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Deconstruction, Hermeneutics, and the Book of Job:
A Comparative Analysis and Critique of
Two Deconstructive Readings of the Epilogue (42:7-17)

by

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The views expressed in this thesis do not necessarily express the views of the thesis advisor, the thesis reader, or Tyndale Seminary.

ABSTRACT

The focus of this thesis is to compare and contrast two deconstructive readings of the epilogue of the Book of Job (42:7-17) by David Clines and Edwin Good in order to evaluate the appropriation of deconstruction as a biblical hermeneutic. I begin my analysis by outlining the perennial issue of epilogue tension in Joban studies as well as the philosophical and literary modes of deconstruction before turning to a critique of the deconstructive readings of Job 42:7-17 by both Clines and Good. Comparative analysis shows that although both readings of the epilogue are deconstructive, the hermeneutics of Clines and Good differ significantly, as does the focus of their respective deconstructions. I conclude that Good offers a better model for the appropriation of deconstruction as a biblical hermeneutic since his reading strategy is more thoroughly deconstructive, and is less inhibited by competing interpretive assumptions which arrest deconstruction in the reading of Clines. Ultimately any attempt to evaluate deconstruction finds itself “under erasure” (French *sous rature*), though the comparative analysis of the deconstructive readings of Clines and Good suggest guidelines for the continued appropriation of deconstruction as a hermeneutic in biblical studies. Even beyond the stated thesis agenda, analysis of the limited deconstruction of Clines is itself open to deconstruction, and the deconstruction of his hermeneutic is more valuable than his deconstructive reading of Job since the former exposes the dependence of biblical studies on philosophical concepts and calls for a reading strategy for biblical texts and theological discourse that is at least aware of its dependence on philosophy for its articulation.

To Carol
my wife, my sister, my friend

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INTRODUCTION

The Book of Job has inspired a quantity and range of works which testify to the depth and richness of this theological and literary masterpiece. Elusive, indeterminate, entertaining, accessible, it appeals to a wide range of readers. The theological writing and commentary on the Book of Job is vast, and millennia of readings have produced numerous layers of religious and theological tradition. Yet while scholarship of the last two centuries represents multiple, often mutually exclusive reading strategies, one of the recurring challenges for Job scholars is how to interpret the epilogue (Job 42:7-17) in relation to the rest of the book.

The interpretive work of two particular scholars, Edwin Good and David Clines, represents a distinct contribution to the field: Both scholars view the book of Job as decidedly indeterminate and radically open, and both engage in deconstruction as a reading strategy to interpret the text. The work of these two scholars—specifically, their respective commentaries on Job—will be the focus of this paper.

To begin, I will first describe the nature of the epilogue tension in Job, and further expand on deconstruction and its more recent role as a reading strategy in biblical studies. I will conclude the chapter with an elaboration of my research topic, an overview of current scholarship that applies deconstruction for reading Job, and an outline of my research agenda.

1.1 EPILOGUE TENSION AND THE BOOK OF JOB

Before offering any description of the epilogue tension in the Book of Job, I wish to highlight two necessary presuppositions—necessary because they are already assumed in the notion of epilogue tension. The first is the structure of the text. The Book of Job is generally divided into three parts: a long section of speeches written in poetic verse (Job 3:1-42:6) sandwiched between two shorter sections of narrative prose (1:1-2:13 and 42:7-17). The opening prose section functions as a prologue to the series of speeches that follow, and the closing prose as the epilogue. This broad division of the text into three parts—prologue, dialogue, epilogue—is broadly held,¹ though Clines entertains alternative structures at work in the book, and Norman Habel rejects the prologue-epilogue frame-story structure and its limitations altogether in favour of a continuous narrative plot in which the question of epilogue tension is effaced.² As such, while this basic view of the structure of the text is an interpretive choice and not fundamental to all readings of the text, it is essential for any conception of epilogue tension.

The other presupposition is that one of the central arguments or meanings of the text has to do with the moral order of the universe. The question of the basis of divine-human relationships first posed in 1:9 is addressed throughout the

¹ See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1985), 85-86; Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxvi-xxxvii; Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 199-212; Edwin M. Good, *In Turns of Tempest* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 12-13; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (M.J. O'Connell, trans.; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 1; John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 35-37; J. Gerald Janzen, *Job* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), ix-xi; Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (3d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 33-48; Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (AB 15; New York: Doubleday, 1973), xv-xxiii.

² Cf. Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxiv-xxxvi; Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 25-35.

entire book, and it is the development of this particular argument which renders the interpretation of the epilogue problematic.

With these two interpretive assumptions established, I will proceed to give an overview of the structure of the book and of the development of its argument about moral order, followed by a general description of what different scholars consider to be in varying degrees the epilogue tension.

1.1.1 Prologue (1:1-2:13)

Whether it is a folktale or not, Alter's term "frame-story"³ aptly recognizes the function of the prologue and epilogue as two bookends for the poetic discourse in between. The structure of the prologue is simple and effective to build tension and set the stage for the speeches that follow:

- A Job, Moral, Healthy and Wealthy (1:1-5)
- B Yahweh's Question and the Satan's Challenge (1:6-12)
- B' Job, Moral and Healthy (1:13-22)
- C Yahweh's Question and the Satan's Challenge, Repeated (2:1-6)
- C' Job the Moral (2:7-10)
- D Job's Three Friends (2:11-13)

In short, sections A and D form an inclusio, the first introducing Job as "the greatest of all the people of the east" (1:3),⁴ moral, healthy, and wealthy, and the last showing Job in a state of utter desolation, his wealth and possessions destroyed and sitting on the ash heap outside the city (cf. 2:8), so disfigured from the sores that afflict his body that his friends do not recognize him even from a

³ Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 85-86.

⁴ All Scripture references are from the NRSV unless otherwise indicated.

distance (cf. 2:12; it is interesting to note that usually the opposite is true—we mistake a distant stranger for someone we know). The two middle pairs—B/B' and C/C'—each portray a cosmic debate in the heavenly courts and the consequent suffering of Job on earth.

The prologue opens by introducing Job (1:1-5). The exact location of Uz is uncertain though the text places it in the east (1:3) which was considered a centre of wisdom along with Egypt in other parts of the OT (1 Kgs 4:30; Isa 2:6).⁵ It then gives a description of Job's moral excellence and wealth (children and material goods), and concludes that he was “the greatest of all the people of the east” (1:3). It continues by describing the unity of Job's family and his role as a mediator for his children with God (1:4-5).

Next are two pairs of scenes which alternate between a cosmic debate and the consequences for Job. Section B starts with the sons of God (also called “heavenly beings” or “angels”) presenting themselves before Yahweh. Among them is “the satan” who is frequently equated with the mythological character Satan. This is an unfortunate assumption on two counts. First, the Hebrew word שָׂטָן does not appear as a proper name until the second century B.C., and then only in intertestamental literature, making the association to שָׂטָן in the book of Job anachronistic at best.⁶ Second, each occurrence of שָׂטָן in the book of Job is accompanied by the definite article (as שָׂטָן) which is unusual in the construction

⁵ E. Jenni, “שָׂטָן”, *TLOT* 3:1002-3.

⁶ J.H. Walton, “Satan”, *DOTOT* 3:715.

of Hebrew names.⁷ Just as in English we would not refer to someone named Brad as “the Brad,” neither is it a grammatical convention in Hebrew. The word can mean “adversary” or “opponent,” but in the context of the Book of Job and the two scenes in which “the satan” appears, the definite article suggests that “the satan” is a role or function designated by Yahweh, and it is best to simply transpose the name from Hebrew to English as the satan.

Regardless of the particular details of the role of the satan, his presence among the heavenly beings gets Yahweh’s exclusive attention and he asks him, “Where have you come from?” (1:7). The satan replies, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it” (1:7). The wandering of the satan on the earth elicits a second question from Yahweh: “Have you considered my servant Job?” (1:8). One popular misreading of the Book of Job as a whole is that Job was tormented by Satan and Yahweh is merely a passive observer who gives permission for the testing of Job. However, 1:7-8 portrays Yahweh as the one who initiates the chain of events that lead to Job’s misery. Dissatisfied with the satan’s wandering, Yahweh presents Job to him as one he has overlooked.

As such, there is nothing malicious or evil about the satan in Job which corresponds to the devil of intertestamental and NT literature. If anything, the

⁷ Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 239-40, 249. The only exception to this grammatical convention are instances when, in order to elevate a particular person or thing to a position of uniqueness, intrinsically definite nouns and common nouns take the definite article and the combinations (called toponyms) become equivalent to proper names. However, this rarely happens in the case of individuals—“the god” for God and “the lord” for Baal being the only two exceptions. In the case of Baal, the definite article always appears, whereas in the case of God it varies. Since “satan” only appears in four passages in the OT and the use of the definite article is inconsistent, it lacks both the frequency and consistency of “the god” or “the lord” to be considered a toponym. Further, in the instances where the definite article is used, the role of the satan hardly compares to the mythological Satan or devil.

satan seems to be a kind of “policy expert” who responds to Yahweh’s question with a direct challenge to the nature of divine-human relations: Does Job’s morality depend on his expectation of reward for doing good (and perhaps fear of punishment for doing evil), or would he do what is right regardless of the consequences? At this juncture I would like to clarify the nature of the satan’s challenge: Since Job, “the greatest of all the people of the east,” is hardly representative of the average person, his endurance of suffering will not prove that anyone who is subject to suffering will remain faithful to God and continue to praise him. However, if the greatest man of the east fails to endure innocent suffering it will prove that there is a causal connection between morality and blessing. In other words, if the best of the blessed only fears God and turns from evil in order to receive God’s blessing and curses God when this relationship fails, then so will everyone else. Yahweh entertains the satan’s challenge and gives him permission to bring trouble to Job with the one condition that Job’s personal well-being be left untouched (1:12).

In the complementary section that follows (1:13-22), the story shifts back to earth and the cosmic challenge is played out. In a comic escalation of overlapping disasters, Job loses all of his wealth previously described in 1:2-3: the oxen and donkeys, the sheep, and the camels, as well as the lives of all his children and servants except the four who escape to report the bad news to him. Despite his deep loss, the text is careful to report, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing” (1:22).

It would seem that Job had passed the test but in section C the heavenly beings once again present themselves to Yahweh and the satan is also with them. Again Yahweh questions the satan, who has been wandering, and still unsatisfied with the satan's response, Yahweh asks a second time, "Have you considered my servant Job?" (2:3) The satan is not content with Yahweh's affirmation of Job's integrity since Yahweh's protective proviso kept him from afflicting Job physically. For a second time, Yahweh entertains the satan's protest, only this time merely on the condition that Job's life be spared. In other words, the satan is free to inflict whatever suffering he wishes on Job short of killing him.

In 2:7-10, the scene changes back to the earth, and unlike section B' in which the satan is only the implied cause behind the disasters, the satan is said to inflict Job with sores all over his body. Still Job resists any urge to curse God and sin.

The final section of the prologue, much like the first, introduces the next group of main characters who, with Job, will make most of the speeches in 3:1-42:6. This section also functions as an inclusio: just as 1:1-5 introduced Job as wealthy and morally upright, the Job of 2:11-13 is materially and socially ruined, and so ravaged from the sores on his body that his friends do not recognize him. While it seems Job has persisted in his integrity to fear God and turn from evil, he has been stripped of the health, wealth, and children he possessed in 1:1-5.

1.1.2 Dialogue and Speeches (3:1-42:6)

The middle section, sometimes called the dialogue, is really a mix of different types of speech including soliloquy, dialogue, and legal addresses.⁸ The term dialogue may seem misleading at times given the many instances in which characters “speak past” each other or address a character who does not respond, but the respective speeches of Job and his friends are no more disjoint than any instance in which two or more parties are in disagreement.

Analyzing the content of each speech is far beyond the scope of this paper but at the very least I will give an overview of the progression of speeches which crescendo in Yahweh’s voice from the storm:

- A Opening Soliloquy of Job (3:1-16)
- B Dialogue of Job and His Three Friends (3:1-31:40)
- C Speeches of Elihu (32:6-37:24)
- D Dialogue of Yahweh and Job (38:1-42:6)

The structure of the series of poetic verse functions to organize the speeches into a kind of momentum in which the level of poetic expression heightens and finally culminates in Yahweh’s address to Job from the storm.

In Section A, Job’s opening soliloquy is an egotistical withdrawal from the created order in which he repeatedly calls for darkness and invokes the chaos which preceded the first light of Genesis 1. He breaks the seven days of silent mourning and anguished resignation with seven curses (3:1-10), and light/darkness, day/night imagery which allude to the seven days of creation.⁹ His

⁸ Clines, *Job 1-20*, 104; Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 208-9.

⁹ Anthony R. Ceresko, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom: A Spirituality for Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 77.

appeal is to the created order, and he makes no mention to the principal of moral retribution or any appeal to God's justice.¹⁰

Job's opening soliloquy has a dual function, for it not only the opening of an *inclusio* with the Yahweh dialogues in 38:1, but it also begins Section B and the first series of dialogues between Job and his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. The first cycle of dialogues spans 3:1-11:20. Following Job's complaint, Eliphaz responds by introducing the notion of retributive justice: Job's suffering is a result of his sin. Job defends himself against Eliphaz, and Bildad is next to accuse him of sinning, as well. In his third speech, Job complains of the absence of any arbitrator between he and God (9:33-35), and Zophar responds, also believing that Job's suffering is the result of his sin.

The second cycle of speeches (12:1-20:29) follows the same structure as the first: Job speaks and each of his friends responds in turn. In this section, the accusations against Job escalate as the focus of his friends shifts from accusing Job of merely sinning to living a lifestyle of wickedness, of being "abominable and corrupt" (15:16).

Job opens the third cycle (21:1-31:40) by directly questioning the principle of moral retribution and claims that, contrary to traditional wisdom, observation shows that prosperity is the result of human achievement and thus it does not profit anyone to pray to God (21:15-16). The wicked indeed prosper and never taste the suffering they deserve (21:29-33). The pattern in the previous cycles repeats itself: Eliphaz is the first to respond, followed by Bildad after Job's second speech. However, the pattern is incomplete. In Job's third and longest

¹⁰ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 233.

speech (26:1-31:40) of the third cycle, he rebukes his friends for their help and then goes on to contemplate the greatness of God in his authority over pre-creation chaos which demonstrates only a fraction of his power. He seems to stump them, or at least exasperate them, and reaffirms his integrity. What follows is at first puzzling since Job gives a very traditional rendering of the reward of the wicked (27:7-23), a speech we would expect to come from one of the friends. However, what comes next is Job's contemplation of the place of wisdom (28:1-28), and their juxtaposition suggests the former is a sarcastic reprise of the traditional wisdom used by Job's friends to accuse and judge him, whereas the latter affirms that wisdom is not to be found even in any of the places where the world's most valued treasures are hidden. Job gives one final defence before ending his speech.

Just as Section B opened with a short section of narrative prose (3:1-2), so does Section C in 32:1-6a. Similarly, as the cycles of dialogue between Job and his friends are a response to his opening soliloquy, so Elihu's speeches are a response to the cycles of dialogue and somewhat derivative of what was already a digression from Job's first words. In Elihu's first speech (32:6-33:33), he claims Job is wrong to contend with God and demand a response. Rather, God has already spoken to Job through his circumstances—that is, his suffering, which clearly indicates he needs to repent. In his next speech (34:1-16), Elihu seeks wisdom with the other three friends through applying their reason to Job's words. He defends God against Job's accusation of injustice (24:9-12), and even wishes more suffering on Job that he might finally learn from it and turn from his

rebellion and sin. Elihu continues to affirm God's justice in his third speech (35:1-16) and deduces that if God has not answered Job's prayer, then Job's case is not just and it is only God's mercy that his life has even been spared. Elihu opens his final speech (36:1-37:24), claiming "I have something to say on God's behalf," and, "one who is perfect in knowledge is with you" (36:2, 4). He continues to affirm traditional wisdom and dismisses Job's attention to the prosperity of the wicked as an obsession. In the final lines of his fourth speech, Elihu undercuts his own claim to wisdom when he says of God, "he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit" (37:24) since Yahweh does not even acknowledge the contributions of Elihu in either of his speeches or in the epilogue.

