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God-talk in the Book of Job

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Chapter 3

God, Suffering, and the Human Condition in the Eyes of the Friends

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Introduction

The speeches by Job's friends introduce the concept of retribution in the dialogue. For the friends, this concept is the basic model for explaining God's involvement in a person's misery.¹ The friends back this 'theoretical concept' by extensive lists of examples of miserable fates that befall the wicked. These observable cases prove the right of this theoretical model and at the same time they also serve as a warning for Job. The friends explain Job's misfortune by means of the concept of retribution. They hold to God's righteousness. God's actions do not deviate from this concept according to them. Therefore, they can only deduce from Job's suffering that Job must have sinned before. Even though the concept of retribution is the basic model with which the friends perceive God's involvement in human misery, some modifications to or some stretching of this model appear in their speeches. Suffering a miserable fate because of wickedness is not irreversible. Changing one's behaviour might accomplish a turn in one's destiny. Even forgiveness of sins is once mentioned, although it is used in a negative way and serves to show that Job would have suffered even more if God had blamed him for all his setbacks. The motif of human imperfection sheds a different light on the concept of retribution. It expresses the opinion that nobody can be righteous before God. Finally, Elihu in particular also emphasizes the pedagogical function that suffering might perform. These somewhat distinctive elements are different aspects of the occurrence of suffering in the eyes of the friends. With these different facets, they try to get a hold on the function of suffering in the Creation and on God's relation to it.

This third chapter deals with the view of Job's friends of the function of suffering and God's involvement in it. It successively elaborates upon the concept of retribution (3.2), the possibility of change and forgiveness (3.3), the motif of

¹ Job does the same anyway.

human imperfection (3.4), and suffering as a pedagogical instrument (3.5). One might argue that the friends do not distinguish these different elements to this extent but consider them as different aspects of the same case. However, it is the aim of a biblical-theological study to reconstruct theological implications of a text. As a result, such a reconstruction implies a certain amount of systematization which the text itself might not contain to this extent. However, the aim of reconstructing theological implications of the speeches of Job's friends in order to make them applicable for current debate on the issue of theodicy justifies such an exercise.²

3.1.2 The Approach of the Speeches of the Friends

Job's friends are presented as three individuals.³ They successively enter into conversation with Job. The question is, to what extent can they be treated as three different characters? For instance, Kuhl states that the poet has somewhat differentiated the characters of the friends even though they basically represent the same type. According to him, Eliphaz is depicted as an old sage with sensibility and experience; Bildad represents tradition and has a somewhat more aggressive attitude; as the first of the friends, Zophar is the youngest, he is blunt and sharpens the situation because he brings a charge against Job and utters the gravest charge.⁴ Clines points out some differences with regard to the content of the friends' arguments. According to him, Eliphaz argues from the piety of Job in order to offer consolation. His intention is to encourage Job to patience and hope; Bildad argues from the contrast between the fates of Job and his children in order to offer warning. Bildad's intention is to urge Job to search his heart before God; Zophar argues from the suffering of Job in order to denounce Job. His intention is to summon Job to repentance for his sins.⁵ Whereas somewhat distinct interests could be pointed out in the individual speeches of the friends, the problem is that this difference actually only occurs in the first cycle.⁶ Moreover, Bildad expresses a view –the motif of human imperfection– that was previously raised twice by Eliphaz.⁷ As a result, this particular motif does not indicate a characteristic that distinguishes one from the other. These considerations call into question whether it is possible to attribute a specific character to each individual friend.

² See also §1.2.1.

³ Elihu is a fourth friend. His speeches are later added to the book of Job. See also §1.4.

⁴ C. Kuhl, "Neuere Literarkritik des Buches Hiob", *ThR* N.F. 21 (1953) 272.

⁵ D.A.J. Clines, "The Arguments of Job's Three Friends", in: D.A.J. Clines, *On the Way to the Postmodern. Old Testament Essays, 1967-1998. Vol. II* (JSOT.SS 293), Sheffield 1998, 730-731 [earlier published in D.A.J. Clines-D.M. Gunn-A.J. Hauser (eds.), *Art and Meaning. Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* (JSOT.SS 19, Sheffield 1982, 199-214)].

⁶ Therefore, Clines argues that the first speech of each friend serves as a hermeneutic key for their following speeches (Clines, "Arguments", 732).

⁷ Eliphaz: 4,17-21; 15,14-16; Bildad: 25,4-6.

Since, in my view, distinct positions between the three friends can not be distinguished clearly enough, I treat their speeches as one voice in the debate with Job. They basically represent the same view. However, if one takes the interaction with Job's speeches into account, a different phenomenon may be seen. The speeches of the friends develop somewhat and work toward a climax in cooperation with each other, particularly in the first cycle, but also in the course of the main part of the dialogue. While Eliphaz introduces the concept of retribution (Job 4-5), Bildad assures that God does not deviate from this concept (Job 8). This provokes Job's charge that God does pervert justice (Job 9-10), which subsequently makes Zophar react, saying that Job is the one who is guilty (Job 11). Eliphaz takes up this suggestion and expresses clearly that Job's arguing is inspired by guilt (Job 15). After some extensive lists of the fates of the wicked (Job 18 and 20), Eliphaz finally concludes that Job must be wicked. He proves this by means of citing some sins which Job would have committed (Job 22). Job counters this definitive accusation with his oath of innocence (Job 31). Although the dialogue does not have a strict linear structure toward a climax at the end⁸, this progress can be found in the course of the dialogue in my view. This cooperation between the speeches of the friends in order to accomplish progress in thinking during the course of the dialogue backs up the view that the speeches of Job's friends should be approached as representing one voice.

3.2 The Concept of Retribution and Its Implications

3.2.1 The Concept of Retribution

The first speech of Eliphaz introduces the concept of retribution in the dialogue.⁹ In the preceding speech, Job wonders why God gives life to the troublesome (3,20). Eliphaz now proposes an explanation of the origin of trouble. He divides human beings into two groups. There are upright and wicked. The difference between them is the fate which they meet. While those who sow iniquity and trouble perish, those who fear God do not. The blameless prosper as Bildad makes clear (8,20-21).

Eliphaz tackles Job about his righteous way of life. He wonders why Job's piety does not give him confidence, now that he has suffered this miserable fate.

4,6 Is not your fear of God¹⁰ your confidence,
 and¹¹ is not the perfection of your ways your hope?

⁸ I have e.g. already argued that Job 9 contains an accusation against God that is not surpassed in the rest of the dialogue (Ch.2).

⁹ Job 4-5. This concept has already been supposed in the prologue (see §6.2.1).

¹⁰ יראת אלֹהִים refers to 'fear of God'. See also the prologue, where Job is called יראת אלֹהִים (1,1.8; 2,3). The word returns in both other speeches of Eliphaz (15,4; 22,4).

¹¹ The ך of ׀ה has to be read before ׀ה׀ה.

- 4,7 Remember: who ever perished innocently,
and where were the upright annihilated?
- 4,8 As I have seen: those who plough iniquity,
and those who sow trouble, reap it.
- 4,9 By God's breath they perish,
by the breath of his anger they vanish.

Eliphaz explains his appeal to Job's righteousness by a reference to the concept of retribution. This concept shows that Job does not have to fear for his future if he is upright. In 4,8, the concept of retribution is summarized. Those who plough iniquity and sow trouble, reap it. There is a close connection between the actions of human beings and what befalls them. The suffix of *קִצְרָהוּ* (reap it) refers to the preceding iniquity and trouble. Evildoers encounter the trouble and misery¹² which they caused before. Although 4,9 expresses a new image, it does not articulate a different element of the concept of retribution.¹³ It offers a metaphor of God's execution of this concept.¹⁴ God is clearly mentioned as the actor here.¹⁵ The verb *אָבַד* (to perish) is a typical verb to describe the fate of the wicked in Wisdom literature. Wicked persons perish like their dung (20,7). Furthermore, their hope (8,13), refuge (11,20), and memory (18,17) perish. Perishing does not only refer to a physical death; Barth has shown that someone in trouble can also feel that they are in the realm of death.¹⁶ In this way, perishing can also refer to the trouble in 4,8. God's *אָפַק* (anger) in 4,9 is a reaction against injustice and wickedness and results in punishment and destruction by God.¹⁷ It hits those who have committed iniquities. Eliphaz is convinced that human beings do not perish innocently (4,7). Misery only touches evildoers. Therefore, he appeals to Job's supposed fear of God and perfection of his ways of life (4,6).¹⁸ These attributes characterize an upright

¹² *אָפַק* can be the act of wrongdoing: *פְּעֹלֵי אָוֶן* (those who commit iniquity: 31,3; 34,8.22) and occurs parallel to *עוֹלָה* (iniquity: 11,14). But it can also be the misery that someone encounters (18,12; 21,19). See also Clines, *Job*, 126.

¹³ Pace Clines, *Job*, 127.

¹⁴ Compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 139; S.R. Driver-G.B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job together with a New Translation* (ICC), Edinburgh 1921, 43.

¹⁵ Pace Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma", 172.

¹⁶ C. Barth, *Die Errettung vom Tode. Leben in den Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testaments* (newly published by B. Janowski), Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln 1997 [1947], 72-97.

¹⁷ See §2.2.2.2. According to several scholars, Eliphaz alludes to the death of Job's sons and daughters here and attributes their death to former sinfulness (so e.g. Clines, *Job*, 124; D.W. Cotter, *A Study of Job 4-5 in the Light of Contemporary Literary Theory* (SBL DS 124), Atlanta 1992, 165-172).

¹⁸ The words 'fear of God' and 'upright' remind of the characterization of Job's righteousness in the prologue (1,1.8; 2,3). As in Job 9, the link to the prologue here also intensifies Job's charge. The friends will conclude that Job is wicked. However, the reader

and innocent person.¹⁹ According to Eliphaz, if Job is upright he will certainly survive his suffering. Thus, the positive side of the concept of retribution is also assumed. God will turn Job's fate around and offer him prosperity if, indeed, Job is righteous.

The origin of affliction and trouble is explicitly attributed to human beings in the second half of the first speech of Eliphaz. Eliphaz prepares a general statement in 5,6-7 with a concrete example from daily life about the fate of a fool. He has noticed how a fool lost his possessions and how his children became victims of his misfortune too (5,3-5). Then Eliphaz explains:

5,6 For affliction does not²⁰ spring from the dust
and trouble does not sprout from the soil,
5,7 but a human being begets²¹ trouble
and the sparks²² fly high.

