






Understanding theodicy and anthropodicy in the perspective of Job and its implications for human suffering



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Suffering is often experienced by those who obey God, while happiness is experienced by those who do not know God. This study aims to re-examine theodicy about disasters and calamities and tries to provide alternative thoughts regarding the relationship between God, accidents and humans, based on the story of Job. This research methodology is a qualitative approach through library research, by reading books and journals and investigating related books. Hermeneutic principles are also used to understand the meaning of the signs and symbols in the text. The results of this study indicate that the concept of anthropodicy stands as a complement to the idea of theodicy, which can help humans - especially believers - to understand the meaning of suffering and their vocation in a world full of uncertainty while still having faith in God, who is sovereign over all.

Contribution: This article contributes to providing an understanding of anthropodicy from Job's perspective, so that humans see suffering as God's sovereignty and as something that God allows in order to see God's omnipotence.

Keywords: anthropodicy; Job; suffering; omnipotence; obedient.

Human suffering and God's promise

The blessings of happiness and prosperity that God promised his people Israel would manifest when they obeyed his commandments (Dt 5:29; 4:40; 28:1–14). Meanwhile, disobedience to God will be rewarded with suffering, misery and even death. But in reality, the Bible also shows things that contradict God's promises. Job, one of the devout Old Testament figures, actually experienced very heavy suffering in his life. All the suffering he experienced happened with the permission and will of God. In one version of the Qur'an, Ayub (Job) is referred to as the Prophet Ayyub bin Amwash, and his mother is from the descendants of the Prophet Lut (Pitaloka & Truna 2021). It is explained that the suffering he experienced was solely a test from God. When the Prophet Ayyub manages to pass the test with patience and faith in God, his condition is restored, and his life becomes an example for people who believe in God (Pitaloka & Truna 2021). Furthermore, in the context of the lives of God's people today, it can be seen that suffering is often experienced by God's obedient children, while happiness is felt by those who do not know God (cf. 1 Ki 19:1–4; 2 Cor 11:23; Heb 11:36–37). Reflecting on the story of Job, spiritual reflection related to obedience and suffering is often based on theodicy. Theodicy itself is a way of theology that seeks to reconcile the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect God with the fact of evil (Losada-Sierra 2019; Welker 2019). Crenshaw defines theodicy as an effort to maintain divine justice in the face of strange phenomena that indicate God's indifference or hostility towards virtuous people (Elvis & Ronda 2021; Laato & Moor 2003; Lamoureux 2020; Tolanda & Maiaweng 2011). Often it is concluded that God is wholly righteous, and humans are sinners by nature. On the one hand, this contemplation has a positive aspect that everything, including suffering and disaster, ultimately brings us to the realisation that the true God is sovereign over all of his creation. But on the other hand, this contemplation is to sacrifice the human aspect, as an object – helpless – trapped in the reality of a world full of uncertainty.

Another model of contemplation refers to the understanding or awareness of the silent God. God, who seems to be quiet about human suffering, is a God who is in solidarity with humans, who is suffering together with humans (Hodge 2020; Zaluchu 2021). This contemplation emphasises that

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silence on God's part is not a symptom of his displeasure but his remoteness as Creator. The Creator's remoteness implies that he is the first to speak and can choose to remain silent even if his creatures are in great danger (Jong 2013; Maletta 2021). In his speech and his silence, God acts according to his divine plan, which is a mystery to humanity; adversity does not always point to God's wrath and human transgression, and holy silence does not always indicate divine wrath (Kanov 2021). The usual conclusion drawn from this reflection is that God always cares about humans because he feels and experiences human suffering. Suffering humans must ultimately accept suffering – the mystery – with hope in God (Hoskins 2020).

But another thing that needs to be discussed is how humans should act in the face of suffering itself. Should a person be silent with his or her suffering, drown in surrender and cry out, 'regretfully, I sit in dust and ashes'? (Job 42:6) To answer this question, the author tries to dig deeper into the book of Job, gaining truth values from the story of Job's suffering life. This research uses qualitative research methods by collecting data, analysing and interpreting them (Gioia 2021) to find a deep understanding of a phenomenon, fact or reality (Gear, Eppel & Koziol-McLain 2018). This article begins by presenting the outline of the book of Job, analysing it and then drawing conclusions about the value or meaning of suffering in human life from a different perspective.