Where conventional wisdom failed to rise to the challenge of Job's opening soliloquy, in Section D Yahweh finally responds with a revelation of his power and authority: "In direct contrast to all this withdrawal inward and turning out of lights, God's poem is a demonstration of the energizing power of panoramic vision."¹¹ The beginning of his first speech (38:1-40:2) is a critique of Job's speech in the third chapter and picks up Job's language of darkness: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (38:2). Yahweh proceeds with his own set of questions for Job which demonstrate his authority over the created order from meteorological events to the warhorse. In contrast to Job's rebuke of his friends in 12:7-25, Yahweh's imagery culminates in his description of the warhorse, and with this progression of images he challenges Job's view of God as only a conqueror over the chaotic forces of nature and

¹¹ Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 97.

reveals himself as one who is able to channel and restrain those chaotic powers in harmonious order.¹² Job's response to Yahweh's first speech is brief and he chooses to remain silent, but Yahweh takes up his questioning again, directing Job's attention to two other beasts of great power: Behemoth and Leviathan. Job's response to Yahweh's second response is also brief but it seems to be sufficient for Yahweh as he questions him no further.¹³

1.1.3 Epilogue (42:7-17)

The epilogue is the other bookend of prose which closes the text. It is divided into only two short sections: the vindication of Job before his three friends and the restoration of Job's health and wealth (including his children). In the first section (42:7-9), Yahweh addresses Eliphaz who began the barrage of accusations against Job in the poetic section and expresses his anger against Eliphaz and his two friends since they did not speak truth about him whereas Job did. Yahweh instructs them to ask Job to offer sacrifices on their behalf, thus restoring Job to his role as mediator (cf. 1:5). In the second section (42:10-17), Yahweh restores Job's wealth, social status, and children to him. He receives sympathy from friends and family, as well as money and a gold ring from each. Further, Yahweh doubles the original number of his sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys, and gives Job seven more sons and three more daughters to replace the ten lost in the prologue. Job goes on to live one hundred forty years, which is a doubling of the seventy-year average expressed in Psalm 90:10. Although prominent in the

¹² Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 90-91, 99-100.

¹³ Job's response to Yahweh is significant here and difficult to summarize, especially since his conclusion in 42:6 is source of several incompatible translations. This verse will be the focus of lengthier discussion in subsequent chapters as it relates to the epilogue tension.

prologue, neither the heavenly beings nor the satan reappear in the epilogue, and Job seems to have passed the test, having maintained his integrity and innocence throughout his suffering.

1.1.4 Resulting Epilogue Tension

The restoration of the health and wealth of Job in 42:7-17 is at first glance a satisfying resolution to his suffering. Not only is Job restored to his original state in the prologue, but his possessions and his lifespan are doubled (42:12-16), and even his new daughters possess a beauty that was unmatched in all the land (cf. 42:15). The specific case of Job's endurance in suffering seems to satisfy Yahweh's desire to test the causal relationship between human morality and his blessing. Since the causal relationship does not hold for Job, the greatest man of the east, then there is at least one man who fears God and turns from evil for reasons other than manipulation of God for material well-being. However, that the entirety of the poetic section is focused on challenging this principle of retributive justice—that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked—is undercut by the simplicity of Job's restoration through doubling. If the epilogue ended at 42:9 the book would be a strong polemic against the principle of moral retribution espoused by both the Torah (Deut 28-30) and the wisdom of Proverbs (Prov 1:7; 4:18-19; 11:23; 12:2; etc.). However, the principle of moral retribution so eloquently and effectively refuted in the poetic section is reaffirmed in the last eight verses of the book. The epilogue undermines what seems to be the central argument of the book, and there lies the tension—that the Book of Job should go

to such great lengths to challenge the principle of retributive justice of the Torah and traditional wisdom only to reaffirm it in its final lines.

1.1.5 Approaches to Interpreting the Epilogue Tension

As mentioned in the first section, the epilogue tension just described depends on two necessary presuppositions: The first is the division of the book into three sections based on literary form and style (narrative prose and poetic discourse), and the second is that the question of the moral order of the universe is a central argument of the book.

With these two assumptions in mind, scholars differ significantly in their interpretations of the tension between the epilogue of Job and the rest of the book. Some, such as Marvin Pope, find the inconsistencies between the prologue and epilogue with the dialogue to be a problem of literary unity and integrity in terms of form and message.¹⁴ Thus, the tension is more the result of poor editing and not meant to be the focus of the book. Others, such as John Hartley, do not have a problem with accepting the work as the product of a single author and simply view the tension between the three parts to be intentional.¹⁵ However, the epilogue tension is minimized for Hartley since he views the main argument of the book not as a refutation of the doctrine of retribution but simply a corrective to its application.¹⁶ Thus, Job's restoration in the epilogue is not incongruent with the message of the book, and even more, it is necessary in order to show that God seeks Job's ultimate good despite what he has suffered.¹⁷

¹⁴ Pope, *Job*, xxiii-xxx.

¹⁵ Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 20-24.

¹⁶ Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 24.

¹⁷ Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 22, 540.

Habel recognizes the tension between the two parts yet takes a narrative approach which does not entertain questions of authorship or composition but is concerned with plot analysis.¹⁸ Likewise, Clines is unconcerned with considerations of authorship and composition in his interpretation of the epilogue;¹⁹ his primary view of the tension between the three main sections of Job is that “the epilogue deconstructs the book as a whole.”²⁰

Katharine Dell, who views parody as the overall genre of Job,²¹ claims the author of Job misused forms purposely, making Job an example of sceptical literature, and sees the contradictory final form of the book as deliberate in order to question traditionally-held beliefs.²² Thus, for Dell the tension in the book is not so much a concern as is the book’s overall scepticism achieved by its subversive use of form. Similarly, the high level of indeterminacy entertained by Good does not draw special attention to the epilogue tension; rather he engages in the play of deconstructive indeterminacy throughout his entire reading of Job.²³

As for the structure of the text there are few exceptions to the threefold division into prologue-dialogue-epilogue. Only in the case of Habel, who reads both prose and poetry simply as narrative, is there little distinction between the three sections just mentioned, nor even the basic division of prose-poetry-prose.²⁴ Thus, while speculation regarding authorship and stages of composition is often used to dismiss the epilogue tension and other difficult passages in Job as mere

¹⁸ Habel, *The Book of Job*, 25.

¹⁹ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxix.

²⁰ Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 112.

²¹ Dell, *The Book of Job*, 109-57.

²² Dell, *The Book of Job*, 216-7.

²³ Good, , *In Turns of Tempest*, 178-87.

²⁴ Habel, *The Book of Job*, 25-35.

editorial blunders, there is a general consensus on the structure of the book upon which the tension depends. Whether the epilogue tension is meant to direct us to one of the central points of the book or is just a peripheral issue will largely depend on interpretive approach.

1.2 DECONSTRUCTION AND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Deconstruction carries with it a variety of concepts and assumptions about texts which will be important for critique and comparison of the work of Clines and Good. In this section I will offer a brief introduction to deconstruction, especially in relation to its origins in the work of Jacques Derrida and its development as a critical theory, before moving on to an overview of the recent history of biblical hermeneutics and its appropriation of deconstruction for interpreting biblical texts.

1.2.1 Deconstruction

Despite its relatively short history within philosophy, deconstruction is often admired and opposed for reasons that have nothing to do with its strategy. It is often abstracted from its historical and intellectual context, and consequently both its popularity and its rejection are the result of “ideological provocation” rather than any kind of critical appreciation, good or bad.²⁵ Thus, although my primary interest in this paper is on its appropriation for biblical hermeneutics, I offer here a brief overview of what is meant by deconstruction within the intellectual climate in which it was first articulated and developed, as well as its place in history, in order to clear away some of the misconceptions about what it entails. To this end

²⁵ Peter V. Zima, *Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (trans. by R. Emig. London: Continuum, 2002), vi.

I will also discuss some of the challenges of shifting the focus of deconstruction from philosophy to literature.

While the term “deconstruction” was coined by French philosopher and theorist Jacques Derrida, its conception and early development owe much to the work of Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Schlegel, German Romanticism, the Young Hegelians, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Martin Heidegger—in other words, the complex of over two hundred years of philosophical and literary thought. Deconstruction itself is to some extent a heterogeneous philosophy which has two primary modes—its French origins in the work of Derrida, and its various developments by American theorists such as Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, and Harold Bloom.²⁶

Deconstruction is notoriously difficult to describe or define for several reasons. First, because it is primarily a critique within philosophy but not itself a philosophy or coherent system, it poses a double challenge to those interested in its appropriation for literature—that the realm of philosophy is not necessarily familiar ground in the first place, but further, that it is a critical mode not born *of* philosophy but borne *by* philosophy. Second, although both modes of deconstruction are referred to by the same term “deconstruction,” Derridean deconstruction is an operation within philosophy, whereas deconstruction as a critical theory represents the appropriation/development of Derridean deconstruction within literary theory and criticism.²⁷ Although the two are related, they are too often equated and both are frequently misunderstood.

²⁶ Zima, *Deconstruction and Literary Theory*, vii.

²⁷ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 180.

My focus in the first part of this section will be on the former mode in the hopes that by better situating deconstruction within philosophy its implications for literature as expressed in its mode as a critical theory will be more evident, especially for the particular case of appropriating it as a reading strategy for biblical studies and the Book of Job.

There are various ways to describe deconstruction. The following by Zima and Culler are a good starting point:

An attempt to liberate critical thinking from institutionalized philosophy and to question in a radical way the dominance of concepts as well as a systemic subversion of European metaphysics.²⁸

A mode of philosophical and literary analysis derived from the work of the philosopher Jacques Derrida, which interrogates basic philosophical categories or concepts.²⁹

Zima's description is accurate in light of the history of deconstruction since Derrida's primary focus despite his interest in literature was on philosophy. Culler's description takes into account the broader practice and development of deconstruction beyond the work of Derrida by also including literature in the scope of its critical sights. While both of these descriptions have strengths, I turn to Derrida for further elaboration of its beginnings:

To "deconstruct" philosophy, thus, would be to think—in the most faithful, interior way—the structured genealogy of philosophy's concepts, but at the same time to determine—from a certain exterior that is unqualifiable and unnameable by philosophy—what this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid, making itself into a history by means of this somewhere motivated repression.³⁰

As noted by theorist Christopher Norris, Derrida recognizes in philosophy a metaphysical prejudice "whereby the values of truth and reason are equated with a privileged epistemic access to thoughts 'in the mind' of those presumed or

²⁸ Zima, *Deconstruction and Literary Theory*, 1; author's emphasis removed.

²⁹ Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), vii-viii.

³⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (trans. by A. Bass; London: Continuum, 2002), 5.

authorized to know.”³¹ Often referred to as logocentrism, it is the tendency within metaphysics “toward an order of meaning—thought, truth, reason, logic, the Word—conceived as existing in itself, as foundation.”³² Thus, “the structured genealogy of philosophy’s concepts” consists of the conceptual basis of philosophy which metaphysics considers as essential and original, independent of other systems of meaning. It is the logocentrism of metaphysics that claims to underwrite other disciplines, sometimes overtly, such as in the case of the philosophy of mathematics, the philosophy of science, and the philosophy of the life sciences. Even critical theories in literature trace their methodologies back to philosophical concepts. The strategy of deconstruction, then, is to expose, “from a certain exterior”—a critical mode that is not complicit with metaphysics—what the history of metaphysics has been able to dismiss or forbid through the hierarchization of binary pairs. However, it is not enough to merely neutralize the binary oppositions of metaphysics: “We must traverse a phase of *overturning*. To do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy.”³³ As such, “to deconstruct the opposition...is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment.”³⁴ In this way, deconstruction does not dominate philosophy through introducing an external system or concept which subjects it to another violent hierarchization (e.g. deconstruction/logocentrism), but “in the most faithful, interior way,” within the most rigorous adherence to the

³¹ Christopher Norris, introduction to Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (trans. by A. Bass; London: Continuum, 2002), xix.

³² Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 92.

³³ Derrida, *Positions*, 38-39; author’s emphasis.

³⁴ Derrida, *Positions*, 39.

terms of philosophy itself, identifies a moment when reversal is possible, in which philosophy turns against itself. In the “Translator’s Preface” to Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak aptly describes the mechanics of this deconstructive reversal: “How to dismantle these structures? By using a signifier not as a transcendental key that will unlock the way to truth but as a bricoleur’s or tinker’s too—a ‘positive lever.’”³⁵ Spivak goes on to make an important clarification about the nature of this signifier: “It must be emphasized that I am not speaking simply of locating a moment of ambiguity or irony ultimately incorporated into the text’s system of unified meaning but rather a moment that genuinely threatens to collapse that system.”³⁶ This will be an important distinction to consider in the appropriation of deconstruction for literary texts, that moments of ambiguity or irony in the text, including at the semantic level of signification, are not themselves open to deconstruction.

To return to the particular case of philosophy, deconstruction takes place at the moment of systemic fissure when logocentrism loses its footing and the domination of metaphysics fails. The conditions for such a moment are closely linked to *différance*, what Spivak claims “comes close to becoming Derrida’s master-concept.”³⁷ Derrida considers *différance* as the most general structure of economy, as *the* economic concept, which accounts for both the movement which produces binary oppositions as well as the production of such differences.³⁸ Culler describes it as “both a ‘passive’ difference already in place as the condition

³⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translator’s preface to Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (trans. G.C. Spivak; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), lxxv.

³⁶ Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” lxxv.

³⁷ Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” xliii.

³⁸ Derrida, *Positions*, 7.

of signification and an act of differing which produces differences.”³⁹ It is “neither a word nor a concept,”⁴⁰ but “the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other.”⁴¹ It represents both the process of “difference” and “deferment,” exploiting the double sense of the French word *différer* (both “to differ” and “to defer”) although it is itself a neographism in which the “a” reminds us that “even within the graphic structure, the perfectly spelled word is always absent, constituted through an endless series of spelling mistakes.”⁴² Ultimately, *différance* is what deconstructs the logocentrism of metaphysics.

Also central to the deconstruction of logocentrism is *presence*. Derrida argues it can be shown “that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence.”⁴³ In other words, common to the claim of metaphysics (or philosophy in general) to underwrite other disciplines, to possess the authority and privilege of expressing first principles, is *presence*. However, though presence underwrites all other philosophical concepts, presence itself is not original but derivative and contingent, “a determination or an effect within a system which is no longer that of presence but of *différance*, a system that no longer tolerates the opposition of activity and passivity, nor that of cause and effect.”⁴⁴ This is the moment of fissure that threatens to collapse the whole system, that presence, which Derrida

³⁹ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 97.

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (trans. A. Bass; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 7.

⁴¹ Derrida, *Positions*, 24 [author’s italics].

⁴² Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” xliii.

⁴³ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (trans. A. Bass; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 279.

⁴⁴ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 16.

identifies as the basis for all other philosophical concepts—the origin of the “structured genealogy”—is itself constituted and can only be expressed by reverting to complex constructions. Thus, to summarize the deconstruction of logocentrism: Metaphysics assigns to its concepts a privileged epistemic access which underwrites the truth claims of other disciplines. It does this through the hierarchization of terms such as thought/emotion, reason/opinion, etc. However, characteristic of all metaphysical concepts is presence. By showing that to have meaning presence must itself depend on a series of differences, presence actually behaves more like absence in the presence/absence hierarchy. It is therefore subject to the more general economy of *différance* which produces the differences necessary for presence to exist. In this sense, presence behaves like absence since “for presence to function as it is said to, it must have the qualities that supposedly belong to its opposite, absence”⁴⁵—that is, constitution is only characteristic of that which needs signification, which is not already present. In this way, terms of the hierarchy are reversed, and what was supposed to function as the transcendental key for all of philosophy—presence—is in fact the “tinker’s tool” which dismantles the presence/absence hierarchy. What the logocentrism of the metaphysics of presence sought to “dissimulate or forbid” was *différance*. Thus, not only is the metaphysics of presence displaced in its deconstruction, but it admits that which is neither concept nor word to precede any conceptual origin.

Although the particular aspects of the deconstruction of logocentrism may not make the relevance of deconstruction as critical strategy for reading texts immediately clear, it is effective to illustrate its sophistication and complexity, as

⁴⁵ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 95.

well as how rigorously it operates as a mode of analysis. Further, it helps to clarify the common misconception of the association of Derridean deconstruction with postmodernism. Although deconstruction and postmodernism may share a common scepticism and rejection of the grand narratives of modernity and of the domination of concepts such as rationality and progress—indeed the deconstruction of logocentrism means the overturning of the dominance of any concept—yet deconstruction is more than just scepticism, for it does not merely throw off the conventions of philosophy but rigorously works within its system of meaning in order to liberate it from the dominance of logocentrism. Further, deconstruction does not destroy what it deconstructs but reinscribes or “grafts” it back:

Deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the nonconceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated. For example, writing, as a classical concept, carries with it predicates which have been subordinated, excluded, or held in reserve by forces and according to necessities to be analyzed. It is these predicates (I have mentioned some) whose force of generality, generalization, and generativity find themselves liberated, grafted onto a “new” concept of writing which also corresponds to whatever always has *resisted* the former organization of forces, which always has constituted the *remainder* irreducible to the dominant force which organized the—to say it quickly—logocentric hierarchy. To leave to this new concept the old name of writing is to maintain the structure of the graft, the transition and indispensable adherence to an effective *intervention* in the constituted historic field. And it is also to give their chance and their force, their power of *communication*, to everything played out in the operations of deconstruction.⁴⁶

In the case of the deconstruction of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence, the result is not the abandonment of the conceptual order of philosophy or its replacement by a nonconceptual order, but a reinscription of the deconstructed order. In this way, deconstruction liberates philosophy from the dominance of logocentrism and the graft intervenes by preventing the logocentric hierarchy

⁴⁶ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 329-30 [author’s italics].

from re-establishing itself. Thus, while deconstruction may at times share in the same generalized scepticism as postmodernism, it is not reducible as a sub-branch of the latter⁴⁷ and is very much at home in modernity as a wild card which operates as a critical strategy within philosophy.

