Introduction

Friendship is a moral responsibility. Failure to uphold the expectations of friendship not only causes disappointment for those involved, it is a moral failure. This is what the book of Job, when read through the lens of virtue ethics, maintains. The theme of friendship weaves throughout all portions of the book of Job, not least of all, in the poetic dialogue, where Job debates the nature of his suffering among his so-called friends. Job's pleas to his conversation partners to show compassion and solidarity toward him in the midst of his trials underscore Job's need for these obligations of friendship, perhaps even more so than his need for intellectual clarity over the hidden causes of his troubles. Job is searching for someone who will fulfill the role of a genuine friend.

Joban scholar Samuel Balentine writes:

> The book of Job is about friendship. For all its heavy hitting on such important theological topics as innocent suffering and the justice of God, it is the theology of friendship that provides the frame for the book's central concerns . . . Indeed, of the forty-two chapters that comprise the book of Job, no less than thirty-eight, roughly ninety per cent of the entire story, are forged in the crucible of a lingering, but never articulated question: Who will be Job's friend?[1]

Reading the book through the particular lens of virtue ethics further highlights the moral responsibility of friendship. Virtue ethics emphasizes inner attitudes as essential to moral goodness and elevates friendship as a virtue that is essential to a fulfilled life. A person's dispositions,

[1] Samuel E. Balentine, *Job* (Macon, GA: Smith and Helwys, 2006), 445.

intentions, and perceptions toward others are critical for demonstrating moral purity according to this ethical perspective. Job criticizes his conversation partners – Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar – throughout his interactions with them for their hurtful dispositions, selfish intentions, and demeaning perceptions toward him. He beseeches them, instead, to respond with kindness, honesty, respect, loyalty, hospitality, and humility. These virtues form the core of Job's expectations of genuine friendship.

The friends' inappropriate responses render them susceptible to God's judgment, Job suggests (13:7–10). Read through the perspective of virtue ethics, Job's warning focuses the friends' moral failure on their improper dispositions toward him over and above the intellectual content of their speeches. Similarly, God's disapproval of the friends in the epilogue (42:7–8), while often read as a critique of the friends' improper theological stance, conveys their failure to uphold the obligations of friendship. For Job, the proper dispositions of a friend are most fully embodied in actions of advocacy. When read through the perspective of virtue ethics, Job's friends incurred God's wrath because they failed to plead Job's cause before God.

Given the central role that the theme of friendship plays in Job, it is surprising that no larger work on friendship has been undertaken with reference to the book of Job. To be sure, a number of Joban scholars have identified friendship as a central theme in Job, and a number have published articles explicitly concerning this topic.[2] The scarcity of works devoted solely to friendship in Job may be due to the fact that friendship as a subject for serious ethical reflection has been marginal in contemporary scholarship. In classical Greco-Roman cultures this was not the case,

[2] In "Only the Jackal Is My Friend: On Friends and Redeemers in Job," Norman Habel explores the meaning of true friendship according to Job by focusing on the notions of genuine loyalty (*ḥesed*), compassion (*naḥāmāh*), and advocacy, demonstrated by a kinsman-redeemer figure (*gō'ēl*) (*Interpretation* 31, no. 3 [1977]: 227–36). Balentine probes the question "Who is Job's true friend, of all his would-be comforters?" in "Let Love Clasp Grief Lest Both Be Drowned." Balentine also identifies *ḥesed* as essential to genuine friendship and concludes that of all the human participants in the story, Job alone models true friendship, as demonstrated in Job 29 (*Perspectives in Religious Studies* 30, no. 4 [Winter 2003]: 381–97). Carol Newsom explores the social and cultural expectations regarding the role of friends as wisdom teachers and comforters in the Greco-Roman period in "The Consolations of God: Assessing Job's Friends across a Cultural Abyss" (in *Reading from Right to Left: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J. A. Clines*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum and H. G. M. Williamson [London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003], 347–58).

as friendship enjoyed a central role in philosophical and ethical discourse.[3] Gilbert Meilaender attributes the lack of attention to friendship in contemporary ethical studies, in part, to the influence of Christianity in western thought and its emphasis on *agape*, a disposition toward others that is non-preferential, unconcerned with reciprocity, and universal in scope – characteristics that are often held as contrary to the particular bonds of friendship.[4] Whether this is true or not, there have been few works written specifically on the ethics of friendship since classical times. In the field of biblical studies, a handful of works pertaining to friendship and the New Testament appear,[5] yet in Old Testament scholarship, there are only two monographs that I am aware of that deal solely with the topic of friendship, which are Saul Olyan's recent work, *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible* (2017), and Jeremy Corley's treatment of friendship in the *Wisdom of Sirach* (2002).[6] One of my intentions here is to enlarge this conversation, underscoring both the significance of the theme of friendship in the book of Job and the relevance of friendship as a topic for serious ethical reflection in the broader field of biblical ethics.

