the earth) is regularly used to stress that God is the one who founded the earth.³⁶ Since Job did not observe this process of creation, he lacks substantial knowledge of God's thoughts and the order behind the earth's construction. God accompanies

³³ Pope, *Job*, 291; Habel, *Job*, 536; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 359.

³⁴ In both references, the word מִתְנַיִם is used instead of הַלְצִיָּם (loins). Furthermore, in 1 Kgs.18,46, the verb שָׁנַם is used instead of שָׂזַר (to gird). See also, Isa.5,27 where a person's strength is also meant. The expression might refer to the practice of belt wrestling (C.H. Gordon, "Belt-Wrestling in the Bible World", *HUCA* 23 I (1950-51), 136).

³⁵ See also 38,21.

³⁶ Isa.48,13; 51,13.16; Zech.12,1; Ps.24,2; 104,5; Prov.3,19.

this question with a renewed appeal for information (38,4b).³⁷ The verb **גַּנַּן** (to tell) is used by Zophar in order to suggest that Job's wisdom would double, if God told him secrets of wisdom (11,6). Whereas God reveals some of these secrets in his answer, he now summons Job to inform (**גַּנַּן**) him, if Job has understanding.³⁸ Here, understanding refers to primordial knowledge of God's counsel. Thus, the fundamental difference between God and human beings has already been introduced at the beginning of God's exposition. God distinguishes himself from Job by his knowledge of the Creation's and by his creative power. Job can not be acquainted with the details of God's counsel because of his absence at the moment of creation.

5.2.3 Who Else than God?

The fact that God and human beings are of a different order is an important issue in God's answer. God attempts to persuade Job of this fundamental difference. Job's lack of insight into God's counsel is connected to the position that Job adopts in relation to the Creation and God. Job does not hold a divine position from which he can observe the coherence of the cosmos. God confronts Job with this distinction between Job and God by focusing attention on his own position as Creator. By means of questions constructed with the interrogative pronoun **מִי** (who), God emphasizes that he himself is the Creation's origin and preserver. The only possible and correct answer to these 'who' questions is clear in advance. It is God who acts preserverly and creatively.

God continues the theme of creation after his question about Job's presence during this operation (38,4). From 38,5, he elaborates on some of his creative activities when he constructed the earth. Job's attention is immediately focused on the distinction between himself and his Creator. Job is forced to admit that God is the only one with creative capacities.

- 38,5 Who fixed its measurements, for³⁹ you know!
Or who stretched out a measuring line over it?
- 38,6 On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone...

The answer to the question of who designed and constructed the earth (38,5.6b) has already been given by the suffix **י** (me) of **בִּיסְדִּי** (when I founded) in 38,4. The interrogative pronoun **מִי** (who) points to God. In 38,5, God presents himself as the

³⁷ This appeal returns in 38,18.

³⁸ See also Job's promise that he will inform God about his steps (31,37).

³⁹ According to Fohrer, **כִּי** has a conditional meaning here (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 491). However, a causal meaning is more obvious; God challenges Job because Job would have knowledge of God's counsel.

architect of the cosmos. He has fixed its measurements. The word קָן (measuring line) occurs in Isa.34,17, where God portions out the land with a line. In 38,5a, God makes it clear that he has carefully determined the dimensions of the earth. Here, Job's knowledge is challenged ironically. If Job had sufficient understanding of God's counsel, he would know that God had fixed these measurements. The 'who' questions are interrupted by a test in substantial knowledge (38,6a). Can Job explain on what base the foundations of the earth rest? The structure of the world is compared to the construction of a house. יָסַד (base) is a pedestal in a building.⁴⁰ In 38,6a, the earth rests on such supports.⁴¹ God also mentions the cornerstone which is a supporting section of a building. The strength of a construction depends on it.⁴² Job has to make it clear who laid the earth's cornerstone. But actually, he can not ignore the fact that God is the founder of the earth and that God's wisdom underlies its ingenious construction.

In 38,8-11, God steps even more pointedly into the limelight. Whereas Job had the opportunity to choose between God and someone else in the preceding questions (38,5-6), God now only mentions the option that somebody else acted creatively during his own creative activities. God asks who shut in the sea with doors (38,8), when he bound it with clouds and darkness (38,9).⁴³ The sea can be a threatening power (7,12) but in 38,8-9, it is depicted as a baby, which stems from the womb and is bounded with clothes by God.⁴⁴ God has put a check on the sea and has prescribed it its boundaries.⁴⁵ Thus, creative activity consists particularly in controlling and limiting. Job does not even have a chance to suggest something

⁴⁰ See e.g. Exod.26,19.

⁴¹ See also 9,6.

⁴² Isa.28,16; Jer.51,26; Ps.118,22.

⁴³ In 38,8, יָסַד can best be read as סָךְ cf. Vlg. in correspondence with 38,6b (so Budde, *Hiob*, 228; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 88; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 491; Hesse, *Hiob*, 194; Habel, *Job*, 521; Pope, *Job*, 288; Weiser, *Hiob*, 238; Van Selms, *Job II*, 169). Strauß maintains the Masoretic text (Strauß, *Hiob*, 337). Driver-Gray and De Wilde want to read אִיפֹה הָיִיתָ (where were you) and change בַּדְּלָתִים (with doors) into בַּדְּלָת (at the birth) because of a dittography (Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 299; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 361). De Wilde argues that it would be strange if the sea had already been shut in with its birth (361). However, shutting in the sea (38,8a) does not contradict the following description of 38,9-11 because 38,8a expresses an action that is further elaborated upon with concrete details in 38,9-11.

⁴⁴ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 503; Habel, *Job*, 538; Weiser, *Hiob*, 245.

⁴⁵ 38,10-11. In 38,10, it is better to emend וַאֲשַׁבֵּר (and I broke) because breaking a limit does not make much sense. Some scholars read the root סָגַר (to shut in) (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 491; Hesse, *Hiob*, 194) but I prefer reading וַאֲשִׁיתָ (and I set) in correspondence with LXX (so Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 300; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 362) (compare 14,13). חָקִי does not need to be changed into חָקֶךָ (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 491, De Wilde, *Hiob*, 362; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 88; Hesse, *Hiob*, 194), since it can be understood as the limit set by God (cf. Habel, *Job*, 521).

different. For, God himself gives the answer to his question of who shut in the sea with doors (38,8). It is God who has set bars and doors to the sea (38,10).

The next 'who' question concentrates on a preserving action. God points to the water supply in waste land. This sustaining measure demonstrates how ingeniously the cosmos is constructed according to God's counsel. His counsel provides details that were not directly expected by everyone. God even brings rain to desolate land.

- 38,25 Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain
and a way for the thunderstorm,⁴⁶
38,26 to bring rain on land where no one stays
on wilderness where no human being is,
38,27 to saturate waste and desolate land,
and to let the dry ground⁴⁷ sprout fresh grass?

The distribution of rain is depicted as a heavenly irrigation system. God leads water to specific places by means of irrigation channels. The word *תעלה* (channel) can be a trench (1 Kgs.18,32) or a pool (Isa.7,3). In Ezek.31,4, channels lead water to all trees of the field. God has built a heavenly channel in order to irrigate waste land (38,25f). In 38,27, the combination *שאה ומשאה* (waste and desolate) occurs parallel to *ציה* (dry land).⁴⁸ It also stands parallel to *מדבר* (wilderness) (38,26), hence it means dry and desolate land. Rain and thunderstorm function according to God's rule.⁴⁹ Therefore, the presence of a channel in order to lead water to desolate places implies that God intended to let it rain there. It belongs to God's order and insight that it also pours on those unexpected desolate places.

The meaning of this rain fall in the desert is subject to debate. Since it can be considered part of God's counsel, the question arises which divine thoughts are represented by this action. Some scholars emphasize the senselessness of rain in such regions from a human perspective. According to Tsevat, for instance, the lack of relevance for human beings when rain falls on the desert demonstrates that rain is not a vehicle of morality at all. For Tsevat, this serves to deny the existence of retribution.⁵⁰ However, wasting water is not the central point here. Rain can be a

⁴⁶ Cf. 28,26b.

⁴⁷ The word *מצי* (source) makes little sense in this context. Some scholars read *צמא* (thirsty) (so Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 305; Pope, *Job*, 298). However, it is better to read *מצייה* (from the dry land) because of the parallel with *משאה* (desolate land) in 38,27a (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 492; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 90; Habel, *Job*, 522). See for the same parallel 30,3.

⁴⁸ Also, in 30,3.

⁴⁹ 28,26. Compare also 38,37, where God tips the vessels of heaven.

⁵⁰ Tsevat, "Meaning", 99-100. In the same way, Van Wolde argues that here God makes it clear that ethical categories of reward and punishment have nothing to do with the Creation and the continued existence of the Creation (Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 141). Albertz particularly sees a demonstration of the Creator's freedom in this senseless

vehicle of blessing or punishment.⁵¹ In Gen.2,5f, God makes life on earth possible by giving rain that moistens the dry unfruitful soil. A similar action can be found in 38,25-27. God sends rain to desolate areas in order to make vegetation possible. Ecological data shows that rich vegetation comes up within a few days after rain on the desert.⁵² The flocks of the Bedouin can find food at these desolate places thanks to these incidental rains.⁵³ Therefore, the rain at desolate places is a life giving deed.⁵⁴ God creates new life at places that are believed to be barren and unfruitful. This is a preserving action that might go beyond human observation. Whereas it may be true that God wants to show that his concern for the Creation exceeds human interests⁵⁵, this passage in particular serves to refute Job in the first place. Job reproached God for saturating him with bitterness without reason (9,18). God now replies that he saturates waste and desolate land (38,27). With this, he makes life possible even at unexpected places instead of spoiling a person's joy in life. It belongs to God's counsel to provide places of death with new life.⁵⁶

The elements from the Creation's structure and functioning (38,4-38,38) are alternated with a presentation of several animals (38,39-39,30). God asks who provides the raven with prey (38,41) and has assigned the wilderness as a dwelling place for the wild ass (39,5-8). The list of animals in 38,39-39,30 raises the question of whether these particular animals represent special intentions. Keel considers them all as somehow representative of an oppositional world.⁵⁷ According to him, God makes it clear with these images that the world indeed does not lack chaotic powers but that God as lord of the animals keeps the chaos under his thumb without falling into a boring rigid order.⁵⁸ Fuchs acknowledges such a chaotic background but, on the contrary, records that these (mythical) chaotic qualities hardly survive in the descriptions at hand. She says that God predominantly appears as the Creator of the animals with care for his creatures.⁵⁹ The depictions of the animals favour the observations of Fuchs. For, they concentrate more on their specific characteristics, which God has given them, and on God's caring treatment of them, than on God's control over them. The examples

moistening of the desert (R. Albertz, *Weltschöpfung und Menschenschöpfung* (CTM 3), Stuttgart 1974, 143).

⁵¹ Blessing: e.g. Ps.65,10-11. Punishing: e.g. Deut.11,17, where rain is withheld, or Ezek.38,22, where God enters into judgement with rains and hailstones.

⁵² Cf. 38,27b. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 507; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 365-366.

⁵³ So Fohrer, *Hiob*, 507. See also 39,5-8, where the wild ass has to find its food at barren places.

⁵⁴ Compare Keel, *Entgegnung*, 58.

⁵⁵ So Driver-Gray, *Job*, 332; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 366. See also Gordis, *Job*, 435.449.558.

⁵⁶ See also Nam, *Talking About God*, 136-137.

⁵⁷ Keel, *Entgegnung*, 63-70.

⁵⁸ Keel, *Entgegnung*, 81-125.

⁵⁹ G. Fuchs, *Mythos und Hiobdichtung. Aufnahme und Umdeutung altorientalischer Vorstellungen*, Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln 1993, 210-220.

of the raven and the wild ass confirm this. God is concerned with the raven's food supply. The case of the wild ass demonstrates that God gives each individual creature its particular function and place. In this way, the reference to several animals illustrates different facets of God's counsel and is a demonstration of God's powerful, creative, and preserving actions.

Some 'who' questions remain. God is the origin and controller of the weather. Ice stems from God's womb (38,29f).⁶⁰ God counts the clouds in his wisdom and pours celestial vessels of water in order to let it rain (38,37). Some intelligence has been applied to specific elements of the Creation. God equipped the *טַחֲוֹת* and the *שְׂכָוִי* with a certain kind of wisdom and insight.⁶¹ So, each 'who' question mentions a specific element of God's counsel. Each question focuses the attention on God's creative and sustaining activities. Who is the brain behind this order? Who is the driving force that designed the earth and brought it into being? Who preserves its cycles and provides it with life? Job can only admit that God is the origin of this ingenious structure. God has given each detail of the Creation its function, characteristics, and place. The only correct answer to each 'who' question is 'God'.