Despite its Derridean origins, literary theorist Jonathan Culler notes that “the implications of deconstruction for the study of literature are far from clear.”⁴⁸ Since Derrida never engaged in deconstruction as an approach to literary criticism, its development by American theorists has taken several directions. It is primarily the work of these literary deconstructionists which define deconstruction as a critical theory, and so to some extent the two modes are disjoint. The question of the relevance of deconstruction to literature as a mode of critical analysis is a complex and extensive topic which receives thorough treatment by Culler in his work, *On Deconstruction*. Since both Clines and Good depend on Culler’s work as the primary source of their understanding of deconstruction for literary interpretation, I will defer to Culler as my primary source both for the various developments of deconstruction within critical theory and for critiquing the deconstructive readings of Job by Clines and Good.

1.2.2 Biblical Hermeneutics

Of the multiple senses of the term “hermeneutics” which are related but not equivalent, the one to which I will refer to repeatedly in this section and the rest of this paper is its most traditional usage: Hermeneutics as the study of the interpretation of written texts. Although deconstruction also figures into

⁴⁷ Norris, “Introduction,” xi.

⁴⁸ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 180.

contemporary discussions of philosophical hermeneutics, I will be considering it more strictly in its appropriation as an interpretive approach for biblical scholarship, and the changes that took place in the field of biblical hermeneutics which led to its inclusion.

Toward the middle of the eighteenth century, an intellectual conversion took place in Europe. It was believed that the secret of knowledge, and therefore of mastery over the cosmos, had been discovered. This period, commonly called the Enlightenment, had a new vision of knowledge that believed in the limitlessness of human reason and its capacity to understand reality. Fundamental to this new epistemological conviction was a shift in the nature of people's explanatory framework. Where the revelation of divine purpose had once been the basis for understanding reality, this former teleological emphasis was replaced by a causal one: To understand the cause of a phenomenon meant to explain it. This shift away from teleology to causality started in science with the work of Isaac Newton but later spread to all aspects of thought and daily living.⁴⁹

Biblical hermeneutics was no exception, and since the Enlightenment many Christian circles still equate biblical knowledge as the product of applying analytical methods to reading texts in order to determine their meaning. Some examples include the historical-critical method, source criticism, and the history-of-religions approach, which were all largely the product of rationalism and the scientific method. Their focus on issues such as dates, authorship, composition, and the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) background is meant to determine the

⁴⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 23-25.

intentions which led to the final form of the text, and assume that tracing out these causal links is necessary in order to understand the meaning of a text. With the exception of form criticism and its attention to literary genres, these interpretive methods tend to overlook the literary quality of biblical writings as well as the role of the reader in constructing meaning and primarily focus on reconstructing the conditions of authorship.

It was not until the latter half of the twentieth century that more text-centered and reader-oriented interpretative models emerged.⁵⁰ Clines frames this final stage of change succinctly: “What has happened in biblical studies, as likewise in many branches of literary studies...can be represented, rather simply, as a shift in focus that has moved from *author* to *text* to *reader*.”⁵¹ The existentialist hermeneutic of NT scholar Rudolf Bultmann, as well as canon criticism and its focus on the final form of biblical texts, were amongst the first to break away from the author-centered approach. Aside from these exceptions, the move to text-centered and reader-oriented biblical hermeneutics was not so much a development within biblical scholarship than the appropriation of literary theories from without. This act of appropriation is evident in text-centered approaches such as New Criticism and narrative criticism, as well as various reader-centered approaches.

This final shift in the locus of meaning from text to reader is indicative of an even deeper change regarding the nature of meaning. Whereas the text-

⁵⁰ W.W. Klein, C.L. Blomberg, and R.L. Hubbard, eds, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Word, 1993),44-51.

⁵¹ D.J.A. Clines, “Introduction,” *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (JSOTSup 94; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 9-10; author’s emphasis.

centered literary approaches still worked within the assumption that to explain what a text means is to determine causality based on the rigorous application of reason—the explanatory framework of causality discussed above—reader-centered critical theories emerge from the postmodernist mood which resists and rejects the grand narratives of modernity and expresses “a generalized scepticism...with regard to such typecast ‘modernist’ concepts as truth, reason and critique.”⁵² Thus, if meaning is the product of reading, then multiple readings must mean there are multiple meanings. In other words, the meaning of a text is indeterminate and the causality chain of its meaning is intricately and intimately connected to the personal experiences and history of the reader. This does not preclude the possibility that multiple readings could have similar meanings but it does prevent a single reading from claiming ultimate authority over another.

Where deconstruction figures into the interpretive history of biblical hermeneutics is with reader-response criticism. This interpretive approach recognizes the reader as an active participant in the construction of meaning and is often used as shorthand for a variety of other critical theories including feminism, Marxism, New Historicism, Structuralism, and deconstruction.⁵³ This classification of deconstruction as a form of reader-response criticism, though popular, is a gross oversimplification at best, not only because it mischaracterizes its operation as a critical theory, as will be clear from Culler’s work in later chapters, but also because it suggests deconstruction belongs to the postmodernist

⁵² Norris, “Introduction,” xi.

⁵³ Charles E. Bressler, *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (2d ed.; Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1999), 69, 75.

mood rather than recognizing it as a rigorous strategy within the project of modernity.

Nonetheless it is important to be aware that deconstruction is often perceived within biblical hermeneutics as a postmodernist, reader-oriented interpretive approach, whether it belongs in that category or not. Since both Clines and Good claim deconstruction as central to their readings of the Book of Job, they are ideal test cases both for the question of how deconstruction as a critical theory is best appropriated as a biblical hermeneutic, as well as its implications for our understanding of biblical texts.

1.3 RESEARCH AGENDA AND APPROACH

While many scholars' commitment to one interpretive approach rarely excludes all others, on the whole more contemporary Job scholars such as Habel, Clines, and Good represent a decidedly literary approach directed more to the final form of the book than to its compositional history.⁵⁴ The work of these three scholars is distinct within the interpretive history of Job, and represents the shift in biblical scholarship to appropriate literary theory for biblical hermeneutics. However, Habel's reading of Job reflects the work of Alter and is New Critical in its approach, whereas both Clines and Good engage in a deconstructive reading of Job, albeit in varying degrees.⁵⁵ Given the infrequency of deconstruction as an interpretive approach for the study of Job, the purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast the hermeneutics of Clines and Good in their reading of the Book of Job, and in particular, of their deconstructive readings of the epilogue tension.

⁵⁴ Carol A. Newsom, "Considering Job," *CuBS* 1 (1993), 88.

⁵⁵ Newsom, "Considering Job," 89-91.

Further, I will evaluate the implications of a deconstructive reading strategy for interpreting the epilogue of Job and consider the broader implications of deconstruction as a mode of analysis within biblical studies.

In addition to the writing of Clines and Good, there are two other sources of related scholarship which I will employ to critique their work. The first, which I already mentioned earlier, is Culler's presentation of deconstruction for literary criticism in *On Deconstruction*. Culler is thoroughly grounded in the philosophical context for deconstruction and the work of Derrida, as well as its various developments for literature as a critical theory, and both Clines and Good reference Culler's work as the source of their understanding of deconstruction. Thus, it will be my primary source for critiquing the extent to which their readings of the epilogue of Job are deconstructive. The other source is the work of biblical scholar Carol Newsom who views genre as a critical category for reading the Book of Job, and seeks to recuperate the concept by rooting it the work of philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, "particularly his distinction between monologic and dialogic truth and his conception of the polyphonic text."⁵⁶ Both the theoretical work of Bakhtin and its appropriation by Newsom will be important for critiquing deconstruction as a biblical hermeneutic and providing a literary alternative to deconstruction for interpreting the epilogue tension.

In order to approach my two-fold agenda—comparing and contrasting the two deconstructive readings of the epilogue of Job and evaluating deconstruction

⁵⁶ Cf. Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 8-11.

as a biblical hermeneutic—I will first examine the deconstructive readings of the epilogue of Job by each scholar (Clines in Chapter 2, Good in Chapter 3). I will next critique the readings of each scholar in relation to Culler’s work on deconstruction as a mode of literary analysis, as well as compare the readings of Clines and Good to one another. In the final chapter, I will evaluate the appropriation of deconstruction to read the epilogue of Job and consider its broader challenges to biblical studies. I will also consider the alternative to deconstruction in the work of Newsom and her incorporation of Bakhtinian concepts of polyphony and dialogic truth before concluding with some final thoughts on biblical hermeneutics.

2

**DECONSTRUCTIVE READING BY CLINES****2.1 DECONSTRUCTIVE READING OF THE EPILOGUE TENSION**

My focus on the work of Clines¹ in this chapter will be twofold: First, to examine his deconstructive reading of the epilogue and his interpretation of the epilogue tension; and second, to identify the distinctive features of the deconstruction of Clines in his reading of the epilogue.

I argued earlier in Chapter 1 that the epilogue tension is contingent on two presuppositions: first, a view of the structure of the text as a division into three segments—prologue, dialogue, and epilogue—on the basis of literary form and speakers; and second, that one of the central arguments of the Book of Job concerns the order of the universe. From this view of structure and meaning emerges the epilogue tension described earlier. Thus, in this first section I begin with an overview of the structure and meaning of the Book of Job for Clines before discussing his deconstructive reading of the epilogue and his interpretation of the epilogue tension.

¹ Though the bulk of Clines' work on Job is in his voluminous three-part commentary—*Job 1-20*, *Job 21-37*, and *Job 38-42*—the last volume was not yet available in published form during the writing of this thesis. Consequently it was necessary to rely on his article, "Deconstructing the Book of Job," as well as the introduction of *Job 1-20*, for his reading of 42:7-17.

2.1.1 Structure and Argument

One of the fundamental views of the Book of Job held by Clines is that it is an open text “that lends itself to many divergent interpretations.”² As such, for Clines both the structure and meaning of the Book of Job are indeterminate,³ making it necessary to differentiate exactly which structures and meanings in his reading of Job are essential to the epilogue tension.

Not surprisingly, Clines presents not one but three different and increasingly complex ways of viewing structure in the Book of Job. For Clines, the structure of the text is not inherent to the text but a product of the reader: “The shape of a book, as of anything, is not an intrinsic property of the object itself, but in the mind of the observer.”⁴ While Clines does not settle on any one view of the shape of the Book of Job, the second structure he proposes is problematic to identifying the epilogue tension since it does not make a distinction between 42:7-17 and the rest of the book. As such, only the first and third of his three views of structure are relevant to the discussion.⁵

The first of these is to differentiate the framework of the book—1:1-2:13 and 42:7-17—from its core—3:1-42:6. In this approach to structure, the framework and core each have distinguishing features. On the surface, the framework is written in prose, whereas the core is written in poetic verse.

² Clines, David J.A. “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” (*What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament*. JSOTSup 94. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 106.

³ See Clines, *Job 1-20*, xi-ii..

⁴ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxv.

⁵ The second view, while interesting, roots the structure of Job in the narrative thread of the text but does not read 42:7-17 as a closing to the book. For more on this narrative-based structure, see Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxvi.

Likewise, the style of the framework is primarily narrative, whereas the core is primarily didactic poetry. This results in the following organization:⁶

1:1-2:13	Framework:	prose	narrative
3:1-42:6	Core:	poetry	argument
42:7-17	Framework:	prose	narrative

According to Clines, the narrative of the framework is also naive in contrast to the sophistication of the argument of the poetic core. This notion of naivety in the framework is an important interpretive element for Clines. Both the opening and closing narrative have the innocence of an adapted folktale on the surface, but on the conceptual level Clines recognizes a deeper significance: “the simple structure of the prologue is only falsely naive; like the unsophisticated language of these chapters, the plainness of the structure suggests, not a primitive narrative mode, but a subtle artistic severity.”⁷ For Clines, this false naivety is manifest throughout the prologue:⁸ in the laxness of using a waw conjunction to open the story in 1:1; in Yahweh’s question to the satan in 1:8; in the satan’s proposal to Yahweh in 1:11; in the reports of the four disasters of 1:13-22; in the economy of Job’s mourning in 1:21; in the formalities between Yahweh and the satan repeated in 2:1-2; and, in the seven days of silence between Job and his friends in 2:13. Similarly, the closing narrative of 42:7-17—the vindication of Job by Yahweh, the restoration of Job’s social standing and wealth, including the doubling of all that he had before, the replacement of his ten children, and even the doubling of his lifespan of the standard seventy-year average of Psalm 90:10—seems to be a satisfying resolution to the suffering of Job. However, the simplicity of structure

⁶ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxv.

⁷ Clines, *Job 1-20*, 9

⁸ Cf. Clines, *Job 1-20*, 7, 9, 24-25, 27-28, 30, 35-36, 41, 63; Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 109.

could also be falsely naive, for in the restoration of Job is also a reaffirmation of the doctrine disputed in the first place. It is here that Clines sees deconstruction at work in the text, and why this first way of understanding the structure of Job as based primarily on literary form (prose and poetry) is essential to his deconstructive reading of the epilogue.

The second is a considerably more elaborate view which sees the entire book as a series of speeches. In this approach, the shape of the book is determined by indications given by the book itself of who is speaking—namely, the narrator as speaker in both prologue and epilogue, and the characters as speakers in the dialogue. This way of structuring the text takes on the following form:⁹

- I Prologue (1:1-2:13)
Narrator
- II Dialogue (3:1-42:6)
 - 1 Job and the three friends, First Cycle (3:1-11:20)
 - 2 Job and the three friends, Second Cycle (12:1-20:29)
 - 3 Job and the three friends, Third Cycle (21:1-31:40)
 - 4 Elihu (32:1-37:24)
 - 5 Yahweh and Job (38:1-42:6)
- III Epilogue (42:7-17)
Narrator

For Clines, this particular view of the structure of Job highlights realities in the book not evident in the first. Of particular significance to the epilogue tension is that since the words of the narrator in both the prologue and epilogue enclose the words of the speakers in the dialogue, it leaves “the narrator’s perspective uppermost in the reader’s mind.”¹⁰ Thus, this view not only establishes the notion

⁹ See Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxvi-vii, for the fully expanded outline. I took the liberty of condensing the original layout, which had Scripture divisions for each speech.

¹⁰ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxvii.

of an epilogue, but recognizes that the narrator gets the last word, even after Yahweh has spoken from the storm.

Although Clines presents these two views of structure as distinct, I would argue that the first is merely a superficial version of the second—a recognition of literary form and function without any attention to the more complex level of speeches in the poetic section. However, whether it is necessary to keep these two levels of structure separate or not, Clines draws on elements of both as he discusses the tension between the epilogue and the rest of the book.

Like his stance on the shape of the book, the meaning of the Book of Job is also indeterminate for Clines, and while he assumes that the book has a central argument or question, he pursues two different possibilities in the opening of his commentary: the problem of suffering and the moral order of the universe. While Clines considers both to be equally valid candidates as the chief issue of the text,¹¹ only the issue of moral order is relevant to the discussion of epilogue tension.¹² This issue asks the question: What, if any, is the moral order of the world? In this view of the central message, the text challenges the doctrine of retribution, the basic belief that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked, “that there is an exact correspondence between one’s behavior and one’s destiny.”¹³ Clines argues that this sentiment is not only held by religious people but is often shared in one form or another by most human beings.¹⁴ Therefore,

¹¹ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxviii.

¹² It is worth noting that while the question of suffering is not the source of the epilogue tension, Clines does recognize the development of this argument in the text as deconstructive, as well. Cf. Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 116-120.

¹³ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxix.

¹⁴ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxix.

according to Clines, the book not only challenges a religious doctrine but a basic human conviction about the moral order of the universe.

In order to situate Clines' particular characterization of the epilogue tension, it is necessary to follow the thread of the central argument throughout the book as he sees it unfold.

Clines argues that implicit to belief in the doctrine of retribution is a shared awareness that it is not a coherent principle at the level of experience, that there are exceptions to the rule when the righteous suffer and the wicked succeed. He observes that both the narrator and the characters of the book focus their attention on this discrepancy between doctrine and experience, and that each represents a distinctive view on the moral order of the world.¹⁵ In moving from character to character, Clines traces the book's stance on the doctrine of retribution and the development of its argument from start to finish. He begins with the narrator, who implies the concept of retributive justice as early as the first three verses of the book in the introduction of Job: the most prosperous man in the east also happens to be one of the most pious.¹⁶ Even if this juxtaposition is mere coincidence, the doctrine is affirmed by both God and the satan in 1:8-9, which Clines sees as adequate grounds for supposing that it is also implied by the narrator in 1:1, though naively and unquestioningly.¹⁷ In response to the satan's questioning of the causal connection between Job's piety and prosperity, Yahweh gives the satan permission to strip Job of both his wealth and his health in order to test whether the converse of the causal relationship is also true—that the reason

¹⁵ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxix-xlvii.

¹⁶ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxix; Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job," 109.