A number of scholars have provided foundational contributions to the field of Joban ethics that have been instrumental for my own study and for paving the way for future work in Joban ethics. In addition to attention given to the ethical relevance of various Joban passages in commentaries or larger works on the book of Job, several authors have published individual articles or chapters in larger collections that focus on

[3] Friendship plays a central role in Homer's *Iliad* (seventh century BCE), the Neo-Pythagorean writings (beginning in the sixth to fifth century BCE), Plato's *Lysis* (fifth to fourth century BCE), Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (fourth century BCE), the *Ethics* of Zeno (fourth to third century BCE), Cicero's *Laelius de Amicitia* (first century BCE), and Arius Didymus' *Epitome of Peripatetic Ethics* (first century BCE to first century CE), to list only a few examples.

[4] Meilaender, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981), 1–6, 14, 54.

[5] Most of these occur as isolated articles in periodicals, yet *Friendship, Flattery, and Frankness of Speech: Studies on Friendship in the New Testament World* (ed. John T. Fitzgerald [New York: Brill, 1996]) provides an exception to this trend. Alicia J. Batten provides a study of the subject of friendship in the context of a particular New Testament epistle in *Friendship and Benefaction in James*, as well (Blanford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2010).

[6] Saul M. Olyan, *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); Jeremy Corley, *Ben Sira's Teaching on Friendship* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2002). For an informative article on the subject of friendship in the wisdom texts of the Hebrew Bible, see Graham Davies, "The Ethics of Friendship in Wisdom Literature," in *Ethical and Unethical in the Old Testament*, ed. Katharine Dell (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 135–50.

ethics in Job.[7] While such studies have proved valuable for drawing attention to a variety of ethical concerns related to the book, there are few monographs devoted exclusively to the topic of Job and ethics.[8] Fewer, still, are works devoted specifically to the ethical issue of friendship in Job. In this work, I argue that friendship is a major theme that binds the various portions of the book together and thus merits a more careful investigation than has yet been undertaken in the field of Joban ethics.

In order to interpret the ethics of friendship in Job, I have chosen to employ the criteria of the particular ethical theory of virtue ethics. My choice of virtue ethics as an overarching perspective through which to read and interpret friendship in Job is based on the following motivations. First, rather than offer a general critique of the relationship between Job and his friends based on my own presuppositions, by incorporating a critically vetted ethical theory, the criteria with which I will be assessing friendship is made transparent both to myself and to my readers. The attention given to friendship in the ethical works of Aristotle, considered foundational for virtue ethics, provides an instructive starting point for an evaluation of friendship in Job from a virtue ethics perspective. In addition, employing a well-established ethical theory as a prominent voice in

[7] For material dealing with an ethical assessment of Job's character, see, for example, Samuel E. Balentine, "The Moral and Ethical Demands of Suffering," in *Character Ethics and the Old Testament*, ed. M. Daniel Carroll R. and J. E. Lapsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 63–79; William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 50–119; idem, *Wisdom's Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible's Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 67–135; Daniel C. Timmer, "Character Formed in the Crucible: Job's Relationship with God and Joban Character Ethics," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 1–16. For material assessing the ethics of God's character, see T. N. D. Mettinger, "The God of Job: Avenger, Tyrant, or Victor?," in *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job*, ed. L. Perdue and W. G. Gilpin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 39–42; Ellen Van Wolde, "Different Perspectives on Faith and Justice: The God of Jacob and the God of Job," in *The Many Voices of the Bible*, ed. S. Freyne and E. Van Wolde (London: SCM, 2002), 17–23; David J. A. Clines, "Job's Fifth Friend: An Ethical Critique of the Book of Job," *Biblical Interpretation* 12 (2004): 233–50; Katherine J. Dell, "Does God Behave Unethically in the Book of Job?," in *Ethical and Unethical in the Old Testament: God and Humans in Dialogue*, ed. K. Dell (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 170–86.