Outline of the book of Job

The book of Job begins with an introduction that introduces the reader to the book's central character, Job. It is said that Job was a devout and wealthy man who lived in the land of Uz. Most interpreters state that the land of the Uz was east of Israel in the Arabian desert, possibly between Damascus and the Euphrates River, which is today the border area between Jordan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia (Wright & Măcelaru 2018). No man in the east was richer than Job. In the beginning, Job is shown as an ideal human figure, having wealth and being loyal to God.

The first heavenly congregation

After a brief description of Job's godly and prosperous life, the setting changes. Now the reader is brought to the atmosphere of the heavenly congregation, where God's children come before God. Also among them are demons. In the original language, Satan also means accuser or claimant. This designation does not refer to a personal name but rather a functional description; however, there is no doubt that the devil as a creature is the enemy of God (Hill & Walton 2000). Satan does not come before God on his throne at will, but by God's sovereign will, as he calls Satan to come to him.

In the dialogue between God and the devil, God takes the initiative to open the conversation about Job as his faithful servant, saying there is no one on earth like him. But the devil claims that God's blessings to the righteous hinder the development of actual truth, because people live righteously

for the benefits (gifts) they can receive. Satan challenges God to take all that belongs to Job to prove his argument. God bets with the claimant on Job's integrity.

The second suffering

This dialogue between God and the devil in the second heavenly congregation results in the suffering Job feels in his own body. The terms 'flesh and bones' refer to a person's entire being (Boss 2010), so it can be understood that Job endures excruciating pain throughout his body. The disease he may be suffering from is black leprosy, the most disgusting and dangerous type of leprosy, which causes scabies all over the skin, swelling of the legs and face, hair loss and loss of the sense of touch; the voice becomes nasal and hoarse, and bones and skin are covered with spots and tumours, initially red and then black (Sørensen & Kalleberg 2001).

Job and his friends

Hearing the news about Job, three of his friends (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar) visit him. When they see Job's suffering, they weep and mourn with him. So severe is the suffering that they sit for a week and mourn without uttering a word (2:13). After that, Job begins to speak. But Job's words seem different from what he has said before. He complains that his life is miserable. The patient Job seems to have turned into an impatient Job. This is, of course, very human, considering that Job is described as experiencing the apocalypse. The friends then take turns advising Job, and to each of his friends' advice, Job always answers. The arguments of Job's friends are the same, namely that suffering is the result of personal sin (retributive justice theory). Therefore, Job's great suffering proves his sinfulness and hypocrisy (Janzen 2012). Job's three friends advise him to repent and turn to God based on this view. In every answer Job gives to his friends, he always emphasises that he is innocent.

After a long dialogue between Job and his three friends, Elihu's argument draws the reader's attention. Elihu is a mysterious figure. He is not mentioned as part of Job's three friends. The absence of Job's response and God's response to Elihu's argument shows that it seems that Elihu's argument is a part that was added later (Vicchio 2020). However, Elihu's appearance in Chapter 32 is unique. He was introduced complete with his father's name (Barakheel), his tribal name (the Bus) and the name of his people (the Ram). The name Elihu itself means 'he is my Lord', which is similar to the name Eliyahu, 'Yahweh is my Lord' (Batnitzky & Pardes 2014), while his father's name, Barakheel, means 'God has blessed him' (Whybray 2008). Based on this name, he too is a worshiper of the Lord, just like Abraham.

Elihu expresses his anger at Job for thinking he is more righteous than God (32:2). On the other hand, Elihu also questions the arguments of Job's three friends, who corner Job instead of providing a solution to his problem. In his argument, Elihu puts forward three new views regarding the problem of Job, which contradict the theory of retributive

justice that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar have previously put forward. The first view is the view of moral quality. This view would suggest that sometimes God uses evil and suffering to develop certain moral qualities, such as fortitude and patience (33:19) (O'Connor 2012). The second view is the testing perspective. This view shows that sometimes God uses evil and suffering to test the character of godly people (33:16; 34:3; 34:36) (Balentine 2021). The third view is the view of the divine plan. This view emphasises that God knows the meaning of Job's suffering better than humans (33:12; 34:31–32; 36:22 and 26–30; 37:23–24) (Van der Zwan 2019). God has a plan far beyond human knowledge. Elihu discusses suffering from a view of the past (retributive justice theory) towards a view of the future (divine plan view). Elihu's view is theodicy. But this view is better than Job's other friends' answers, which contradict God's character. True to his name, in the case of Job, Elihu appears as a defender of God's honour, teaching that God disciplines his servants with mercy and justice (Gray 2010). Elihu's argument is the opening part of God's self-revelation to Job from within the storm.