¹⁷ Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job," 110.

for Job's piety is his prosperity. These events mark the failure of the doctrine of retribution and the launching of Job on a quest for a new moral order.¹⁸

If for Clines it is the narrator who sets the whole question of the book in motion, it is Job and his friends who debate the doctrine in its classical articulation. In contrast to Job, the three friends introduced in 2:11 all agree that not only is the doctrine of retribution true, but so is its converse: Those who suffer must be guilty of sin. Elihu adds little to the discussion, except that he sees the doctrine less as a mechanistic operating principle and more as an instrument of divine communication.¹⁹ Unlike the friends, Clines sees Job's mind as "confused, flexible, and experimental" in his response to the injustice of his suffering, having lost faith in all but his own conviction of his innocence.²⁰ For Clines, Job's defence of his own innocence is a major problem for the moral order of the universe: "For if Job is innocent, the doctrine of retribution is false. And there is no other principle available to replace it."²¹ Thus the arguments of Job are a serious refutation of retributive justice.

Yahweh appears last in the dialogue, but rather than enter into the discussion of the moral order of the universe, his speeches are broader in scope and centre on the created order: "The order of creation sets the standard for the moral order of the universe; and that is, that God must be allowed to know what he is doing, and lies under no obligation to give any account of himself."²² Clines aptly notes that Yahweh's viewpoint neither affirms nor denies the doctrine of

¹⁸ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xl; Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job," 110.

¹⁹ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xlii.

²⁰ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xlii.

²¹ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xliv.

²² Clines, *Job 1-20*, xlvi.

retribution; it merely marginalizes it. It seems the created order is deeper than the moral order—trumps it, even—and so Yahweh leaves the issue unresolved.

The epilogue is the final speech of the narrator, in which we are told of the restoration of Job's wealth and social status. Clines remarks that what this final narrative episode does for the issue of moral retribution is to reinstate it, for the restoration of Job means the reaffirmation that the most righteous man is also the most prosperous. Thus, even if the doctrine of retribution is partially defective, "in the main it is affirmed by the Book of Job as the truth about the moral universe."²³ Despite the sophistication of Job's argument against retributive justice and his search for moral order, its status as a doctrine is restored in the closing narrative prose.

With two levels of structure within the Book of Job clearly outlined and the development of its central argument established, I now turn my attention to Clines' deconstructive reading of the epilogue.

2.1.2 Deconstructive Reading of the Epilogue

Clines' understanding of deconstruction is relatively pragmatic and limited to Culler's formulation of its strategy: "To deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies."²⁴ For Clines, deconstruction is primarily a methodology, "a procedure with texts."²⁵ The one distinction he does make is around the meaning of the term "undermine." For him, to deconstruct a text is not simply to recognize incoherence or contradictions at a superficial level: "For a discourse to need

²³ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xlvi.

²⁴ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 86.

²⁵ Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job," 107.

deconstructing or to be susceptible to deconstruction the undermining has to be latent, as indeed the metaphor of undermining already tells us.”²⁶ To this end, Clines distinguishes between shallow and deep readings of a text: the deep reading is the more sophisticated of the two, and its meaning is what undermines or deconstructs the argument of the shallow reading.

The notion of a shallow reading best describes how Clines interprets the significance of the events of the epilogue in relation to the issue of moral retribution as developed in the rest of the book. With the closing of the dialogue section, Clines sees the argument build along these lines: The principle of moral retribution is implicit in 1:1-3 and affirmed in 1:8-9 before it is negated in the subsequent suffering of Job the pious. In the poetic section that follows (3:1-42:6), the doctrine of retribution is repeatedly proved wrong.²⁷ Thus, on the question of the moral order of the universe, the majority of the book argues in favour of the negation of the doctrine of retribution. At this juncture, Clines’ initial (and arguably shallow) reading of the epilogue recognizes that the reversal of Job’s fortunes, both social and material, also reinstates the dogma of retribution, for the most righteous man is also the wealthiest.²⁸ Though it may not be true in all circumstances, the Book of Job at last affirms it as the truth about the moral order of the world. The restoration of Job in 42:10-17 is also congruent with the questions of the satan in the prologue: “for it is only if it has been decisively established that Job’s prosperity is not the cause of his piety that his fortunes can be restored (42:10) without permitting the initial question of 1:9-11 to be raised

²⁶ Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 107.

²⁷ Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 111.

²⁸ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xlvii; Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 113.

afresh, so setting in motion again the whole tragic cycle.”²⁹ Thus, in the naivety of the narrative prose, the question has been answered, and there is no longer any need to inflict Job further.

However, a deeper reading of the epilogue is not content to be merely “surprised” by the reinstatement of the original philosophy, the doctrine of retribution, after the second philosophy has been so eloquently espoused. As such, “the epilogue deconstructs the book as a whole,”³⁰ for it undermines the message of rest of the book, which argues against the doctrine of retribution: “What the book has been doing its best to demolish...is on its last page triumphantly affirmed.”³¹ In contrast to the conflicting philosophies of the prologue—the doctrine of retribution and its negation—the first undermines the second in the epilogue. While it is no surprise that the sophistication of the poetic argument in the dialogue would interrupt the naivety of the narrative of the prologue and develop the argument about the moral order of the universe as it does, it is entirely unexpected that an equally naive closing narrative should undermine the poem and restore the original naivety of the opening, both in style and content.³² Thus, the epilogue deconstructs the book as a whole since it undercuts the entire development of what appears to be the central argument of the text, the shallow reading of the text.

²⁹ Clines, *Job 1-20*, 46.

³⁰ Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 112.

³¹ Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 114.

³² Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 115-6.

2.1.3 Understanding of the Epilogue Tension

What does this mean for the epilogue tension in general? At the very least, Clines' deconstructive reading takes into account the incongruence between the primary argument of the book and the reaffirmation of the doctrine of retribution without resorting to a more shallow reading, or worse, to redaction criticism or some other historical-critical explanation which views the discrepancy as a compositional issue and seeks to explain its cause rather than understand its significance. Clines is explicit in differentiating himself from this approach, especially since it often assigns a secondary status to the epilogue within the history of the book's composition.³³

However, though Clines recognizes deconstruction at work in the Book of Job, it is little more than a label for he quickly moves beyond the shaky hermeneutical terrain of deconstruction, away from aporia and indeterminacy.³⁴ For Clines, it is not necessary for interpretation to dwell on the deconstruction of the text since the text is inoculated against deconstruction by its own rhetoric: "What sustains a book's life beyond its deconstruction is its rhetoric, that is, its power to persuade beyond the bounds of pure reason, its ability to provoke its readers into willing its success even beyond its deserts."³⁵ Although as a deconstructed text the Book of Job may lose all of its authority as a trustworthy source for understanding the moral order of the world, "rhetoric triumphs over mere fact."³⁶ Clines gives an example of this in Job's address to Yahweh in 13:13-15, 20-25: Though readers know that the source of Job's suffering has

³³ Cf. Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job," 112-3.

³⁴ Cf. Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job," 116.

³⁵ Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job," 121.

³⁶ Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job," 122.

nothing to do with a misunderstanding of his innocence by God, most readers prefer to side with Job in his complaint to God rather than to allow knowledge of the prologue to undercut Job's stance. In fact, all of Job's defiance in the dialogue is the result of a misunderstanding. However, Clines claims that as readers, "we are willing...to entertain the possibility that the prologue to the book does not exist and that there is no such perfectly simple explanation of Job's suffering as the prologue suggests."³⁷ The rhetoric of Job's argument thus surpasses the facts of his situation.

Even if the rhetorical strength of the book carries more weight than the deconstruction of its central argument by the epilogue, Clines still sees hermeneutic value in the deconstructive reading, for deconstruction seeks to eliminate dogma as dogma: "The problem with the dogma of retribution or any other dogma is not that it is wrong, but that it is a dogma."³⁸ This view is certainly implicit in Yahweh's response (or lack thereof) to Job regarding the principle of moral retribution. By marginalizing it he undermines its significance. In the same way, the deconstruction of the book by the epilogue affirms both philosophies about the moral order and has the overall effect of displacing each other.

2.2 DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF CLINES' DECONSTRUCTION

I will defer engaging in a full critique of the hermeneutics of Clines and the extent to which it aligns with deconstruction as presented by Culler to Chapter 4. In this

³⁷ Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job," 122.

³⁸ Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job," 123.

section I wish only to consider the question of deconstruction in the work of Clines in much broader terms, namely: What is deconstruction for Clines?

As a form of literary analysis, deconstruction differs in its hermeneutic function: For some it is their primary approach to interpreting a text, while others see it only as a tool within a broader reading strategy. In the case of Clines, deconstruction does not initially figure into his reading strategy for Job, at least not for the Book of Job as a whole. From the outset, he calls Job “[the] most open of texts,”³⁹ and as such entertains a certain degree of indeterminacy in the meaning of the text. Clines also makes it clear from the start of his commentary on Job that his approach is decidedly readerly, that his concern is with readerly questions. He states this explicitly in the opening pages: “If, as I believe, meaning comes into existence at the intersection between the text and the reader, texts need readers to become meaningful, for meaningful always means meaningful to someone.”⁴⁰ Thus, meaning emerges in the process of reading but is not inherent to the text itself. Implicit to this dependency of meaning on the reading process is that the meaning of a text will vary from reader to reader: “For meanings are not properties of books, but are understandings created in the minds of readers who are intent upon reading books. And as many readers, as many readings.”⁴¹ For Clines, even the shape of the book—its structure or organization—is only “a design in the mind of the observer.”⁴² All of these interpretive positions clearly align the hermeneutics of Clines with reader-

³⁹ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xii.

⁴⁰ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xii.

⁴¹ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxix.

⁴² Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxv.

response criticism.⁴³ As such, there is nothing specifically deconstructive about Clines' reading strategy. In fact, the concepts of an open text and the indeterminacy of meaning to some extent preclude deconstruction as an interpretive aspect of his reading strategy.⁴⁴

Only in relation to the two central arguments of the book—the problem of suffering and the question of moral order—does Clines identify deconstruction in the text, and even then his starting point is the formulation of Culler. For Clines, deconstruction is primarily a methodology, “a procedure with texts.”⁴⁵ Quite divorced from its status as a form of literary criticism, Clines relegates further discussion of its implications for meaning in texts to philosophy, and does not venture beyond a strictly formulaic understanding of it as a reading strategy. In the particular case of his reading of the epilogue, deconstruction is more a label for a structural anomaly than it is a reading strategy. In much the same way that the symbol i is used in mathematics to denote the square root of -1 (called an “imaginary” or “complex” number) since the concept of $\sqrt{-1}$ has no expression in the “shallowness” of real numbers, so deconstruction is the label adopted by Clines to express the tension between the epilogue and book as a whole which appears as an uncomfortable anomaly in the course of a relatively traditional reading of the book. At best, deconstruction for Clines is an interpretive tool within the broader spectrum of a reader-response criticism.

This relatively functional view of deconstruction and the limits of its scope as a reading strategy differ significantly from the approach of Good, who

⁴³ See Bressler, *Literary Criticism*, 65-67.

⁴⁴ Cf. Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 132-4, 188-9.

⁴⁵ Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 107.

identifies deconstruction throughout the text and at varying levels. In the next chapter, I will turn my attention to the work of Good and his deconstructive reading of the epilogue.

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DECONSTRUCTIVE READING BY GOOD

3.1 DECONSTRUCTIVE READING OF THE EPILOGUE TENSION

In the respective readings of Clines and Good of the Book of Job there are significant differences not only in how they engage in a deconstructive reading of the epilogue but in the depth and frequency at which they find deconstruction at work in the text as a whole. Whereas Clines marginalizes deconstruction as an interpretive tool within a broader reading strategy, Good makes it central to his approach. As I did in the previous chapter for Clines, I will shape my discussion of Good's deconstructive reading around two central questions: How does Good read Job 42:7-17 deconstructively, and what are distinctive features of the deconstruction of Good in his reading of the epilogue?

Since the epilogue tension is contingent on two presuppositions—the structure of the text as prologue-dialogue-epilogue, and the central argument as related to the order of the universe—I begin this first section with an overview of how Good conceives of structure and meaning in the Book of Job before looking to his deconstructive reading of 42:7-17 and interpretation of the epilogue tension.

3.1.1 Structure and Argument

Good spends little time discussing the structure of the book and presents one primary division of the text with additional layers of complexity.¹ Initially he perceives a broad structure on the basis of literary form:

- I. Prose narrative (1.1-2.13)

¹ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 13-14.

- II. Dialogue in poetry (3.1-42.6)
- III. Prose narrative (42:7-17)

He next identifies an asymmetrical structure in the long poetic middle, which he arranges into three parts:

- A. Dialogue of Job and the three friends (chaps. 3-31)
- B. Speeches of Elihu (chaps. 32-37)
- C. Dialogue of Yahweh and Job (38.1-42.6)

Within this organization of the poetic dialogue, Good makes one further distinction of structure in Part A by breaking the dialogue between Job and his friends into three cycles:²

- First Cycle (chaps. 3-11)*
 - Job (chap. 3) / Eliphaz (chaps. 4-5)
 - Job (chaps. 6-7) / Bildad (chap. 8)
 - Job (chaps. 9-10) / Zophar (chap. 11)
- Second Cycle (chaps. 12-20)*
 - Job (chaps. 12-14) / Eliphaz (chap. 15)
 - Job (chaps. 16-17) / Bildad (chap. 18)
 - Job (chap. 19) / Zophar (chap. 20)
- Third Cycle (chaps. 21-31)*
 - Job (chap. 21) / Eliphaz (chap. 22)
 - Job (chaps. 23-24) / Bildad (chap. 25)
 - Job (chaps. 26-31)

In addition to these degrees of distinction in the first part of the poetic section, Good also points out that Elihu's speech is preceded by an opening narrative, and the speech itself contains introductory formulae which divide it into four sections. Similarly, the fourfold division appears in the dialogue of Yahweh and Job, in which two speeches by Yahweh alternate with two speeches by Job.

Thus, while Good does not explicitly use the labels "prologue," "dialogue," or "epilogue" to designate the three main sections of the text, he does see the Book of Job as following the same basic structure.

² I have taken the liberty of condensing the format of this second layer of organization within the dialogue section; cf. Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 14.

As for the argument of the book, Good is far less intent on identifying this from the outset of his reading. To some extent it is problematic to identify a central argument for the Book of Job in Good's writing since for Good, the Book of Job "steadfastly refuses to reveal any unitary truth to us,"³ and he does not see any reading of the text, including his own, as definitive or correct.⁴ For him, with a work of such depth and dense complexity, "sure perceptions of undoubtable truth are impossible and misleading."⁵ Good holds that "open" texts such as Job are neither inert nor passive in the reading process or the production of meaning, and as such the only way to approach them is in "play."⁶ This notion of play is central to the hermeneutics of Good: "[w]e find meaning in cooperative play with the text itself, not by jamming a theoretical or critical approach over it."⁷ Given this relatively text-centered reading strategy, Good's reading does not clearly identify a central argument through which to interpret the rest of the text, though his reading picks up on several meanings which all orbit one central question: what is the order of the universe? As such, the question of the order of the universe is certainly a recurring theme, but Good does not clearly advance any single message as central for the text; the very nature of an open text does not allow it. Furthermore, in contrast to Clines, who sees the chief issue as the *moral* order of the universe as it relates to the doctrine of retribution (and its negation), Good's tracing of the theme of cosmic order differs significantly, and so I will further elaborate this development.

³ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 397.

⁴ Cf. Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 178-9.

⁵ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, vii.

⁶ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 180.

⁷ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 186.

In the opening of his commentary, Good observes that while the doctrine of retribution is applied to individuals by Job's friends, even this articulation of the theory differs from "a theory of retribution that in the prophets and the Book of Deuteronomy applies exclusively to collectivities such as Israel or other nations."⁸ Thus, it is only speculative to assume that it has anything to do with the teaching in the Torah and the Prophets (though the traditional wisdom of Proverbs still applies the theory to individuals). What is more, for Good the challenge of the satan in 1:11-12 is not a response to the doctrine of retribution which for Clines is already implicit in 1:1-3, but of the magical religion practiced by Job in 1:4-5. Good interprets Job 1:1 differently than most, as is evident in his translation of the Hebrew text: "Once there was a man in the country of Uz named Job, a man scrupulously moral, religious, one who avoided evil."⁹ Good reads וַיֵּשֶׁר וַיִּירָא אֱלֹהִים, usually translated as "blameless and upright," as a hendiadys to mean "scrupulously moral." Similarly, the familiar Hebrew phrase וַיִּירָא אֱלֹהִים does not necessarily imply any moral or spiritual quality, but simply "to fulfill one's duties" (translated by Good as "religious"), and remains ambiguous as to the nature of Job's fear (i.e. as a positive reverence or a negative fear of consequences).¹⁰ Consequently Job is not the moral paragon that most see him as—a righteous free agent—but a man devoted to religious observances. Further, in addition to Job's sacrifices on behalf of his children, while Good still sees these as a sign of a caring father, he also observes that Job assumes his religious deeds

⁸ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 5.

⁹ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 49.