[8] The closest example of a work devoted specifically to ethics and Job is Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). In her work, Newsom presents a Bakhtinian reading of Job and, in doing so, pays particular attention to the differing "moral imaginations" or moral perspectives that each voice of the complex Joban dialogue offers.

my critique provides readers a solid entry into the conversation and facilitates their ability to engage in dialogue with my evaluations. Finally, utilizing virtue ethics as a perspective with which to assess the nature of friendship in Job serves as a test case for addressing a broader range of ethical concerns in the book. If the perspective of virtue ethics provides a suitable means for assessing the ethics of friendship in Job, then it may serve as a helpful tool for tackling other important ethical issues in Job, as well.

In this text, I argue that virtue ethics, indeed, provides a constructive tool for understanding and evaluating the nature of friendship in Job. Virtue ethics highlights the importance of proper dispositions, intentions, and perceptions as indispensable components of a righteous life. While right actions are not ignored according to a virtue ethics perspective, outward actions are considered signs of a person's inner character, which is the focus of moral goodness. According to the expectations expressed by Job in the dialogue, a portrait of a genuine friend becomes clear: a genuine friend will demonstrate perceptions of others as unique subjects worthy of voice and name, selfless motivations, and the virtues of loyalty, compassion, courage, hospitality, honesty, humility, and practical wisdom, or discernment. Cultivating these traits of character is a moral imperative, particularly in relation to a suffering companion. In Job, the "face" of another person symbolizes this moral demand: friendship constitutes a face-to-face encounter with another human being that demands that one respond to another as a Subject who may affect one's values and perceptions rather than an Object to be studied and controlled.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In Chapter 1, I introduce virtue ethics as the ethical perspective through which I interpret and evaluate friendship in Job. I begin with a general overview in which I describe three basic features that are integral to an ethics based on virtue: (1) an emphasis on character over action, (2) a tendency to deemphasize moral rules, and (3) a teleological understanding of virtue in the human life. In order to provide a more detailed picture of this ethical theory from both philosophical and biblical-theological contexts, I survey the works of three representatives of virtue ethics. First, I examine the ethical writings of Aristotle, who is considered the first philosopher to construct an ethics centered on virtue. Second, I explore the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, a leading moral and political philosopher

of the twentieth century who is instrumental for his contribution to the revival of virtue ethics in the modern period. Finally, I examine the work of Bruce Birch, an Old Testament scholar who has made significant contributions to the field of biblical ethics and whose interpretation of biblical texts reflects an application of virtue ethics to Old Testament literature.

Chapter 2 deals with the particular topic of friendship, first, within Aristotelian ethics, and, second, within the broader Greco-Roman culture. As a primary representative for virtue ethics, Aristotle's model of friendship provides an integral tool for assessing friendship in Job from a virtue ethics perspective. My use of virtue ethics as a reading lens draws on the insights of Aristotle as well as later virtue ethicists who nuance Aristotle's ethics in ways suitable to their own contexts; however, Aristotle provides the most lengthy description of friendship of all the authors included in my investigation and thus deserves further attention. After I examine the key components of friendship according to Aristotle, I contextualize his treatment of the subject within the Greco-Roman world by exploring the role that friendship plays in the works of such authors as Homer, Hesiod, Theognis, Pythagoris, Plato, Ben Sira, and Cicero.

Chapter 3 shifts the focus from friendship in the Greco-Roman texts to friendship in the biblical tradition. I rely on my investigation of friendship in Aristotle as a grid for exploring the topic of friendship in the Hebrew Bible. While the texts of the Hebrew Bible, by and large, are communicated in different languages, through different genres, and with different cultural milieus shaping their perspectives than those stemming from the ancient Greek tradition, the early Jewish authors often voiced similar concerns regarding the nature of friendship as those writers from the Hellenistic world. This chapter narrows the context for reading Job from the backdrop of the classical Greco-Roman world to that of the biblical period.[9] I begin with a careful study of the Hebrew terms used for the concepts of "friend" and "friendship" in the Hebrew Bible; then, I offer a brief survey of those texts where friendship is a central concern. I intentionally omit an investigation of friendship in Job from this chapter in order that I might assess the topic in depth in subsequent chapters.

