

# The “Innards” in the Psalms and Job as Metaphors for Illness

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## Abstract

This article explores body and illness metaphors in the Psalms and Job. Specifically, it focuses on the various terms pertaining to the “innards” or “internal organs” of the human body. Although myriad terms for internal organs exist, the terms *קֶרֶב* and *מֵעָה* are the particular focus of this article. Interestingly, a link between discourse and digestion emerges in the metaphors from both Job and the Psalms. However, in Job a language for pain emerges which is disturbing and anthropomorphic, regularly depicting an attacking deity. In contrast, in the examples from the Psalms, tend to make a clearer distinction between the righteous and the wicked. In both cases, however, the body and metaphors connected to it are tightly bound up with what is social. The body is portrayed as an ever-interpreted entity and the actions and reactions of the community are all-important.

## Keywords

body – metaphor – Psalms – Job – illness – pain – interdisciplinary – *קֶרֶב* – *מֵעָה*

Using social anthropology to examine historical religious documents is a risky business. Hazards include anachronism, cultural projection, “cherry-picking” and “shoe-horning” material into alignment with texts, and outdated “arm-chair anthropology” approaches (given the acknowledged lack of scope for participant observation). This article examines two biblical terms for internal organs, *קֶרֶב* and *מֵעָה*, from the perspective of current social scientific research concerning illness metaphors, with the aim of considering the socio-cultural

meanings attributed to the dysfunction of the body in the Psalms and Job. Examining illness in poetic texts like these complicates matters even further. Arguments have emerged, for example, seeking retrospectively to diagnose Job by suggesting he had a “malady” such as depression,<sup>1</sup> that he was “obsessional, and paranoid”<sup>2</sup> or had psychosis.<sup>3</sup> Retrospective diagnosis is problematic: Job is a character in an edited text wherein translations and versions differ significantly.<sup>4</sup> Why suppose a biomedical perspective? Why assume that Western medicine should be used? Moreover, diagnosing in this way ignores existing methodologies developed within historiography and literary criticism, by simplistically treating the text as a scientific record.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, since diagnosing retrospectively is unverifiable—myriad scenarios may be contemplated—it is exegetically uninteresting. Given these difficulties, this article seeks to avoid retrospective diagnosis.

If we are to make use of research concerning illness metaphors and meanings for the understanding of biblical poetic texts, significant dangers arise even if we do not go so far as to “diagnose” an author or character. First, terms

- 1 K. Dell, “What Was Job’s Malady?” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 41, no. 1 (2016): 61–77.
- 2 J.H. Kahn and H. Solomon, *Job’s Illness: Loss, Grief and Integration: A Psychological Interpretation* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1975), 54.
- 3 M. Glasby, *Wholeness and Holiness: Medicine, Disease, Purity and the Levitical Priesthood* (London: Apostolos Publishing, 2017). One case even goes so far as to diagnose (retrospectively) Job with arsenic poisoning: S. Gorman and D.L. Kaplan, “The Affliction of Job: Poisoned!” *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* 40, no. 1 (1999): 126–128.
- 4 As Witte explains, “the oldest (known) form of the Greek book of Job appears to be an abridged version when compared to the Masoretic, reflecting a similar situation to the transmission of the book of Jeremiah” (M. Witte, “The Greek Book of Job,” in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verita vom 14.–19. August 2005*, ed. T. Krüger [Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2007], 33–54).
- 5 It should be noted that Akkadian material such as the Prayer to Ishtar, in contrast to Job and the Psalms, does portray personal suffering in a detailed, diagnostic manner. Similarly, Akkadian *shuilla* prayers were usually offered in order to secure relief from suffering, sometimes from illness and fear of death. See A. Lenzi, “Invoking the God: Interpreting Invocations in Mesopotamian Prayers and Biblical Laments of the Individual,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 129, no. 2 (2010): 303–315; W. Lambert, “A Further Attempt at the Babylonian ‘Man and His God,’” in *Language, Literature and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner*, ed. F. Rochberg (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1987), 187–202; W. Lambert, “Dingir.sa.dib.ba Incantations,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 33, no. 3 (1974): 267–322.

However, even here it would be anachronistic, culturally insensitive, and uninteresting to retrospectively diagnose with a modern medical textbook.

for illness in the Psalms and Job are often as vague as the term “illness” itself.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, illness can be expressed using language that goes beyond obvious illness labels. This causes confusion: even if we limit our research to language which is explicitly corporeal, how do we distinguish a metaphor for illness from a generalized expression of suffering which just happens to use somatic language?<sup>7</sup> This problem is compounded by the fact that, as Warren-Rothlin argues,

Body idioms are by far the most common type of idiom in most languages, largely because of the role of body parts in symbolic social communication and the range of associations attached to body part terms.<sup>8</sup>

Warren-Rothlin’s point is important for clarifying our objectives. Because that this article is not concerned with diagnosis, it is of little consequence whether or not an illness metaphor is “just a metaphor” or whether it points to an actual illness. What is important in this article is instead the way language concerning internal organs is used, what this language conveys about social expectations, attitudes, and interpretations of the dysfunction of the body among early audiences, and how this compares with modern scholarship on illness.