¹⁰ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 21.

will produce a religious effect on his children without them doing anything of their own. In this way, “Job’s religion is a magical one.”¹¹ It is this relationship, therefore, that the satan wishes to challenge in 1:11-12:

[We] are not dealing with an underhanded trick of a Devil or with an unobservant deity who allows his most faithful servant to be the object of an experiment. We are dealing with a frontal challenge to magical religion, a religion that allows Yahweh’s favorite to be religious for his own ends, not for Yahweh’s. In one sense, the Prosecutor is angry not at the righteous Job but at Yahweh’s system of order.¹²

It is not the doctrine of retribution being represented or challenged in the opening narrative, but Yahweh’s order in divine-human relationships.

It is important to note that in addition to Good’s reading of magical religion in 1:1-5 and in both challenges of the satan (1:9-11 and 2:4-5), his reading of the opening narrative hinges on two other concepts: the significance of the oath formula (1:11 and 2:5), and the ambiguity around the meaning of the Hebrew בָּרַךְ as both “to bless” and “to curse” depending on context (used in 1:5, 11, 21; 2:5, 9). The particular significance to the development of the theme of cosmic order is that in both 1:11 and 2:5, the curse formula has the result clause omitted, implying the worst possible consequences to the satan should Job fail to בָּרַךְ Yahweh to his face as the satan has ensured. Since the fulfillment of the satan’s words is ambiguous following Job’s response in 1:21, where “be praised” is מְבָרַךְ, which could mean “be blessed” or “be cursed,” the satan reappears in the second chapter, if only on a technicality. If the self-curse of the satan is to be taken seriously in 2:5, then his absence for Good is no surprise after the second chapter: Since Job has not sinned with his lips, by implication the curse of the

¹¹ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 193.

¹² Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 195.

satan is eventuated in banishment or destruction.¹³ To this extent, then, the challenge of the satan has been met: “Job, it seems, *is* religious for nothing, holds to his integrity and to his piety even when the magic goes out of his life....With the Prosecutor’s disappearance, the debate in Yahweh’s court about Job’s piety appears to be settled.”¹⁴ However, where the heavenly question ends regarding magic religion, the earthly question begins about divine control of the world.

For Good, the question of cosmic order continues in the context of the three cycles of dialogue between Job and the three friends, a discussion which includes but is not limited to the doctrine of retribution. In Job 3-31, the development of the theme is complex, and so I will defer to summarize only. In the first cycle, Job moves from a view of the chaotic experience in his own life to an apprehension that the entire structure of divine-human relationships has fallen apart: It seems that the god¹⁵ makes no distinction between the righteous and the wicked.¹⁶ Job concludes that there is no connection between human behaviour and treatment by the god. The theme develops further in the second cycle, in which beyond the lack of justice in the deity’s exercise of power in the first cycle, his use of power is in fact destructive in both the social and cosmic spheres of life.¹⁷ The god’s activity is inconsistent, and so Job no longer seeks justice through an arbiter (cf. 9:33) but revenge through the aid of a witness (16:19) and

¹³ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 201.

¹⁴ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 203; author’s emphasis.

¹⁵ One of the conventions of Good which I have adopted in summarizing his work is his translation of the Hebrew typically rendered in English as “God” as “the god” or “the deity” instead. Not only do I believe this best represents the flavour of Good’s writing, but in many ways I find it more accurate since the setting of the Book of Job is outside of Israel, and the English word “God” too often conjures up Judeo-Christian sentiment which may or may not belong to the world of the text.

¹⁶ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 229.

¹⁷ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 235.

even more, an avenger (19:25), who will act on Job's behalf against the wickedness of the god. In the final cycle, Job actually proposes that a reversal the doctrine of retribution is a more accurate picture of the world. This is not simply its negation but a deconstructive reversal of the hierarchy of its basic terms of righteous/wicked. Thus, prosperity rewards vice and suffering punishes virtue.¹⁸ Job's final conclusion in 24:12 is that not only is the doctrine of retribution reversed, but the god is in fact the cause of evil human behaviour. With Job's conclusion in 24:25, the three friends no longer respond. As far as the doctrine of retribution is concerned, it has been refuted, and for Good, neither Elihu nor Yahweh makes any effort to prove Job wrong in their speeches which follow.¹⁹ Yet despite this total reversal of previous norms, Job returns to a full retributionist position in chapter 31 before his speech ends, if not sincerely, then at least superficially since that is the only basis on which he can invoke the deity to a legal trial.

The contributions of Elihu's four speeches do nothing to further the discussion of divine order, and so there is no significant movement until the appearance of Yahweh in chapter 38. Within his exchange with Job, the meaning of cosmic order shifts dramatically in Good's reading. As it turns out, "the world does not balance upon sin and righteousness, on guilt and innocence."²⁰ At the core of the arguments of both Job and his friends was the assumption that the underlying order of the universe depends on antithesis, that if one is right, the other must be wrong. However, Yahweh shows Job a deeper, more ambiguous

¹⁸ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 266.

¹⁹ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 281.

²⁰ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 355.

level of order that entails “both regularity and irregularity, both law and lawlessness, both order and disorder.”²¹ For Good, this is a decisive shift in the issue of order and a pivotal moment in the book as a whole for it shows that the antithetical structure of human morality does not reflect the fundamental order of the cosmos.²²

Before moving to the closing narrative, there is one other passage in the Yahweh-Job dialogue which belongs to the discussion of cosmic order: Job’s closing speech in 42:2-6. For Good, while Yahweh’s question of guilt and innocence in 40:8 in relation to cosmic order is “the pivot on which the whole book turns,”²³ Job’s final words in 42:6 are “the punch line of the Book of Job.”²⁴ Since Good’s translation of Job’s speech differs significantly from most standard translations, I have included it below:

¹Job answered Yahweh thus:

²I know that you can do everything,
no plan is inaccessible to you.

³“Who is this who obscures counsel ignorantly?”

Therefore I told, and didn’t understand,
Wonders beyond me, and I didn’t know.

⁴“Hear, and I will speak,

I will ask you questions, and you instruct me.”

⁵With ears’ hearing I hear you,
and now my eye sees you.

⁶Therefore I despise and repent
of dust and ashes.²⁵

In his reading of Job’s short response to Yahweh’s second speech, Good identifies multiple and equally plausible meanings for 42:2-5—a veritable buffet of indeterminacy. However, regardless of the particular combination of meanings

²¹ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 355.

²² Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 355-6.

²³ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 353.

²⁴ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 375.

²⁵ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 171.

chosen, what is consistently clear to Good is that Job has come to a new experience of the divine presence as a result of hearing and seeing him. Yet how has Job changed? According to Good, the answer is in 42:6: “Insofar as ‘dust and ashes’ stands for the abjection of rituals of repentance for sin and of mourning for the dead, to ‘repent of dust and ashes’ is to give up the religious structure that construes the world in terms of guilt and innocence. It is to repent of repentance.”²⁶ This response is congruent with the decisive shift of 40:8 in which Yahweh displaces the structure of innocence and guilt central to the arguments of both Job and his friends in lieu of a more ambiguous vision of cosmic order that does not hinge on such antithetical relationships. Job has heard Yahweh’s question in 40:8, and repents of a religious system that orders the entire cosmos around guilt and innocence.

In the closing narrative of 42:7-17, the restoration of Job in 42:10 following his intercession on behalf of the three friends seems to function like magical religion and work exactly like the retributive theology which they espoused. Thus, the book concludes with a surprising affirmation of the magical religion and the doctrine of retribution refuted and repented of in the rest of the book.

While the first presupposition for epilogue tension—the structure of the book—is easily met in Good’s reading of the text, the second presupposition regarding the argument of the book is more ambiguous given Good’s reading strategy regarding the meaning of a text. At best, there is no central argument of

²⁶ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 377.

the book, only the tracing of the theme of cosmic order, a path of meaning which includes the doctrine of retribution.

3.1.2 Deconstructive Reading of the Epilogue

In contrast to Clines, deconstruction is central to Good for his entire reading strategy. For him, the Book of Job is an open text in which its meaning is only found “in cooperative play with the text itself.”²⁷ Not surprising, Good’s deconstructive reading of the epilogue is not limited to the theme of cosmic order but includes all occasions of “deconstructive indeterminacy”²⁸ in the text some of which are more important to consider in relation to their impact on the epilogue tension than others.

Good notes that while the opening prose tale focused on deprivation, the closing one “luxuriates in restoration.”²⁹ Job returns from the ash heap (2:8) to his house (42:11), and from social alienation (19:13-19) to restored relationships (42:11). His flocks and herds are also doubled from before and he is given a new family of sons and daughters. He lives long enough to see his great grandchildren, and even his relationship with the original three friends is restored (42:7-9). Job’s life seems better than ever, and he is no longer the object of Yahweh’s torment.

However, Good also identifies several features of the closing narrative which elicit further attention: the change of rhythm from dense poetic verse to fast-paced prose; several unexpected events in the narrative itself which cause most readers to do a double-take; and, a “Hollywood” ending which Good notes is troubling to many, perhaps because what seemed to be a tragedy from 3:1

²⁷ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 186.

²⁸ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 181.

²⁹ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 379.

onwards has reverted to a resolution that is comparatively banal, even comic.³⁰ For Good, these surprises are crucial elements to understanding the ending of the book, and it is here that he engages in a thoroughly deconstructive reading of the text. Of particular significance to Good are the acceptance of Job's prayer in 42:7-9, and the terms of Job's restoration in 42:10 and onwards.

The first series of surprises for Good are the events of 42:7-9 between Yahweh, Job, and the three friends. From a structural point of view it is fitting that Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar reappear at this junction: Just as they made their first appearance at the end of the first narrative (2:11), so they make their final appearance at the beginning of the last narrative (42:7-9). However, there are several puzzling realities in this text for Good which are contingent on his particular reading of the opening narrative and especially 40:8 and 42:2-6. In 42:7, Yahweh is angry with Eliphaz and the friends because they did not speak "truth" about Yahweh as did Job. The word used for truth is *אֱמֻנָה*, an unusual word to convey the idea which, Good suggests based on its usage in the rest of the book, does not signify "truth" in the intellectual sense but more in the sense of "establishment," "preparation," or "readiness."³¹ Thus, Yahweh criticizes the friends for not speaking something "established," not properly prepared. Despite all of their certainty about the doctrine of retribution, they have failed to speak of the god satisfactorily in contrast to Job. Yet Good notes that what remains unclear still is how or when the friends misspoke, and more significantly, in what way Job spoke correctly. Since Yahweh criticizes Job in 38:2, Good does not see

³⁰ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 380.

³¹ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 381.

his approval of Job's speech as all-inclusive. However, he claims that at the very least the god's approval must include Job's last utterance—Job's repentance from religious structures that centre on antithetic relationships like guilt and innocence. For Good, the presence of 42:2-6 means that in 42:7, "Yahweh in effect approves Job's renunciation of religion."³² However, none of these details result in deconstructive indeterminacy until 42:9: After affirming Job's renunciation of religion as "truth," Yahweh requires, as a condition of restoring the friends, that Job make a sacrifice on their behalf. In response to Job's intercession on behalf of his friends, Yahweh responds by "lifting Job's face," that is, by accepting his intercessory act.³³ It seems that the means for the relationship between Yahweh and the three friends to be restored is through Job's intercession. In other words, the restoration of the three friends is a reaffirmation by Yahweh of the kind of religious structure that he claimed is an affront to cosmic order in 40:8. In this sense, the intercession on behalf of the friends seems to reaffirm the magical religion of 1:3-5 challenged by the satan and which belongs to a vision of cosmic order that is limited to antithetic relationships.

The same is true of 42:10-17, in the restoration of Job. Good notes that Yahweh restores Job "when he had prayed for his friends" (42:10). This is another instance of deconstruction in Good's reading since the doubling of Job's fortunes only happens after he prays for his friends. Good notes: "After 42.6, the intercession is either a religious act of a sort that Job has apparently renounced, or it is a purely magical act whose efficacy has nothing to do with Job's religious

³² Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 382.

³³ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 383.

feelings or ideas.”³⁴ Thus, the doctrine of retribution also seems to be reaffirmed. Returned to his religious role as intercessor, Job once more enjoys the blessings of the deity.

As mentioned above, there are two other deconstructive aspects to the closing narrative which do not contribute directly to the epilogue tension but which are interesting to note in passing nonetheless. The first is in the inclusion of the three new daughters in the inheritance (42:15). Good notes the omission of any blessing for Job’s wife, without whom the second family would not have been possible. However, the book sees the children almost exclusively as Job’s children and ascribes their mother no significance. For Good, “The sexism of that understanding and whatever feminism may be in the daughters’ inheriting mutually mitigate and deconstruct each other.”³⁵ The second is the last line of the book, which Good translates as, “Then Job died, old and sated with days.”³⁶ Good argues that the meaning of the Hebrew שָׂבַע as used throughout the Book of Job is ambiguous since it means “contentedly full” as often as it means “gorged,” and so he translates it in 42:17 as an ambiguous pleasure.³⁷ Thus, on the very closing note of the book, Good is not sure if Job’s long life is a sign of the deity’s blessing or if it represents “a fullness that makes him yearn for emptiness.”³⁸ Like the rest of the book, the ending remains open and indeterminate.

³⁴ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 385.

³⁵ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 390.

³⁶ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 173.

³⁷ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 393.

³⁸ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 393.

3.1.3 Understanding of the Epilogue Tension

The epilogue tension unravels almost immediately in Good's reading of Job for two reasons. First, Good's fundamental understanding of an open text is that meaning is indeterminate: "There is no single correct understanding of the Book of Job."³⁹ For Good, this not only implies the existence of multiple readings, but also multiple and incongruent meanings within a single reading. Thus, while Good loosely identifies a structure for the book, he is unwilling to read the text through the narrow lens of the concept of a central argument. In other words, the text does not need to have a primary argument for Good, and so the very lack of this concept in his reading diminishes the possibility of the kind of epilogue tension identified by Clines since it depends on a central argument that is consistent throughout the book. Good's reading strategy engages in a degree of "purposelessness" in its notion of indeterminate play,⁴⁰ and ruins the gravity of the tension that emerges in a unitary reading of the book's argument.

I did note that while there is not central argument for Good, there are several meanings which orbit the question of cosmic order, including the doctrine of retribution. In contrast to Clines, who sees the chief issue as the moral order of the universe and both the doctrine of retribution and its negation as the primary components of the debate, Good only sees it as one of several views relating to cosmic order and so the doctrine of retribution is only marginal to the discussion.

Nonetheless there are still traces of the epilogue tension. As discussed in the previous section, Good identifies several events in the closing narrative which seem unexpected in relation to the rest of the book, one of which is the restoration

³⁹ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 178.

⁴⁰ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 180-1.

of Job's fortunes as a result of his intercession on behalf of the three friends. The tension here exists between Yahweh's approval in 42:7 of Job's recent renunciation of religious structures such as the doctrine of retribution and the contingency of Job's well-being on the performing of religious acts of the very type he has just renounced. The primary difference between this tension and that identified by Clines is that it is not the reaffirmation of the doctrine of retribution or even of magical religion which may be implied, but the return to religious structures which promote a vision of order around hierarchical pairs like right and wrong, innocent and guilty, order and chaos. Thus the tension emerges not because Job the righteous is once again the most prosperous—a possible reaffirmation of the doctrine of retribution—but because the condition of Job's restoration in 42:10-17 is directly related to a religious act in 42:9, both of which seem to reaffirm the very type of religion renounced by Job and Yahweh in 42:6-7.

3.2 DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF DECONSTRUCTION IN GOOD

The centrality of deconstruction to the reading strategy of Good is radically different from that of Clines, mainly due to Good's understanding of open texts and their implications for reading and interpretation. For Good, the sense of the text as open is not dependent on the reading process since his assumption about any text is that it is "a pattern of words that means itself."⁴¹ The reading process may be necessary to find meaning, but the meaning itself is inherent to the text, whether read or not. Further, since open texts are neither inert nor passive, the only way to approach them is in cooperative play, for in play we allow the text to

⁴¹ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 186-7.

propose meanings that a theoretical or critical approach may otherwise inhibit.⁴² It is at this junction that deconstruction takes its place as the joker, the wild card: It is part of the deck, but it has not face value of its own—only the ability to disrupt the rules of the game, to take on value within the established system of control in order to cause a short circuit. It is not a critical methodology that imposes limits on meaning; rather it is a way of reading a text against itself, against the presuppositions and claims that it makes. Hence Good’s key interpretive question is, how does the text play itself?⁴³ He sees his reading strategy as a kind of deconstructive play in which the indeterminacy of the text is allowed to exhaust the possibilities of meaning of the text rather than be arrested in the name of some external principle that governs meaning. In this sense, Good’s reading strategy is explicitly deconstructive.

In his own description of what a deconstructive reading of the Book of Job entails, Good makes two points of clarification which I believe are important when considering his understanding of deconstruction. The first is that the notion of play as an analogy for reading “promotes a certain purposelessness.”⁴⁴ This is not to say that there is no value in play—only that it lacks the seriousness of some reading strategies which seek answers to prescribed questions that emerge not from the text but inherent to the reading strategy itself.