In 5,6, Eliphaz repeats that there is a relation between a person's actions and what befalls them. Misfortune has a specific source. It does not spring from the soil as vegetation does (Gen.2,5). The words און and עמל from 4,8 return in 5,6. They are now used in the sense of the consequence of wrongdoing. The example of the fool's fate (5,3-5) makes clear that trouble and affliction do not spring from sources other than human behaviour itself. A human being reaps the און (iniquity-affliction) and the עמל (trouble) that he has sown (4,8). There is debate about the

knows that Job is upright. See also K. Fullerton, "Double Entendre in the First Speech of Eliphaz", *JBL* 49 (1930) 342-343, who remarks that the words 'thy religion', 'blameless', 'innocent', and 'upright' in 4,6-7 are intended to remind of 1,1.8; 2,3.

¹⁹ נקי (innocent) stands parallel to צדיק (a righteous) in 22,19 and 27,17. It describes a righteous way of life.

²⁰ Habel changes the vocalization of אלו both times into אלו (surely). According to him, suffering can be interpreted as the work of the invading powers arising from the depths of the accursed earth as well as the result of overt human actions (Habel, *Job*, 117.132; Pope, *Job*, 42). However, the example of the destiny of the fool simply shows that suffering stems from the behaviour of human beings themselves. Therefore, the vocalization of אלו does not have to be changed.

²¹ The vocalization of און has to be changed into און cf. LXX (for explanation, see main text).

²² There is considerable debate on this word. Several scholars see a mythological background here and think that it refers to a bird (vulture), which transmits a disease (Hölscher, *Das Buch Hiob* (HAT 17), 2nd rev. ed., Tübingen 1952, 19; Van Selms, *Job I*, 55), or to the god Resheph, who is the god of pestilence and the netherworld (Pope, *Job*, 42-43; Habel, *Job*, 132). According to Habel, this verse means to disclose a chthonic dimension to human misfortunes: suffering can be interpreted as the work of invading powers as well as the result of overt human actions (Habel, *Job*, 132). However, in 5,7b, the only fact established is that the בני־רשף fly high, but they are not explicitly identified as a source of misfortune. Therefore, I prefer to take the בני־רשף as sparks.

vocalization of יִלְדָּ (is born) in 5,7. This line means ‘for a human being is born for trouble’ if the Masoretic text is maintained. However, this meaning is inconsistent with the preceding context because it implies that trouble has another origin than human action. Some scholars think that 5,7a refers to the night vision of Eliphaz in 4,17-21, where an apparition states that human beings can not be righteous before God.²³ In this view, it would be natural for human beings to experience some misfortune and human beings would be born to it.²⁴ Then human beings would be determined to sin to a certain extent beyond their own influence. However, it does not seem plausible that Eliphaz adopts the view of the night vision in this part of his speech because he has just presented the voice of the night vision as having a different opinion independent of himself. Moreover, the word עַמַּל connects 5,7 with 5,6. It would take the edge off the previous argument that the destiny of human beings depends on their behaviour, if the vocalization of the Masoretic text was maintained. Because of the continuity of the elaboration of the concept of retribution (5,2-7), it is preferable to change the vocalization of יִלְדָּ into יִלְדָּ.²⁵ Trouble does not spring from the soil, but human beings beget it. As much it is natural for a fire to cause sparks and some high sparks may cause danger (5,7b), so the chance that human beings beget trouble and suffer a bad fate is considerable, maybe even natural.²⁶

The first speech of Eliphaz introduces in the dialogue the concept of retribution. This concept describes how God acts towards human beings. God rewards or punishes human behaviour. So, human beings actually have their fate under their own control. Bildad calls this concept ‘justice’. He is convinced that God does not deviate from it.

- 8,3 Does God pervert justice?
or does the Almighty one pervert right?
- 8,4 If your children sinned against him,
he handed them over into the power of their transgression.

In 8,3, the words מִשְׁפָּט (justice) and צַדִּיק (right) refer to the concept of retribution as brought up in Job 4-5. They refer here to the order which describes

²³ For the explanation of the night vision, see §3.4.1.

²⁴ So Driver-Gray, *Job*, 51. According to Fohrer, 5,6-7 does not contain the concept of retribution as in 5,1-5, but returns to the basic idea of 4,17ff that weak human nature is the origin of an unfortunate destiny. Misery springs from human beings themselves who are born for it as weak, mortal and inadequate beings (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 148).

²⁵ See also 15,35: they conceive trouble and bring forth iniquity (יִלְדָּ אִשָּׁרָ). Many scholars change it. For an overview of positions see: De Wilde, *Hiob*, 111; Clines, *Job*, 116.

²⁶ Compare H.H. Rowley (ed.), *Job* (The Century Bible. New Series), London e.a. 1970, 61.

how God acts in his righteousness.²⁷ Bildad safeguards God's position in advance after Job's first complaints about his miserable situation and some questions on God's treatment of him (Job 5-6). In his view, the answer to the rhetorical question of 8,3 can only be: 'No, God does not pervert justice'.²⁸ God acts justly, if he treats human beings according to the concept of retribution. God does not deviate from this concept. This assurance makes it possible to establish a person's previous behaviour based on their fate because it is certain that misery is punishment for sins and prosperity reward for righteousness. This mechanism also counts for the situation of Job's sons (8,4).²⁹ There can not be another reason for their death other than their own transgressions according to Bildad. The statement in 8,3 puts a lot of pressure on the rest of the dialogue. Here, Bildad determines God's immunity for the rest of the dialogue. This is the basis for further arguing by the friends. According to them, God can not have done something wrong in Job's case. At the same, it provokes Job's opposite conclusion in Job 9. Because of his innocence, Job can no longer hold to God's righteousness.

The subsequent speeches of the friends particularly illustrate the working of the concept of retribution by depicting the fate of the wicked. Security and freedom from concerns cease³⁰ and terrors frighten them³¹. They come to a premature end.³² Different aspects of the downfall of the wicked can be found. They lose their property³³, that which was sometimes obtained illegally³⁴. Their memory passes away.³⁵ Their house or tent vanishes or is destroyed³⁶ and they do not have offspring or their progeny perishes³⁷. The prosperity and the security of the wicked are only on the surface and temporal.³⁸ According to Eliphaz, the wicked live their life in constant fear of their approaching fate.³⁹

It is striking that God is hardly mentioned in these depictions. Witnessing the concept of retribution in action is the starting point.⁴⁰ Thus, the mechanism can be

²⁷ מִשְׁפָּט bears a similar meaning in 40,8 where justice refers to the order or patterns behind God's actions. The point there is that Job's understanding of justice –the concept of retribution– is assessed as frustration of God's justice (see §5.2.6).

²⁸ See 8,20. Elihu repeats this claim in 34,12.

²⁹ This remark seems to be a reference to the prologue (1,18-19).

³⁰ 11,20; 15,21; 18,14.

³¹ 18,11; 27,20. It is not clear whether 27,7-23 can be attributed to Job, since it describes the fate of the wicked as Job's friends do in their speeches.

³² 8,11-13; 15,32; 20,5-7.11.

³³ 15,29; 20,15.18; 27,16-17.19.

³⁴ 20,19.

³⁵ 8,18; 18,17.

³⁶ 8,22; 15,34; 18,15.

³⁷ 15,34; 18,19; 27,14.

³⁸ 8,16-19; 20,5.

³⁹ 15,20-25.

⁴⁰ Job's friends refer to their own observations and to insights, which they received from wise people and former generations (8,8; 15,17-18).

verified in the experience of daily life.⁴¹ Nevertheless, God is supposed as actor in the illustrations of the fate of the wicked. He brings the destiny of the wicked about. In Job 20, God is explicitly mentioned twice as the subject of an action. God drives the possessions that the wicked swallowed away from their belly (20,15) and he sends his burning anger (20,23).⁴² Furthermore, the fate of the wicked is called their ‘inheritance on the part of God’.⁴³ So, the concept of retribution is not an inner worldly mechanism beyond the active working of God in the book of Job.

The emphasis on the miserable fate of the wicked might suggest that the concept of retribution is one-sided and only refers to evildoers. For, only the negative outcome seems to be mentioned. However, the friends’ speeches also assume the positive side of this concept. The mere fact that a change for the better in Job’s fate is possible, if he is upright (8,6) or if he throws away his iniquities⁴⁴, departs from the idea that a righteous way of life is rewarded.⁴⁵ Eliphaz says that the righteous will rejoice about the fate of the wicked.⁴⁶ A realization of retribution appears in 27,17, where the righteous receive and divide the possessions of the wicked. Whereas Eliphaz hinted at the positive side of the concept of retribution by urging Job to have confidence in his righteousness (4,6-7), both outcomes explicitly occur at the end of Bildad’s first speech.

8,20 Behold, God does not reject a blameless person,
nor does he grasp the hand of evildoers.

This statement refers to the rhetorical question ‘does God pervert justice?’ (8,3). It confirms that evildoers as well as the blameless receive their legitimate share according to the concept of retribution. The word צַדִּיק (blameless) is used in order to express Job’s righteousness in the prologue.⁴⁷ Job expresses his conviction that he is innocent by it and states that God treats the blameless and the wicked equally.⁴⁸ Bildad holds that God’s actions do not deviate from the concept of retribution. ‘To grasp the hand’ (8,20b) means to receive God’s help and solidarity.⁴⁹ This belongs to the blameless, while God rejects the evildoers.⁵⁰ In this

⁴¹ It is also because of this perceptibility that Eliphaz lists some of Job’s iniquities (22,6-9) in order to offer convincing proof for Job’s guilt (see §3.2.2).

⁴² Compare with 4,9, where the evildoer vanishes by the breath of God’s anger. In 8,18, both God or an indefinite person can be subject: ‘when he destroys him from his place...’. According to Job, God destroys (also בִּלְעָ) him (10,8). In the same way, God might be subject in 8,18, but this remains unclear.

⁴³ 20,29; 27,13.

⁴⁴ 11,13-16; 22,23.26.

⁴⁵ This is elaborated upon in more detail in the next section (§3.3).

⁴⁶ 22,19. See also Ps.58,11. On the contrary, Job complains that the wicked rejoice (21,12).

⁴⁷ 1,1.8; 2,3.

⁴⁸ 9,21-22. See §2.2.2.3.

⁴⁹ Isa.41,13; 42,6; Ps.73,23.

way, Bildad lays down God's two-sided retributive action for the rest of the dialogue. His statement implies that God helps the righteous and rejects the wicked. While the friends will hold to this point of view further, Job directly rejects it after he hears this first speech of Bildad in Job 9.