5.2.4 Knowledge and Insight

The opening of God's answer has already made it clear that the issue of knowledge and insight is a very important consideration for God. God reproaches Job for having a wrong impression of God's order and actions due to a lack of knowledge. Job is challenged to inform God, if he has knowledge.⁶² After this introduction, the issue of knowledge and insight is further elaborated upon in three different ways. First, God tests Job's knowledge by means of questions with regard to the content. He incites Job to present some details of God's counsel. Secondly, God confronts Job with 'yes or no' questions. Finally, God goes one step further. He wonders whether it is Job's own insight that underlies the order of the cosmos. In this way, God wants to let Job realize that he lacks adequate understanding of the logic and coherence in the cosmos. Job is not able to explain or point out God's actions in it.

In the first place, God examines whether Job has substantial knowledge of God's counsel. He asks Job to clarify several facets of the earth's construction. Can Job explain on what the bases of the earth were sunk (38,6)? Does he know the way to the light's dwelling and where the place of the darkness is?⁶³ Where is the

⁶⁰ In 37,10, ice comes into being by God's breath.

⁶¹ 38,36. The meaning of *טַחֲוֹת* and *שְׂכָוִי* is unclear.

⁶² 38,3-4. See §5.2.2.

⁶³ 38,19. Here, light and darkness are depicted as both having their own abode. According to Gen.1,3-4, they are separated. Some scholars consider 38,19-20 as a gloss that is unnecessary after the reference to the morning in 38,12f (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 90; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 492; Hesse, *Hiob*, 195). However, the argument of unnecessary repetition is not convincing because the points of view differ in both parts. While 38,12 deals with Job's ability to

way to the place where the wind is scattered over the earth (38,24)?⁶⁴ So, Job is challenged to demonstrate his knowledge and inform God. If Job thinks that he is able to assess God's actions and value them as unrighteous, one may expect that he has insight into the construction of the Creation and God's operating in it. His charges against God would lack each basis otherwise. Secondly, God also tries a different tack and wonders whether Job's insight underlies the design of the Creation. Is it by Job's discernment that the falcon takes flight (39,26)? As long as this is not so, Job's statements about God's actions seem rather doubtful.

In two 'yes or no' questions, God wonders whether Job surveys the coherence of the cosmos and is familiar with the laws and order that regulate life and continuation in the Creation.

38,18a Do you direct your attention to the expanses of the earth?

38,33a Do you know the laws of heaven?

The crucial problem is that Job lacks the survey of the whole earth. He is unable to direct his attention to the expanses of the earth. With the question of 38,18a, God hints to what he elaborates upon at the end of his answer in more detail where he confronts Job with the fact that Job does not possess divine attributes.⁶⁵ Job does not adopt a divine position. He is unable to direct his attention to the expanses of the earth because he lacks a God's eye view. Job is part of the Creation. He does not adopt a standpoint independent from it from which he observes the expanses of the earth. The same counts for Job's insight into the laws of heaven (38,33a). In Jer.5,24, the word לִקְוֹת (law) refers to the appointed weeks for the harvest and in Jer.33,25 to the laws of heaven and earth. In God's answer, the regularities of heaven refer to the constellation and the cycles of the celestial bodies (38,31f). Is Job familiar with the scheme behind the positions and movements of the stars? Subsequently, another type of cycle is also brought up. God asks Job whether he knows the length of the gestation of an ibex or a hind (39,1-2). In this way, Job is confronted with his lack of knowledge of God's counsel. His reply to each question

summon the morning in order to take its position, 38,19f deals with Job's knowledge of the way to the dwelling places, where both light and darkness live. Moreover, 38,19f fits the context where Job's insight into different parts of the cosmos and his ability to be present there are explored (38,16-24).

⁶⁴ In 38,24a, the word אֶרֶב (light) can best be read as רוּחַ (wind) because of the parallel with מִזְרָח (east wind) in 38,24b (so Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 304; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 492; Budde, *Hiob*, 231; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 90; Hesse, *Hiob*, 196). Understanding אֶרֶב as lightning (so Habel, *Job*, 522; Strauß, *Hiob*, 330; Van Selms, *Job II*, 173) is less probable, since lightning is mentioned by means of the word בָּרָק (38,35) and אֶרֶב does not have the meaning of lightning in 38,19.

⁶⁵ 40,9-14. See §5.2.6.

can only be 'no' or 'I do not know'. With wondering to what extent Job has knowledge of the order of the Creation and God's considerations behind it, God wants to make it clear that God's wisdom and intelligence are beyond human understanding. Human beings are unable to direct their attention to the expanses of the earth. Finally, Job will admit this lack of knowledge in his reply (42,3).

5.2.5 Job's Strength and Capabilities

A very clear example of the fundamental difference between God and human beings is the distinction in strength and capabilities between them. God points to Job's lack of divine power. Has Job ever operated creatively or preserveringly in the world? Or is he able to move freely in each remote division of the cosmos? Job is faced with the fact that he is not equipped with divine power or other divine attributes. This serves to demonstrate that Job is not equal to God. In order to have insight into God's counsel it is necessary to be equal to God. Since God and human beings fundamentally differ, Job lacks this insight. In this way, the confrontation with Job's impotence backs up God's claim that Job has darkened God's counsel because of a shortage of understanding. It proves that Job simply does not hold a similar position to God.

The first question about Job's capabilities is an example of God's actions which contains creative as well as sustaining aspects. God mentions his control of day and night and his treatment of the wicked.

- 38,12 Have you ever commanded the morning in your life,
caused the dawn to know its place,⁶⁶
38,13 in order to take hold of the skirts of the earth,
so that the wicked⁶⁷ are shaken out of it?
38,14 It changes like clay under a seal,
and it becomes dyed like a garment.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Reading Qere.

⁶⁷ The ׀ is one of the *litterae suspensae* (see also 38,15a). However, it is not clear what an alternative reading could have been (cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 492). An original reading רשׁים (the poor) is unlikely because God would not withhold light from the poor. Other scholars regard it as an omission by a scribe that has been corrected (Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 302; Gordis, *Job*, 445; Strauß, *Hiob*, 338; Budde, *Hiob*, 229).

⁶⁸ Since the sense of 38,14b in its current shape can not be explained satisfactorily, change is necessary. Gordis reads בָּשׁוּ כָּלֵם (all put to shame) instead of לְבוֹשׁ (Gordis, *Job*, 446-447; see also Hölscher, *Hiob*, 88). Various other scholars emend וַיִּתְּצְבוּ (they stand) into וַיִּתְּצַמְּבֵעַ (it appears dyed) or וַיִּתְּצַבֵּעַ (it becomes dyed). The verb צָבַע is a hapax but the root can be found as a substantive in Judg.5,30. Reading the root צָבַע is preferable because this verse expresses the change of colours at dawn (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 492; Hesse, *Hiob*, 194; Pope, *Job*, 295; Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 302; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 363; Van Selms, *Job II*, 170).

38,15 Then their light is withheld from the wicked
and the upraised arm is broken.

God asks whether Job has ever called a new day into being. Each new morning breaks thanks to divine effort. God orders the personified dawn to rise and shows it its place. In this way, he limits the indefinable circumstances of the night by summoning the morning to take its place.⁶⁹ This act belongs to God's sustaining work. A part of the dawn's task is to take hold of the earth's skirts (38,13).⁷⁰ In combination with אָרֶץ , the word כַּנֶּף means the edge of the earth.⁷¹ The verb נָעַר (to shake) several times expresses an action against God's opponents. In Neh.5,13, God shakes someone, who does not perform this word, out from their house and possessions.⁷² When the dawn breaks, it seizes the edges of the earth and shakes it like a cloth. Some scholars think that in 38,13, the night is depicted as a coverlet that covers the earth and under which the wicked commit their crimes.⁷³ However, the representation of shaking the wicked out makes it likely that the earth itself is depicted as a cloth.⁷⁴ Wicked actions are characterized as dealing in the night (24,13-17). The light of the dawn unmasks such wrong deeds. Like shaking the crumbs out of a cloth, the wicked are dispersed and they hide when the morning dawns.⁷⁵ So, the light of the day functions as an opponent of the chaotic and threatening forces of the night. God limits these forces and comes into action against wrongdoers.⁷⁶ Has Job ever accomplished such creative and preserving deeds?

Subsequently, the rise of daybreak is depicted with a second image (38,14). Here, אָרֶץ (earth) from 38,13a is subject. The earth recovers its contours and colours when the day dawns. Its relief returns like the transformation of clay under the pressure of a seal. The grey and dark environment becomes dyed again like a garment. The effects of the daybreak for the wicked do not remain limited to dispersion. In 38,15 it becomes clear that 'shaking out of the earth' (38,13b) implies more than a temporal halt to their activities. Their light is withheld and their upraised arm is broken. Here, אוֹר (light) refers to the light of life. According to Bildad, the light of the evildoer (אֵשׁ) will be extinguished.⁷⁷ Job, by contrast,

⁶⁹ Compare 9,7 where, on the contrary, God summons the sun and it does not rise.

⁷⁰ Some understand 'you' as subject of לִּשְׂמֹךְ (to take hold) in 38,13a because of 40,9ff (Habel, *Job*, 521; Gordis, *Job*, 445). However, the change of the second person perfect (38,12) into an infinitive (38,13) suggests that an action of the dawn is described.

⁷¹ Isa.11,12; 24,16; Ezek.7,2.

⁷² See also Ps.109,23; 136,15; Exod.14,27.

⁷³ Pope, *Job*, 295; Habel, *Job*, 540.

⁷⁴ Cf. Driver-Gray, *Job*, 330; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 504; Gordis, *Job*, 445.

⁷⁵ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 504; Gordis, *Job*, 445.

⁷⁶ Compare Strauß, *Hiob*, 360; Hesse, *Hiob*, 195-196.

⁷⁷ 18,5-6. See also Prov.13,9; 24,20.

complains that the wicked hardly meet this fate (21,17ff). He states that God treats wicked and righteous equally (9,22-24) but God's answer presents a different picture. Here the light is withheld from the wicked. The expression זרוע שבר (to break the arm) is used for breaking the force of opponents or the wicked.⁷⁸ So, the wicked lose their power and prosperity at daybreak. They have to fear for their lives. This implies that God holds on to the concept of retribution.⁷⁹ Whereas Job established that the wicked prosper and live carefree, God presents an order in which the wicked meet setbacks and get what they deserve. In this way, God's presentation of his treatment of the wicked as a part of his counsel rejects Job's impression that the wicked prosper and are favoured in comparison to the righteous.⁸⁰

The ability to move freely within the cosmos is another topic in God's examination of Job's capacities. God wonders whether Job is able to enter into several regions of the cosmos.

38,16 Have you entered unto the springs of the sea
and have you walked in the recesses of the deep?

God presents some invisible places in the cosmos which are usually inaccessible for human beings. The deep (תהום) refers to the primeval ocean that is below the earth.⁸¹ The sea is filled with water from this source.⁸² Does Job have access to this area? The verb בא (to enter) is used again in 38,22, where God asks a similar question. Here God wonders whether Job has entered the storehouses of the snow. It belongs to God's abilities to traverse each region of the cosmos. The observation of such areas provides knowledge of their construction and functioning. God also refers to the dark part of the Creation that goes beyond the borders of a human life. Has Job seen the underworld (38,17)? Job's inability to visit these different places shows that he does not have divine capacities. Therefore, it is also reasonable to

⁷⁸ Jer.48,25; Ezek.30,21.24; Ps.10,15; 37,17. In 40,9, God asks whether Job has an arm like God.

⁷⁹ Pace Tsevat, "Meaning", 99. Clines follows Tsevat and is of the opinion that the divine speeches make clear that there is no divine justice. According to him, these passages do not refer to God's actions but are only an ironic invitation for Job to take the place of a god and to make such judgements for himself (Clines, "Does the Book of Job Suggest", 100-105). However, God confronts Job with some of his divine actions in order to make the difference between Job and God clear. Therefore, it can not be denied that some kind of retributive action through God returns in God's answer. Driver-Gray also see a retributive act here: "..., the wicked are brought to justice and punishment" (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 330).

⁸⁰ See also Habel, *Job*, 540; P. Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt? –Gottes Antwort an Ijob. Eine sprachwissenschaftliche und exegetische Studie zur ersten Gottesrede Ijob 38 und 39* (Altes Testament und Moderne 5), Münster-Hamburg-London 2000, 178.

⁸¹ Exod.20,4; Ps.24,2; 136,6. The earth was thought to stand on pillars above the deep (9,6).

⁸² Gen.7,11; 8,2; 49,25; Prov.8,28.

suppose that Job's knowledge of these regions is insufficient; he has never observed them.