Second, Good is emphatic about the distinction of “deconstruction” from mere “destruction.” For Good, deconstructive play is not the removal of truth, but “the assertion that the open text has already undone its own tendencies to closure,

⁴² Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 180, 186.

⁴³ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 178.

⁴⁴ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 180.

already is playing with breaking its unities into multiplicities.”⁴⁵ Thus, for Good, as an open text, “there is no single correct understanding about the Book of Job.”⁴⁶ There is still truth to uncover and discover in reading the text, but in contrast to reading strategies which settle on a final, determinate meaning after all of the possibilities have been considered, deconstructive play explores the indeterminacy of meaning in a text without establishing a particular reading as final.

As I have already remarked, this kind of openness in Good’s reading of the Book of Job differs significantly from the limited role of deconstruction in the reading strategy of Clines. In the next chapter, I will give a more comprehensive critique of the deconstruction of both Clines and Good, especially in relation to Culler’s articulation of deconstruction as a critical theory for reading texts, and finally a comparison of their respective readings of Job 42:7-17.

⁴⁵ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 181.

⁴⁶ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 178.

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CRITIQUE AND COMPARISON OF CLINES AND GOOD

In many ways, the deconstructive readings of the epilogue of Job by Clines and Good are more divergent than convergent, both in the extent to which their respective hermeneutics are deconstructive and in their understanding of the meaning of the book as a whole. While the focus of the last two chapters was to outline the preconditions for epilogue tension in the work of each scholar and examine how their deconstructive readings understand that tension, in this chapter I present a more detailed critique of the deconstruction of each, as well as a direct comparison of their readings of the epilogue in relation to each other. The primary basis of my critique is Culler's *On Deconstruction* which provides a thorough grounding in Derridean deconstruction but more importantly an overview of its various developments as a critical theory. Both Clines and Good are explicit in referencing Culler's work as a source for their understanding of deconstruction,¹ and so Culler's work is ideal for evaluating the extent to which each scholar's reading is deconstructive. Following my critique of Clines and Good, I conclude with a comparison of their readings of Job 42:7-17 and their contribution to understanding epilogue tension in the Book of Job.

4.1 CRITIQUE OF DECONSTRUCTION IN CLINES

As discussed earlier, there are considerable constraints placed on deconstruction as a reading strategy in the work of Clines. Far from making it central to his

¹ Cf. Clines, , "Deconstructing the Book of Job," 107; Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 408 (n.8).

interpretive approach, Clines only entertains deconstruction in a nominal sense and as a result his deconstructive reading of the epilogue is selective and somewhat superficial. In the first half of this section, I will explore the reading strategy of Clines in order to more clearly establish the hermeneutical context of his work and its inherent limitations and incongruence with deconstruction before turning to a more focussed critique of specific aspects of Clines' deconstructive reading of the epilogue.

4.1.1 Hermeneutic Context for Deconstruction in Clines

From the outset of his work on Job, the hermeneutic of Clines explicitly aligns with reader-response criticism, a reading strategy which recognizes that all readers bring a set of presuppositions, including previous literary experiences, into their interpretation of a text,² and consequently considers the reader “an essential participant in the reading process and the creation of meaning.”³ For Clines, the meaning of a text—both its form and its content—are products of the reader and not qualities of the text itself.⁴

In contrast to his allegiance to a literary theory that puts so much interpretive stock in the reader, several other elements of Clines' reading resemble more text-centered approaches. The first is his insistence that there is an “argument” to the book, that there is a point which the book is trying to make, a problem for which it seeks resolution.⁵ He asks the question directly: “What is

² Bressler, *Literary Criticism*, 65-66.

³ Bressler, *Literary Criticism*, 67.

⁴ Cf. Clines, *Job 1-20*, xii, xxix, xxxv.

⁵ For example, Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxii, xxxvii-xxxix, 38, 46.

the ‘argument’ of the book?”⁶ On the one hand, Clines is open to a certain degree of indeterminacy: In response to the question of the primary argument of the book, he holds that the chief issue of the book could be either “the problem of suffering” or “the problem of the moral order of the world.”⁷ Clines allows for indeterminacy in his reading of Job at least in relation to its central message since he does not insist on the need to finalize which issue is the chief issue but sees both as equally valid readings. However, where his entertainment of openness in the text stops is in the asking of the question in the first place: He still asserts that the search for meaning implies the existence of a central argument. Thus, only in the attempt to satisfy this very determinate expectation of the text is he open to indeterminacy.

This view of the text as having a primary meaning is reinforced by his insistence to always interpret the part in relation to the whole. He describes his approach as a constant interplay between the meaning of the part and the meaning of the whole, from verse to strophe to chapter, in which his goal is “to understand every detail in the context of the total book.”⁸ However, both this characteristic of Clines’ interpretive method and his search for a central argument are characteristic of New Criticism: “the New Critics posit the organic unity of a poem—that is, the concept that all parts of a poem are interrelated and interconnected, with each part reflecting and helping to support the poem’s central idea.”⁹ For Clines, not only does he assume that there is a primary meaning to the

⁶ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxviii.

⁷ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxviii.

⁸ Clines, *Job 1-20*, x.

⁹ Bressler, *Literary Criticism*, 43.

text, but he is also convinced that the book represents a unified effort to express a particular message: “At every point I have tried to be conscious of the book as a whole, and of how the sentence under consideration contributes to the total work. At every point also I have been asking how this sentence is connected, in thought, with the previous sentences, and how the argument of the speaker is being developed.”¹⁰ Thus the concept of organic unity is dominant in the hermeneutics of Clines and precludes the possibility that the text behave in other ways—that perhaps there is no development and the book is a collection of disparate, incongruent pieces, or that what is presented as the central argument at one level is overturned by another argument further into the text. While Clines is careful to avoid mere verse-by-verse interpretation which he claims “can be in fact a steadfast and systemic refusal to confront the primary questions of meaning,”¹¹ it is also possible that insisting that all parts contribute to the unity of the whole could be a systemic suppression of portions of the text which threaten to overturn and undermine previous arguments. This aspect of Clines’ reading strategy denies that a single verse could change the direction of the entire book, or that its meaning turn on a single word.

In addition to his stance on the organic unity of the text, Clines also admits that almost all of his emphasis is on the final form of the book with little regard for how it came to be. For him, questions of date, authorship, source, and compositional history are mostly extrinsic to the book and its interpretation.¹²

¹⁰ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxii.

¹¹ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxxii

¹² Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxix.

However, despite this explicit claim, Clines still seems intent on giving considerable attention to such extrinsic factors:

Naturally, for the most complete understanding of any piece of literature, we need to consider all that may be known about its background, its author, and the circumstances of its composition. Unfortunately, in the case of the Book of Job, there is little hard evidence of this kind, and we must rely largely on intelligent speculation.¹³

This is a disconcerting admission—not only that it contradicts his earlier commitment to the final form of the text by introducing interpretive elements external to the text,¹⁴ but that despite the lack of concrete evidence for answers to such questions about the Book of Job he does not simply dismiss the need to pursue them in the first place—questions which Clines has already called “*extrinsic* to the book itself and therefore to the question of meaning or interpretation.”¹⁵ Instead he proposes that the best alternative is to rely on “intelligent speculation.” There are multiple examples in his commentary which show this concession to historiographical interpretation: in his notes on 2:11-13, Clines discusses the different opinions of proponents of redaction criticism regarding the composition of the prologue and epilogue;¹⁶ he makes several inferences about what Hebrew readers would think regarding the names in 2:11;¹⁷ he makes a lengthy comparison of Job 3:1-26 with Jeremiah 20:14-20, and explores their possible interrelationship;¹⁸ in his discussion of Job 3:1-26, he considers the placement of v16 and speculates about “whether there may be any

¹³ Clines, *Job 1-20*, lvi-lvii.

¹⁴ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxix.

¹⁵ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xxix; author’s emphasis.

¹⁶ Clines, *Job 1-20*, 56.

¹⁷ Clines, *Job 1-20*, 58.

¹⁸ Clines, *Job 1-20*, 80.

reason why it is to be found in its present place”,¹⁹ and for the Elihu speeches (Job 32-37) and wisdom poem of 28:1-28, Clines entertains the reason for their placement before returning to his original focus on final form.²⁰ It is not that any of these lines of discussion are not valid concerns to have about the Book of Job, only that they stand at odds to his earlier claim to be focussed almost entirely on the final form of the book, and bear little difference from the standard historical-critical approach still widely held as the reigning interpretive paradigm in biblical studies.

To summarize the hermeneutic of Clines, it represents a selective blend of deference to the historical-critical method, a New Critical concept of organic unity, and a reader-response understanding of meaning. Even so, given the breadth of reader-response criticism, the heterogeneous hermeneutics of Clines can still be considered as reader-response if Clines, as a reader, represents a biblical scholar who is well-acquainted with the historical-critical method and a New Critical concept of textual coherence. As such, reader-response criticism is the “frame-theory” in which he engages in what would otherwise be considered a mix of interpretive approaches.

This hermeneutical landscape in Clines’ reading of Job is incompatible with deconstruction on two counts. First, contrary to its popular classification as a form of reader-response criticism, deconstruction in fact shows how the identification of meaning with the experience of the reader is undermined by the

¹⁹ Clines, *Job 1-20*, 95.

²⁰ Clines, *Job 1-20*, lviii-lix.

theory that depends on it.²¹ In other words, the concept of meaning as a product of the reader is open to being deconstructed since it depends on the reader's experience in order to commence, experience which is itself shaped and constituted by that which it is supposed to elucidate. Thus, by championing the role of the reader in the creation of meaning, the reader-response criticism of Clines affirms a logocentric hierarchy in which the meaning of the text is subject to the action of the reader. This aspect of Clines' reading strategy is clearly at odds with Culler's description of deconstruction:

Deconstruction is not a theory that defines meaning in order to tell you how to find it. As a critical undoing of the hierarchical oppositions on which theories depend, it demonstrates the difficulties of any theory that would define meaning in a univocal way: as what an author intends, what conventions determine, what a reader experiences.²²

Consequently, the reader-response notion of meaning held by Clines, with its narrow, univocal theory of reading, is itself open to deconstruction. This suggests that Clines hermeneutics could only be deconstructive on a shallow level; otherwise Clines leaves the hierarchical relationships of his own reading strategy open to the same deconstructive analysis with which he interprets the epilogue tension.

Second, the hermeneutics of Clines is incongruent with deconstruction in its assertion of the New Critical concept of the organic unity of the text. In contrast to Culler's description of deconstruction—that it “does not elucidate texts in the traditional sense of attempting to grasp a unifying content or theme...[but] investigates the work of metaphysical oppositions in their arguments and the ways

²¹ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 224.

²² Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 131.

in which textual figures and relations...produce a double, aporetic logic”²³—Clines’ New Critical conviction of coherence in the text delimits the role that deconstruction is allowed to play. Only after he has clearly outlined the two chief issues of the book—the problem of suffering and the question of moral order—does Clines look to deconstruction as an interpretive approach.²⁴

Thus, given Clines’ selective appropriation of different interpretive approaches and their implications for a deconstructive reading of the text, it follows that the hermeneutics of Clines should only admit deconstruction onto its landscape at a very shallow level.

4.1.2 Deconstruction as Methodology in Clines

In addition to the limitations inherent to his reading strategy as a whole, Clines’ deconstructive reading of the epilogue is also weakened because of his reduction of deconstruction to a methodological tool. This is evident in both his isolation of deconstruction from its philosophical context, as well as his selective deconstruction of the text at the level of the book’s central argument.

Clines adopts Culler’s formulation of the strategy of deconstruction as his starting point: “To deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies.”²⁵ Although this is a reasonable point of departure, it is only one of many formulaic descriptions of deconstruction.²⁶ Of Culler’s formulation, Clines claims that it does not “lend itself to the aspect of deconstructionism that is a strategy in

²³ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 109.

²⁴ Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 108, 116.

²⁵ Culler in Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 107.

²⁶ For example, see Derrida, *Positions*, 5, 38-39; Derrida, *Margins*, 329.

philosophy,” but that it is primarily suited for “deconstruction as a procedure with texts.”²⁷ There are two problems with this appropriation of Culler. The first is that Culler does not make such a stringent distinction between philosophy and critical theory. Earlier in the same chapter, he describes deconstruction as “a mode of philosophical and literary analysis derived from the work of the philosopher Jacques Derrida, which interrogates basic philosophical categories or concepts.”²⁸ Thus, as a mode of analysis, it plays a role in both philosophical and literary writing. However, more problematic is the fact that in setting up concrete boundaries between deconstruction as philosophy and deconstruction as critical theory, Clines introduces yet another hierarchical pair—philosophy/literature, or philosophy/literary theory—which opens his hermeneutics to deconstruction.

Further to his separation of deconstruction as a strategy in philosophy from its role within literary criticism, Clines reduces deconstruction to a methodology by selectively “applying” it to the text. I write “applying,” of course, for two reasons. First, as Culler observes, because deconstruction “is not, Derrida insists, a school or a method, a philosophy or a practice, but something that happens, as when the arguments of a text undercut the presuppositions on which it relies.”²⁹ Since Clines adheres to a reader-response conception of meaning and a New Critical view of textual coherence, any serious engagement in a deconstructive reading of Job would deconstruct Clines’ hermeneutics and undermine his interpretive basis—especially his notion of a unifying theme or central argument for the book, where he identifies deconstruction in the text in the

²⁷ Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 107.

²⁸ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, vii-viii.

²⁹ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, viii.

first place. Thus, Clines can only “apply” deconstruction to certain aporetic instances in the text lest he undermine the concepts of his primary reading strategy.

However, the reduction of deconstruction to methodology is specifically evident in his reading of the epilogue of Job since he only identifies deconstruction at the structural level of the book’s central argument—for him, the discussion of the doctrine of moral retribution. He does not identify deconstruction at any other level in the epilogue, and in the rest of the book only in relation to the question of suffering, the other central argument which he identifies in Job. In the same way that the hermeneutic of Clines places the reader above the text in the production of meaning, Clines also treats deconstruction as a methodology that can simply be added to his interpretive toolkit and not as a textual event in which the reader is engaged in a less dominant or even passive role. To this effect, Clines seems less interested in fully exploring the potential of deconstruction throughout the text than in “applying” deconstruction more as a label to describe a structural anomaly in the text—the tension between the epilogue and the Book of Job as a whole.

By applying categories to deconstruction in order to distinguish its critical role in philosophy from its application as a procedure in literature, as well as reducing it to a method or interpretive tool, Clines is able to adopt it into his already heterogeneous reading strategy—all under the free licence of reader-response criticism—and engage it freely as a dominant reader of texts. Perhaps the one successful aspect of deconstruction in Clines is that despite limiting it to

his discussion of the central argument of the Book of Job, its inclusion does free him to acknowledge a moment in the text where the New Critical expectation of organic unity is disrupted, albeit with a proviso to which I will now turn.

4.1.3 Rhetorical Inoculation against Deconstruction

No sooner does Clines ask the question of whether the Book of Job may be “open to a deconstruction” than he contains this openness of the text with a limit, that “to some extent [the book] is inoculated against its deconstructability by its rhetoric.”³⁰ Even in its formulaic and marginal role within his hermeneutics, Clines does not admit deconstruction into his reading strategy unchecked, and so inoculates his own reading strategy by appealing to the power of rhetoric. If deconstruction allows Clines to comfortably acknowledge the epilogue tension without resorting to a speculative argument about the compositional history of the book³¹ or a more shallow reading of the central argument in which the doctrine of retribution is only corrected and not refuted,³² then it is the triumph of rhetoric over facts that keeps the indeterminacy of meaning in the details from having the upper hand.³³ In the same way that Clines claims the Book of Job undermines the significance of the doctrine of retribution by marginalizing it in the Yahweh speeches,³⁴ so Clines undermines deconstruction by reducing it to pure methodology and attempts to arrest its consequences by the power of his own rhetoric. As Clines makes clear, “you can’t solve the problem of a dogma with

³⁰ Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 106-7.

³¹ For example, Pope, *Job*, xxiii-xxx.

³² For example, Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 24.

³³ Cf. Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 122: “Rhetoric triumphs over mere fact, and we would not have it otherwise.”

³⁴ Cf. Clines, *Job 1-20*, xlvi.

another dogma.”³⁵ Thus, while Clines plays rhetoric as the ace up his hermeneutic sleeve, it does not arrest deconstruction in the rest of the Book of Job, nor in his own work as I have already highlighted above. Deconstruction as a wild card still trumps the triumph of rhetoric, for if rhetoric were really successful then there would be no need to make sense of the “many divergent interpretations”³⁶ of the Book of Job which draw Clines to deconstruction in the first place. In other words, if rhetoric really does triumph over facts and the rhetoric of the Book of Job is so effective, then Clines would not have been inclined to write such a detailed account of deconstruction and add his reading of Job to the multitude of others. What is more, if the answer to one dogma is not another, then a bald statement like, “rhetoric triumphs over mere fact,” is exactly the kind of dogma that Clines claims deconstruction eliminates. As such, Clines’ own reading of the epilogue is not just deconstructing but deconstructed, for the power of rhetoric over indeterminacy is undermined by the need for such a thorough treatment of the epilogue tension, if it is not merely banal to claim that deconstruction in Job shows that the problem with the doctrine of retribution is its status as dogma *directly after* a dogmatic statement about the meaning of texts. Despite Culler’s observation that “an opposition that is deconstructed is not destroyed or abandoned but reinscribed”³⁷—in this case, that the deconstructed doctrine of retribution is grafted back onto the text—Clines does not seem to see deconstruction in this way, and prefers to appeal to what he claims is a higher level of meaning in the text—its rhetorical meaning—rather than to allow the

³⁵ Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 123.