3.2.2 Job's Wickedness

In the course of the dialogue, the friends come to the conclusion that Job must have sinned. On the basis of the concept of retribution, they can only interpret Job's misery as a result of earlier wicked deeds. Zophar as first one explicitly attributes iniquities to Job. After Job's claim that he is blameless (9,21), Zophar rejects this possibility and declares that God even forgets parts of Job's sin (עוֹן) (11,6). The subsequent speeches of Job's friends then assume Job's wickedness. Eliphaz sees Job's rebellious words as proof of Job's guilt. He states that Job's sin (עוֹן) instructs his mouth (15,5-6).⁵¹ The culmination of the verdict of guilty is found in the final speech of Eliphaz. Here, Eliphaz mentions clear transgressions which Job would have committed. These transgressions particularly concern the social sphere.

- 22,6 For you took a pledge from your brothers for no reason
and stripped the naked of their clothing.
- 22,7 You did not give water to the weary
and you withheld bread from the hungry.
- 22,8 But the powerful possessed the land
and the honourable lived on it.
- 22,9 You sent widows away empty-handed
and you crushed⁵² the arms of orphans.

This list of transgressions demonstrates that being righteous emphatically bears a social dimension. The legal and prophetic call to care for the weak and to stop exploiting them can be heard here.⁵³ Job's wealth is assumed here but he has failed to apply it for feeding the hungry. What is more, the suggestion is made that Job has enriched himself at the cost of the weak. Job took a pledge, exploited people so that they did not have enough money to live, and occupied an unnecessarily large expanse of land. With this, Eliphaz reproaches Job for a lack of loyalty to the community and his fellow human beings. Clines characterizes these sins as sins of omission rather than sins of commission.⁵⁴ However, taking pledges and sending widows away gives the impression of rather active and deliberate actions. Several

⁵⁰ Ps.53,6.

⁵¹ Compare 9,20, where Job states that his mouth would condemn him, even if he was right.

⁵² Rendering עָרַב as עָרַב (cf. LXX).

⁵³ E.g. Deut.24,12-13.17-22; Isa.5,8; 58,7.10; Ezek.18,7.16; Mic.2,1-2.9.

⁵⁴ Clines, "Arguments", 733.

scholars call this list of transgressions a postulate of the concept of retribution, which requires that Job must have acted in this way.⁵⁵ Since the legitimacy of Job's misfortune has not been proved by the friends until now, Eliphaz has to suppose that Job has committed these severe sins. The friends have made it clear by means of extensive lists which misfortunes the wicked meet. These expositions act to emphasize the visibility of the working of their theological scheme. Since it is beyond question that Job's misfortune is the result of former sins, the friends have to find out which transgressions Job has committed in the past time. These transgressions have to be generally observable in order to be verifiable. Their severity has to correspond somehow to the misery that the evildoer has met. Even though Job will claim that he has not done any wrong against the slave, the widow, the orphan, and the poor (31,13-23), Eliphaz boldly states the opposite in Job 22. He is familiar with different transgressions which the wealthy and supposedly pious Job has committed. This concrete and grave accusation is needed in order to construct the impasse with which the dialogue ends. This is the conviction of the friends that Job has sinned as opposed to Job's conviction that he is innocent (Job 31). This impasse can only be overcome, if a third party –God– enters the stage and offers a new perspective.

It is unclear to what extent Eliphaz and Bildad suppose that Job is guilty in their first speech. Zophar mentions it explicitly as the first of the friends. The first speech of Eliphaz is ambivalent. On the one hand, the appeal to Job's fear of God (4,6) might imply that Eliphaz sees Job as a righteous person.⁵⁶ Then it would express an encouragement for the future. On the other hand, it could also be that it already presupposes that Job has given up his fear of God because Job's misfortune indicates wrong behaviour.⁵⁷ Clines argues that Eliphaz does not for a moment mean to imply that Job is in the company of the wicked, since Job has not perished.⁵⁸ But actually, Job's miserable fate is already a form of perishing.⁵⁹ This would indicate that Job is wicked. In his first speech, Eliphaz leaves open the question of whether or not Job is wicked, although some indication for his opinion

⁵⁵ Hölscher, *Hiob*, 57; Weiser, *Hiob*, 173; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 356.

⁵⁶ Fullerton e.g. thinks that Job is not included with the sinners here. According to him, the formulation is purposely ambiguous, so that Job would misunderstand it as a warning (K. Fullerton, "Double Entendre", 330-332).

⁵⁷ So Hesse, *Hiob*, 55. Noort points out that the clause 'from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head' (2,7) is a quotation of Deut.28,35 where it is a consequence of not observing God's commands (E. Noort, "UNDE MALUM. The Relation between YHWH and Evil in the Old Testament", in: A. Amaladass (ed.), *The Problem of Evil. Essays on Cross-Cultural Perspectives. Proceedings of the Symposium Held in January 1996 at Satya Nilayam Research Institute, Madras, India*, Thiruvanmiyur-Madras 1997, 64-65). This would imply that Job's appearances are against him and his miserable condition conveys the impression that he has sinned.

⁵⁸ Clines, *Job*, 124-125: "the righteous do not die prematurely".

⁵⁹ See §3.2.1.

may be found. The night vision, which Eliphaz mentions, expresses the opinion that nobody can be righteous before God (4,17). This is the first step towards the view that it is impossible that Job would be righteous.⁶⁰ Whereas Eliphaz expresses no opinion on Job's righteousness explicitly in this stage of the dialogue, the reference to the night vision might indicate that Eliphaz has already suspected that Job is somehow guilty of sinning in Job 4-5.

Bildad also remains silent on this point. On the one hand, his advice to seek God and implore mercy (8,5) might indicate that Bildad suspects wickedness in Job's case. But the verb יִתְחַנֵּן (to implore mercy) does not necessarily suppose some amount of wrongdoing.⁶¹ On the other hand, the end of Bildad's first speech gives the impression that Bildad trusts that a good outcome is possible. He thinks that God will fill Job's mouth with laughter (8,21-22). Hence, Bildad keeps both options –righteous or wicked– open.

3.2.3 The Benefit of Being Righteous

In the dialogue, the friends and Job touch several times on the issue of how human behaviour affects God. For example, Job wonders what he does to God if he sins (7,20). He seems to suppose that human behaviour does not affect God. The suggestion is that God might cease punishing if wrong behaviour does not affect him at all. Later on in the dialogue this issue further concentrates on the effect of a person's righteousness. Does it make any difference for God if one is faithful to him or not? Job doubts this. He asks what profit we get for praying to God (21,15). Eliphaz replies that only human beings themselves profit by their righteousness. It does not affect God.

- 22,2 Can a mortal be of use to God?
 Can even a wise be of service to him?
- 22,3 Is it any delight for the Almighty that you are righteous,
 or is it gain for him that your ways are perfect?

Eliphaz mentions the purpose of an upright way of life by means of several rhetorical questions. Does it benefit God anyhow? In 35,3, the verb יִסְכֵּן (be of use) is used parallel to the verb יִעֲלֶה (to get profit). Here, Elihu refers to a question of Job and paraphrases 'how am I better off than if I sin?'. In 22,2, Eliphaz wonders whether a human being can be useful to God or whether God profits from them. Some scholars read כִּי in 22,2b as a denial: 'no, on the contrary'.⁶² This would mean that Eliphaz explicitly answers the question of 22,2a negatively. However,

⁶⁰ See §3.4.

⁶¹ See §3.3.

⁶² In this case 'him' refers to the wise one. Driver-Gray, *Job*, 192; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 349; H.J. Hermisson, "Von Gottes und Hiobs Nutzen. Zur Auslegung von Hiob 22", *ZThK* 93 (1996) 333.

since 22,2-5 is constructed by a successive row of questions, it is unlikely that 22,2b breaks through this pattern. Therefore, 'כ can better be read emphatically.⁶³ In 22,2b, the reference to the wise serves to strengthen Eliphaz' point. Even a wise person can not mean anything to God.

In 22,3, the general question of whether God would have any benefit from human beings is focused on Job's righteousness in particular. Eliphaz suggests that there is no joy in heaven when someone is righteous. It does not provide God with delight or gain. With this, Eliphaz counters Job's suggestion that human beings do not profit from their piety (21,15). On the contrary, he suggests that a righteous way of life is particularly of use to human beings themselves. Their fate depends on it. It is interesting to note that this question touches on the issue that the satan brings up in the prologue. The satan wonders whether Job's real intention for living a pious life is devotion or self-interest.⁶⁴ If someone's behaviour does not affect God, the danger of self-interest as motive for being righteous increases. Then the question arises of what kind of relationship God has with human beings if their ways of acting do not make any difference to God. The personal aspect in the God-talk would fade into the background. God becomes more of a mechanism that rewards and punishes according to a person's deeds.⁶⁵ But there is more. The irony is that the readers know that God has a very specific interest.⁶⁶ His gain is namely being proved to be right against the satan. So, Eliphaz' case is not as strong as the force of his speech might imply.

Elihu connects Job's remark about the use of being righteous (21,15) and Eliphaz' reply that it does not affect God (22,2-3) in his third speech (35,3-8).⁶⁷ This serves to counter Job's suggestion that it does not make any difference to God whether one is righteous or not because God treats the righteous and the wicked equally. Elihu now emphasizes that human behaviour influences their state of life.

- 35,6 If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against him,
if your transgressions multiply, what do you do to him?
- 35,7 If you are righteous, what do you give to him,
or what does he receive from your hand?
- 35,8 Your wickedness affects people like you
and your righteousness human beings.

In comparison to Eliphaz, Elihu extends the field of human actions which affect God. While human beings do not benefit God in any way with their uprightness,

⁶³ De Wilde, *Hiob*, 233.

⁶⁴ 1,9. See §6.2.2.

⁶⁵ See also Fohrer, *Hiob*, 355.

⁶⁶ See also Hermisson, "Von Gottes und Hiobs Nutzen", 337-338.

⁶⁷ Most scholars assume that the speeches of Elihu are inserted at a later time into the book of Job. See §1.4.

their criminal or wrong behaviour does not touch God either. God's greatness is the reason for this. The clouds and the heavens are already higher than Job (35,5). God is exalted above human beings. Therefore, God is not dependent upon human actions for his well-being. There is nothing that he could receive from their hand. The conclusion is that human behaviour only affects human beings. It looks as though Elihu has an eye for the result of human action. Its effect touches fellow human beings for good or bad. It has already been mentioned that righteous or wicked behaviour includes a person's actions towards others.⁶⁸ Job's actions have consequences for fellow human beings instead of God. In this way, Elihu does not hint at the consequences of human actions for themselves according to the concept of retribution in the first instance. Whereas the expression כַּמֹּךָ (like you) includes Job, the statement makes a particular contrast between God and fellow human beings. While human beings can be victimised by or benefit from the deeds of fellow human beings, these deeds do not affect God.