The issue of Job's strength and capacities is further elaborated upon in two different ways. On the one hand, God questions Job's ability to act with divine strength. He confronts Job with several divine activities: the control of the course of the stars (38,31-32), letting it rain and sending forth lightning (38,34-35), the food supply of lions (38,39), and guaranteeing the cycle of gestation of the mountain goat and the hind (39,2). In this list, several facets of the Creation's order and God's persevering work are mentioned. God governs the cycles of seasons, procreation, and food supply. He rules the weather. Has Job ever played a role in any of these divine occupations? On the other hand, God mentions Job's creative capabilities. Does Job give the horse its might and its capacity to jump as a locust (39,19-20)? The power with which God acts controlling, creating, and preserving, fundamentally distinguishes God from human beings. This confrontation has to make Job aware of his limited strength.

The added parts about the Behemoth (40,15-24) and the Leviathan (40,25-41,26) particularly follow up on this topic of strength and capacity. Here, God considers Job's strength in relation to these two impressive beings that are lower than God.⁸³ Both the Behemoth and the Leviathan are striking because of their impressive build and considerable strength. God wonders whether Job would be able to subject them and domesticate them like harmless 'pets'.⁸⁴ The identification of these creatures is rather unclear. Whereas some think that these creatures represent zoological animals, it is more likely to suppose that they have mythological connotations.⁸⁵ For, the earlier depiction of the Leviathan's terrifying

⁸³ In 39,10-11, the first beginnings of such a comparison can be found. There, God asks Job whether Job is able to control the wild ox.

⁸⁴ 40,25-31. The passage about the Behemoth probably ends with a similar question (40,24). Then, 40,24a has to be taken as a question (so Driver-Gray, *Job*, 358; Strauß, *Hiob*, 377) or מַי הוּא (who is it) has to be inserted which disappeared because of the preceding אֵל-פִּי הוּא in 40,23b (so Budde, *Hiob*, 246; Weiser, *Hiob*, 252; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 523; Gordis, *Job*, 480; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 384; Pope, *Job*, 327; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 95; Van Selms, *Job II*, 197; Hesse, *Hiob*, 205): who will grasp him by his eyes?

⁸⁵ The identity of these creatures is subject to debate. Respectively, the Behemoth and the Leviathan are frequently identified with the hippopotamus and the crocodile because their depictions seem similar to these animals (so e.g. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 528; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 99-100; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 380-381.385; Gordis, *Job*, 475-476.567-572). Some think that there could be a relation between the word בְּהֵמוֹתַי and the Egyptian word *p'-ih-mw* (water rind). However, Keel argues that identification with the hippopotamus only makes sense if it is not taken as the zoological hippopotamus but as the male, red hippopotamus, for which the Egyptian king and Horus hunted and which symbolizes evil. Only in this way is the hippopotamus invincible according to Keel (Keel, *Entgegnung*, 132-141). Keel notes that, in the same way, the crocodile is representative of evil in Egypt (Keel, *Entgegnung*, 143-154). Ruprecht differs in the sense that he suggests לִיָּהוֹן (Leviathan) as another surname

and monstrous appearance (41,4-26) leaves the impression of a mythical figure rather than an actual animal.⁸⁶ לַוִּיָּתָן (the Leviathan) is one of God's mythical opponents and represents the threatening forces of chaos.⁸⁷ According to Gammie, the descriptions of the Behemoth and the Leviathan are caricatures of Job and function as a mirror for him.⁸⁸ However, God explicitly compares Job to the Leviathan when he asks whether Job is able to cope with this fellow creature (40,25-31). Therefore, it is unlikely that the Leviathan represents Job. God confronts Job with his limited strength by pointing out his impotent position with regard to the Behemoth and the Leviathan. This proportion of Job to the forces of chaos is compared to the relation between Job and God. If nobody is fierce enough to stir up the Leviathan, then who can hold before God and remain undamaged when they confront God?⁸⁹ Since Job already lacks strength in confrontation with

of the hippopotamus because the hunting equipment as depicted in 40,25-31 does not match the crocodiles (E. Ruprecht, "Das Nilpferd im Hiobbuch. Beobachtungen zu der sogenannten zweiten Gottesrede", *VT* 21 (1971) 221-222). However, Keel maintains that the methods mentioned were also used for capturing crocodiles (Keel, *Entgegnung*, 142). Fuchs follows Ruprecht to a certain extent by supposing that, in her eyes, the text refers to one mythical being. However, she considers בַּהֲמוֹת as its generic name and לַוִּיָּתָן as its proper name (Fuchs, *Mythos und Hiobdichtung*, 247-248, 259-260). Others think that each similarity of בַּהֲמוֹת and לַוִּיָּתָן to a hippopotamus and a crocodile is lacking and, moreover, is not supported by any other texts. Therefore, they consider them as mythological terms that refer to the myth of the chaos battle and represent the forces of chaos (so e.g. Kubina, *Gottesreden*, 45-59; Pope, *Job*, 320-322, 329-331). See also, the overview in Habel, *Job*, 557-558.

⁸⁶ Some scholars regard this part as a later addition to the description of the Behemoth and the Leviathan (e.g. Ruprecht, *Nilpferd*, 223-224; Westermann, *Aufbau*, 121; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 384).

⁸⁷ 3,8; Isa.27,1; Ps.74,14. Ruprecht sees the Behemoth as a representation of the historical superpowers (Ruprecht, "Nilpferd", 230). This view corresponds with the opinion of Westermann, who considers the second part of God's answer (40,6ff) as glorification of God as Lord of history (Westermann, *Aufbau*, 112-114). However, it is unclear to what extent actual historical powers are meant. The figure of the Behemoth seems too vague in order to permit such a specific interpretation.

⁸⁸ J.G. Gammie, "Behemoth and Leviathan: on the Didactic and Theological Significance of Job 40:15-41:26", in: J.G. Gammie-W.A. Brueggemann-W.L. Humphreys-J.M. Ward (eds.), *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, Missoula 1978, 217-231. Habel adopts this view (see Habel, *Job*, 558-574).

⁸⁹ 41,2b-3a. Compare Ruprecht, *Nilpferd*, 224. Several scholars change the suffix ך- of לִפְנַי (before me) and of הִקְדַּמְנִי (confront me) into a ך- (him), so that it refers to the Leviathan instead of God (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 527; 529; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 96; Pope, *Job*, 337; Van Selms, *Job II*, 200; Strauß, *Hiob*, 335.346 (only 41,2)). However, this passage is meant to connect the passages about the Behemoth and the Leviathan to the relation between Job and God as it is discussed in the first part of God's answer. If this animal is already overwhelming to human beings, how then will Job remain undamaged before God? Therefore, it is not necessary to change the suffix. The verb שָׁלַח in 41,3a alludes to 9,4, where someone who resists God does not remain undamaged. In the same way, somebody

some of God's opponents, he will certainly not be able to measure up to God. God's restriction and control of these threatening powers of chaos can be labelled as a creative deed. For, it leaves human beings room for an undisturbed life. It is clear that Job does not have the capacity to operate in such a creative way.

5.2.6 The Image of the Lawsuit and God's Final Plea

God concludes his speech with a final plea (40,2.8-14). Here he sums up the issues which have arisen from different perspectives in a central point and comes back to his rejection of Job's words. In this final part, the image of the lawsuit returns. God wonders whether Job is willing to carry through the frustration of God's justice and confronts Job with his divine position. The presentation of God's creative and preserving work and the questions about Job's knowledge and capabilities in the preceding part of God's answer have all served to make it clear that Job does not hold the same position as God. In a final, provoking plea, God challenges Job to prove whether or not this observation is wrong.

- 40,2 Will the faultfinder⁹⁰ contend⁹¹ with the Almighty?
Let the one who argues with God answer!
- 40,8 Will you frustrate my justice,
will you condemn me so that you have right?

God assesses Job's words rather clearly. God feels that he is being reprimanded by Job (40,2) and values Job's words as frustration of God's justice (40,8). Things are turned around. While Job uses the verb **רִיב** (to contend) in order to express how others contend with him and understands his misfortune as God's legal case with

looking for a confrontation with God does not remain undamaged in 41,3a. Hence, it is reasonable to read **וַיִּשְׁלֶם** (and he remains undamaged) cf. LXX instead of **וַיִּשְׁלֶם** (and I remain undamaged) (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 527; Gordis, *Job*, 483; Pope, *Job*, 337; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 364; Budde, *Hiob*, 249; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 96; Hesse, *Hiob*, 206; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 388).

⁹⁰ The word **סֹרֵר** (fault-finder) is a hapax legomena. It can be derived from the root **סָר** (to correct/instruct) and is constructed like **גִּבּוֹר** (cf. Budde, *Hiob*, 240). Other scholars change the vocalization and read **סֹרֵר** from the verb **סָרַר** (to turn aside/yield) (so Pope, *Job*, 318; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 94) or **סֹרֵר** from the verb **סָרַר** (to be stubborn) (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 394). Gordis reads an impf. qal of **סָר** because of the parallel with **יַעֲנֵנָה** (let he answer) in 40,2b: 'let he instruct him' (Gordis, *Job*, 465; so also NBV). However, a chiasm can read in 40,2 through which **סֹרֵר** stands parallel to **גִּבּוֹרֵיחַ** (the one who reproves) and can be taken as a substantive.

⁹¹ Several scholars change the vocalization of the inf. abs. **רִיב** into a partic. **רִיב** (so Pope, *Job*, 318; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 94; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 394). Gordis argues that **רִיב** can be an archaic ptc. qal. of the Media waw verbs (Gordis, *Job*, 464; adopted by Habel, *Job*, 526). However, the infinite absolute can represent a finite form (Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Grammar*, § 113,4b). Therefore, emendation is not necessary.

him (9,3), God now designates Job's actions as contending with God.⁹² Job's attitude is characterized by the words יסור (faultfinder) and מוכיח (the one who argues). The verb כח can mean 'to reprove' (5,17) as well as 'to argue a case' (13,3.15). In 40,2, both elements play a role. On the one hand, the forensic atmosphere of this verse suggests that God refers to Job's attempts to enter into a legal case with God. Job's accusations are characterized and experienced as Job's pleading with God. On the other hand, the meaning 'reprove' is supported by the parallel word יסור. For, the root יסר expresses an instructing and reproving activity.⁹³ In God's eyes, Job is the one who argues with God because of supposed wrongdoing and rebukes God for incorrect behaviour. God makes it clear that things are turned around. According to God, Job is the one who blames God unjustly. Job should respond to God's questions and accept his challenges if he wants to continue instructing and contending with the Almighty (40,2b). Otherwise his accusations become unreliable.

God further turns up the heat on Job in 40,8. He asks whether Job wants to frustrate his justice. According to Huberman-Scholnick, here the word משפט (justice) has an executive dimension and refers to God's governance of the universe.⁹⁴ However, Job does not have the capacity to hinder God's actions as such because God is free to act in the way he wants. Therefore, it is unlikely that Job is accused of frustration of God's governance. The problem is that Job's reasoning did not do justice to the standards on the basis of which God values, creates, and acts. Bildad assures that God does not pervert justice (8,3). Here, justice refers to the logic behind God's actions and refers to the concept of retribution.⁹⁵ Equally, משפט expresses the patterns behind God's dealing in 40,8. This word is reminiscent of עצה (counsel) in 38,2. While first God more generally values Job's words as darkening of his counsel at the beginning of his answer, he now uses forensic terms. Job's way of reasoning is based on the concept of retribution. From his innocent suffering, he derived that God perverts justice in his case. This conclusion is backed by the observation that the wicked prosper. God now takes this reasoning as frustration of his justice. Apparently, God's actions can not be derived from reality and be pointed out on the basis of a person's fate by such a strict application of the concept of retribution.⁹⁶

In 40,8b, God summarizes the impasse in Job's thinking quite to the point. Job's conviction that he is right (צדק) results in a condemnation (רשע) of God. Whereas Job comprehended his misfortune as God's condemnation of him (10,2),

⁹² In 33,13, Elihu also designates Job as the one who is contending with God.

⁹³ 4,3; 5,17.

⁹⁴ Huberman-Scholnick, "The Meaning of *Mišpaṭ* in the Book of Job", *JBL* 101 (1982), 521-529. So also Habel, *Job*, 562.

⁹⁵ See §3.2.1.

⁹⁶ Meanwhile, readers know that there is indeed another reason for Job's suffering other than sinful behaviour.

God now points out that Job declares God guilty if he persists in accusing God. In this way, the provoking questions in 40,8 contain a disapproval of Job's striving to enter into a legal case with God.⁹⁷ God is of the opinion that Job's motive for this attempt is based on an incorrect understanding of the logic and coherence behind God's actions. The interpretation of God's actions in reality according to a strict application of the concept of retribution appears to be frustration of God's justice.

In order to enforce these reproving questions, God concludes his speech with a final plea. He confronts Job with the fundamental difference between God and human beings by challenging Job to be and act like God. For, only somebody with divine power and knowledge would be able to judge God's actions properly. Therefore, Job should prove that he holds such a divine position if he wants to declare God guilty. Otherwise his charge can be dismissed.