³⁶ Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 106.

³⁷ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 133.

indeterminacy of meaning brought to the forefront by deconstruction to “elucidate the heterogeneity of the text.”³⁸ Perhaps the greatest irony of all is that Clines only partially quotes Culler’s formulation of deconstruction. In full, it reads:

To deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies, by identifying in the text the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept or premise.³⁹

It is puzzling that Clines claims immunity from deconstruction on behalf of the Book of Job at the beginning of his article on the basis of the rhetorical power of its discourse only to reference a text on deconstruction that describes it as a strategy that identifies “the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument” in the text—in the case of Clines’ reading of Job, the argument in favour of the negation of the doctrine of moral retribution which begins in the prologue and continues to the end of the poetic discourse of the dialogue. In this respect the Book of Job is not inoculated by its rhetoric, for this is the shallow level of interpretation that is undermined by the epilogue in the first place.⁴⁰ If anything, it is inoculated against its deconstruction by centuries and millennia of religious dogma which condition most readers to look for “Job the patient” and “Job the faithful” and rarely recognize it as a polemic against the doctrine of retribution.

One further issue with Clines’ claim that “rhetoric triumphs over mere fact” is the establishment of yet another hierarchical relationship—performative and constative speech acts. Like all logocentric hierarchies, it invites deconstruction—in this case, the statement that “rhetoric triumphs over mere fact”

³⁸ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 134.

³⁹ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 86.

⁴⁰ Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 107.

undermines the dominance of the performative by asserting it in the constative. Thus, Clines' attempts to limit deconstruction through rhetorical inoculation simply lead to its proliferation.

Despite his view of the Book of Job as one of the "most open" of texts, the hermeneutics of Clines, his reduction of deconstruction to a methodology, and his attempt to inoculate the text against the consequences of deconstruction do not represent a strong case for the appropriation of deconstruction as a biblical hermeneutic, although I will forego any further conclusions about Clines until the final section. Before Clines and Good can enter into a dialogue of their own, I will present a similar critique of deconstruction in the work of Good.

4.2 CRITIQUE OF DECONSTRUCTION BY GOOD

In contrast to Clines, deconstruction is not merely a component of Good's hermeneutics: It is central to his overall reading strategy and how he understands meaning in the text. Good makes the association early in his reading: "I have found deconstructive criticism, with its pleasure in indeterminacy, a helpful stimulus in breaking open my own lifelong critical habits and nervous mental constrictions."⁴¹ Thus, while Good's reading of Job engages in particular *deconstructions*, as was the case of Clines' reading of the epilogue, his overall reading strategy is also *deconstructive* to the extent that it embodies an awareness of Derrida's readings of philosophical works and their literary implications.⁴² In other words, Good's reading strategy is shaped by the literary implications of deconstruction within philosophy in addition to deconstructing the text at different

⁴¹ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 181.

⁴² Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 213.

points. This distinction between deconstructions and deconstructive reading is particular to deconstruction as a literary mode of criticism⁴³ and an important feature of the hermeneutics of Good.

As such, in my critique of deconstruction in Good, I will not limit my focus to his reading of the epilogue but consider the interpretive landscape of his reading of the Book of Job as a whole. In particular, I will examine the extent to which deconstruction shapes Good's overall hermeneutic, especially as it relates to his conception of deconstructive play, indeterminate meaning, and incoherence.

4.2.1 The Hermeneutics of Good as Deconstructive

At the basis of Good's hermeneutics is a decidedly literary approach for reading Job: "In this book I am engaged in a particular undertaking: to investigate how the Book of Job goes about happening as a book, as a work of literary art."⁴⁴ Consequently Good sees the more traditional questions of authorship, source, date, and composition, which are commonplace in biblical studies, to be irrelevant to a literary approach, and deems them "dispensable" to his reading of the text. To this end he makes a distinction between historiographical and historical criticism:

I distinguish, then, a necessary *historical* criticism, which reads the book critically in the light of its language, style, and cultural assumptions, from *historiographical* criticism, which is content with answers to questions of date, provenance, authorship, compilation, with all the information that good answers to such questions might give of historical and biographical settings and the process by which a book achieved its present form.⁴⁵

Good is uninterested in the kind of criticism that insists that knowing external details about the text is prerequisite to understanding it. Such an approach not only considers meaning to be contingent on a extrinsic elements to the text but

⁴³ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 213.

⁴⁴ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 1.

⁴⁵ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 184; author's emphasis.

“reduces a work to a series of events outside of the work.”⁴⁶ In contrast to a literary reading, it has little regard for the final form of the text or its inherent complexity. Nonetheless, despite his disinterest in historiographical matters, Good is concerned with historical criticism, which takes into account philological and cultural elements pertinent to the world of the text. As such, Good’s literary reading strategy is also a diachronic historical reading of the text (as opposed to a synchronic reading which is totally uninterested in the past).⁴⁷ In this way, the hermeneutic basis of Good is both literary and historical

What allows Good the freedom to disassociate from historiographical criticism is his notion of truth in the text. Good critiques the relatively modern assumption that whoever composed the text intended or determined “a coherent meaning and embodied it in the text.”⁴⁸ For him, incoherence is not necessarily accidental, and so where historiographical criticism sees inconsistencies or even contradictions, the literary approach of Good focuses on the final form of the text. In the case of the Book of Job, Good considers it to be a work of “dense complexity” in which “sure perceptions of truth are impossible and misleading.”⁴⁹ This interpretive stance is evident throughout Good’s reading of Job as he explores the full semantic range of words within their literary context. He resists the historiographical tendency to interpret incoherence in the Book of Job, such as the omission of Zophar’s third speech in Job 25, by speculating about the book’s compositional history and does not take the liberty of attempting to reconstruct or

⁴⁶ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 183.

⁴⁷ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 181.

⁴⁸ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 179.

⁴⁹ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, vii.

rearrange the current text in order to satisfy the assumption that “authors do not write texts with incoherences.”⁵⁰

Closely related to Good’s entertainment of incongruence is his reading of the Book of Job as an “open” text. Just as Good claims that the book “steadfastly refuses to reveal any unitary truth to us,”⁵¹ so does he consider its meaning to be indeterminate: “There is no single correct understanding about the Book of Job.”⁵² However, in contrast to reader-response criticism, Good identifies indeterminacy in the text itself and not as a result of the reading process. As such, the meaning of the text is inherent: “An open text may propose many meanings or few, or none, but it is not inert or passive.”⁵³ In other words, the indeterminacy of the text is not subject to the authority of the reader but is a consequence of its own openness. Essential to this understanding of indeterminacy is Good’s view that a text is a pattern of words that “means itself.”⁵⁴ For him, meaning in a literary work is not determined by aspects of the author’s life or intentions, whether stated or implied. Neither is it rooted in the presuppositions of the reader: “Meaning in a literary work is in the work’s text.”⁵⁵ Good elevates the text over both author and reader, and his hermeneutics are thoroughly text-centered in this respect.

One final component of the hermeneutics of Good is his view that the only way to approach an open text is through play. Thus at the centre of his reading

⁵⁰ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 8.

⁵¹ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 397.

⁵² Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 178.

⁵³ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 180.

⁵⁴ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 186-7.

⁵⁵ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 2.

strategy is the question, “how does the text play itself?”⁵⁶ He calls on a sexual analogy in order to describe this type of reading: Like playful eroticism, playful reading does not exist for any purpose external to itself, for the purpose of play “is the play itself.”⁵⁷ Consequently, Good describes reading in similar terms: “The purpose of reading is to read, to see what one can see, to let the text play openly on us and we openly on it—or, perhaps better, that we and the text play with each other—so that we close off no possibility.”⁵⁸ Thus, far from viewing the text as passive—whether subject to the intentions of the author or the presuppositions of the reader—Good proposes that for an open text like Job, meaning is found in cooperative play with the text itself.⁵⁹

Although Good does not elaborate on the extent to which deconstruction influences his reading strategy, he does admit “elements of ‘deconstruction’” in his discussion of reading.⁶⁰ Thus, in the second half of this section, I will trace several aspects of Good’s hermeneutics to deconstruction as presented in Culler’s work, particularly in relation to his conception of deconstructive play, indeterminate meaning, and incoherence.

The concept of “play” is one aspect of Good’s hermeneutics which demonstrates a direct link to deconstruction. This notion of play is important in the work of Derrida, especially in relation to the play of signs as they resist the totalizing effect of finite systems of meaning.⁶¹ However, this Derridean sense of

⁵⁶ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 178.

⁵⁷ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 180.

⁵⁸ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 180.

⁵⁹ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 186.

⁶⁰ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 181.

⁶¹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 289.

the play of signs does not imply that “deconstruction makes interpretation a process of free association in which anything goes.”⁶² Rather, the notion of deconstructive play rejects totalizing approaches to meaning imposed on the text and depends on context as the space in which meaning occurs. Culler aptly summarizes Derrida’s stance on meaning and context as follows: “Meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless.”⁶³ Thus, although the play of Good in reading the Book of Job may sound like an invitation to a reader-oriented approach, a mistake which Newsom makes in her review of Good,⁶⁴ the relationship of his reading strategy with deconstruction suggests from the outset an approach to reading that recognizes the limits of any concept of meaning that is defined by the intentions of the author or the experience of the reader. As such, it is a primarily text-centered approach since it does not seek to subject the meaning of the text of Job to a system of meaning external to it.

Another deconstructive aspect of the hermeneutics of Good is his notion of indeterminate meaning. Good also refers to it as “deconstructive indeterminacy,”⁶⁵ and similar to his sense of play, it recognizes meaning as the production of the text. Also like the notion of play, indeterminacy is often radicalized, and consequently misunderstood to infer “the impossibility or unjustifiability of choosing one meaning over another.”⁶⁶ However, deconstructive indeterminacy does not occur at the level of overall meaning but at the level of signification. In other words, while “there are no final meanings that

⁶² Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 110.

⁶³ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 123.

⁶⁴ Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 9.

⁶⁵ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 181.

⁶⁶ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 189.

arrest the movement of signification”⁶⁷—no meaning that prevents signifiers from suggesting alternative meanings—it does not mean that having entertained the semantic range of a particular word or phrase it is not possible to choose one meaning over another, only that the constitution of the signifier precludes closure.⁶⁸ An example of this sense of indeterminacy in Good is in his reading of Job 19:25: Although the traditional reading of the Hebrew לְנִצָּן, especially in Christian traditions, is “redeemer,” Good also considers the possibility of its meaning as “avenger,” and in relation to the context of both Job’s speech and his reference to an arbiter (9:33) and a witness (16:19-21), he opts for the connotation “avenger of blood” who will take vengeance on Job’s behalf against the deity who has inflicted him.⁶⁹ Thus, having considered the range of possible meanings—the indeterminacy of possible meanings—Good chooses the one which best fits the immediate co-text as well as the development of Job’s argument within the rest of the text.

In addition to the notions of play and deconstructive indeterminacy, both of which are inherent to Good’s sense of an open text, is his concept of truth that does not necessitate organic unity or coherence of the text that is commonly assumed by both historiographical approaches and New Criticism. Like any metaphysical concept which depends on logocentric hierarchization—in this case, congruence and fragmentation—deconstruction shows how the organic unity of a poem is often at the cost of a fragmented notion of congruence—one which depends on extrinsic factors such as compositional history in order to suppress

⁶⁷ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 188.

⁶⁸ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 189.

⁶⁹ See Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 257-9.

aspects of the text which undermine organic unity. Deconstruction always brings to the surface the tendency to impose systems of interpretation which suppress or exclude elements in the text which are problematic, to question “our inclination to use notions of unity and thematic coherence to exclude possibilities that are manifestly awakened by the language and that pose a problem.”⁷⁰ Of course, this does not mean that Good excludes the possibility of coherence and unity, only that they are not allowed to impose in a deterministic way limits on the possible meanings of the text, to arrest “the text’s fullness of possible meanings.”⁷¹

In relation to the deconstructive nature of Good’s hermeneutics, there are two other aspects which I would like to consider regarding Good’s interpretive landscape. First, while his distinction of historical and philological questions from historiographical concerns represents an important break from the dominance of the historical-critical method without reverting to the synchronic extreme of disregarding history altogether, Good also includes comparison with other literature in the former category:

If interpretation depends exclusively on the assumed generic context of a book or on formal usages, I think wisdom literature or any genre designation is a dispensable concept. Such an interpretive procedure too easily degenerates into a way to avoid reading the work. Any formal conclusion that allows the reader to walk around the text or that requires the interpreter to produce another text is dangerous.⁷²

Not only does Good dismiss genre from the discussion, but he is also reluctant to allow any aspect of Job to depend on other texts, even within the Hebrew canon. For him it represents another external limit on the meaning of the text. This rejection of genre on the basis of its conception within the historical-critical

⁷⁰ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 247.

⁷¹ Cf. Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 218; Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 188.

⁷² Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 11.

tradition is central to Carol Newsom's critique of Good's reading of Job.⁷³ Although I will return to Newsom in the next chapter, I do agree with her in her view that Good is near-sighted to dispense with the notion of genre altogether. However, I do not agree with her that the problem with his rejection of genre is his limited sense of it as a historical-critical tool used to answer historiographical questions, but propose that even more significantly it is the point in Good's literary approach where he makes an arbitrary distinction in his reading strategy between intrinsic and extrinsic. At the lexical and syntactical level of translation, lexicons and grammars represent the usage and patterns of all classical Hebrew literature, and Good does not hesitate in his translation of the text to refer to different connotations and phrases that appear throughout the Hebrew canon in order to interpret their meaning in the context of Job. Good is also comfortable with recognizing literary allusions in his reading of the text (e.g. Genesis 1:3 for Job 3:4) and referencing other Hebrew Scripture in his interpretation of cultural norms (e.g. the Israelite prohibition against suicide; cf. Job 3:17-19). However, when it comes to genre—to call on literary conventions that extend beyond the word or phrase—Good holds comparison with other texts in low regard.⁷⁴ This is an arbitrary distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic literary conventions, especially since reference to other Hebrew works for literary allusions for interpretation is arguably an example of a formal conclusion “that requires the interpreter to produce another text”—precisely the kind of danger against which Good warns. Not only is the exclusion of genre as a critical category for a literary

⁷³ Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 9-11. In her own work on Job, Newsom seeks to recuperate the concept of genre as a critical category for interpreting the Book of Job.

⁷⁴ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 189-90, 208-9.

reading undermined by Good's dependence on other texts at a more granular linguistic level, but it also depends on a hierarchization of intrinsic over extrinsic which is easily deconstructed by showing that any intrinsic feature of the text is constituted and therefore necessarily extrinsic to the text. In this sense, Good's exclusion of genre in his literary reading is an instance in which his hermeneutics is not deconstructive but deconstructed.

Another important aspect of Good's hermeneutics is the balance he maintains in discarding the assumption that a text must embody a coherent meaning while limiting the indeterminacy of an open text by considering the text itself to be an active participant and a controlling factor of meaning. In contrast to reader-response criticism, Good's approach is willing to exclude and even deny some interpretations of the text, not on the basis of their correctness or falsehood, but on the basis of the limits placed on meaning by the text itself, their "relative distance from the text's fullness of possible meanings."⁷⁵ Thus, when Good later claims that the Book of Job "steadfastly refuses to reveal any unitary truth to us,"⁷⁶ it is not a postmodernist denial of truth or meaning, but a hermeneutical stance which looks to the text as the source of meaning rather than the author or the reader and embodies the deconstructive notion of context-bound meaning. Both historiographical criticism and reader-response criticism situate meaning outside of the text, whereas Good's deconstructive position allows for meaning to be multiple and even self-contradictory as long as it does not exceed the limits of the text.

⁷⁵ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 188.

⁷⁶ Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 397.

4.3 CLINES AND GOOD: COMPARISON OF TWO READINGS

The work of both Clines and Good is distinct from most contributions to Job studies in that they are the only scholars who have written critical commentaries in which they interpret the meaning of the epilogue tension through deconstructive analysis. However, despite the shared presence of deconstruction in their readings of the Book of Job, the interpretive approach of each scholar differs in many ways and consequently so do their deconstructive readings of the epilogue, as I have shown thus far. In this final section I will compare their deconstructive readings to one another and conclude with some final remarks on each scholar's appropriation of deconstruction for reading Job.