3.3 Change and Forgiveness

3.3.1 The Possibility of Change in One's Fate

The consequences of the concept of retribution are not irreversible or definite in the eyes of the friends. A change in one's fate is possible if one alters one's behaviour. This process of change occurs within the sphere of the concept of retribution. Changing the causes of a miserable fate brings about an alteration in one's destiny. All three friends leave open the possibility that Job's fate will change for the better. They connect this possibility to the condition that Job direct himself toward God again and remove his iniquities. Job's miserable circumstances will improve if Job mends his ways.

Even though Zophar is the first of Job's friends to declare that Job has sinned (11,6), he is not pessimistic about Job's future. Zophar thinks that a good outcome is possible, if Job gives up his sinful actions.

- 11,13 If you direct your heart
and stretch out your hands towards him.
- 11,14 If there is iniquity in your hand, remove it
and let no injustice dwell in your tent.
- 11,15 Then you will lift up your face without blemish
and you will firmly stand without fear.

The two conditions for a change in Job's fate are differently formulated. While the first one (11,13) is constructed with $\square\aleph$ (if), the second one (11,14) includes an imperative ($\square\aleph\aleph\aleph\aleph$: remove it). The first condition deals with Job's attitude.

⁶⁸ E.g. 22,6-9; Job 31.

The combination of כִּוֶּן (hifil; to direct) with לֵב (heart) can be found with the word דָּרַשׁ (to seek): to direct one's heart to seek the Lord.⁶⁹ It expresses devotion to God and contrasts with doing evil (2 Chr.12,14). Directing one's heart to God indicates loyalty.⁷⁰ It is used in the context of leaving other deities behind and converting to God (1 Sam.7,3). Zophar calls on Job to dedicate himself to God again. He supposes that Job has drifted apart from God by committing sins (11,6). Therefore, only a renewed dedication to God may bring a change in Job's miserable fate. The second half of 11,13 cements this dedication. Spreading one's hands describes the position of prayer.⁷¹ In this way, Zophar asks for a renewed concentration on God.

The second condition is concerned with Job's injustice (11,14). Some scholars take this verse as a parenthesis because of its construction by means of an imperative.⁷² However, this verse introduces a rather independent second element in the *protasis* because it now explicitly mentions iniquity and injustice as obstacles that have to be removed in order to accomplish a change in Job's life. The emphasis here shifts to Job's actions. The significance of this second condition is that it explicitly places the possibility of a change in one's fate within the sphere of the concept of retribution. The mention of removing iniquity makes it clear that an alteration in Job's miserable state can only be realized by an alteration of his wicked way of life. So, here it also applies that Job reaps what he has sown. A renewed dedication to God and a pure way of life will give him a happy and untroubled life again.

After Eliphaz listed several sins which Job would have committed according to him (22,6-9), he ends his speech by showing Job a way out of his misery (22,21-30). This concluding part of the final speech of Eliphaz begins with a general appeal. Eliphaz urges Job to be familiar with God⁷³ and to accept God's instruction. By doing so, Job will encounter prosperity (22,21-22). Then some concrete conditions for a change in Job's destiny follow:

22,23 If you return to the Almighty and bow⁷⁴,

⁶⁹ 2 Chr.12,14; 19,3; 30,19.

⁷⁰ Ps.78,37; 112,7.

⁷¹ 1 Kgs.8,22.38; Isa.1,15; Ezra 9,5. Newsom points out how rituals can provide human beings with real power in order to cope with their situation. According to her, the friends urge Job to make use of the resources of power embodied in the ritual of prayer. She concludes that in this way the friends do not offer Job an illusion that overlooks his 'true' situation, but offer him access to power, the opportunity to take action to influence his situation (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 106-115).

⁷² Budde, *Hiob*, 56; Clines, *Job*, 256.

⁷³ See for the verb סָכַן (hifil) also Ps.139,3 and Num.22,30. In Ps.139,3, the verb describes God's familiarity with the poet's life. In 22,21, it refers to Job's familiarity with God.

⁷⁴ הָעִנָּה has to be read instead of הִבְנֶה cf. LXX (for explanation, see the main text).

(if) you remove injustice from your tent,
⁷⁵
 22,26 Then, you will take your delight in the Almighty
 and lift up your face to God.

The conditions in 22,23 correspond to those in 11,13-14. The two elements –Job’s attitude and removing injustice– return here. The verb **תִּבְנֶה** (you will be built) seems to break through the *protasis* of 22,23 because it already expresses the result of returning to God. However, this result only occurs in 22,26. This interruption also makes it more difficult to suppose **אִם** in the second half of 22,23. Therefore, it is preferable to read **תִּעֲנֶה** (you bow) for **תִּבְנֶה** in accordance with the LXX.⁷⁶ The verb **שׁוּב** (to return) carries an appeal for conversion and introduces an almost prophetic sound in the dialogue.⁷⁷ After Eliphaz has openly declared Job guilty by pointing out some concrete social iniquities, only renewed submission to God and removing Job’s iniquities will change Job’s situation. Within the context of this speech, the word **עוֹלָה** (injustice) refers to the question of whether Job’s wickedness is not great (22,5) and to the examples of Job’s iniquities, which then follow (22,6-9). According to Eliphaz, a change for the better in Job’s situation is possible only if Job mends his ways and abandons his sins.

Bildad mentions the possibility of restoration in Job 8. The context of Job 8 differs from the two preceding passages because it is unclear whether Bildad has already assumed that Job is guilty here.⁷⁸ In this speech, Bildad safeguards God’s righteousness and assures that God does not deviate from the concept of retribution (8,3.20). At the same time, he reckons with the possibility of a good outcome with regard to Job’s fate: “God will yet again fill your mouth with laughter” (8,21). Within this context, Bildad states:

⁷⁵ 22,24-25 brings up a different theme with its references to precious metals. Furthermore, it is constructed with an imperative. This makes it likely that 22,24-25 is an independent unit which disturbs the coherence of 22,23 and 22,26 (cf. Hölscher, *Hiob*, 56; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 351; Hesse, *Hiob*, 141). In this way, the same construction with **אִם...אָז** (if...then) as in 11,13-15 can be found here, if 22,24-25 is left aside. Gordis considers 22,23a as an independent and complete condition. He takes 22,23b as the *protasis* of a new condition, of which the *apodosis* is to be found in 22,24-25. According to Gordis, God promises Job security, when he has made peace with God, and will be able to leave his gold unregarded in his tent (Gordis, *Job*, 249-250. Habel also reads 22,23-25 together (Habel, *Job*, 342-343)). However, it is not clear how 22,23 is related to 22,24-25 with regard to the content. It is questionable whether security is the topic of 22,24-25. Job has to put gold aside in these verses. Strauß considers 22,25 as the *apodosis* of 22,23 and 22,24 as a glossarial extension (H. Strauß, *Hiob 19,1-42,17* (BKAT XVI/2), Neukirchen-Vluyn 2000, 67-68).

⁷⁶ Budde, *Hiob*, 127; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 198; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 56; Weiser, *Hiob*, 171; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 351; Hesse, *Hiob*, 141.

⁷⁷ Compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 190. He states that in 22,23, the prophetic turn is inserted in the belief of retribution, after Job was accused of real, serious sins.

⁷⁸ See §3.2.2.

- 8,5 If you seek God,
and implore the Almighty for mercy,
8,6 if you are pure and upright,
then he will rouse himself for you
and will restore your righteous abode.

Since Bildad does not say explicitly that Job has sinned, there remains the question of how the first condition in 8,5 should be understood. Does the verb ׁננן (to implore mercy) imply that Job has sinned to some degree? Some scholars think that Bildad supposes here that Job has sinned, even though he does not say so.⁷⁹ However, the verb ׁננן does not necessarily imply that Job is wicked to some extent. This verb ׁננן (hitp.)— occurs in the context of forgiveness and conversion from wickedness. At these points, imploring mercy means asking God to forgive.⁸⁰ But the verb also appears as an appeal for a change for the better in a distressing situation. In these cases, it is not directly assumed that someone has sinned or is guilty.⁸¹ Hence, the verb ׁננן does not always presuppose that someone has sinned. It is striking that ‘removing injustice’ is not mentioned as a condition in 8,5-6 as it is in 11,14 and 22,23. Bildad is silent upon the issue of Job’s guilt.⁸² The conditions in 8,5-6 do not express which change Job should make in his life because Job’s guilt has not been mentioned yet. Instead, Bildad offers more general advice and characterizes the true nature of a righteous person. If Job meets these characteristics, God will restore his former life.

Such righteous persons direct themselves to God. In 8,5a, the verb ׁשׁחך (to seek) expresses ‘addressing oneself to’. It describes the attitude of those who address themselves to God after they have converted⁸³ or who are righteous and expect their salvation from the Lord⁸⁴. Righteous persons address themselves to the Almighty and implore God for mercy because they expect that God achieves an outcome in miserable situations. The favour in this case consists of being recompensed for right behaviour.⁸⁵ Several scholars delete 8,6a, since they consider

⁷⁹ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 189; Hesse, *Hiob*, 75; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 76.

⁸⁰ 1 Kgs.8,33.47; 2 Chr.6,24; Hos.12,5.

⁸¹ Ps.30,9; 142,2; Esth.4,8; 8,3. In Ps.26,11, the poet asks God to be gracious (ׁננן qal), since he is blameless. In 9,15, Job considers imploring mercy as the only way to become righteous before God because he will not be proved right in a legal case with God. Asking God for a favour seems the only chance. See also the use of ׁננן (hitp.) in 19,16.

⁸² See also Clines, *Job*, 204.

⁸³ Hos.5,15; Ps.78,34.

⁸⁴ Isa.26,9; Ps.63,2. In 5,8, Eliphaz advises Job to seek (ׁשׁחך) God.

⁸⁵ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 190; Clines, *Job*, 204.

it as a moralising gloss to 8,5.⁸⁶ However, it can be read as a further depiction of the righteous person; they are pure and upright. This characterization places the possibility of restoration within the sphere the concept of retribution. יָשָׁר (upright) refers to 4,7, where Eliphaz asks where the upright were annihilated. At the same time, the author calls to mind the words of the narrator and God in the prologue. They state that nobody is as upright as Job.⁸⁷ In Job 8, Bildad introduces into the dialogue the possibility of a change in Job's fate. God will restore his righteous abode, if Job is righteous. Whereas Bildad does not give his opinion on whether or not Job is righteous, he makes clear what is required for a prosperous life. If Job is wicked, it is clear how he can bring about a change in his fate. For, God does not reject the blameless (8,20).

3.3.2 Forgiveness

Whereas the possibility of a change for the better falls within the sphere of the concept of retribution, Zophar once mentions the possibility that this concept is broken. Reacting to Job's conviction that he is innocent (Job 9), Zophar states that Job would draw a different conclusion if God spoke to him and told him the secrets of wisdom (11,5-6). Then Job would learn the following:

11,6c then you would know⁸⁸ that God forgets some of your sin.

