

## | Foreword

ONE OF THE SIGNS of the maturation of a scientific discipline is its applicability in unexpected contexts; and one of the prime signs of both the intellectual curiosity and ability of a researcher is to actually engage his or her discipline and its methods in said unexpected context—and, importantly, succeed. This treatise on the Book of Job is a case in point. It connects two research traditions that so far rarely have been brought together, namely, hermeneutics on the one hand and a prominent branch of existential psychotherapy, logotherapy and existential analysis, on the other.

The outcome is an analysis of the Book of Job—next to Qoheleth arguably one of the most existential books of the Old Testament—that guides the reader through a passage towards a deep personal, existential, and historical understanding of the problem of unjustified suffering and the despair and doubt which can come with it, and yet does not end there, but continues until it reaches areas and insights that very few treatises of the Book of Job ever reach.

For at the end of the journey, and in hindsight, Job (and the reader) will look back and perhaps understand that what lies behind them is not a linear narrative, but an interactive structure in which subject and object, experience, understanding, and outer and inner happenings make for a complex web of events—far too complex to allow for simple and easy answers.

Hence, in contrast to theological attempts to understand (the God of) the Book of Job, this book analyzes its subject from a first-person (i.e., Job's) perspective; and yet in contrast to accounts primarily based on psychodynamic models of personhood, it does not solely focus on the subjective experience of Job (and the reader). Rather, it attempts to reconnect the self and the world. It thus attempts to fulfill what one of the early Austrian-American pioneers of existential and phenomenological psychiatry, Rudolf Allers, defined as the ultimate goal of all psychotherapy and philosophy: To

## FOREWORD

reconcile man and the world by looking not only at what is (conditions), but also at that which could (freedom) and should (meaning) be.

This book, then, combines some of the core ideas of the personalist existentialist tradition, and in doing so allows for ambiguity where allowing ambiguity is due, and clarity where it is possible. And in contrast to the French existentialist tradition, it refrains from declaring to be “absurd” what on closer inspection merely turns out to allow for different, and sometimes contradicting, interpretations. Readers may look at figure 2 to get a preview on how the seemingly absurd or self-contradicting can either be a temptation to give up one step too early and claim that things that don’t make sense are “absurd”—or an invitation to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of reality. This book, then, is such an invitation. It is an eye-opener.

Next to the fact that this book is an intellectual and scientific masterpiece and succeeds in establishing a new research methodology within the personalist existentialist tradition, there remains of course the open question of the relationship between providence and the problem of evil and suffering. Will we ever know THE answer to this problem? In all likelihood: No.

And yet, as the analysis of this book implies, the problem is perhaps not so much the unfound answer as it is the question. For inasmuch as impersonal meaning would be the designator of something so remote from everyday human existence that it would have little, if any, actual existential relevance, an impersonal, generic answer to the problem of suffering would also be far too removed from actual human experience to be of solace, or perhaps even understandable (which, by the way, also portrays Frankl’s position on the theodicy problem: He held that there is indeed an answer, but one that we would not be able to understand intellectually). But, as this book shows, it is possible to address the problem of evil and suffering without fully understanding it; and the answer is not merely cognitive or affective, but existential.

This, then, is an outstanding testimony of the strength of the personalist existentialist approach to one of the core questions of the human condition; it is destined to become a classic both due to its original line of thought and the rarely found blend of sensitivity and knowledge so impressively present throughout its chapters.

Prof. Dr. Alexander Batthyány  
The Endowed Viktor Frankl Chair for Philosophy and Psychology  
Liechtenstein