God answered Job from the storm

If we think that Elihu's argument is a part that was added later, then the silence of Job and his companions during the argument is reasonable. But furthermore, Job himself is trying to wait for God's answer instead of humanity's answer (31:35), so it cannot be said that Elihu silences Job.

God, as the holder of power over Job's suffering, is finally included in the discussion. Chapter 38, verse 1 of the book of Job explains that God answers Job from within the storm. The storm itself is a natural phenomenon (read: natural disaster). Instead of revealing his presence in a soothing bright light, God prefers to reveal himself in the darkness of a dreadful storm. The presence of God from within this storm also presents a new question. Did God mean to threaten Job to repent?

The Bible shows that God's theophanies (appearances) are often accompanied by powerful natural phenomena such as dark clouds, storms, earthquakes or fire (Ps 77:18–19; 18:10–13; 97:2; Jdg 5:4; Ps 18:8; Is 30:27; Ps 50:3). The presence of God in a tremendous natural phenomenon emphasises his awesomeness, greatness and omnipotence over the entire universe (creation). Therefore, God's presence in the storm to answer Job cannot be interpreted as a form of action that tries to pressure and threaten Job. Throughout Job's defence of himself, none of his words condemn God as predicted by the accuser (the devil). Job does not focus his argument on his truth. He only repeatedly asserts his innocence to show his point that God has committed an inexplicable (or difficult) act (Boss 2010).

However, God's presence in the storm completely silences Job, and he witnesses a universe of complexity far beyond his comprehension. The splendour of God's presence shows the

difference between Creator and creation. God's voice from within the storm asks a series of questions that Job cannot answer ('Who are you? Where are you? Are you capable?') (Scott 2020). Even though Job is entirely innocent, he still has to face his ignorance, limitations and nature as a created being, not a creator (Mason 2020).

Job's sufferings are only a tiny part of the universe's complexity, too transcendent for limited and weak human wisdom to comprehend (Margulies 2020). If the world and the entire universe were created with such uncertainty, suffering or challenges, could Job have made a better world and universe than that? Certainly not!

Job's response to God

In awe, Job looks to God and listens to everything he says. There is nothing he could say in response to interrupt God. There is only a doxology and an acknowledgement of the majesty and greatness of God. Job's confusion and questions about his suffering go unanswered. But in his encounter with God, Job realises that he cannot know all the complexities of suffering in this world, but he can understand that he belongs to his Creator (Are 1999:297).

Job's words in his last sentences seem to indicate his repentance and resignation to his bad luck (42:6). Has Job sinned against God? Morrow explains that the sentence in 42:6 is a complicated passage, and there are differences among scholars regarding the correct translation (Morrow 1986). There are at least three translations of the book of Job 42:6 worth noting (Morrow 1986:211–212):

1. Wherefore I retract (or I submit) and I repent on (or on account of) dust and ashes.
2. Wherefore I reject it (implied object in v. 5), and I am consoled for dust and ashes.
3. Wherefore I reject and forswear dust and ashes.

The vague and ambiguous language of 42:6 indicates that the author intentionally created a situation that could be interpreted in several ways, according to the theological leanings of the reader (Morrow 1986:225). So the choice of a particular translation is driven by what is believed (reader subjectivity). If the reader is pro-theodicy, then Job's repentance sentence (as shown by the first translation) will be considered natural because he has been against God. But did Job not speak honestly in his complaint against God (questioning God's actions) that he did not sin by cursing or blaspheming God? In this case, Job's conversion is less understandable.

The second and third translations are more in favour of Job. Job, who previously only heard stories about God from people's mouths, now no longer views these stories as necessary because he has experienced an encounter with God. Thus, he is comforted by dust and ashes. Meanwhile, the third translation shows Job's rejection of dust and ashes themselves. The terms dust and ashes have previously been

used by Job to denote his suffering situation (30:19), so this term does not refer to a place but is a metaphor to describe his suffering and humiliation (Fokkelman 2012).