While Job wonders why God does not overlook his sin (7,21),⁸⁹ Zophar states that God does forget some of his sin. This view of forgiveness in the sense that God does not punish someone for some sins is rather unique in Wisdom literature.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Hölscher, *Hiob*, 26; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 184; Horst, *Hiob*, 126.129; Hesse, *Hiob*, 73. De Wilde moves 8,6a behind 8,20 (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 134).

⁸⁷ 1,1.8; 2,3.

⁸⁸ An imperative can also express a consequence which is to be expected with certainty (Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley §110i).

⁸⁹ On the relation of this question with Job's conviction that he is innocent, see §4.3.2.2.

⁹⁰ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 226; Clines, *Job*, 262. 22,30 could be a second place with a notion of forgiveness. There Eliphaz states: 'He will deliver who is not innocent; he will escape by the cleanness of your hands.' If God is taken as the subject in 22,30a, this statement would be inconsistent with the opinion of Eliphaz in the foregoing part that God rewards and punishes according to someone's behaviour. Therefore, many scholars propose to change the reading of אִשָּׁר (not). Habel, on the contrary, takes the אִשָּׁר (the guilty one) as subject of 22,30a. He thinks that the restitution of Job includes Job's elevation to the status of a mediator. According to Habel, Job's superior purity would provide the ransom for delivering someone who is guilty (see 42,7-9) (Habel, *Job*, 343-344). But 22,29-30 can best be read as an explanation of God's actions. It makes clear why Job will be restored (22,26-28), if he has removed his injustice (22,23). In this case, God is the subject of 22,29-30. He delivers the innocent and helps the humble, but humiliates the arrogant. So, different changes in the reading of 22,29-30 have to be made. In that case, אִשָּׁר can best be rendered as אִשָּׁר (man) (so Driver-Gray, *Job*, 199; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 56; Weiser, *Hiob*, 171; Fohrer,

From a systematic point of view, it seems to be in contrast with the common concept of retribution. How does this notion relate to that concept?⁹¹ 11,6c functions as an argument against Job's conviction that he is blameless (9,21). This conviction leads to the conclusion that God perverts justice (9,22-24). Zophar calls this conviction idle talk (11,3-4) and contrasts it with the secrets of wisdom in order to reject it (11,6a). 11,6c apparently elaborates upon the content of these secrets. It belongs to God's secrets of wisdom that God sometimes breaks the concept of retribution in his mercy and does not always punish human beings for all the sins that they have committed.⁹² This is a mystery in the sense that human beings are unable to notice whether or to what extent God applies this freedom. Although God's forgiveness is beneficial for human beings, it serves a negative purpose here. In opposition to Job's accusation that God punishes him unjustly, Zophar holds that God does not punish Job for all of his sins. In this way, the notion of forgiveness serves to support Zophar's conviction that Job is guilty. Even though God may break the concept of retribution, Job's iniquities are still so many that he has to suffer some extent of misery.⁹³

3.4 The Motif of Human Imperfection

3.4.1 The Night Vision

Whereas the concept of retribution is the dominant pattern in the thinking of Job's friends, they also approach Job's case from a different angle. In the friends' speeches it is mentioned three times that human beings are unable to be righteous before God at all.⁹⁴ These passages present a fundamental opposition between God and the Creation. God is of a different order and soars above everything. The whole

Hiob, 352; Terrien, *Job*, 170; Rowley, *Job*, 199; Hesse, *Hiob*, 143; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 238-239). Then Eliphaz ends his call for Job to remove his injustice and to turn to God again with his opinion that God delivers the innocent human being. This means that forgiveness is not mentioned in this verse.

⁹¹ Several scholars have difficulties with this sentence and make proposals for changing the reading of ׀׀׀ (to forget): for an overview, see the textual notes of Clines (Clines, *Job*, 254-255, note 6d). Hölscher deletes this sentence (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 32) and De Wilde reads it before 11,18 (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 156-157).

⁹² Fohrer, *Hiob*, 226; Clines, *Job*, 261-262.

⁹³ Fohrer and Hesse think that Zophar wants to express that Job owes the fact that he is still alive and has not yet perished like his children to God's clemency (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 226; Hesse, *Hiob*, 90). However, this is not clear because Zophar does not state that Job would already have died if God had not forgotten some of his sin.

⁹⁴ 4,17-21; 15,14-16; 25,4-6. Witte attributes these passages to a redaction, which he calls the 'Niedrigkeitsredaktion'. According to him, this redaction contains the passages 4,12-21, 15,11-16, 25,1-6, 40,3-5 and 42,2.3aβb.5-6 (M. Witte, *Vom Leiden zur Lehre -Der dritte Redegang (Hiob 21-27) und die Redaktionsgeschichte des Hiobbuches* (BZAW 230), Berlin-New York 1994).

of Creation is of a lower state than its Creator; therefore, no creature can be righteous in the eyes of God. I call this view the motif of human imperfection.

Eliphaz introduces the motif of human imperfection in the dialogue. In his first speech, he presents it as the content of a night vision. After the exposition of the concept of retribution (4,7-9), Eliphaz speaks of a night vision. He describes that a form appeared to him in nocturnal hours and that he heard a voice (4,12-16). Then the content of this vision follows:

- 4,17 Can a mortal be righteous before⁹⁵ God,
or can a man be pure before his Maker?
4,18 Behold⁹⁶, he does not trust his servants
and he charges his angels with folly,
4,19 how much less those who dwell in houses of clay,
with their foundation in dust,
they are crushed before⁹⁷ the moth.
4,20 From the morning till the evening they are smashed
and they perish forever without being noticed⁹⁸.

⁹⁵ ׀ can specify the point of view of the person who is passing judgement (art. ׀, HAL II, 598, 5a). See also 32,2; Gen.38,26; Num.32,22; Jer.51,5. The night vision deals with the comparison between the being of God and human beings. Mortals can not be righteous or pure *in relation to or over against* God (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 140). Fohrer also translates ׀ as ‘gegenüber’ (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 128). See also LXX. Some wonder whether or suggest that the author expresses a deliberate ambiguity with ׀ (before/ comparative: more than) (e.g. Habel, *Job*, 129; J.E. Harding, “A Spirit of Deception in Job 4:15? Interpretive Indeterminacy and Eliphaz’s Vision”, *Biblical Interpretation* 13 (2005) 152-153.158-159.163-165). However, this is unlikely because it does not belong to the range of thought of Eliphaz at all that human beings can be more righteous than God. Moreover, it is unlikely that Eliphaz hints to Job’s claim that he is innocent and God acts unjustly with a comparison here, since Job has not mentioned this conviction yet.

⁹⁶ Some think that ׀ (behold) states a premise (‘if’; so Clines, *Job*, 112; Habel, *Job*, 113). But it stresses what follows.

⁹⁷ Some take ׀ as ‘in the way of’ (see also 3,24; e.g. Clines, *Job*, 113.135; LXX). Other scholars consider 4,19c as a gloss (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 18 (4,19c-20 as a gloss); Fohrer, *Hiob*, 131; Hesse, *Hiob*, 51). However, a temporal use of ׀ is most likely (‘before’; so Driver-Gray, *Job*, 47; Habel, *Job*, 113). Elsewhere the moth is the subject that destructs (13,28; Isa.50,9; 51,8; Hos.5,12; Ps.39,12). This makes it less likely that the moth is used here as an image of vulnerability, with which human beings are compared. The night vision states that those who dwell in houses of clay will be crushed before the slow destructive work of the moth can reach its culmination (cf. Cotter, *Study of Job 4-5*, 194-196). Thus, the vulnerability of human beings is emphasized.

⁹⁸ The hifil of ׀ does not occur elsewhere. It is rendered as ׀ (name; so Pope, *Job*, 38; Habel, *Job*, 116), as a substantive (attention; so Horst, *Hiob*, 61), as ׀ (helper; so De Wilde, *Hiob*, 109; Rowley, *Job*, 56; cf. LXX) or as ׀ (ptc. qal; so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 131). I read the latter as an abbreviated form of ׀ (to pay attention) cf. 23,6.

4,21 Is not their tent-cord pulled out?
They die without wisdom.

The question of whether a mortal can be righteous before God (4,17) as such could be a neutral question. However, the continuation of the night vision shows that the answer to this question is negative. Reasoning *a maiore ad minus*, the night vision makes clear that human beings are lower creatures than angels. Since God does not trust his own servants, how much less are human beings able to be righteous before their Creator.⁹⁹ So, the night vision indicates a fundamental difference between God and creatures. The nature of human beings is depicted from 4,19. Most scholars regard the ‘houses of clay’ as an image of the human body.¹⁰⁰ חמר (clay) is the material from which a human being is formed.¹⁰¹ The image refers to the Creation story, where God forms the human being from dust (עפר) (Gen.2,7). The flood washes the foundation (יסוד) of the wicked away (22,16), but the foundation of the righteous is for ever (Prov.10,25). Since this verse deals with the weakness and mortality of human beings, it is likely that the houses of clay refer to the human body. A strong foundation on rock is lacking. So, human existence is vulnerable. Human beings are perishable like the material they are made from. The fact that they are vulnerable and perishable indicates their low state. These dwellings of clay are crushed before a moth is able to eat them up.

The depiction of the human state is continued in 4,20-21. Whereas evildoers perish (אבד; 4,9) but the innocent do not (4,7), perishing is a characteristic of all human beings in 4,20; they pass away during the day. When they die, nobody takes any notice of it.¹⁰² So, it appears that an individual human life is rather insignificant. Pulling out their tent-cord (4,21) is an image of a person’s death (cf. Isa.38,12). Death often comes suddenly and unexpectedly. People die without wisdom. The word חכמה (wisdom) can refer to God’s inscrutable wisdom or to human understanding in the book of Job.¹⁰³ Van Hecke demonstrates, by means of a semantic study of חכמה that it expresses the regular amount of educational knowledge a person is supposed to acquire during his lifetime. Dying an untimely death deprives man of the possibility of ever acquiring חכמה, since it comes with

⁹⁹ Weiser and Clines restrict the content of the night vision to 4,17. They consider 4,18-21 as Wisdom’s extensions to it (Weiser, *Hiob*, 50; Clines, *Job*, 133-134). However, the night vision would not make much sense if it only poses a question without showing the implications of it. Furthermore, the same content and structure return in 15,14-16 and 25,4-6. This makes the unity of 4,17-21 plausible (compare Horst, *Hiob*, 78).

¹⁰⁰ De Wilde, however, thinks that dwellings are meant instead of bodies. According to him, these are symbolically used for the occupants (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 109).

¹⁰¹ 10,9; 33,6.

¹⁰² Cf. Clines, *Job*, 136.