- 40,9 Do you have an arm like God
and can you thunder with a voice like his?
40,10 Deck yourself with pride and dignity,
cloth yourself with majesty and splendour.
40,11 Pour out the outbursts of your anger,
and look on all the proud and abase them.
40,12 Look on all the proud and humble them,
tread down the wicked where they stand.

God provokes Job to demonstrate divine capacities. If Job thinks that he can see through and judge God's actions in the Creation, he should be able to adorn himself with divine dignity and undertake various divine tasks. God distinguishes himself from Job with regard to his power. He wonders whether Job has an arm like God. The word זרוע (arm) expresses God's power, with which he punishes, fights, creates, judges, performs wonders, or acts beneficently.⁹⁸ While Job's impotence has already been mentioned in God's answer several times, God now explicitly asks whether Job possesses the same strength as God (40,9). The thundering of God's voice is an illustration of divine power (40,9b). It is an utterance of God's majesty.⁹⁹ While God earlier wondered whether Job is able to lift up his voice (קול) to the clouds (38,34), he now asks whether Job can thunder with his voice like God.

God challenges Job to be like God. In 40,10, he summons Job to adorn himself with God's royal dignity. The word גאון (pride) can be found, among others, in

⁹⁷ See also Kubina, who states that God's speech takes up Job's challenge to enter into a lawsuit with him in order to reverse it (Kubina, *Gottesreden*, 77-78).

⁹⁸ E.g.: to punish: Isa.30,30; to fight: Jer.21,5; to create: Jer.27,5; to judge: Isa.51,5; to perform wonders or act beneficially: Deut.5,15; 26,8; Isa.40,11; 59,16; Ps.77,16.

⁹⁹ 37,2.4.5.

Ps.93,1, where the Lord is king clothed with majesty (גִּשׁוֹרֵה).¹⁰⁰ In Isa.5,16, the Lord is exalted (גִּבֹּהַ) by justice. The combination הַדָּד וְהַדָּד (majesty and splendour; 40,10b) refers to the dignity of a king.¹⁰¹ God gets the royal title 'king' and is attributed with this dignity.¹⁰² In Ps.104,1, God is clothed (לְבָשׁ) with majesty and splendour. Job should deck himself with these royal vestments and act like God. If Job was equal to God, he would be able to judge God's ways but, since Job has none of these divine qualities, he can not form an opinion about God's actions. There is a fundamental distance between God and Job. This makes it logically impossible for Job to be like God and to survey his actions.

The divine tasks include ruling and judging. God takes punishing measures against the proud and wicked (40,11-13). In 40,11, God calls on Job to pour out the outbursts of his anger (אֵשׁ). Job's friends have argued that God's anger hurts the wicked. For instance, Eliphaz makes it clear that those who sow trouble vanish by the breath of God's anger.¹⁰³ On the contrary, Job is of the opinion that God's anger is incalculable. For, God's anger has turned against him even though he is innocent.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, according to Job's observations, the wicked escape their punishment and are even favoured compared to the righteous.¹⁰⁵ In 40,11f, the outbursts of anger are connected with God's oppressing steps against the proud and the wicked. Proud human beings (גִּבּוֹרִים) are characterized by their haughtiness and the setting of traps. They fall into disfavour with God.¹⁰⁶ In 40,12, they occur parallel to the רָשָׁע (wicked).¹⁰⁷ In this way, God takes the edge off Job's reproach that the wicked prosper. He depicts an image in which it belongs to the divine tasks to humble and tread down the proud and wicked (40,11-12).¹⁰⁸ Obviously, God acts according to the concept of retribution in the case of evildoers in a certain way.¹⁰⁹ How this exactly happens is beyond human observation.

The challenge to be and act like God reveals that Job does not have divine capacities. This is the reason for Job's lack of insight into God's counsel. The fundamental difference between God and human beings hinders human beings

¹⁰⁰ See among others Isa.2,10.19; Mic.5,3.

¹⁰¹ Ps.21,6; 45,4.

¹⁰² Ps.96,6.10; 111,3 (God's deeds); 145,5; 1 Chr.16,27.

¹⁰³ 4,9. See also 20,23.28. The friends are convinced that the wicked meet setbacks and perish (8,22; 11,20; 15,20; 18,5; 20,5.29. See also 27,13ff). See §3.2.1.

¹⁰⁴ 16,9; 19,11.

¹⁰⁵ 9,22.24; 10,3, 21,7.17.

¹⁰⁶ Jer.48,29; Ps.94,2; 140,6; Prov.8,13; 15,25.

¹⁰⁷ So also in Ps.94,2f; 140,5-6.

¹⁰⁸ According to Clines, this is not a divine judgment that some humans are wicked and some not because YHWH is ironically inviting Job to take the place of a god and to make such judgments for himself (Clines, "Does the Book of Job Suggest", 101). However, the expression כַּאֲלֹהִים (like God) in 40,9 implies that God does refer to his own actions in this final part of God's answer.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. 38,13-15.

from moving to a similar position as God. Brenner proposes to understand 40,7-14 as a straightforward, although partial, admittance of divine failure. According to her, God is conceding that he can not dispose of the wicked and of evil, at least no more than Job can.¹¹⁰ However, God does not challenge Job to operate with divine power because of his own incapability or lack of sufficient power to act in such a way. On the contrary, God wants to make it clear that nobody is able to carry out such divine tasks except himself. Therefore, God's unique power is underlined instead of reduced in this final plea.¹¹¹ Job does not adopt the same position as God. This implies that he is unable to overlook the logic and coherence behind God's actions completely. Job concluded on the basis of the concept of retribution that God perverts justice in his case. However, God sees this reasoning as frustration of his justice. Apparently, a person's behaviour can not be derived so directly from their fate. Nevertheless, God maintains the fact that there is a balance between a person's deeds and their consequences. He punishes evildoers for their wrong deeds but this action goes beyond the human ability of observation.

5.3 Job's Reply

The strenuous nature of God's challenges and questions forces Job to react. Therefore, Job takes the floor and responds.¹¹² This answer shows a turn in Job's attitude. God's answer changed Job's perception of God. Job has the feeling to understand God better thanks to the fact that he has somehow seen God in a more direct way. The fundamental difference between God and human beings returns in Job's reply. Job acknowledges that he holds a small position in relation to the mighty God. He admits that he did not overlook the exact logic of God's dealing when he earlier spoke about God. This fact hinders him in answering God and leads him to the conclusion that he has told without understanding. Therefore, Job expresses some regret about his former attitude towards God.

Jobs' reply follows on God's final challenge to be and act like God (40,9-14). God summons Job to answer (40,2). But in front of this overwhelming appearance, Job can only acknowledge that he does not hold a similar position to God and is unable to perform some of the divine tasks. Therefore, Job will not answer anymore.

40,4 Behold, I am small; how can I respond you?

¹¹⁰ A. Brenner, "God's Answer to Job", *VT* 31 (1981) 133. According to her, God subtly admits to the basic duality of his nature in the divine speeches (132). Kushner suggests a similar interpretation for 40,9-14 (Kushner, *Als 't kwaad*, 44-47).

¹¹¹ A criticism of Kushner's interpretation can also be found in J.J.J. Spangenberg, "Om teologiseer oor God en lyding: Opmerkings na aanleiding van Harold Kushner se interpretasie van Job 40:9-14", *HTS* 50 (1994) 995-996.

¹¹² 40,4-5; 42,2-6. It is likely that the book of Job originally contained one reply to God's answer. See §5.1.2.

I lay my hand on my mouth.
40,5 I have spoken once and I will not answer again¹¹³,
twice and I will not go on.

God's impressive speech makes Job draw the conclusion that he is small in comparison to God (40,4). The presentation of God's superior power and the confrontation with Job's lack of insight into God's ways seem to inspire Job with awe. Habel is of the opinion that Job suggests that he is reduced to smallness and humbled by the divine speeches.¹¹⁴ However, it is questionable whether the verb קָלַל (to be small) refers to such an act of humiliation. Several times this verb refers to a person's small state in comparison to another.¹¹⁵ In 40,4, it similarly establishes Job's position in relation to God. God's tempestuous exposition has made Job aware of the fact that he is not on equal terms with God. Faced by God's powerful (creative) actions in the Creation and Job's lack of knowledge of the counsel behind this, Job wonders how he could respond to God adequately. Answering God refers to a forensic context. In Job 9, Job has made clear that he would not be able to answer God in a legal case because God's powerful and terrifying manifestation would hinder him in putting an adequate answer into words.¹¹⁶ This expectation now comes true. For, in 40,5, Job does not accept God's challenge to answer him (40,2). God's majestic appearance, his provoking questions, as well as the elaboration of several details of his counsel have silenced Job. Within a legal context, ceasing to respond (עָנָה) means that a plaintiff is convinced by the arguments of the adversary or at least does not see any good in continuing to argue.¹¹⁷ Thus, Job does not mean that he completely stops speaking. He makes it clear that he abandons further contention with God as his adversary at law.¹¹⁸ In this way, Job's silence can be understood as an acknowledgement that

¹¹³ Several scholars read אֶשָּׁנָה (I will repeat) instead of אֶעֱנֶה (I will answer) (so Budde, *Hiob*, 240; Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 325; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 532; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 396). However, such an emendation is not necessary because אֶעֱנֶה fits the context very well. After Job's question about how he can respond God (40,4), Job now makes it clear that he will not answer again (40,5). Van Selms points out that עָנָה also includes the meaning 'to take the floor' (Van Selms, *Job II*, 187). Job will not start arguing again.

¹¹⁴ Habel, *Job*, 549. Habel sees the mood of complaint here.

¹¹⁵ Gen.16,4-5; 1 Sam.2,30; Nah.1,14.

¹¹⁶ 9,3.14-16.20. Although Job later keeps the possibility open that God calls and he answers (13,22).

¹¹⁷ Compare Driver-Gray: Job will give up the role of critic (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 347).

¹¹⁸ Therefore, possible difficulty with the fact that Job still speaks in 42,2ff is not necessary, even if there were two separate answers originally. For, in 42,2ff, Job does not start arguing with God again but further elaborates upon the consequences of his small position and explains why he ceased answering God. Pace Glazov, who states that the existence of the second speech implies that Job has taken his hand off his mouth and has repudiated his vow

God has a stronger case at this moment. Awareness of his small position in relation to God forces Job to give up further arguing.

The question arises of what the nature of Job's silence is. Does it demonstrate humbleness, disapproval, or awe? Fohrer sees a complete difference between 9,3 and 40,4f in the fundamental attitude of the one who keeps silence. Whereas it is an impotent and teeth gnashing silence in 9,3, it is a humble silence in 40,4f, according to Fohrer.¹¹⁹ However, it is questionable whether Job's silence here particularly expresses a humble attitude. The gesture of laying the hand on the mouth (40,4) may throw more light on its character. This gesture means becoming or being silent and at several points it is the result of awe or dismay.¹²⁰ Earlier, Job expressed his desire to speak up and fill his mouth with arguments¹²¹ although he was conscious that his mouth would condemn him impressed by God's superior power (9,20). However, Job now decides to keep his mouth closed (40,4). Glazov understands this gesture as disapproval because Job is aware that he did not get the freedom to 'open his mouth' and to state his case fairly as he wished in 9,34f and 13,20f.¹²² However, this argument neglects the fact that God also meets Job's wishes by getting up to speak and by reacting to several elements in Job's speeches.¹²³ It appears that Job's silence contains a forced and unavoidable element. In the sight of God's powerful actions, which also reveals Job's ignorance of God's counsel, Job can only acknowledge the fact that he is small and unable to refute. With this, the characterization 'humble' expresses too much deliberate resignation and submission.¹²⁴ God's impressive and overwhelming manifestation earlier evokes surprise and dismay. Such a show of strength silences Job. In this way, Job's predictive expectation in Job 9 that he would not be able to answer God comes true at the end of the book.

Job further determines his position in relation to God in the continuation of his reply. He contrasts God's unlimited possibilities with his own restricted capacities.

not to speak again (G.Y. Glazov, "The Significance of the 'Hand on the Mouth' Gesture in Job XL 4", *VT* 52 (2002) 37).

¹¹⁹ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 533.

¹²⁰ 21,5; 29,9; Mic.7,16; Judg.18,19. In Judg.18,19, it occurs parallel to the verb שָׁרַר (to keep silent).

¹²¹ 7,11; 23,4.

¹²² Glazov, "Gesture", 36.40. See also Brenner, who thinks that Job's answer in 40,4-5 shows disapproval because God did not learn anything new in his first speech (Brenner, "Answer", 133).

¹²³ Job's statement that his eye has seen God (42,4) also proves that Job does not value God's answer negatively. See §5.4, where I argue that God takes notice of several elements from Job's speeches by depicting a counter picture.