The third version of Job's response presents Job as a hero figure who refuses to continue suffering. This response shows resistance – not to God but to the heart's tendency to surrender and give up. Job cannot know why suffering came the way it did, but he can understand that grief does not rob him of his calling in God's creation (Are 1999). Evidence of this truth can be seen in God's subsequent actions. He restores Job's condition, instead of blaming and punishing him. Instead, God condemns Job's three friends, declaring Job to be his servant who spoke the truth (42:7).

Job's condition is restored

Job's story has a happy ending. He proves to be a faithful servant of God and eventually receives restoration from God. Job's restoration takes place in his relationship with God, society and the natural order. Job intercedes for his friends, showing his role as a mediator between God and the community. Eating together with all his relatives and relatives marks his return to social life, and all the material goods and offspring he receives signify that he is back to living in harmony with the universe (Habel 1985).

Job, who refused to endure constant suffering, chooses to make peace with the world with all its uncertainties. Restoration from God also, of course, involves the activity of Job himself. The wealth given by his brothers and relatives becomes the basis for Job to rebuild his estate. Job's wealth must have doubled from its previous amount because of God's blessing for what his brothers and relatives have given him and his efforts (Hartley 1988).

Theodicy and anthropodicy in the perspective of Job's suffering

In the theodicy concept, Job's suffering is God's will for Job's good, not God's wrath for sin and evil. What is interesting is that the presence of Job's wife and her hurtful words to Job represent human responses in general in the face of suffering.

If you view theodicy as God's justice, what happens to Job was because of his sin. The book of Job reveals that Job's friends are there for sympathy and comfort. Job's friends cannot understand why someone like Job, wealthy and prosperous, could suffer. They feel it appropriate to reassure Job that his suffering must be his fault (Kou 2003; Nadar 2003:350; Stoeber 2005). His friends criticise him for being inconsistent; they even try to make him see that he is cursing. They realise what his protest of innocence implies in their view of things, and they are offended (Gutiérrez 1987). In the end, God defends Job in front of his friends. The Lord says to Eliphaz, 'to you and your two friends, because you do not tell the truth about me as my servant Job did' (42:7, 8) (Kraemer 1995:33).

The book of Job rejects theodicy themes that tend to explain suffering in terms of punishment by God. Rejection of theories that explain suffering as a result of human actions (Pellach 2012; Stoeber 2005). Job does not accept that this suffering is because of his sin and evil. Job's response as a human being shows the concept of anthropodicy towards suffering. There are lessons to be learned from suffering. The study concerns the human reaction to suffering rather than the causes, which remain in the realm of divine knowledge and beyond human understanding (Pellach 2012).

Job's anthropodicy concept of protesting against God states that what he does is good in his sight. God ultimately gives Job the right in his protest against his humble position. This sentence also implies that God gave humans the right to protest, like Job, against their suffering. People suffering have the right to scream, and their cries must be taken very seriously (Tönsing 1996). In the 24th chapter of the book of Job, Job laments that those who cause people suffering, those who oppress and exploit, are not punished. He sees all injustices from the perspective of the poor, not as a wealthy farmer. He can only do this because he has experienced being poor; he has experienced the pain and suffering of the poor (Nadar 2003:349). Job responds to the words of his wife and friends and to the grief God has permitted by viewing it as a process of getting closer to God. If one wants to go deeper into this mystery of redemptive suffering, God allows us to feel, not just to know – to feel what it means to be empty, abandoned and unnoticed (Rohr 1996:15). Anthropodicy views suffering as something that humans with an excellent human existence should experience. Job experiences both theodicy and anthropodicy from the perspective of God's presence.

From theodicy to anthropodicy: An implication

The third translated version of Job's response provides readers with a more practical understanding of dealing with the realities of a world filled with various contexts of suffering, injustice and oppression (Patrick 1976:369). This version of the translation was brought up by Patrick after he saw that there was a difference in meaning between the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (RSV) and the Hebrew version. Rather than theodicy, Job's answer leads us to the concept of anthropodicy. Anthropodicy itself is the idea that humans can independently handle evil or suffering (Hall et al. 2019). 'Anthropodicy is visibly clinging to the human ability to create goodness amid suffering' (Untea 2019). This thinking is becoming more substantial along with the rise of the social sciences.