¹⁰³ E.g. 11,6; 12,2.12-13; 15,8. Wisdom is the central topic in the later added Job 28.

age (e.g. 12,12) according to Van Hecke.¹⁰⁴ The limited length of life hinders access to full wisdom. This distinguishes human beings from God and demonstrates their subordinate position in relation to him. It is because of this subordinate position of human beings in relation to God that human beings can never be righteous before God.

The motif of human imperfection sheds a somewhat different light on human existence in comparison to the concept of retribution.¹⁰⁵ While humankind is divided into the righteous and the wicked according to the relation between a person's actions and what befalls them (4,6-9), the night vision seems to remove this distinction. For, it holds that nobody can be righteous before God. This distinction can be illustrated by means of the verb **אָבַד** (to perish). While the verb describes the fate of the wicked in 4,6-9, it is the destiny of each human being in the night vision (4,20). This perishing in the night vision indicates that all human beings are wicked.¹⁰⁶ In particular, a systematic point of view raises the question of how these two distinct aspects, which occur together in one speech, relate to each other. For, they seem to conflict to some extent, if they are compared to each other systematically.

Fohrer solves this issue by supposing that both views are concerned with different fields of human life. He makes a distinction between the area of retribution and the infinite subordination of all creatures before God. He thinks that the night vision does not deal with the retribution of good or bad people, but with the impotence of creatures beyond the doctrine of retribution. Even a human being

¹⁰⁴ P. van Hecke, *Job 12-14. A Functional-Grammatical and Cognitive-Semantic Approach*, Melle 2005, 338-339. He reads this verse as a possibility instead of a sketch of human fate in general.

¹⁰⁵ Compare Hesse, *Hiob*, 56; Witte, *Leiden*, 74. Witte sees 4,12-21 as a part of a redaction (*Niedrigkeitsredaktion*). Würthwein describes it as a piece of traditional theology which can hardly be explained in the context; a "Fremdkörper im Denken der Freunde" (E. Würthwein, "Gott und Mensch in Dialog und Gottesreden des Buches Hiob" [1938], in: E. Würthwein, *Wort und Existenz – Studien zum Alten Testament*, Göttingen 1970, 239). According to Tur-Sinai, Eliphaz quotes Job to refute this argument. Tur-Sinai is of the opinion that Job has experienced the night vision (N.H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job. A New Commentary*, Jerusalem 1957, 90-91; G.V. Smith also defends this opinion: G.V. Smith, "Job IV 12-21: Is It Eliphaz's Vision?", *VT* 40 (1990) 453-463). However, it does not become clear that Eliphaz quotes Job. Moreover, the fact that the view of the night vision returns in the second speech of Eliphaz (15,14-16) and the third one of Bildad (25,4-6) makes it even more likely that it is a topic of Job's friends.

¹⁰⁶ See also Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 140. Since Clines regards 4,18-21 as the words of Eliphaz, it becomes even more problematic to him. For, Eliphaz would contradict his former words. Therefore, Clines distinguishes 4,19a-b as a universal truth about mankind from 4,19c-21 as particular possibilities. He translates the verbs in 4,19c-21 as modal verbs (D.A.J. Clines, "Verb Modality and the Interpretation of Job IV 20-21", *VT* 30 (1980) 355-356; Clines, *Job*, 135). Van Hecke adopts this view (Van Hecke, *Job 12-14*, 338). However, 4,19c-21 belong to the general the description of the state and unavoidable fate of mortals within the content of the night vision).

who lives a perfect life according to the doctrine of Wisdom is not pure before God according to Fohrer.¹⁰⁷ He concludes from the image of the house of clay (4,19) that infinite subordination to God is not due to a religious or ethical base, but stems from the perishable nature of humankind.¹⁰⁸ So, the concept of retribution as described in 4,6-9 would deal with the religious and ethical behaviour of human beings, while the night vision expresses the absolutely imperfect state of human beings beyond the area of retribution, according to Fohrer.

In the opinion of Witte, the night vision serves to offer a modification to retributive thinking. He takes this vision as an interpolation that makes it clear that suffering does not have to be considered any longer as a punishment of immediate transgressions, but can be understood as an always righteous destiny of the, as such, naturally¹⁰⁹ and morally (15,16) unworthy human being. The connection of this opinion of the night vision with the concept of retribution means that a human being is absolutely corrupt, but can be relatively righteous according to Witte.¹¹⁰ The views of Fohrer and Witte correspond with each other in the sense that both assume that the concept of retribution (4,6-9) and the night vision (4,17-21) refer to different fields of human life. The night vision points out the absolutely imperfect state of human beings or absolute corruption on the one hand, while the retributive logic of 4,6-9 is concerned with the possibility of relative righteousness or ethical and religiously correct behaviour on the other. However, the nature of absolute imperfection in the night vision differs in both views. Fohrer places the innate impotence of human beings beyond the area of retribution.¹¹¹ Witte, on the other hand, is of the opinion that the night vision refers to the area of retribution. In his view, the night vision regards each human being as essentially רשע (wicked), but denies that suffering always stems from immediate transgressions. Sin is an integral part of human nature according to Witte.¹¹²

Both of the above views suppose that the first part of Job 4 refers to the area of retribution, in which people can be righteous or wicked. Then it deals with ethical or religious behaviour. Subsequently they argue that the night vision refers to a different field and expresses the absolute imperfection of human beings in relation

¹⁰⁷ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 144.

¹⁰⁸ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 145. Cf. Hölscher, *Hiob*, 21.

¹⁰⁹ 4,19-21 and 25,6.

¹¹⁰ Witte, *Leiden*, 225. Remus makes a similar distinction: from the perspective of human beings, a human being can be characterized as righteous when he behaves loyally in his many relationships in the communion. But nobody is righteous from the perspective of God (M. Remus, *Menschenbildvorstellungen im Ijob-Buch. Ein Beitrag zur alttestamentlichen Anthropologie* (BEATAJ 21), Frankfurt am Main e.a. 1993, 21, note 73). Also, Hesse thinks of a modification to retributive thinking, so that Job's misfortune does not necessarily have to be caused by his wickedness (Hesse, *Hiob*, 56).

¹¹¹ Hesse similarly considers the night vision as an attempt to explain Job's misery beyond the area of retribution: caused by another reason than wickedness (Hesse, *Hiob*, 56).

¹¹² Witte, *Leiden*, 225-226.

to God. However, two problems arise with regard to this distinction. First, Fohrer bases this distinction mainly on the description ‘houses of clay’ (4,19). From this image of the perishable human body, he deduces the distinction between a lapse, which stems from the natural weakness of human beings and falls beyond the area of retribution, and iniquities in an ethical sense that fall within the area of retribution and point to wickedness. Fohrer argues that the depiction of the human body in 4,19 demonstrates that the night vision wants to base Job’s suffering on his human nature beyond the area of retribution instead of on sins committed.¹¹³ However, it is questionable whether the depiction of human bodies as houses of clay can also serve as an explanation for which of the two is the origin of a sin. This image indicates the low state of human beings. The perishable materials represent their subordinate position to God’s servants and angels. But it does not express a source of sins due to the natural weakness of human beings beyond the area of retribution.

Secondly, this distinction would imply that the verb צַדִּיק (to be righteous) in 4,17 would refer to the area of imperfection beyond the area of retribution.¹¹⁴ In 22,3, Eliphaz asks Job whether it is any delight for God that he is righteous. Here, the verb צַדִּיק stands parallel to תַּתֵּם דַּרְכֵי־יָדָי (make your ways perfect). דַּרְךְ (way) refers to a person’s way of living.¹¹⁵ After this question, Eliphaz describes some concrete transgressions which Job would have committed (22,5-9). So, the verb צַדִּיק refers to the area of retribution in Job 22. It would be strange if the verb צַדִּיק referred to the area of retribution in 22,3 although it would point out some imperfection beyond the area of retribution in 4,17. Moreover, when the content of the night vision returns in the second speech of Eliphaz (15,14-16), it is explicitly placed within the area of retribution. In this speech human beings are characterized as those who drink injustice like water (15,16).¹¹⁶ This makes it plausible that צַדִּיק in 4,17 also refers to the area of retribution. In this way, it becomes clear that a

¹¹³ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 145.181.271. Fohrer distinguishes the opinion of the night vision from 15,16, where Eliphaz attributes Job’s suffering to his sins and so places the motif of imperfection within the area of retribution there (271). Furthermore, 7,21 plays a role, where Job asks why God does not overlook his iniquities. According to Fohrer, Job can only refer here to the iniquities which stem from natural human weakness (cf. 4,17-21) (181). Because of among others 7,21 and 13,26, Scherer distinguishes between sins that stem from the natural weakness which fall beyond the area of retribution and sins that are committed consciously and deliberately, which fall within the area of retribution (A. Scherer, “Relative Gerechtigkeit und absolute Vollkommenheit bei Hiob. Überlegungen zu Spannungsmomenten im Hiobbuch”, *Biblische Notizen* 101 (2000) 90-91.95-97). Compare also V. Maag, *Hiob. Wandlung und Verarbeitung des Problems in Novelle, Dialogdichtung und Spätfassungen* (FRLANT 128), Göttingen 1982, 158-165. According to Maag, Job charges God with blaming him for sins that stem from the natural weakness of humankind (159).

¹¹⁴ This verb also occurs in the two other passages on the human imperfection (15,14; 25,4).

¹¹⁵ See e.g. 4,6.

¹¹⁶ For the description of 15,14-16, see §3.4.2.

distinction between an area of retribution (4,6-9) and an imperfect state of human beings beyond the area of retribution (4,17-21) is not tenable.¹¹⁷

Since it is not possible to distinguish between a source of sin within the area of retribution and one beyond it in Job 4 and since קָדַשׁ functions within the area of retribution at the other places in the speeches of the friends, the concept of retribution also counts for the content of the night vision. Thus, Witte is right to a certain extent when he says that the night vision considers each human being as being essentially wicked. However, this view of the night vision does not speak about a level other than the concept of retribution as described in the first half of Job 4. On the contrary, the night vision offers some modification to the retributive thinking of 4,6-9. Whereas the concept of retribution assumes that somebody can be wicked or righteous, the night vision argues that being fully righteous is only a theoretical possibility. However, practically speaking, it is impossible to be fully righteous before God, according to the night vision.¹¹⁸

The presentation of the night vision puts pressure on the further continuation of the dialogue. It prepares Job and the reader for the view that will develop in the course of the speeches of the friends: Job can not be righteous because of his suffering. The argument of the night vision intensifies this view. Since no human being can be righteous before God, a person's conviction that he is blameless can not be true.¹¹⁹ By introducing it as a night vision, the argument of human imperfection is somewhat distanced from Eliphaz. So, Eliphaz leaves the question of whether or not Job is guilty open at this stage of the dialogue. But the night vision has already rejected the possibility of being righteous. Hence, Job's conviction that he is blameless (Job 9) has already been refuted by the night vision in Job 4. In this way, the night vision provides an important argument in the attempts of Job's friends to safeguard God's righteousness and theology that understands God's actions according to the concept of retribution. It backs the conviction of Job's friends in the course of the dialogue that Job must have sinned.