Following this, I address the role that genre plays in communicating certain ethical norms and introduce the complex generic form of the book

[9] For a discussion of possible cultural links between ancient Israel and ancient Greece, see Chapter 3, fn. 1.

of Job. My approach toward Job is as a work of literature; that is, I am reading the text synchronically and in its final form. My aim is to demonstrate that virtue ethics' emphasis on dispositions, intentions, and perceptions yields one valuable perspective by which contemporary audiences may read and understand the text of Job, but I am not arguing that the author or authors of Job designed the book with virtue ethics as their guiding perspective. Central to my reading of Job, then, are issues common to literary criticism and reader response criticism, including questions of genre and audience. I examine what role genre plays in constructing meaning and generating moral values, how one can best understand the genre(s) of Job, and how the genre(s) of Job contributes to its "ethical meaning," as well as what role readers play in contributing to the meaning of texts and their responsibility, if any, to challenge the moral claims of a text where appropriate. Authors with whom I am in conversation here include John Barton, Wayne Booth, Alasdair MacIntyre, Carol Newsom, Adam Zachary Newton, and Martha Nussbaum.

I conclude Chapter 3 with an "Appendix to Chapter 3: Antecedent Texts in the Ancient Near East." This appendix introduces other ancient near Eastern texts that share common literary features with Job and briefly compares the biblical book with these texts. I focus in particular on the Mesopotamian texts "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom" (*Ludlul bel nemeqi*) (second millennium BCE) and "The Babylonian Theodicy" (c. 1000 BCE). These writings explore the themes of the suffering of the righteous and divine justice. "The Babylonian Theodicy" is particularly relevant to this study for its treatment of the theme of righteous suffering within the context of friendship.

The next three chapters (Chapters 4–6) contain an exegesis of the Joban text. In these chapters, I employ the assumptions of virtue ethics as a reading lens to assess the nature of friendship in the book of Job. Chapter 4 examines friendship in the poetic dialogue (Job 3–27), focusing on the relationship between Job and Eliphaz. I have chosen Eliphaz as a representative of Job's three friends as a means to control the amount of text with which I will be working. Eliphaz also speaks first of the three friends, and his responses are generally the longest of the three. The issues that arise concerning the debate over friendship in Job sufficiently are represented in Eliphaz's replies. The texts that I will investigate closely in my exegesis of the poetic dialogue, then, include the exchanges between Eliphaz and Job found in 4:1–7:21, 15:1–17:16, and 22:1–24:25. Using the basic tenets of virtue ethics to inform my interpretation, I highlight

several traits of character that are considered integral to friendship, according to Job. These include (1) loyalty, (2) compassion, (3) courage, (4) hospitality, (5) honesty, (6) humility, and (7) practical wisdom, or discernment. These character traits are most fully revealed in actions of advocacy, Job suggests. I compare Job's expectations of friendship with Eliphaz's and argue that, in some respects, Eliphaz parallels Job in those dispositions that he considers proper to a friend. Eliphaz also demands humility and honesty; yet, unlike Job, who seeks someone who will display bold resistance to God's excessive – and perhaps unjust – behavior, Eliphaz counsels Job to cultivate the virtues of submission, restraint, and acquiescence to the will of God. I situate Eliphaz's and Job's contrasting portrayals of friendship within the broader context of the biblical wisdom tradition and suggest that Job may represent a challenge to the conventional tenets of wisdom through his expectations of friendship. I conclude Chapter 4 by providing a summary portrait of a genuine friend, focusing on the particular dispositions, intentions, and perceptions that Job deems essential to friendship and the moral responsibility of one who seeks to live a blameless life.

In Chapter 5, I assess the nature of friendship in the prose narrative in Job 1:1–2:13 and 42:7–17. This portion of the text paints a very different picture of the book's leading characters and the expectations of friendship held by those characters. The "paragon of righteousness" in the prose narrative is not the bold, verbose, and argumentative Job that readers encounter in the dialogue; rather, this Job is devout, acquiescing, and, for the most part, silent. Likewise, the friends are given contrasting portrayals in the prose frame and poetic dialogue. In the prologue, they appear sympathetic and sensitive to Job's losses. They offer no words of judgment as they sit in silence with Job as he grieves. In this chapter, I explore these contrasting depictions of the characters of Job and his friends and address such questions as, "Does the prose tale, with its well-mannered and decorous depictions of Job and his friends, override their characterizations in the poetic dialogue?" and "Are Job's expectations of friendship, especially his desire for someone who will boldly challenge God's ways and, in particular, the injustices of unmerited suffering, to be replaced by someone who will advocate humility, silence, and an acquiescence to the will of God?" The contrasting genres of the didactic tale in the prose frame and the wisdom dialogue of the poetic center play a key role in generating the moral norms and assumptions that guide Job and his friends' expectations of what constitutes virtuous behavior in the face of inexplicable suffering. In this chapter, I address the contribution that

genre makes in these divergent pictures of the book's main characters and their expectations of friendship.