¹²⁴ For a similar reason, the suggestion of Strauß that it deals with the silence of a sage (Strauß, *Hiob*, 375; see also T.F. Dailey, "The Wisdom of Divine Disputation? On Job 40,2-5", *JSOT* 63 (1994) 113-119, who takes it as a sophisticated silence) is less likely. Such a suggestion supposes too much calmness and rationality at this moment.

While God is able to do everything, Job lacks understanding. However, the paradox is that, nevertheless, Job feels that he knows God better now. For, his eye has seen God.

- 42,2 I know¹²⁵ that you can do everything
and that no plan is impossible for you.
42,3 ..¹²⁶
Therefore, I have spoken without understanding it,
of things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
42,4 ..
42,5 By the listening of the ear, I heard of you,
but now my eye has seen you.

Job establishes his relation to God in more detail by opposing his small state to God's (unlimited) capacities. He declares that he knows that God can do everything (42,2). The verb *יָדַע* (to know) expresses a conviction.¹²⁷ The poet plays with this verb. God provoked Job to show his knowledge of God's counsel¹²⁸ and to operate with divine power. Now Job, states to the contrary that he knows that God can do everything (42,2) but that he himself has spoken about things which he did not know (42,3). The subject of this knowledge in 42,2 is God's ability to do what he wants. This could be indicated as a kind of divine omnipotence. In 42,2b, the substantive *מַזְמֵר* (plan) refers to God's intention to deal in particular ways. This can include avenging elements.¹²⁹ The verb *בִּצָר* (to be possible) occurs in Gen.11,6, where God is worried that nothing that the human race proposes to do will be impossible. Job declares that God is able to execute everything he wants to do. Some scholars read an admission of God's wisdom in this verse.¹³⁰ However, such a designation is not explicitly mentioned.¹³¹ Job acknowledges God's sovereign position. God freely acts in the way he wants. This powerful and sovereign divine position fundamentally distinguishes God from Job.

¹²⁵ Reading Qere: *יָדַעְתִּי*.

¹²⁶ Most scholars regard 42,3ab and 42,4 as later insertions which cite 38,2 and 38,3b (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 532; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 396; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 372; Budde, *Hiob*, 253; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 98; Hesse, *Hiob*, 202). Others treat it as an intended quotation (Habel, *Job*, 576; Gordis, *Job*, 492; Strauß, *Hiob*, 386-387; Van Selms, *Job II*, 207-208; Kubina, *Gottesreden*, 107).

¹²⁷ Compare 9,2,28; 10,13; 13,18; 19,25.

¹²⁸ 38,3-5.18.21.33; 39,1-2. *יָדַעְתִּי*: 38,2.

¹²⁹ Jer.23,20; 30,24; 51,11.

¹³⁰ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 534; Hesse, *Hiob*, 203; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 397 (quoting Davidson).

¹³¹ An appreciative overtone can mainly be heard in Job's remark that he has now seen God (42,5).

This ultimate position of God has as a result that Job is unable to overlook and judge God's functioning. God wondered who it was that darkened God's counsel with words without knowledge (דַּעַת; 38,2). He summoned Job to say (נָגַד), if he has understanding (בִּינָה).¹³² Job now admits that he spoke (נָגַד) without understanding it (בִּינָה), about wonderful things which he did not know (42,3). In the dialogue, Job complains that he does not perceive (בִּינָה) God if God passes by.¹³³ Meanwhile Eliphaz asks rather provocatively what Job knows (יָדַע) and understands (בִּינָה) but which is not clear to the friends (15,9). Job's reply now displays the awakening that his knowledge is less reliable than Job earlier thought.¹³⁴ Job is already familiar with the fact he is unable to see God's ways through. However, this insight is now connected with his reasoning. Job has become aware that his interpretative tools were inadequate for valuing God's actions in reality correctly. Things are too wonderful for Job's understanding. The word נִפְלְאוֹת (wonderful things) can refer to powerful and beneficial actions of God (5,9; Eliphaz) as well as include God's unpredictable and devastating actions (9,10; Job).¹³⁵ In 42,3, it characterizes the unfathomable character of God's actions. God's actions are different, more wide-ranging, and more complicated than Job supposed. This functioning goes beyond Job's ability of observation and this awareness also includes an admission. Job acknowledges the fact that his reasoning and arguments did not do justice to God's counsel.

Job indicates the experience of God's answer from the whirlwind as the cause of this process of awakening. While Job had earlier only heard of God by the listening of the ear, he has now seen God (42,5). The contrast between 'hearing' and 'seeing' typifies the situation before and after God's speaking. These characterizations indicate the quality of obtained knowledge. The expression שָׁמַעַתְּ בְּאָזְנוֹ (by the listening of the ear) refers to information that has reached someone in an indirect way.¹³⁶ Job values the earlier interpretative frames which he had at his disposal in order to understand God's comings and goings as second-hand knowledge in comparison to the insights into God's functioning that he acquired from God's answer.¹³⁷ In 9,11, Job complains that he does not see (רָאָה) God, if God passes by. Hereafter he expresses his wish to see God with his eyes (19,27). The notion 'seeing God' in 42,5 expresses the fulfilment of this wish. Whereas Job experienced God as obscure and unreliable in 9,11, he has now encountered some

¹³² 38,4.18.

¹³³ 9,11. See also 23,8.

¹³⁴ Habel calls this statement a public confession, that Job is 'indeed' the one who obscured God's cosmic design (Habel, *Job*, 581). However, the characterization 'confession' is too strained. It is more the expression of a new awareness that Job has obtained experience of God's answer.

¹³⁵ Elihu also refers to the wonderful nature of God's actions in 37,5.14.

¹³⁶ 2 Sam.22,45; Ps.18,45. In 28,22, the hidden wisdom is only heard by rumours.

¹³⁷ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 534-535; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 372.

signs of God's involvement in his case and has learned God's reaction to his questions and charges. God's answer from the whirlwind has provided Job with some insight into God's functioning. Paradoxically this new knowledge is the consciousness that God's ways are too wonderful to comprehend. Nevertheless, Job has the feeling that he has come closer to God and knows him better. The combination of experiencing that God has taken notice of Job's case and getting the opportunity to observe several details of God's counsel has caused a new awareness and some change in Job.¹³⁸

In the final verse, Job summarizes the effect of the encounter with God. He expresses some regret. God's answer has let him see that he is insignificant before God's overwhelming appearance. The unbridgeable distance between God and Job is the reason for Job's lack of insight into God's counsel. Impressed by God's superior power and having become aware of the impossibility of fathoming God's actions, Job dissolves and regrets that he has spoken inadequately.

42,6 Therefore, I dissolve and regret,
for I am dust and ashes.

This verse is rather controversial because nearly every word is problematic.¹³⁹ The first obstacle is the verb **נסח**. This verb can be read as **נסח** 1 (to reject) or **נסח** 2 (to dissolve). The main problem is the absence of an object, by which it is unclear what **נסח** exactly means and to what it refers. If **נסח** is taken as **נסח** 1, three different meanings can be found. Some scholars translate it as 'to retract'.¹⁴⁰ This meaning is unlikely because it would be unique for **נסח** 1. Others understand it as 'to feel loathing contempt and revulsion'.¹⁴¹ Curtis, for instance, argues that Job feels loathing contempt towards God, since God responded with contemptuous and arrogant boasting.¹⁴² However, such an attitude is improbable because Job's statement that his eye has seen God (42,5) suggests a more positive impression of

¹³⁸ Fohrer calls it an inner transformation, through which Job bears his fate with unconditional devotion to God and in complete community with him (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 535). However, within the context, this verse particularly refers to nature of knowledge and insight. Job now has the feeling of knowing God better but he does not mention an unconditional devotion or complete community.

¹³⁹ For an overview see e.g. T.F. Dailey, "And Yet He Repents –On Job 42,6", *ZAW* 105 (1993) 205-206. Morrow argues that the ambiguity is deliberately built into 42,6 by the Joban author (W. Morrow, "Consolation, Rejection, and Repentance in Job 42,6", *JBL* 105 (1986) 211-225).

¹⁴⁰ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 535-536; Habel, *Job*, 575; Pope, *Job*, 347 (recant); NBV.

¹⁴¹ So J.B. Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yahweh", *JBL* 98 (1979) 503-505; Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 578 (abhor). Both the meaning 'feel loathing' and the possibility of reading **נסח** 2 are mentioned in D.A.J. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew. Vol. V*, Sheffield 2001, 120-122.

¹⁴² Curtis, "On Job's Response", 505.

God's answer.¹⁴³ The final option, which takes **סָנַן** as a rejection according to the verb's basic meaning, would therefore be most likely, if **סָנַן** is read as **סָנַן** 1.¹⁴⁴ In that case, the question is what does Job reject? The most probable object is Job's speaking in the dialogue and in particular his charges against God based on the concept of retribution.¹⁴⁵ For, Job has already acknowledged that he argued without sufficient insight into God's counsel (42,3). If **סָנַן** is read as **סָנַן** 1, it is an intensification of Job's awareness that God's actions go beyond Job's ability of observation. Then Job would take the next step and reject his former conclusions and charges. However, Job's friends would finally triumph if Job repudiated his accusations. For, they summoned Job to give up arguing further with God.¹⁴⁶ It is questionable whether such a consequence is likely, if it is also taken into consideration that God rejects the friends' words in 42,7.¹⁴⁷

The versions LXX and 11QtgJob present trouble with a meaning of rejection and both show a preference for **סָנַן** 2.¹⁴⁸ This is especially striking in the case of LXX because a rejection or retraction of Job's words would have fitted better in its theology of weakening the sharpness of Job's rebellion against God.¹⁴⁹ In Ps.58,8, the psalmist asks God to let the wicked dissolve like water flows away. This is a prayer for depriving the wicked of their influence and strength.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Job has the feeling of losing his strength and becoming insignificant in the sight of God's majesty. In this way, the experience of seeing God (42,5) and the realization

¹⁴³ Kuyper argues that the usage of verb **סָנַן** hardly allows the extreme emphasis of 'to despise, to abhor' (L.J. Kuyper, "The Repentance of Job", *VT* 9 (1959) 92-94).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Kuyper, "Repentance of Job", 91-94; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 373; Strauß, *Hiob*, 336.

¹⁴⁵ Retracting his attitude and words (Pope, *Job*, 348); his words (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 536; NBV). Rejecting/repudiating his words: Kuyper, "Repentance of Job", 94; Budde, *Hiob*, 253; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 373. Despising his arguments: Gordis, *Job*, 492. Several other objects are proposed. For example; 1. Job withdraws his case against God (Habel, *Job*, 576.582 (following Scholnick)). However, it is not necessary to mention that explicitly because Job's silence has already made it clear that he gives up further arguing. 2. Job despises his life (cf. 9,20) (T.F. Dailey, "He Repents", 207 (his life and 'Lebenswelt' as it is now)). However because of the new perspective in Job's life due to God's answer, this is unlikely. 3. Job despises himself (S. Wagner, art. **סָנַן**, ThWAT IV, 627 (as part of penance); Strauß, *Hiob*, 336; Rowley, *Job*, 342; M.C.A. Korpel, "God heeft altijd gelijk. Theodicee in het Oude Nabije Oosten", *NTT* 58 (2004) 202 (as reflexive meaning)). 4. Dust and ashes (D. Patrick, "The Translation of Job XLII,6", *VT* 26 (1976) 369; E.J. van Wolde, "Job 42,1-6: The Reversal of Job", in: W.A.M. Beuken (ed.), *The Book of Job* (BETL CXIV), Leuven 1994, 249 (one of the two possibilities)).

¹⁴⁶ Noort, "Duister duel", 50.

¹⁴⁷ One could object that there God only rejects the friends' speaking of God. However, their call on Job to change his view on God and to take his accusations back directly concerns their opinions about God.

¹⁴⁸ 11QtgJob reads **סָנַן וְאֶתְנַסַּח** (I am poured out and dissolve); LXX: 'I consider myself little and melt'.

¹⁴⁹ Noort, "Duister duel", 50.

¹⁵⁰ Compare 2 Sam.14,14. See also 6,15-18.

of having spoken without sufficient understanding (42,3) have evoked the consciousness of being small (cf.40,4a). Because of the support of LXX and 11QtgJob, the solution to the problem of an implied object and a well fitting meaning within the context of the book, it is preferable to read **מֵאֵס** 2.¹⁵¹ It expresses Job's condition after hearing God's answer. Job's observation that he is unable to answer God (40,4f) has already articulated this state. Job has experienced his own insignificance during God's overwhelming appearance and dissolves.