¹¹⁷ A similar kind of problem arises when Witte makes a distinction between relative righteousness and absolute corruption. It would mean that קָדַשׁ refers to the absolute corruption in 4,17, while it concerns the area of relative righteousness in Job 22. For, the mentioned sins in 22,5-9 belong to the area of the possibility of being relatively righteous in his way of reasoning.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Clines. He thinks that the night vision makes Eliphaz aware that terms like 'righteous' and 'innocent' are simply rule-of-thumb designations that do not correspond to the reality of a universe where only God is truly 'righteous'. Therefore, according to Clines, Job has to expect some degree of suffering as a less than perfectly righteous person (Clines, *Job*, 132-133; also 128: "...the righteous can never be perfectly righteous...").

¹¹⁹ Compare Hermisson, "Notizen", 133.

3.4.2 Further References to the Motif of Human Imperfection

While Eliphaz introduces the motif of human imperfection by quoting a night vision (4,12-21), he uses this motif by himself in Job 15. The situation has now changed. While Eliphaz asked the question of Job's guilt aside in Job 4-5, he now explicitly declares that Job is guilty. Eliphaz reacts against Job's rebellious behaviour and his claim that he is blameless. From this, he concludes that sin is at the root of what Job says (15,5). The motif of human imperfection now serves as an argument to support Eliphaz' impression that Job is guilty.

- 15,14 What is a mortal that he can be pure,
and that one born of woman can be righteous?
15,15 Behold, he does not put trust in his holy ones¹²⁰,
and the heavens are not pure in his eyes.
15,16 How much less one who is abominable and corrupt,
a human being who drinks injustice like water.

While the night vision in particular depicted the perishable nature of human beings (4,19), 15,16 emphasizes their sinful character. Here, corruption is connected with the nature of humankind.¹²¹ Sinning is as natural for human beings as drinking water.¹²² The characterization of humankind as sinners is chosen in view of the specific function of the motif of human imperfection in this second speech of Eliphaz. Here, it serves to support the open declaration that Job is not blameless (15,5). Since all human beings are corrupt, it is impossible that Job's plea in Job 9 is true. The word **שְׁדָדִים** (holy one) can refer to a specific group of human beings¹²³ as well as to angels or beings who dwell in the realm of God¹²⁴. Because of the parallel with heaven (15,15b) and because God's servants and angels are mentioned in 4,18, the holy ones are heavenly beings here.¹²⁵ God does not even trust the heavenly beings that dwell in his realm, how much less, then, does he trust human beings who are used to sin. In Job 15, Eliphaz mentions several 'arguments' in order to demonstrate Job's wrongdoing. He wonders whether Job has the wisdom to see through God's actions (15,7-9) and whether the God's consolations are too small (15,11). Then the motif of human imperfection is introduced as the decisive argument. Job's conviction that he is blameless is incorrect because a human being can simply not be righteous before God.

¹²⁰ Reading **בְּקִדְשׁוֹ** as a plural.

¹²¹ Compare Ps.14,3; 53,4, where the verb **אָלַף** (to be corrupt) is used to describe all human beings who turned away from God and no one does good.

¹²² Cf. Pope, *Job*, 116; Clines, *Job*, 353.

¹²³ E.g. Ps.16,3; 34,10.

¹²⁴ E.g. Ps.89,6.8; Zech.14,5.

¹²⁵ See also the representation of the heavenly court in the prologue.

One could argue that in Job 15 the motif of human imperfection does not refer to a general characteristic of humankind, but is used with an eye on the particular case of Job. In this way, Hesse thinks that Eliphaz refers directly to Job because otherwise there would be a discrepancy between the general world view of the wise, which is exposed in 15,20ff, and the motif of human imperfection, if it regarded all human beings.¹²⁶ However, the general formulation by means of אָנוּשׁ (mortal) and יָלֵדָה אִשָּׁה (born of woman) in 15,14 implies that this statement points to a general characterization of humankind. If this is the case, the question arises of how the exposition of the fate of the wicked (15,20-35)¹²⁷ relates to the first part of Job 15. For, each human being would suffer this fate to some extent, if nobody is fully perfect. One has to establish that Eliphaz describes different aspects of the phenomenon suffering here. While suffering is a consequence for wrong behaviour on the one hand, Eliphaz can not imagine that people never do something wrong on the other hand. The implication of this observation, then, is that human beings are incited to limit wrong behaviour. For, the more one sins, the more one suffers. Because of this, the depiction of the fate of the wicked (15,20-35) bears a double function. On the one hand, it serves as a warning.¹²⁸ Job's suffering might increase with more of these elements if he keeps sinning. On the other hand, some elements of this list seem to correspond to Job's situation.¹²⁹ For instance, the wealth of the wicked will not endure (15,29). Hence, the depiction of the miserable fate of the wicked also serves to prove that Job is wicked to a certain extent. In the eyes of Eliphaz, Job can not be an exception to how humankind generally is. Therefore, he rejects Job's claim that he is innocent. Thus, Job's accusation against God also lacks foundation according to Eliphaz.

The last mention of the motif of human imperfection occurs in Bildad's final speech (Job 25).¹³⁰ This speech starts with a depiction of God's majesty. This majesty is characterized by the words 'dominion' and 'fear' (25,2). According to Bildad, God has an untraceable number of armies (25,3). Bildad contrasts the human state with this mighty God.

¹²⁶ Hesse, *Hiob*, 109. Also Pope, *Job*, 116.

¹²⁷ Horst thinks that 15,20 shows that it is not a general description of the wicked but regards a particular type, namely the עָרִיץ (the ruthless) (Horst, *Hiob*, 228). However, the word עָרִיץ occurs parallel to רָשָׁע (wicked) and is, therefore, meant as a general characterization of the wicked. So, 15,20-35 deals with the fate of all wicked.

¹²⁸ Cf. Driver-Gray, *Job*, 132; Weiser, *Hiob*, 116; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 272; Horst, *Hiob*, 227; Habel, *Job*, 251. Driver-Gray and Fohrer also see a terrifying element in it. Pace Clines, who thinks that Eliphaz wants to encourage Job by an account of what his life-history will not be (Clines, *Job*, 354).

¹²⁹ Cf. Weiser, *Hiob*, 116; Habel, *Job*, 251.

¹³⁰ This speech is remarkably short. For example, it has been proposed that 25,1-6 and 26,5-14 should be read as one speech of Bildad (Pope, *Job*, 180-181; Habel, *Job*, 366-368; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 246; Strauß, *Hiob*, 103-105; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 62-63; the whole of Ch.26). For an overview of the different proposals in the research history, see: Witte, *Leiden*, 1-55.

- 25,4 How can a mortal be righteous before God
and how can one born of woman be pure?
25,5 Behold, even the moon is not bright
and the stars are not pure in his eyes.
25,6 How much less a mortal, a maggot,
a human being, a worm.

After Eliphaz declared Job guilty because of concrete iniquities (22,5-9), the motif of human imperfection in Job 25 ensures Job's wicked state. Whereas the imputation of concrete iniquities may be called into question –Eliphaz may have given wrong information–, this motif guarantees that Job's conviction of his blamelessness can not be true. In Job 23, Job considers the possibility of having a lawsuit with God. He states that an upright person (יָשָׁר) would argue with God, if he had a case (23,7).¹³¹ Bildad opposes the impossibility of being righteous before God to this claim. A reference to the concept of retribution is lacking in this speech. Here, the insignificance of human beings is contrasted with the majesty of the Creator. Human beings are like a maggot or a worm. The word רִמָּה (maggot) refers to the death and to the underworld.¹³² The designation תולעה (worm) is used in Ps.22,7 to disqualify the poet as a human being. This third mention of the motif of human imperfection concentrates on the position of a mortal in relation to the Creator. Because of a fundamental difference between the Creator and creatures, a human being is not able to be righteous before God. In this way, the motif of human imperfection expresses the awareness that God's greatness surpasses all creatures.

3.5 Misery as a Pedagogical Instrument

3.5.1 A Pedagogical Twist in the First Speech of Eliphaz

Even though the concept of retribution is the basic pattern of thought in the friends' speeches, a somewhat different perception of the function of evil also appears. Human beings should understand their misery as a correction or warning from God's side. This is an expression of God's engagement with the well-being of human beings. Eliphaz ends his first speech with such a pedagogical twist. After the exposition of the concept of retribution (4,2-11) and the motif of human imperfection (4,17-21), he mentions a more positive aspect of suffering. It can be understood as a correcting intervention by God.

¹³¹ The word יָשָׁר refers to the characterization of Job by the narrator and God in the prologue (1,1.8; 2,3). A similar claim is made in 23,10: if he tested, I would come out like gold.

¹³² 17,14; 21,26; Isa.14,11.

- 5,17 Behold¹³³, happy is the human being whom God reproves,
do not reject the discipline of the Almighty.
- 5,18 For, he causes pain and binds up,
he wounds, but his hands¹³⁴ heal.

After Eliphaz has depicted God's marvellous deeds in which God rescues the lowly and frustrates the devices of the crafty (5,9-16), he mentions a pedagogical view on misery. The verb כָּחַל (to reprove) in 5,17a gets a pedagogical meaning because it stands parallel to מוֹסֵר (discipline) in 5,17b.¹³⁵ The statement that God causes pain (5,18) makes it clear that, to some extent, this reproach consists of suffering. Job should understand his misery as a warning from God. 5,17-18 refers to Prov.3,11-13, where God's reproof is connected to his love for someone; he calls those who find wisdom happy.¹³⁶ Human beings consider receiving God's reproof as a privilege because it is an expression of God's concern with them. If Job appreciated the trouble, which God takes in favour of him, and took God's discipline into account by changing his wrong way of doing, a prosperous life would be in store. However, how can Job accept God's discipline if he is truly blameless when a reason for God's reproof is lacking?¹³⁷ Either way, this discipline is not applied in a vacuum. In 5,18, Eliphaz makes clear that God not only hurts people in order to correct their way of life, but also heals them, if they accept his discipline.¹³⁸ This topic is formulated by means of a merism. A merism is a figure of speech that expresses a single thing by referring to more (sometimes opposite) parts.¹³⁹ This means that the aim of God's actions is not one-sidedly to punish or to correct someone. God's causing of pain is always connected to the goal of letting a person better their life and them being able to heal themselves because of the change in behaviour as a result of this discipline. Eliphaz subsequently depicts the following prospect; if Job accepts God's reproof and draws the obvious conclusion from it, a bright future lies ahead of him (5,19-26).

