Deconstructing Theodicy: A Fresher Reading of the Book of Job

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Abstract
The Book of Job displays well the reality of the human predicament. However, does the Book of Job provide an answer to the problem it so vividly displays: the existence of God and the reality of suffering? This paper is a quest for an answer, which, if correct, is no. The purpose of the book has less to do with an answer for why good people suffer and more to do with exactly what God has done, and continues to do, to rectify suffering, culminating in the Christ event. Stated simply, the Book of Job exists as a harbinger, to all those with eyes to see and ears to hear, to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ: explaining what to expect and how to respond to a suffering messiah. What follows should not be mistaken as an argument for the interpretation of the Book of Job but rather one suggesting a potential interpretation as an alternative to theodicy.

Though Job has been characterized as an answer to the problem of suffering, for many the book fails to satisfy the longing for answers it supposedly contains. Perhaps that, in fact, is the point of Job--there are no satisfactory arguments for why people suffer. In this compact yet substantial volume, David B. Burrell argues that this is the message of Job. EXCERPT While an initial reading of the story which frames the book of Job suggests a classical theodicy of divine testing and of reward and punishment, we shall later see (with the help of real friends) just how misguided a reading that is. For now, it will suffice to note how the drama's unfolding belies such a reading, notably in the counterpoint between each of Job's friends and Job himself. To deconstruct a discourse is not simply to show its incoherence—which some writers have indeed attempted to do for the Book of Job, at least in its present form. For if a discourse should undermine the philosophy it asserts in the same manner and with the same degree of explicitness that it asserted it we should be merely confused or else amused at its incompetence as a discourse, and pronounce it simply incoherent. It would therefore not be possible to challenge a particular deconstruction of a text by producing a non-deconstructionist reading; a deconstruction could only be called into question by arguing that those elements in the text that the critic thinks undermine it