The remaining part of 42,6 is equally problematic. In particular, the relation between **וַנְחַמְתִּי** and **עַל-עֵפֶר וְאֵפֶר** is the issue here. The verb **נָחַם** (nif.) can express the reconsidering of a decision about something that was planned or performed. This can involve regret about such a decision.¹⁵² The reason for Job's regret is having spoken mistakenly about God's actions. Seeing God (42,5) did not only cause a feeling of insignificance but also brought a change in Job's attitude towards God. Job regrets that he has spoken on the basis of insufficient knowledge. Now the question is, how is **עַל-עֵפֶר וְאֵפֶר** related to this? The verb **נָחַם** occurs several times with the preposition **עַל** which indicates the object of regret.¹⁵³ However, can **עֵפֶר וְאֵפֶר** be such an object? Patrick thinks that this word pair refers to the action of lamenting or mourning. According to him, Job forswears the physical setting associated with mourning and lamentation.¹⁵⁴ However, if the verb **נָחַם** also bears an aspect of regret, mourning can hardly be the object. For, why should Job be sorry for his grief in his miserable situation? If one takes notice of the caesura, 42,6b should be read independently. Traditionally, the preposition **עַל** has often been read as an indication of place. Job is sitting on dust and ashes.¹⁵⁵ However, other occurrences of the word pair **עֵפֶר וְאֵפֶר** express the mortality and insignificance of human beings.¹⁵⁶ In 30,19, Job has become like dust and ashes due to God's hostile actions. Since Job's awareness of his insignificance plays a

¹⁵¹ So Hölscher, *Hiob*, 98; Van Selms, *Job II*, 208; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 398-399; Noort, "Duister duel", 50-51. De Wilde and Noort translate as 'I recognise my insignificance'. The verb **מֵאֵס** also occurs as **מֵאֵס** 2 in 7,5. In 7,16 this seems likely too, where it can express the lack of sufficient strength to keep going (so e.g. Morrow, "Consolation", 214). One could even wonder whether in 36,5, **מֵאֵס** 2 should be read. For 36,5 can articulate the guarantee that God does not reject (**מֵאֵס** 1) the righteous (cf. LXX) or Job but it can also confirm God's power and express that God will not dissolve (**מֵאֵס** 2) (so e.g. Habel, *Job*, 497-498).

¹⁵² See e.g. Gen.6,6-7. Though the verb **נָחַם** could also be a pi'el (to comfort) due to its punctuation, it is not likely that Job speaks of comforting within this context.

¹⁵³ E.g. Jer.18,8.10; Amos 7,3.6.

¹⁵⁴ Patrick, "Translation", 370. In a similar way, De Boer is of the opinion that Job abandons the period of mourning about the calamities that affected him (P.A.H. de Boer, "Haalt Job bakzeil? (Job xlii 6)", *NTT* 31 (1977), 191-193).

¹⁵⁵ This is then taken as a reference to 2,8 (so e.g. Hölscher, *Hiob*, 98; Van Selms, *Job II*, 208; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 536; Habel, *Job*, 583).

¹⁵⁶ Gen.18,27, Sir.10,9; 1QHXXV.5.

considerable role in his reply, it is likely that this word pair also articulates Job's insignificance in 42,6. Such a meaning also corresponds with the feeling of smallness expressed by the verb **נאס**. The particle **על** can indicate a reason.¹⁵⁷ If one takes **על** as a conjunction instead of a preposition and reads 42,6b as a nominal clause with **אנכי** from 42,6a as its implicit subject, **על** does not refer to the place where Job dissolves and regrets but can express the reason for it. Job has become aware that he is insignificant compared to the greatness of God. Therefore, he dissolves and regrets his former attitude. For, Job is dust and ashes.¹⁵⁸

5.4 The Relation of God's Answer and Job's Reply with the Dialogue

5.4.1 Introduction

The introduction of God's answer characterizes this speech as a response to Job (38,1). However, God steers his own course. His answer does not clearly reply to all of Job's questions, accusations, and complaints. Therefore, there is doubt as to whether or to what extent God takes notice of Job's words. Some scholars think that the divine speeches completely ignore Job's contributions in the dialogue.¹⁵⁹ For instance, they argue that the fact that God appears and the event of the encounter between Job and God is more essential than the content of God's speeches.¹⁶⁰ On the contrary, other scholars recognise a substantial reaction to Job's arguments in God's answer. They read objections against Job's views in it, understand it as a rejection of Job's attitude, or see concrete allusions to Job's words in it.¹⁶¹ I have already elaborated upon the fact that God's answer contains a

¹⁵⁷ Art. **על**, HAL II, 827, n.9. In 32,2, Elihu becomes angry with Job because (**על**) Job considered himself to be correct before God.

¹⁵⁸ LXX has further paraphrased this: I consider myself as dust and ashes.

¹⁵⁹ E.g. Weiser, *Hiob*, 241; Hesse, *Hiob*, 11-12. Clines understands the failure of the divine speeches to respond to Job's problem implicitly as a refusal of the validity of Job's complaint (Clines, "Does the Book of Job Suggest", 101).

¹⁶⁰ So e.g. Weiser, *Hiob*, 241. He speaks of 'das Geschehen'. See also Strauß, *Hiob*, 356.

¹⁶¹ E.g. Habel, *Job*, 530-535; Keel, *Entgegnung*, 51-158; Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 26-49; Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 118-142; Nam, *Talking About God*, 123-185; R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, New York, 1985, 85-110; Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 186-198; Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 138-262. Unfortunately, the study of Ritter-Müller only concentrates on Job 38-39, so it is unclear how one of the most crucial parts of God's answer (40,2.8-14) relates to the dialogue in her view. Engljähringer states somewhat paradoxically that in the images of the divine speeches there is an answer with regard to the content but that it is not at all accessible for contemporary readers (K. Engljähringer, *Theologie im Streitgespräch. Studien zur Dynamik der Dialoge des Buches Ijob* (SBS 198), Stuttgart 2003, 164-165). Newsom sees a particular dialogical relation between Job 29-31 and Job 38-42,6 (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 27.237-241). According to Maag, God's answer is a response to Job's complaint in Job 3 (Maag, *Wandlung und*

rejection. Job's impression of God's actions is criticized by the qualifications 'darkening (God's) counsel' (38,2) and 'frustration of God's justice' (40,8).¹⁶² This present section aims to demonstrate that these rejections in God's answer are accompanied by the depiction of a counter picture.¹⁶³ God has taken notice of several issues which Job brought up and responds to them in a more indirect way by showing that his functioning and dealing are different than Job thought.

Job 9 occupies a special position in the book of Job. This chapter has a key function in the dialogue and connects the dialogue with the prologue.¹⁶⁴ It is striking that a notably high number of elements from Job 9 return in God's answer and Job's reply. This is the reason for examining now the relation between Job 9 and the final part of the book in more detail (5.4.2). I argue that God's answer refutes Job's charge that God perverts justice by presenting several elements of God's counsel. This presentation portrays a counter picture, in which the earth is well constructed and designed, God acts preserveringly, and the wicked are punished for their wrong deeds. It appears that Job 9 bridges the dialogue and the final part of the book. The returning elements from Job 9 in the final part of the book connect both parts. Subsequently, the question arises of whether or not the relation between the remaining speeches of Job and this final part of the book corresponds with the impression that God's answer depicts a counter picture. I explore this in 5.4.3.

5.4.2 The Relation of God's Answer and Job's Reply to Job 9

5.4.2.1 Creation Images

In both Job 9 and God's answer, the construction of the earth and God's creative power play a considerable role.¹⁶⁵ The description of the foundation of the earth, the pillars, and the cornerstone (38,4-6) is reminiscent of the world's pillars in 9,6. As God determines the boundaries of the sea (38,8-11), he controls the waves (9,8b). In both speeches, God is able to let the day dawn.¹⁶⁶ They name the stars in the same way.¹⁶⁷ The question of who is able to bind or loose the stars and make them rise (38,31-32) alludes to the remark in 9,7, where God lets the sun rise and seals the stars. The Creation images function in quite the same way in both speeches. In 9,5-9, they show God's power, with which he can also act

Verarbeitung, 99-123). Alter also sees a particular relation between Job 3 and God's answer (Alter, *Art*, 96-100).

¹⁶² See §5.2.2 and §5.2.6.

¹⁶³ Compare Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 122.126-128. She remarks that some old views of Job and the friends get new connotations in the speech of God because God gives them a new overtone and colour and places them in totally different perspectives (122). According to her, God confronts Job with similar images but turns them around (128).

¹⁶⁴ See Ch.2.

¹⁶⁵ See also Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 161.

¹⁶⁶ 9,7; 38,12.

¹⁶⁷ 9,9; 38,31-32. See also Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 207.

destructively in his anger. The Creation images confirm that a rebellious human being does not remain undamaged before God (9,4) and prepare Job's observation that God's dealings can not be seen through or stopped (9,10-12). In God's answer, they serve to demonstrate some aspects of God's counsel behind the cosmos and God's way of working in it.¹⁶⁸ Job lacks insight into this construction of the earth because he was not present when God created the earth. Nor has Job the capacity to create in an equal way. In both parts, the Creation images demonstrate God's superior power over human beings and point out human inability to understand the structure of God's creative work. Both Job and God conclude from God's creative power that Job is unable to see through this divine action. Nevertheless, the use of this power differs to some extent. While Job also observes a devastating and incalculable dimension in God's actions (9,5-7), God particularly emphasizes his creating and sustaining work.¹⁶⁹

5.4.2.2 *Knowledge and Observation*

Knowledge is a central issue in God's answer.¹⁷⁰ Due to a lack of discernment, Job has wrongly spoken about God's counsel and dealings. God challenges Job to demonstrate his insight into the structure of the Creation. God shows elements of its arrangement in order to let Job realize that Job lacks knowledge of this. In 42,3, Job admits this lack of insight. He has spoken about things that he did not understand (לֹא יָדַעְתִּי), things too wonderful (נִפְלְאוֹת) that he did not know (אֲדַע). These words have already been uttered in 9,10-11. There, Job establishes the same observation. He states that God does wonderful things that are unfathomable (9,10). Job does not observe (לֹא יָדַעְתִּי) God if God passes by (9,11). God's conduct and actions can not be seen through by Job. So, Job and God both point out that God's ways pass by human knowledge and the human ability of observation. God illustrates this topic by confronting Job literally with the inscrutability of the Creation. He asks whether Job has entered (הִבַּטְתָּ) into the sources of the sea and the storehouses of the snow (38,22) and is able to walk through the unfathomable (קִרְקִר, compare 9,10) depths of the waters (38,16).¹⁷¹ While Job determines that it is impossible to count God's actions (9,10), God, on the contrary, makes it clear that he counts the clouds with wisdom (38,37) and counts the months of the gestation of the hind (39,2). In this way, God and Job agree about the fact that God's actions can not be perceived by human beings.

Even though the inscrutability of God's ways is mentioned in both speeches, this divine characteristic serves different purposes. God wants to let Job see that the

¹⁶⁸ See also Alter, *Art*, 90.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 161. See also Habel, *Job*, 1985, 530; Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 124-125; Nam, *Talking About God*, 129-130.

¹⁷⁰ See §5.2.4.

¹⁷¹ Compare Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 153.

order of the Creation and God's actions are beyond Job's knowledge and ability of observation. This implies a reproof. For, Job valued God's actions as unjust whereas he is not able to survey the rationale of God's behaviour. Job has already mentioned this inscrutability in Job 9 but uses it there as an argument against God. God can not be stopped when he misuses his power and can not be called to account for what he is doing (9,12) because his ways are unfathomable. While Job uses God's greatness as an argument against God, on the contrary, God brings up his position as Creator as an argument against Job. God confirms Job's observation that God's comings and goings can not be seen through but he rejects Job's conclusion that he abuses this position. Therefore, the connotations of Job's reply that God does marvellous things, which Job does not understand (42,3), somewhat differ from this similar observation in Job 9. Whereas it supports Job's conviction that God misuses his position and acts unjustly in Job 9, it loses its accusatory tone in 42,3. In Job's reply, it expresses the intangible and unobservable character of God's order and actions which human beings lack insight into.

5.4.2.3 *The Image of the Lawsuit*

Job 9 introduced the image of the lawsuit into the dialogue. This image returns at the beginning of Job 40. In 40,2, God uses the forensic terms **רִיב** (to contend), **מוֹכֵיחַ** (arbitrator), and **עֲנֶה** (to answer). God asks whether Job wants to contend with the Almighty (40,2a). Whereas Job interpreted his misfortune as God's contention with Job (9,3), God now labels Job's accusations as Job's contention with God. God forces Job to choose a position. The one, who argues with God and rebukes him, must respond (40,2b). Job answers this challenge with the admittance that he is too small to refute God. He will not answer again (40,4-5). With this, an important line of thought from Job 9 returns in Job 40. In Job 9, Job states that he will not be able to answer God adequately when God contends with him (9,3.14f). Impressed by God's strength (9,17-19), his mouth would declare him guilty even though he is right (9,20). Thus, Job's conclusion that he is too small before God's impressive and powerful appearance and that he therefore can not answer God (40,4-5) has already been foreseen in Job 9.¹⁷²

God continues to speak in legal terms in 40,8. He asks whether Job will frustrate God's justice and condemn God (**רָשַׁע**), so that Job is proved right (**צָדִיק**). Job is convinced that he is blameless (**צַדִּיק**; 9,21) but has to be guilty (**רָשַׁע**) beyond his influence (9,29). Reasoning according to retributive patterns, Job concludes that God has perverted justice in his case (9,22). For, he deserved prosperity because of his righteousness instead of misery. God and Job actually blame each other for the same offence. While Job thinks that God unjustly holds him to be guilty, God

¹⁷² Noort, *Duister duel*, 15.

accuses Job of the same.¹⁷³ God values Job's reasoning as frustration of God's justice. According to God, Job accuses God on the basis of false reasons. In this way, God rejects Job's charge.¹⁷⁴ The indication 'frustration of my justice' demonstrates that Job's charge was unjust. Understanding God's actions on the basis of the concept of retribution apparently does not do justice to the divine considerations behind God's actions. Thus, the book of Job questions the concept of retribution as an adequate tool of interpretation for understanding God's actions towards human beings. Whereas God's answer does not fully reject this concept, it becomes clear that it is impossible for human beings to derive one's former behaviour from one's fate. Obviously, not all suffering is punishment.