4.3.1 Comparison of Clines and Good: Deconstruction and Divergence

Upon reflection on the analysis of this chapter and the previous two, it seems clear that aside from the common presence of deconstruction, the respective readings of Clines and Good of the epilogue tension of Job and indeed the Book of Job as a whole are for the most part divergent. These differences are evident in their respective hermeneutics, their notion of the argument of the Book of Job, their understanding of the epilogue tension, and the extent to which each reading aligns with deconstruction as a critical theory.

The hermeneutics of Clines and Good are almost in polar opposition to one another: Clines aligns himself with reader-response criticism, whereas Good's approach is decidedly literary; Clines adheres to a New Critical expectation of organic unity in the text, whereas Good is open to incoherence; Clines concedes to speculation about certain historiographical concerns despite his claim to focus on the final form of the text, whereas Good distinguishes

historical questions from historiographical ones and rejects the latter as extrinsic to a literary reading of the text; Clines identifies meaning as the creation of the reader and rooted in the experiences of the reader, whereas Good identifies meaning as inherent to the text and only accessible through play. Except for the influence of deconstruction, their hermeneutics are entirely different.

A second major difference between Clines and Good is their understanding of the argument of the Book of Job. As outlined in the first chapter, one of the presuppositions upon which epilogue tension in Job depends is that the central argument of the text has to do with the moral order of the universe. For Clines, whose New Critical conception of organic unity already assumes that a central argument of the book exists, this presupposition is relatively simple to establish. Although Clines does recognize a degree of indeterminacy at the level of the book's central argument, he still sees the doctrine of moral retribution as one of the central arguments of the book from beginning to end. Good, on the other hand, is less intent on identifying a central argument for the book, especially in light of his rejection of the New Critical rule of congruence. For Good, no reading of the Book of Job can be definitive, and consequently he does not organize his reading of Job around a single argument. Nonetheless, it is the case that the theme of cosmic order, of which the concept of retributive justice is only an element, recurs throughout the entire book. Yet even if we were to equate Clines' sense of central argument with Good's looser perception of a recurring theme, the two differ significantly since Good does not see the question of moral retribution to be as central as the issue of cosmic order, whereas cosmic order in

Clines only functions to marginalize the centrality of retribution in the dialogues between Job and his friends.⁷⁷

This difference in the concept of the argument of the Book of Job necessarily affects how each understands epilogue tension in Job. The shallow reading of the text, as Clines calls it, identifies the classic tension between the epilogue and the rest of the book—that the doctrine of retribution which is introduced and negated in the prologue and refuted in the dialogue is reaffirmed in the epilogue. Clines' deconstructive reading of the epilogue takes this incongruence at the level of the book's central argument and recognizes a deeper reading of the text in which "the epilogue deconstructs the book as a whole"⁷⁸ since it undermines the message of the rest of the book which is essentially a polemic against the doctrine of retribution.

In contrast, Good does not see the epilogue as a deconstruction of the rest of the book, especially since he identifies 40:8 and 42:6 as the "pivot" and "punch line" of the book, respectively. Nor does he see the central argument of the prologue and dialogue as a refutation of the doctrine of retribution (although it is one of several arguments related to the theme of cosmic order). What matters most for Good is the content of the dialogue between Yahweh and Job, for it is here that Yahweh refutes a vision of cosmic order based on antithetic relationships such as innocence and guilt (i.e. Yahweh rejects the logocentric hierarchization), as well as where Job repents of a religious system which assumes this basis for cosmic order. Yet despite this difference in the notion of

⁷⁷ Cf. Clines, *Job 1-20*, xlvi.

⁷⁸ Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job," 112.

central argument, Good still recognizes tension between the epilogue and the Yahweh speeches, and more particularly identifies deconstruction within the epilogue itself. The first main instance is in 42:7-9: Immediately following Yahweh's affirmation in 42:7-8 of Job's speech, especially his renunciation of antithetic religion in 42:6, is the restoration of Job's three friends on the basis of Job's intercession on their behalf in 42:9. Thus, the magical religion of the prologue which belongs to a view of cosmic order based on antithetic relationships is reaffirmed. The second instance is in the restoration of Job in 42:10-17. Since the condition of Job's restoration is his intercession on behalf of the three friends, despite his renunciation of such religious structures in 42:6 and Yahweh's affirmation of this in 42:7-8, the doctrine of retribution refuted by Job in the dialogue with the three friends is reaffirmed in his restoration.

Thus, both Clines and Good recognize tension in relation to the rest of the Book of Job, but whereas Clines' understanding of that tension reflects a more traditional reading of Job (i.e. historical-critical or New Critical), Good's reading sees tension in an altogether different light, and this is largely the result of different readings of key texts, especially 40:8 and 42:6 of the Yahweh-Job dialogue.

One final difference between the readings of Clines and Good is the extent to which each aligns with deconstruction as a critical theory. While both engage in deconstructions of the epilogue, the hermeneutics of Good is also deconstructive in its embodiment of several of the literary implications that emerge from the philosophical work of Derrida.

These differences between the deconstructive readings of Clines and Good of the epilogue of Job lead to two important conclusions. The first is recognition that, while the epilogue still raises issues for Good, the classic formulation of the epilogue tension depends on a conception of coherence or organic unity in the text. However, Good's reading shows that this is not a necessary assumption for interpreting the Book of Job, especially when reading it as an open text. Newsom's reading of Job as a polyphonic text presents yet another hermeneutic position which shows that the expectation of "a coherent and unified truth"⁷⁹ of the kind that Clines expects is only one of several approaches to interpreting the text. Thus, while the epilogue of Job is important to the meaning of the book as a whole, the articulation of epilogue tension as introduced in the first chapter is contingent on a particular understanding of the unity of the text.

Second, the hermeneutics of Good highlights the subtle difference between deconstructions and a deconstructive reading. This is an important differentiation of which to be aware, especially for those interested in appropriating deconstruction as a biblical hermeneutic, since a deconstructive reading is far more comprehensive in its approach than the more limited case of deconstruction in Clines.

4.3.2 Clines versus Good: Conclusion

There is little congruence between the deconstructive readings of the epilogue of Job by Clines and Good, and although both engage in deconstruction in their reading strategy, the focus of their deconstructions differs significantly. More interesting, however, is that since Good's deconstructed reading encompasses the

⁷⁹ Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 10.

deconstruction of Clines, Good in effect deconstructs Clines. For Clines, his deconstructive reading not only shows that “the problem with the dogma of retribution or any other dogma is not that it is wrong, but that it is a dogma,” but that deconstruction neither affirms or denies either philosophy but loosens our attachment to them as dogma.⁸⁰ However, in the case of Good, deconstruction in the epilogue operates around a more comprehensive theme—that of moral order and its relationship to antithetic pairs—and so for Good Job 40:8 rejects any conception of cosmic order, including moral order, on the basis of this structure of oppositions, or dogma. In other words, Good recognizes the refutation of dogma much earlier in the Yahweh speeches. However, in his reading of the epilogue he shows how it seems to reaffirm the antithetic pairs as the basis of cosmic order in the affirmation of both the magical religion of Job from the prologue and the retributive theology of Job’s friends from the dialogue. Thus, while both Clines and Good recognize hierarchical oppositions in their deconstructions, the implication of Clines’ deconstruction regarding dogma is one of the philosophies deconstructed in Good’s deconstruction.

In a comparative analysis such as this paper, it is tempting to engage in the kind of logocentric hierarchization which deconstruction dismantles: To critique the hermeneutics of Clines on the basis of Good, or vice versa. However, it is important to note that as a critical theory, “since deconstructive criticism is not the application of philosophical lessons to literary studies but an exploration of textual logic in texts called literary, its possibilities vary.”⁸¹ Thus, there is no

⁸⁰ Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job,” 123.

⁸¹ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 227.

articulation of deconstruction that is ultimately authoritative or original since any such hierarchy will inevitably be deconstructed.

Nonetheless, even it is not possible to express an authoritative evaluation of either reading I will at least venture to express an informed opinion: In considering Clines and Good, I believe that the deconstructive reading of Good provides a better model for other biblical scholars interested in appropriating deconstruction as a reading strategy. While the deconstruction of the epilogue by Clines is effective in handling a perennial issue in biblical scholarship for the Book of Job, it can only do so by inoculating the effects of deconstruction by appealing to another feature of the text—namely, the supremacy of rhetoric over fact. The hermeneutics of Clines clearly delineates the extent to which deconstruction is allowed to operate in the text, and so I believe it falls short not only of appreciating the benefits of a more thoroughly deconstructive reading strategy, as in the case of Good, but of leaving itself open to being deconstructed at a hermeneutic level even as its deconstruction of the epilogue is deconstructed by the deconstruction of Good.

5

EPILOGUE: DERRIDA, BAKHTIN, AND BEYOND

5.1 EVALUATION OF DECONSTRUCTION FOR BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

One of the conventions characteristic of some of Derrida's writing is to put words *sous rature*, or "under erasure." This amounts to writing a word, crossing it out, and then printing both the word and its deletion. Spivak elaborates on its function: "Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible."¹ It is in this sense that I will evaluate the appropriation of deconstruction for biblical hermeneutics, for on the one hand it is unclear what sort of criteria would be appropriate to evaluate deconstruction, especially since deconstruction constantly operates against any logocentric tendency to hierarchize one conceptual framework over another. On the other hand, certain features of deconstruction stand out in the examples of its appropriation for biblical studies considered in this paper which I believe offer some guidelines for its continued appropriation as a hermeneutic within biblical studies.

What should be clear from the two test cases considered—the limited but eloquent deconstruction in Clines' reading of Job, and the more comprehensive deconstructive reading of Job by Good—is that even as a critical theory deconstruction represents "not the application of philosophical lessons to literary studies but an exploration of textual logic in texts called literary."² The operation of deconstruction as a critical mode within philosophy but not of philosophy so

¹ Spivak, "Translator's Preface," xiv.

² Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 227.

that it cannot be clearly articulated is also reflected in the heterogeneity of its development as a form of literary criticism. Nonetheless, based on the critique and comparison of the deconstructive readings of Clines and Good, I propose three cautionary remarks and three important reminders in relation to the appropriation of deconstruction as a hermeneutic for biblical studies.

First, deconstruction should not be equated with postmodernism. Despite the parallels between postmodernist scepticism of grand narratives and modernist concepts of truth and reason and the deconstruction of logocentrism which subverts the domination of those same concepts, deconstruction operates within conceptual systems of order to liberate them from logocentric hierarchization as opposed to merely rejecting them. Even more, a deconstructed philosophy or concept is not destroyed but reinscribed in its deconstructed state. In the case of Job, for example, Clines deconstructive reading of the epilogue, and consequently the message of the entire book, leaves both philosophies intact (i.e., the doctrine of retribution and its negation). The significance of the deconstruction is not to elevate one argument over the other, but to expose what was previously suppressed when only one argument was dominant—namely that the moral order of the universe cannot be expressed by religious dogma. Thus, in contrast to postmodernism, deconstruction always works rigorously within modernity.

A second and related caution regarding the appropriation of deconstruction is that it is not a form of reader-response criticism. Although it is frequently subject to this categorization, as I demonstrated in my critique of the hermeneutics of Clines in the previous chapter, the logocentric hierarchy of reader

and text of the concept of meaning in reader-response criticism is susceptible to deconstruction, and so the two are not compatible reading strategies without either suppressing the degree to which deconstruction is engaged as a critical mode or reinscribing the deconstructed concept of meaning back into a reader-response approach (i.e. to recognize the experience of the reader as a source of meaning as contingent itself, and so explore meaning in the text through play rather than a hierarchization of reader and text). The deconstructive approach of Good provides a thorough example of this.

A third word of caution is to beware of confusing the deconstructive indeterminacy which results from the deconstruction of the concept of meaning by Derrida with “a moment of ambiguity or irony ultimately incorporated into the text’s system of unified meaning.”³ The implications of the constitution of meaning and the resulting indeterminacy of meaning is not free licence to interpret any word or phrase within the fullness of its lexical range, for the signified always precedes the signifier.⁴ Since “meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless,”⁵ it is not the case that it is impossible to choose one meaning over another, but that no context can be exhausted of its possibilities. An example of this is Good’s interpretation of the Hebrew שָׂבֵעַ ambiguously as “sated” rather than either its positive (“contentedly full”) or negative (“gorged”) connotations since in the context of the story as well as the usage of the word throughout the context of the Book of Job, both positive and negative usages have equal representation. Thus, Good chooses “sated” to represent the deconstructive

³ Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” lxxv.

⁴ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 189.

⁵ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 123.

indeterminacy afforded by both boundless context and the possibility allowed by context that Job's long life may be a blessing or may leave him yearning for death.

As for reminders about deconstruction, the first is to be aware of the difference between deconstruction as an operation within philosophy but not itself a philosophy, and deconstruction as a form of literary theory and criticism. Although the latter is indebted to the former, it is a mistake to equate them and is the source of much misunderstanding.

Second, even within deconstruction as form of critical theory, there is a difference between deconstructions and deconstructive reading. Identifying a deconstruction within the system of meaning of a text is more akin to the philosophical mode of deconstruction in which the basis of a hierarchical opposition is undermined by the terms of its own argument, whereas a deconstructive reading is one which embodies an awareness of Derrida's readings of philosophical works and their literary implications. This is an important nuance of deconstruction as a critical theory, as demonstrated in my critique of the hermeneutics of Good, especially as a corrective to misinterpreting various aspects of his approach as reader-response criticism.

Finally, deconstruction always works within a system; it does not establish a new one of its own. Like the joker in a deck of cards, it has no face value of its own but takes on whatever value necessary to undermine the usual course of a game. It is an operation within a system but not of the system, to undermine it without overturning it.

5.2 LITERARY ALTERNATIVE TO DECONSTRUCTION: NEWSOM AND BAKHTIN

As alluded to in the first chapter, another literary alternative to deconstruction for interpreting the Book of Job, especially the epilogue, is modelled in Newsom's reading of Job as a polyphonic text. Newsom's work represents the union of two interpretive strands. The first is "the recuperation of genre as a critical category for understanding the book of Job."⁶ Newsom argues in favour of a renewed understanding of genre, especially since genre analysis is often equated as a tool of historical criticism, and identifies her approach within the project of postmodernism alongside Clines and Good.⁷ However, in addition to a recovery and renewal of an understanding of genre as a basis for interpreting the Book of Job, especially for investigation of its moral claims, is the theoretical work of Bakhtin, particularly his conception of dialogic truth and polyphonic texts. Thus, Newsom's work represents the union of the notion of genre as a critical concept and the appropriation of the Bakhtinian notion of dialogic truth and polyphonic texts.

I have offered here only a thumbnail sketch of Newsom's appropriation of Bakhtin as a hermeneutic approach for reading the Book of Job. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, a comparison of Newsom's genre-based, Bakhtinian reading of Job with Good's deconstructive reading would be fruitful, both in exploring the benefits and limitations afforded by each, especially given the theoretical relationship that exists between Bakhtin's dialogism and Derrida's

⁶ Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 11.

⁷ Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 16. As I noted in Chapter 4, I disagree with Newsom's reduction of Good's deconstructive reading of Job as an example of reader-response and consequently its classification of it as postmodernist.

deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence,⁸ as well as to consider the extent to which Newsom's reclamation of genre as a critical concept is itself susceptible to deconstruction.

5.3 DECONSTRUCTION AND BIBLICAL STUDIES

Amongst the many benefits of the appropriation of deconstruction as a hermeneutic within biblical studies, I believe the most significant is its institutional implications. For if we understand deconstruction as “the emancipation of the signifier from the rule of a priori grammar begun in the Husserl essays” that can also be “generalized into an emancipatory project which seeks liberation from all oppressive, regularizing, normalizing, and exclusionary discourses,”⁹ then as a mechanism of liberation within biblical studies it is an opportunity not only to explore different layers of meaning within a text, but also to challenge the interpretive tendencies of the ruling paradigm within biblical studies, which is still largely the various forms of historiographical criticism which place emphasis on the importance of knowing largely speculative information surrounding the authoring of the text—questions of composition, dating, sources—as a primary means to interpreting the text. Because this kind of information is stewarded only by those who have gone through a religious education, it has the tendency to exclude as “amateur” the interpretation of anyone who reads the text in a different way, outside the history of its interpretation. Thus, there is a social and institutional potential for deconstruction

⁸ Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction* (Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 24.

⁹ Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 193.

to liberate biblical hermeneutics from the tendency to hierarchize theological truth in the opposition of scholarly against untrained.

However, even more than the potential benefits of deconstruction as a biblical hermeneutic are the implications of Derridean deconstruction for the philosophical concepts upon which biblical hermeneutics depend. Although Clines presented a very limited deconstruction of the Book of Job, analysis of his hermeneutics revealed far more instances in which the conceptual basis of his reading strategy is open to deconstruction. The deconstruction of the hermeneutics of Clines is far more valuable than his deconstruction of the Book of Job, not only to expose ways in which biblical studies is subject to philosophical concepts, but also as a call for a reading strategy for biblical texts and theological discourse that is at least aware of its dependence on philosophy for its articulation, as well as its openness to deconstruction, if not for an approach that exceeds the limits of philosophy and the reach of deconstruction altogether.

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