¹³³ Several scholars delete הִנֵּה (behold) (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 20; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 133; Hesse, *Hiob*, 52; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 114).

¹³⁴ Reading the Qere וַיִּדְרֹךְ.

¹³⁵ Pace Horst, who states that כָּחַל has a forensic meaning in 5,17, so that suffering is to be received from God as a forensic as well as pedagogical measure according to this verse (Horst, *Hiob*, 86). The verb כָּחַל also has a pedagogical meaning in e.g. 2 Sam.7,14; Ps.6,2; 38,2.

¹³⁶ If וַיִּבְרָא (like a father) in Prov.3,12b is rendered as וַיִּבְרָא (he causes pain), 5,18a refers also to this part. Compare also Ps.94,12.

¹³⁷ Compare Clines, *Job*, 147.

¹³⁸ Compare Hos.6,1, where it is connected with returning to the Lord.

¹³⁹ E.g. in Gen.1,1, 'heaven and earth' refer to the universe.

This pedagogical turn offers a rather new view of suffering in comparison to the concept of retribution. One could wonder how these two different aspects are related to each other. The specific issue, then, is whether God also wounds people in order to reprove them beyond the area of retribution. This would imply that Eliphaz holds it possible that human beings can also suffer more than they deserve in retributive proportions. Hesse thinks that the concept of retribution retreats to the background in this passage. According to Hesse, any embarrassment caused by the concept of retribution affecting the innocent is prevented if one understands that suffering is a possible chastisement of God.¹⁴⁰ However, the pain and wounds which are caused by God refer to the trouble that stems from one's own behaviour, as Eliphaz argued in the preceding part of his first speech. The pedagogical twist sheds light on an additional aspect of being punished by means of a miserable fate. Whereas suffering is a consequence of committed injustice, the pedagogical view also urges us to understand this misery as an encouragement to remove injustice and turn towards God. Suffering will be temporal for those who accept God's discipline (cf. 5,18ff). So, the pedagogical view does not go beyond the area of retribution here. Only the perspectives on suffering differ in both cases.¹⁴¹

3.5.2 The Emphasis on the Pedagogical Function of Suffering in the Speeches of Elihu

Elihu in particular defends God's righteousness. He subscribes to the concept of retribution. God repays the deeds of human beings, rewarding or punishing them according to their ways. The Almighty would not pervert this justice.¹⁴² Therefore, Elihu strongly attacks Job's claim that he is blameless. Considering his misery, Job must have sinned.¹⁴³ Although Elihu adopts the basic theological structure of the other three friends with this, some modification appears. In the speeches of Elihu, the pedagogical aspect of suffering gets more emphasis. Elihu takes up the pedagogical view of Eliphaz (5,17-18) but elaborates more extensively. He attributes an explicitly pedagogical sense to one's punishment.

After Elihu's statement that Job is not right when he claims that he is blameless (33,12), he refutes Job's complaint that God refuses to answer him.¹⁴⁴ According to Elihu, God answers human beings in several ways (33,14):

33,15 In a dream, in a vision of the night,

¹⁴⁰ Hesse, *Hiob*, 58-59. Fohrer also places this passage outside the area of retribution. According to him, Eliphaz has the misfortune which stems from the natural weakness in mind (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 152).

¹⁴¹ Compare Clines, *Job*, 148.

¹⁴² 34,11-12. See e.g. also 36,6.

¹⁴³ 33,9,12; 34,5-7.

¹⁴⁴ This claim can be found in 19,7; 30,20. In 13,22, Job invites God to communicate with him and in 23,4-5.8-9, Job wants to contend with God, but God is untraceable.

- when deep sleep falls on human beings,¹⁴⁵
while they slumber in bed.
- 33,16 Then he opens ears of human beings,
and terrifies them¹⁴⁶ with warnings¹⁴⁷,
- 33,17 to turn a human being from his doing¹⁴⁸,
and to cut away¹⁴⁹ pride from man.

Elihu confronts Job with his impression that God communicates with human beings during sleep. God reveals himself in dreams and visions. While Job complained that God terrifies him with dreams and visions (7,14), Elihu points out that they had a specific purpose. Dreams and visions serve to warn people. In 5,17, the word **נִסְרָה** bears the meaning ‘discipline’ because it is used in the context of misery. However, this word means ‘warning’ in 33,16, since discipline in the sense of experiencing suffering occurs as a second way in which God speaks in 33,19ff.¹⁵⁰ This warning is concerned with a person’s behaviour. The actions of a human being in 33,17a refer to reprehensible actions due to the parallel with **גָּדָל** (pride) in 33,17b. In Jer.13,17, **גָּדָל** refers to the refusal to listen to God. God warns human beings about wrong ways of life in order to make them remove their pride and rescue their lives (33,18). This warning does not precede possible lapses in order to withhold people from them, but happens because of the injustice which someone has committed. For, the pride in 33,17 refers to wickedness. It is this wickedness that Elihu has also determined in Job’s life (33,12). So, wickedness is the starting point for the description of God’s speaking by means of dreams (33,15-16) and pain (33,19ff). God’s pedagogical action concerns the wicked in the speeches of Elihu.¹⁵¹

Physical suffering is a second way by means of which God communicates with (wicked) human beings in the view of Elihu. God reproves them by pain:

- 33,19 Or he is reproved by pain on his bed,
with a continual strife¹⁵² in his bones.

¹⁴⁵ Many scholars consider this line as an addition, since it is a literal inserted quotation of 4,13 (Wahl, *Gerechte Schöpfer*, 60 (note 46); Budde, *Hiob*, 196; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 287; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 80; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 454; Hesse, *Hiob*, 179; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 313).

¹⁴⁶ Reading **יְהַיֵּאֱרָב** (cf. LXX).

¹⁴⁷ Reading **וַיְהַיֵּאֱרָב**.

¹⁴⁸ Reading **וַיְהַיֵּאֱרָב** (cf. LXX, Tg.).

¹⁴⁹ Reading **וַיְהַיֵּאֱרָב**.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Budde, *Hiob*, 196; Habel, *Job*, 468.

¹⁵¹ So also Wahl, *Gerechte Schöpfer*, 69.

¹⁵² Reading the Kethib.

Severe physical pain can be a way of God correcting the wrong way of life of human beings. This divine communication is more intensive. The verb **כִּחַ** (to reprove) refers to 5,17, where Eliphaz states that a person can be referred to as happy, when God reproves him. As in 5,17-18, suffering also has a reproving and disciplinary function in 33,19ff. The further description in 33,20-22 indicates that Elihu is talking about serious and life-threatening physical diseases. However, a person in these circumstances does not stand alone. Elihu introduces the figure of a mediator in this life-threatening situation (33,23). This mediator informs the sick person how to turn to a righteous way of life on the one hand and intercedes with God on the other hand. If sick and reprovved persons decide to do their duty as an upright person again, God will consider this decision a ransom by which he delivers them from going down into the pit (33,24).¹⁵³ In this way, Elihu emphasizes God's efforts to save people from a miserable fate and to return them to a righteous way of life.¹⁵⁴ The misery of the wicked is a pedagogical measure in the first instance from Elihu's point of view. However, it does not mean that he rules out the function of punishment. For, those who do not pay attention to God's warnings and reprovvements, will not be rescued from going into the pit and will perish.¹⁵⁵

The pedagogical perspective returns in Job 36. The retributive context is clear in this chapter. Elihu states that God does not keep the wicked alive (36,6). God declares their transgressions against those who are chained or caught in cords of affliction (36,8-9). Subsequently Elihu summarizes the main line of thought of the pedagogical perspective on suffering.

- 36,10 He opens their ears for a warning
and says that they return from iniquity.
36,11 If they listen and serve,
they complete their days in prosperity,
and their years in happiness.¹⁵⁶
36,12 But if they do not listen, they perish by a spear¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Cf. G. Fohrer, "Die Weisheit des Elihu (Hi 32-37)", in: G. Fohrer, *Studien zum Buche Hiob (1956-1979)* (BZAW 159), (2nd) Berlin-New York 1983, 97 [=AfO 19 (1959/60) 83-94]; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 459-460.

¹⁵⁴ Compare Fohrer, "Elihu", 110. He points to the fact that Elihu puts less emphasis on human action and more on God's helpful and merciful action.

¹⁵⁵ E.g. 34,17-30.

¹⁵⁶ Several scholars delete this line (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 311; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 85; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 473; Hesse, *Hiob*, 187; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 336).

¹⁵⁷ Several scholars consider **בַּשֵּׁל** (by a spear) as a repeating gloss of 33,18 (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 473; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 311; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 85; Hesse, *Hiob*, 187; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 336). Others think that **בַּלְשֵׁ** bears the meaning 'channel' and refers to the journey to the underworld across the 'channel' (Habel, *Job*, 508; Pope, *Job*, 266; Wahl, *Gerechte*

and they die without knowledge.

Returning from iniquity is the purpose of suffering that is received as consequence of committing transgressions. The verb שׁוּב (to return) in 36,10 refers to 22,23 where Eliphaz mentions returning to the Almighty as a condition for change in Job's miserable fate. God attempts to make the wicked see their wrong way of life. However, the decision to interpret their suffering as a warning and to change their way of life is left to the wicked themselves. They decide whether or not they listen to God's warning. The implications of such a decision are clear; those who take their punishment as a warning and change their way of life will be rewarded and end their days in prosperity. By contrast, those who ignore or miss this sign perish because of their wickedness. Thus, the pedagogical perspective does not break the concept of retribution. Elihu does not mention suffering as a means for testing human beings;¹⁵⁸ suffering is the result of human behaviour in his view. However, he modifies the view of the other three friends to the extent that he emphasizes the pedagogical function of misery more than the other friends do. Punishment for iniquities has to be taken as a warning and reprovment by God in first instance. It demonstrates God's concern for human welfare. In this way, the main issue in the speeches of Elihu is not why people have to suffer, but for what purpose they are suffering.¹⁵⁹

Schöpfer, 60 (note 53) and 107). HAL carefully prefers the meaning 'spear' (art. שׁוּב IV, HAL 4, 1518).

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Wahl, *Gerechte Schöpfer*, 112. Wahl contrasts this view with the opinion of Eliphaz in 5,17ff. According to him, Eliphaz mentions suffering as a test of human beings (112). However, in my opinion Eliphaz also refers to suffering which human beings encounter because of their sins (see §3.5.1).

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Weiser, *Hiob*, 223; Fohrer, "Elihu", 110; Hesse, *Hiob*, 181; Wahl, *Gerechte Schöpfer*, 72.