The following challenge in God's answer (40,9-14) underlines this rejection. Job would only be able to make such a judgement, if he held a divine position. God confronts Job with the fundamental difference between him and Job. Can Job act wrathfully (40,11; compare 9,5-7.13) and thunder with his voice (40,9; compare 9,16) like God? Job has already brought this difference up by the image of the arbitrator in 9,32-33. There, he establishes that he can not have a legal case with God because God is not a human being like Job. Job is not able to judge God's actions correctly or to denounce them because he does not adopt God's position and does not have his eye view.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, Job lacks divine power and insight.

5.4.2.4 *God's Power, Actions, and Appearance*

Job and God's answer value God's actions rather differently. While Job accuses God of satisfying (שבע) him with bitterness (9,18), God, on the other hand, states that he saturates waste and desolate land with rain in order to let dry ground sprout fresh grass (38,27).¹⁷⁶ According to Job, God treats the righteous and the wicked equally and even favours the wicked by giving the earth in their hands (9,22-24). However, God's answer presents a different view. In 38,13-15, the wicked are shaken from the earth and God withholds them their light. Treading down the wicked explicitly belongs to the divine tasks (40,12). Whereas Job reproaches God with deviating from the concept of retribution through punishing a blameless man instead of rewarding him, God refutes this reproach and demonstrates that he does treat the wicked as he should do according to Job's opinion of justice.¹⁷⁷ Another point of contradiction is God's actions from the storm. Job charged God with increasing his wounds for no reason in the storm (9,17). However, God answers

¹⁷³ Engljähringer also remarks that 40,8 in particular refers to Job 9 and then especially to 9,21-24 (Engljähringer, *Theologie im Streitgespräch*, 173-174).

¹⁷⁴ Compare Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 195.

¹⁷⁵ Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 125.

¹⁷⁶ Compare Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 195; Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 28.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Habel, *Job*, 540; Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 178.

Job from the whirlwind instead of wounding or punishing him.¹⁷⁸ In this way, God's answer indirectly refutes parts of Job's imputations by depicting a counter picture. Whereas Job portrayed a concept of God in which God unjustly satisfies a blameless person with bitterness, benefits the wicked, and wounds Job in the tempest, God's answer depicts a different concept, in which it belongs to God's counsel and order to saturate the desolate land with water, to punish the wicked according to justice, and God unexpectedly answers Job from the whirlwind. Responding to Job's allegations, God presents a counter picture, in which he maintains justice, acts preserveringly, and provides life giving facilities.

5.4.2.5 Conclusions

The similarities between Job 9 and God's answer are striking. Both mention God's superior power in the Creation and the inscrutability of God's ways. However, they draw different conclusions from these divine characteristics. Job concludes that God can not be stopped or called to account. Therefore, God has room to misuse his sovereign position and he indeed does in Job's view. Job sums up how God can act devastatingly, wounding him unjustly, and even benefiting the wicked. Job's impotence in relation to God hinders him denouncing this behaviour. God confronts Job with this same divine power and inscrutability but, on the contrary, he uses these in order to point out Job's lack of knowledge of God's counsel and actions. He judges Job's reasoning to be a frustration of God's justice. So, God rejects the suggestion that human beings are able to deduce what a person's former conduct was from their current fate by reasoning according to a retributive logic, as Job did. A shortage of insight into God's counsel is the reason for this impossibility. Human beings do not adopt a divine position in order to survey God's actions. In order to underline this rejection, God contradicts Job's impression of God's actions with a counter picture.¹⁷⁹ He shows elements of an ingenious order in which he acts preserveringly and creatively, provides desolate land with the possibility of life, and withholds the wicked their light. In this way, God has taken notice of several important elements from Job 9. Through these similarities, Job 9 connects the dialogue with God's answer and Job's response at the end of the book of Job.

There is the question of what significance should be attached to the fact that Job has already foreseen in Job 9 that he would be unable to answer God adequately because of God's overwhelming strength. This observation appears to sharpen Job's accusation that he is in the hands of God –justly or not–. For, God confirms that Job takes a powerless stand in the sight of God. It becomes true that nobody can defend himself in a lawsuit with God in front of God's power. This

¹⁷⁸ 38,1; 40,6. Cf. Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 145. See also Habel, *Job*, 535-536; Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 29; Engljähringer, *Theologie im Streitgespräch*, 189.

¹⁷⁹ See also Keel, *Entgegnung*, 61.

consciousness underlines Job's impotence in his miserable situation. If human beings have the feeling of being wrongly done by God, they lack the possibility to denounce it.

5.4.3 The Relation of God's Answer and Job's Reply with the Remaining Speeches of Job

5.4.3.1 Introduction

The former subsection demonstrated how God refutes several accusations in Job 9 by means of the depiction of a counter image. The issue is now whether the thesis that God answers Job by means of a counter picture also counts for the remaining speeches of Job. In order to prove that this is indeed the case, it is necessary to examine the relation of God's answer and Job's reply with the remaining speeches of Job in more detail. That happens in this subsection.

5.4.3.2 God's Creative Power and Activities

Nowhere does Job question as such God's power as Creator and ruler of the world.¹⁸⁰ However, God and Job have different views on the use of these capacities.¹⁸¹ Job wishes that God would have exerted his power in order to prevent the Creation of his existence on the one hand and cease limiting the perspectives of a troubled one on the other hand. On the contrary, God shows that he applies his creative power in order to create and continue life.¹⁸² His limiting activities serve to restrict threatening chaos in order to give room for life. Job's request for a deed of anti-creation occurs in Job 3. There, he curses the day of his birth. Job wishes that this day would perish and is claimed by darkness (3,3-5). Clouds may cover it (3,5). It would have been better if the night of conception had never been ended by daybreak and got stuck in the chaos of the night (3,9). God confirms that the control of day and night belongs to him. He commands the morning (38,12). God knows the way to the dwelling of light and darkness (38,19) and to the place where the light is dispersed (38,24). He counts the clouds with wisdom (38,37) and has made them the sea's garment (38,9). God is familiar with the gates of deep darkness and death (38,17). Although Job does not incite God directly, it is clear that God should have prevented his birth by bringing about this deed of anti-creation. For, God rules day and night.

However, God applies this control of day and night differently than Job desires. Job wishes that the night of conception does not come into the number of the months (3,6). On the contrary, God presents himself as the guarantor of the process

¹⁸⁰ The only exception might be when Job considers the option that God has characteristics similar to human beings (10,4-5).

¹⁸¹ See also Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 126-128.

¹⁸² Compare Alter, *Art*, 96-97.

of procreation and counts the months that the goat and the hind bear (39,2).¹⁸³ Whereas Job hopes that the stars of the night's dawn are dark (3,9), the morning stars rejoice when God constructs the earth (38,7). They value what God created positively, while Job condemns it.¹⁸⁴ While Job encourages God to darken the stars (3,9), God blames Job for darkening his counsel (38,2).¹⁸⁵ Job longs for the undoing of a creative deed by wishing that he was never born. The reason for this desire is the fact that Job does not notice any sense of giving light –life– to one in misery (3,20). On the other hand, God governs the alternation of day and night. This is a creative and chaos-limiting deed. He provides the world with new life by guarding the process of procreation instead of undoing new life. His creative activities bring joy. Although Job's question about the sense of a life in misery remains unanswered, God counters Job's desire with portraying a picture in which God's creative power is utilized for sustaining and life-giving actions. Such a deed of anti-creation such as Job wishes appears to be darkening of God's counsel.¹⁸⁶

Another component of God's creativity consists of binding and limiting actions. In God's answer, this activity concentrates on the restriction of the sea. That the sea (יָם) is a threatening force becomes clear from Job's question of whether God sees Job as the sea which he then sets a guard over (7,12). God shuts in the sea with doors when it bursts out (יָצָא) from the womb (בֶּטֶן) (38,8). On the other hand, Job wonders why God has not shut the doors of his mother's womb (3,10) and why he did bring (יָצָא) him forth from the womb (בֶּטֶן) (10,18).¹⁸⁷ Paradoxically, the act of limiting would be a deed of anti-creation in Job's case, while it is a creating and chaos-limiting act in God's speech.¹⁸⁸ God binds the sea as a baby with clothes (38,9). Job feels that God does not care for him. According to Job, God wilfully obstructs any hope or perspective of a troubled person because he fences (סָבַח) them in (3,23). God, on the other hand, presents how he creates room for living by shutting the sea in with doors (38,8). Job refers to God's limiting activities by pointing to the fact that God has set bounds (גָּבַל) to the duration of human life. Job wonders why God still troubles human beings despite their limited time on earth (14,5-6).¹⁸⁹ Since Job does not understand the reasons for God's actions, he wonders whether God's days are like the days of a mortal (10,5). On the contrary, God makes it clear that he has set his bounds (גָּבַל) to the

¹⁸³ According to Ritter-Müller, here God answers that Job does not have power over the moment of his origin because he is not even able to count the months until the hind's young are given birth (Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 218).

¹⁸⁴ Compare Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 170; Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 28; Alter, *Art*, 98-99.

¹⁸⁵ Compare Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 148.170; Alter, *Art*, 97.

¹⁸⁶ Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 26-27. It is true that light is withheld from the wicked (38,15). However, this action serves to disarm anti-creative forces in the Creation.

¹⁸⁷ Nam, *Talking About God*, 130.

¹⁸⁸ See also Alter, *Art*, 99.

¹⁸⁹ See also 7,16, 9,25, 17,11.

sea in order to restrict this threatening force (38,10). He confronts Job with the difference between a human's limited lifetime and God's eternity. Job would have had more knowledge if the number of his days were great (38,21). In this way, the opinions about how God acts and should use his creative power differ. Job accuses God of improperly using of these limiting activities on the one hand and asks him to perform a deed of anti-creation with this power on the other hand. However, God shows that he only invests his limiting and bounding efforts in creative and chaos-restricting acts in order to provide room for life.¹⁹⁰ He rules day and night in order to continue life.

5.4.3.3 *God's Handling of Creatures*

Job's opinion of God's actions with regard to creatures is also altered in God's answer. Whereas Job and God both mention similar activities of God, they hold different views on the application of these occupations. Job thinks that God actively watches him in order to judge him when he sins (10,14).¹⁹¹ Job calls God 'watcher of humanity' (7,20; נֹצֵר) and wonders whether God sees him as the sea that God sets a guard over him (7,12). On the other hand, God demonstrates that he observes (שָׁמַר) the time that the hind calves (39,2). While God's watching has a negative and prosecuting connotation in Job's mouth, it serves to secure the continuation of life according to God.¹⁹² Job has the feeling that God has not taken precise notice of his way of life. Therefore, he challenges God to count his steps (14,16) and is prepared to give account of their number (31,37).¹⁹³ God makes it clear that he indeed practices this activity of counting. He counts the clouds with wisdom (38,37). In this way, Job's suggestion that God has not carefully observed his real way of life, when God decided to afflict Job, is challenged. God does count in wisdom. Job has the feeling that God hunts him like a lion (10,16). On the contrary, God says that he applies his hunting activities for sustaining goals; he provides the lion with prey (38,39).¹⁹⁴ While Job complains that his cry for help is not heard by God, God shows that he does answer cries for assistance. He provides the raven with prey when its young ones cry to God (38,41).¹⁹⁵ So, Job's impression that God utilizes some of his qualities carelessly or for wrong and evil purposes is corrected. God presents a picture in which he operates conscientiously in the world. He governs the world with wisdom and applies his capacities in order to guarantee the continuation of life.

The handling of the wicked and the application of anger attract particular attention. Job understands his misery as a manifestation of God's anger (19,11).

¹⁹⁰ Compare Habel, *Job*, 538-539.

¹⁹¹ In 14,16, Job assures that God will not observe any sin.

¹⁹² Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 217-218.

¹⁹³ See also 31,4.

¹⁹⁴ Compare Habel, *Job*, 544; Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 210.