Chapter 6 shifts the focus to the ethics of friendship in Job's final appeal of innocence in Job 29–31. Although friendship is not the sole focus of Job's words in these chapters, his description of his life in the past and profession of innocence provide a crucial look at a society in which friendship is an essential bond that sustains the community. In his appeal, Job offers a first-person account of the social and moral world in which he lives and in which the virtue of friendship is held as a chief value. In Chapter 6, then, I explore the structure of Job's social context and those character traits that are deemed necessary to uphold that society. Job's appeal of innocence also provides a teleological focus to Job's understanding of virtue. Here, Job offers a description of "the good life," the way life *ought* to be if the world operated under the governance of a just God. In his portrayal, virtue and a life of prosperity and wholeness are intimately linked. Friendship is one of the "external goods" necessary for a life of human flourishing. I also suggest that Job's vision of his morally blameless life functions both as an appeal of innocence meant to clear his name of any guilt ascribed to him and as an implicit plea for friendship – that his onlookers would respond as would-be friends with the same traits of character that he has demonstrated to others.

In Chapter 7, I address the role that contemporary audiences hold in the ethical conversation surrounding friendship in the book of Job. According to Aristotle, tragic literature plays a formative role in the moral education of its audiences, particularly through the cultivation of the dispositions of pity and fear. I first explore the question of whether Job bears enough similarities with other works of tragedy to be considered an appropriate tool for moral education in the fashion that Aristotle imagined with regard to tragedy; then, I examine how the book of Job, both indirectly, through the use of dramatic irony, and directly, through Job's appeals for pity and fear from his friends, generates these two responses in readers. The lack of pity and fear shown by Job's conversation partners contributes to the cultivation of these two dispositions in audiences by leaving an "emotional void" that readers are invited to fill. By demonstrating pity and fear, audiences are given the opportunity to respond as true friends of Job.

Chapter 7 ends with an appendix that examines the role of God as friend. Throughout the book, I intentionally omit a detailed investigation of the character of God. In this portion of the chapter, I discuss several methodological issues that are raised when assessing God's role as a

potential friend of Job, particularly when approaching the topic from the vantage point of virtue ethics, and I address some possible solutions for approaching this topic. The topic of the friendship of God requires a more detailed study than is possible within the scope of this work. I conclude by offering some questions for further consideration as well as some suggestions about the use of virtue ethics for assessing the ethics of God.

In the Conclusion, I provide some summary comments with respect to friendship in the book of Job. I raise questions concerning the implications of such a study for contemporary readers of Job and draw attention to the limits of using virtue ethics as an interpretive tool. One must keep in mind that there will always be a variety of perspectives through which it is possible to read and interpret biblical texts, and virtue ethics is only one among those. I believe that virtue ethics provides a constructive lens, however, not only for assessing the nature of friendship in Job but also for investigating other ethical themes found in the book. It is my hope that this text will demonstrate the value of using such an ethical theory as an interpretive tool for addressing a number of ethical questions that the book of Job raises.

Humans consistently turn to the Bible to engage in conversations addressing such questions as, "Why do terrible things happen to seemingly good people?," "Where is God in the midst of human suffering?," and "How can one continue to live faithfully in relation to God and others in the midst of inexplicable evil?" This book attempts to enter into such broader conversations by way of the topic of friendship. A reading of Job through the lens of virtue ethics suggests that friendship was what Job needed most from his conversation partners in the midst of his terrible suffering. According to Job, a genuine friend will exhibit the virtues of loyalty, compassion, courage, hospitality, honesty, humility, and practical wisdom. A true friend will stand in solidarity with his suffering companion, even if it means pitting oneself against God. Reading Job through the lens of virtue ethics, likewise, suggests that friendship may be the most valuable gift audiences may offer to others – especially to those, who, like Job, find themselves situated upon the ash heap of suffering.