However, in this case, anthropodicy is not proposed as anti-theodicy. More precisely, it is a complement to theodicy itself. The anthropodicy narrative implicit in Job's answer stems from his realisation of theodicy. His encounter with God makes him realise that God is far beyond his understanding and that he and his sufferings are only a tiny part of the complex universe created and governed by God. In this

realisation, Job looks back at the reality he is facing and refuses or does not want to sit in dust and ashes anymore. Job, who has refused to continue to suffer, accepts his nature as a creature, makes peace with his world of uncertainty and works for his welfare. In his experiences – especially his suffering – Job has led the reader to understand the first theodicy, God's omnipotence over suffering. He transcends the wisdom of all creation and then anthropodicy – human beings of faith who remain empowered in the context of suffering, injustice and oppression.

The concept of anthropodicy proposed here invites the reader of Job's story to underline several things. First, complaints, groans and cries when faced with the context of suffering, injustice and oppression are natural and human things. That is not bad, as long as there is no betrayal of God and denial of his omnipotence. Job personally is not always patient, but he is always faithful to God. In the end, the suffering cannot uproot Job's belief in God's faithfulness (Are 1999).

Second, when faced with suffering, injustice and oppression, humans will often question (or grapple with) God's omnipotence and justice – just like Job did. It is also very human. Job's integrity emerges from within and is shaped by the process of his struggle with the laws of an almighty and just God – and which at the same time contradicts the situation of suffering he is in (Ticciati 2005). Questioning God's actions is entirely different from blaspheming or cursing God. When a suffering person questions God's omnipotence and justice with the same desire as Job – longing for the Almighty's answer (31:35) – indeed, the suffering person will experience an encounter with God and be comforted in his or her suffering.

Third, in suffering, injustice and oppression, despair and surrender are not options. Job's life being restored by God, of course, involves the efforts and work of Job as a human being. Instead of getting bogged down in adversity and looking for justifications, acting and doing something are more practical. It is in works and work that God's blessing is revealed.

It is unfortunate to hear a story, for example, about a girl who has been beaten badly by her lover, who merely says that it was his destiny. Another story is about a patient with breast cancer who endured pain for a long time and refuses to go to the hospital with the excuse of surrendering her life to God. Some people who hope for God's help during the current coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic have never done anything for their safety and health. In a global context (about two years running), humans are struggling with the COVID-19 outbreak. This acute respiratory syndrome was first discovered in Wuhan, Hubei province, China and spread throughout the world very quickly, claiming many lives in a short time (Ciotti et al. 2020:365). In this case, believers are not only required to hope for God's help, but also to do something for the safety and health of their families and even those around them. In Exodus 3:7, the Lord says, 'I have seen the

tribulation of my people in Egypt. I have heard them weep for their slaves, and I am concerned about their suffering'. God's purpose is to simplify our beliefs until our relationship with him is exactly like that of a child (Frisby 2007).

In facing various contexts of suffering, injustice and oppression, the story of Job not only teaches the reader to acknowledge and rely on God's omnipotence in prayer but also invites the reader to remain empowered and take actual actions for the safety and well-being of themselves, their families, the community and even their social environment.

Conclusion

In the context of human suffering, theodicy provides a God-centred answer. God is entirely righteous and holy and has absolute power over all creation. But responses like this are less in favour of humans who struggle with suffering. Through an in-depth reading of the book of Job, a new concept comes to the fore – an idea that favours suffering humans. The concept of anthropodicy appears as a complement to the concept of theodicy, which enables humans to be encouraged to face suffering as a natural occurrence in life and to realise their vocation in a world which is full of uncertainty, while still having faith in God, who is sovereign over all creation. The various sufferings experienced by humans do not show God's limitations in helping and managing life. Undoubtedly, the suffering experienced by every human being in the past, present and future is only a tiny part of the universe's complexity, which is often difficult for people to understand and explain by themselves. Almighty God orders everything perfectly, far beyond the understanding of creation. But that does not mean humans can remain silent in resignation and despair when facing suffering. Awareness of the omnipotence of God, who perfectly organises life, must also be a driving force for suffering humans to remain empowered in the face of suffering. It is in human empowerment that the restoration of Almighty God becomes manifest.

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