¹⁹⁵ Compare Habel, *Job*, 544; Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 213.

According to Job, God tears him in his anger (16,9). Job proposes that God should temporally hide him in the underworld until God's anger has passed (14,13). Job is of the opinion that he suffers the effect of God's anger unjustly because he is innocent in his eyes. This conclusion is enforced by the observation that the wicked are not punished for their deeds. On the contrary, they even get preferential treatment. According to Job, God favours the plan of the wicked (10,3), while Job has always distanced himself from such a plan (21,16). The evildoers live on (21,7) and their lamp is not put out (21,17). God has even delivered Job into the hands of the wicked (16,11). However, God's answer contradicts this impression. God does indeed act sometimes with anger but he denies that he employs this anger wrongly and benefits wicked. It belongs to divine tasks to pour outbursts of anger over the proud and wicked (40,11). The wicked are shaken out of the skirts of the earth and their light is withheld (38,13.15). They meet God's anger and are trodden down (40,11-12). So, God refutes Job's accusation that he favours the wicked in comparison to the righteous.¹⁹⁶ To Job's complaint that God has set darkness upon his paths (19,8), God responds that light is withheld from the wicked (38,15). Thus, according to God, the lamp of the wicked *is* put out. An important aspect of God's answer is the question of whether human beings are able to recognise these deeds of anger. Whereas Job and his friends meant that they can perceive and point out this action by God by means of a strict application of the concept of retribution, God, on the contrary, designates this reasoning as darkening of his counsel and frustration of his justice. God underlines this assessment by depicting a counter picture. He treats creatures differently than Job thought. This presentation of the treatment of the wicked serves to support God's refutation of Job's charge that God perverts justice. In this way, God does not deny the concept of retribution as such. But the way in which God's actions are determined by this concept is beyond human observation.

5.4.3.4 *Knowledge and Insight*

Job touches upon several facets of the issue of knowledge and insight. On the one hand, he expresses different convictions by means of the verb *יָדַע* (to know). Job knows that God had a hidden purpose when God created human beings (10,13), that he himself is right (13,18), and that his redeemer lives (19,25). On the other hand, Job is faced with the limits of his knowledge and ability of observation. He does not know God's dwelling (23,3), nor does he perceive God in any quarter of the world (23,8-9). At the same time, the reason for his suffering remains unclear. Therefore, Job presses God to inform him about his offences (13,23) and the grounds for God's contending with him (10,2). For then Job would learn (*יָדַע*) and understand (*יָבִין*) what God would answer him (23,5). Job's convictions are more or less related to his uncertainties. Job's belief that he is righteous and therefore

¹⁹⁶ Habel, *Job*, 540; Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 178.

suffers unjustly raises the question of why God acts in such a way. Since God is untraceable, it is impossible to understand and discuss this action with God. Nevertheless, at the same time Job keeps relying on God for a change in his miserable situation.

The nature of God's knowing is also denounced. Job doubts God's omniscience and questions the reliability of God's observations. He wonders whether God sees like human beings see (10,4). Therefore, God should notice carefully and weigh Job in a just balance, so that he learns Job's integrity (31,6). On the other hand, Job uses this omniscience as an argument against God. He calls God to account because God is familiar with Job's way of life (23,10) and knows that Job is not wicked (10,7). Why does God pursue Job, although he knows that Job is innocent? Job's unjust suffering makes him question the reliability of God's capacity to observe.

At the end of the book, God puts the ball back into Job's court. Job's call to inform him about the reasons for his misery is opposed by God's challenge for Job to inform God.¹⁹⁷ Job should display his knowledge and insights if he thinks he is able to judge God's actions. God's answer confirms several of Job's convictions and observations. Firstly, God does somehow appear as Job's spokesman. In 42,5, Job also declares that his expectation that his eye will see God (19,27) is fulfilled.¹⁹⁸ Secondly, God confirms that his ways are untraceable. He points to the fact that Job was not present when God founded the earth (38,4) and confronts Job with his inability to enter into unfathomable regions of the Creation (38,16.22).¹⁹⁹ Something paradoxical can be found with regard to the issue of knowledge and insight. While Job expresses his impotence to discuss his case with God by referring to God's inscrutability, God partly removes this inscrutability by answering Job and presenting several elements from the Creation's order and his preserving work. However, this presentation demonstrates that this order and God's actions go beyond human knowledge and observation. Job's charges based on the concept of retribution are characterized as words without knowledge that darken God's counsel (38,2). Job's doubt about God's ability to observe is contradicted by the question of whether Job has any knowledge of the earth's order and whether his understanding underlies the Creation's design.²⁰⁰ The construction and order of the

¹⁹⁷ God's challenge: 38,3; 40,7. See also 38,4-5.18.21. Job's call: 10,2; 13,23. Van Hecke also says that it is easily possible to read God's challenge as a direct reaction to Job's claims of knowing how God deals with people and how he governs the world, voiced in particular in Job 9-10 and 12-14 (Van Hecke, *Job*, 398).

¹⁹⁸ Compare Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 36.

¹⁹⁹ See also §5.4.2.2.

²⁰⁰ For the elaboration of the different questions and challenges with regard to the issue of knowledge and insight in God's answer, see §5.2.4. The inadequate nature of Job's knowledge can also be illustrated by Job's knowledge of the underworld. Job depicts the underworld as place of rest and equity (3,16-19), as a temporal dwelling place out of range of God's anger (14,13-15), and as a land of darkness (10,21-22). God, on the contrary,

cosmos are based on God's counsel. God oversees the Creation, controls the cycles in it, and acts sustainingly in it. All this passes Job's insight and power. In his answer, Job acknowledges this paradox. Now that his eye has seen God, he realizes that he has spoken about things that he did not understand (42,3.5).

5.4.3.5 *The Image of the Lawsuit*

Despite his consciousness that a lawsuit with God is impossible (9,32-33), Job does not put aside his attempts to take up his case with God. Job interprets his miserable fate as God's judgement. He asks God not to condemn (רשע) him (10,2).²⁰¹ Job sees his suffering as unjust because he is convinced of his innocence. He states that he is not guilty (לֹא אֲשַׁע; 10,7) and that nobody would be able to refute (רִיב) him if he explained his case.²⁰² Job refuses to think that God is right (צדק; 27,5). This belief that Job is blameless has two implications. Firstly, Job draws the conclusion from it that God perverts justice. In Job's eyes, God has taken away his right (מִשְׁפָּט; 27,2). Job complains that justice is lacking in situations where a weak person needs it (19,7). Secondly, it encourages Job to persist in his attempts to denounce God's conduct in a lawsuit. Job wants to plead his case before God and fill his mouth with arguments.²⁰³ He leaves it open as to whether God calls and he answers or he calls and God replies (13,22).²⁰⁴ So, the image of the lawsuit is used to explicate Job's misery as a manifestation of divine judgement on the one hand and to express his desire to discuss the legitimacy of this fate with God on the other.

Job's attempts to provoke a reaction from God or to stage a debate with God are answered in a particular way in the final part of the book. God answers Job from the whirlwind (38,1). However, this answer contains a rejection of Job's charge. God contests Job's accusation that God has taken away his right (27,2) by asking whether or not Job will frustrate God's justice (מִשְׁפָּט; 40,8a). Job argues that he is not guilty (10,7) and refuses to think that God is right (27,5). On the contrary, God wonders whether Job will condemn (רשע) him, so that Job has right (צדק; 40,8b). Job and God blame each other for a similar offence.²⁰⁵ While Job accuses God of withholding his justice, God is of the opinion that Job frustrates his justice. Job labelled God as wicked on the basis of the concept of retribution.

wonders whether Job has ever seen the gates of the underworld (38,17). How is it then possible that Job has substantial knowledge of it? Compare Habel, *Job*, 541; Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 182.

²⁰¹ In 14,3, Job designates God as the one who brings Job into justice with him. See also 23,6, where Job wonders whether God would contend (רִיב) with him with superior power.

²⁰² 13,18-19. Job's innocence is elaborated upon in more detail in §4.3.2.

²⁰³ 13,3; 23,4. In Job 31, an element of such a lawsuit can be found. There, Job defends his righteousness in an extended oath of innocence.

²⁰⁴ In 31,35, Job calls on God to answer to his oath of innocence.

²⁰⁵ See also §5.4.2.4.

According to this concept, God has let Job suffer unjustly. However, God sees this reasoning as frustration of his justice. Obviously, a person's former conduct can not so easily be deduced from their fate. Such a conclusion can not be drawn because Job does not hold a divine position and lacks divine knowledge. Job seems to reconcile himself to this reproach. For, after hearing God's answer, Job's intention to fill his mouth with arguments²⁰⁶ has changed into the gesture of laying his hand on his mouth (40,4). Within the context of the image of the lawsuit, God wins the case and is proved right because Job does not respond with counter arguments.

5.4.3.6 Conclusions

God's answer meets Job's conviction that his eye will see God. It takes up Job's challenge to speak to him and counters Job's complaint that God does not answer when Job calls for help (30,20).²⁰⁷ God does not go into Job's charges and requests explicitly. He does not mention or reject Job's most important argument that Job is blameless.²⁰⁸ Neither does God answer the question of why life is given to one in misery, nor does he respond to Job's request to give reasons for Job's suffering. Nevertheless, God does take notice of Job's speeches in a more indirect way by questioning the frame of interpretation that was the source of most of these issues. Job's charges and accusations were inspired by Job's feeling of suffering unjustly. Job based this on the concept of retribution. God values this way of reasoning as darkening of his counsel and frustration of his justice. God's actions in the world can not be interpreted by such a strict application of the concept of retribution. Human beings lack knowledge of the exact details of God's counsel. What is more, they are unable to observe God's dealings objectively because they do not adopt a similar position as God. Therefore, they are unable to judge God's actions in the world.

God disproves Job's reasoning by depicting a counter picture. God does not address each question or accusation of Job separately but refutes Job's impression of God's actions by giving an alternative view. Job reproaches God by applying his attributes wrongly. According to Job, God guards humans in order to prosecute them, punishes the wrong people with distress, does not carefully observe the ways of human beings, restricts the perspectives of people in misery, and does not prevent an existence that is marked by strife. God's answer counters this impression. It presents some details of God's ingenious plan that underlies the order of the Creation and is the basis of God's actions. God shows elements of a

²⁰⁶ 23,4. See also 7,11.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 142.

²⁰⁸ This implies that Job's claim that he is innocent was just. One could wonder whether God also does not reject this claim when he values Job's words as darkening God's counsel and frustrating his justice. However, Job's own innocent state is not part of God's counsel or justice.

well-constructed earth, in which he has given each thing its specific place. He points to his preserving activities, with which he limits threatening powers of chaos, keeps the cycles of day, night and seasons going, provides nourishment, creates conditions which make life possible, takes careful notice of each detail, and guards the process of procreation. Job is faced with a certain kind paradox, in which God reveals some details of his counsel in order to make it clear that the complete coherence of this counsel goes beyond human knowledge and observation. So, God enfeebles Job's charge that God acts unjustly and arbitrarily in this world.²⁰⁹

However, God's answer does not fully repudiate the concept of retribution. There remains a certain amount of balance. God withholds the wicked their light. What God rejects is that such measures can be observed by human beings. His actions transcend human observation. The implication is that God indeed punishes the wicked but other factors might cause suffering, too. Human beings can not know or judge that. Therefore, a person's conduct can not directly be deduced from their fate. In this way, God's answer does not offer a complete denial of retributive thinking as such but denies that such a relationship is visible for and calculable by human beings. This keeps open the possibility that suffering is brought about by causes other than sin.

One could wonder why God does not take notice of Job's charges and requests in a more explicit and visible way. This would have prevented a lot of doubt about the exact impact of God's answer. Perhaps the relatively intangible nature of God's answer should be understood as an utterance of God's sovereignty in comparison to human beings. Although God does answer human calls, it does not mean that human beings are able to direct or manipulate God's actions. This would imply that, in particular, the shape of God's answer represents God's freedom. In the

²⁰⁹ Van Oorschot thinks that the defence of God's freedom is the central point of God's answer. According to him, both Job and his friends have exceeded the limit of human possibilities with their arguing and God now defends his freedom, which a human being experiences as hidden (Van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze*, 192-209). However, God's freedom as such is not the problem. Job acknowledges this freedom and even argues that God abuses this sovereign position (Job 9). The issue at stake is God's righteousness. Job charges God with unjust actions. However, God's answer makes it clear that such an accusation is unfounded.

prologue, the satan's question of whether Job fears God for nothing (1,9) denounces Job's motives for being righteous as well as God's method of earning honour and worship.²¹⁰ A strict order of reward and punishment would imply that in fact God procures his worship on the one hand and that human beings are able to affect his actions on the other. At the end of the book of Job God opposes this suggestion. His actions can not be directly affected or determined by human beings.

²¹⁰ See §6.2.2.