In this article we have elected to focus on conceptions of illness involving two specific terms for “internal organs,” *מֵעָה* and *קֶרֶב*. Why these terms?<sup>9</sup>

6 Some of the terms used include *חָלָה* to be weak, sick; *חָלִי* weakness, sickness; *דֹּרִי* sickbed; *נֶגֶף* plague; *מַגֵּפָה* plague; *מַכָּה* wound, blow; and *כָּאֵב* pain.

7 By limiting the investigation to language which is explicitly corporal, the parameters of this research are narrower than those set by Lindström in his work on illness in the individual complaint Psalms. Lindström chose to include vocabulary which was not limited to somatic expressions. It is not possible to do this within the confines of an article because generalized expressions for suffering such as fear, anxiety, or pain may be used when illness is not a component of suffering. As Lindström observes, illness metaphors are problematic because “sickness is such a general human experience that it is a suitable metaphor for every (other) human suffering.” See F. Lindström, *Suffering and Sin: Interpretations of Illness in the Individual Complaint Psalms* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994), 26.

It is important to note the prevalence of the term “suffering” in secondary literature relating to the Psalms and Job. Use of the term “suffering” in this article is not intended to encourage a simplistic equating of illness with “suffering.” Indeed, some illnesses do not involve suffering.

8 A. Warren-Rothlin, “Body Idioms and the Psalms,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. P.S. Johnston and D.G. Firth (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013), 203.

9 Myriad terms relating to specific internal organs exist. General terms which might have been obvious choices include: *לֵב/לִבָּ* heart, inner man, mind, imagination, memory, conscience; *בֶּטֶן*, belly, abdomen, womb; *כִּלְיָה*, kidneys; *רֶחֶם*, womb. The decision to focus on innards using the terms *מֵעָה* and *קֶרֶב* is specifically meant to restrict the dataset. Although as lexemes the terms are fairly common, when specifically referring to internal organs they are

Indeed, why not look to more obvious biblical texts—healing stories,<sup>10</sup> explicit requests for healing,<sup>11</sup> or psalms, which have, in reception history, been understood as “psalms of sickness”?<sup>12</sup> First, this article is not primarily concerned with questions of genre. Therefore, whether we consider “psalms of sickness” a useful category or not, we need not choose texts on account of their interpretation over the centuries. Moreover, the investigation is not concerned with healing. The focus is instead directly on how illness metaphors and meanings in modern research compare and contrast with examples from the Psalms and Job. As Dell and Kynes have demonstrated, these materials are very closely related and, as such, forms a discrete section of text for analysis.<sup>13</sup> Other texts could have been selected, of course, and the choice to examine internal organs specifically in the Psalms and Job will inevitably impact the results. The approach is necessarily experimental; if successful, there may be scope to investigate beyond the parameters set by this article.

Anachronism and cultural projection remain among the most substantive issues threatening our efforts to understand illness metaphors in Psalms and

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relatively rare. The smaller dataset allows for deeper analysis. See A. Wagner, *Anthropologische Aufbrüche: alttestamentliche und interdisziplinäre Zugänge zur historischen Anthropologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009); H.W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1974).

10 1 Kgs 13:4-6; 17:17-4; 2 Kgs 4:18-37; 5:1-14; 13:21; 20:1-7; 2 Chr 32:24-26; Isa 38:1-8.

11 Ps 6:2; 41:4; Jer 17:14.

12 S.E. Gillingham, *Psalms through the Centuries: A Reception History Commentary on Psalms 1-71* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2018); E.S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms. Part I with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); K. Seybold, *Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament: Untersuchungen zur Bestimmung und Zuordnung der Krankheits- und Heilungspsalmen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973). Gunkel, for example, understands Psalms 51 and 130 as psalms of penitence which constitute a sub-group to the individual complaint Psalms and he therefore argues that the situation is acute sickness; H. Gunkel and J. Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels*, 3rd edn. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 251. Seybold also understood the context as during illness, arguing, “die Hauptlinie alttestamentlicher Krankheitsdeutung, die Schuld-Strafe-Korrelation und die Begnadigung-Heilung-Implication” (Seybold, *Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament*, 170).

13 W.L. Kynes, *My Psalm has Turned into Weeping: Job's Dialogue with the Psalms* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012); K. Dell and W. Keynes, *Reading Job Intertextually* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013). As Kynes, citing Seybold notes the tight connections in some cases. For example, in Psalm 39, “Both Job and the psalmist have suffered at the hand of God (Ps 39:10; cf. Job 1:11-12; 2:5-6; 3:23; 19:8-9; 42:11) and at first respond in submissive silence to avoid sinning with their tongues (Ps 39:2-3; cf. Job 1:22; 2:10). Eventually their pain overwhelms their resolve to control their speech and they lash out at God (Ps 39:4; cf. Job 3). They complain of the brevity of human life (Ps 39:5-7; cf. Job 7:7, 16; 10:20; 14:1-6) and of God's implacable wrath (Ps 39:11; cf. Job 9:34). In so doing, they evoke the ire of their companions (Ps 39:2, 9; cf. Job 16:10-11; 17:6; 30:1, 9-11)” (Kynes, *My Psalm has Turned into Weeping*, 122).

Job. Cultural projection—in the language of medical anthropology, a failure in “cultural competence”—is particularly topical.<sup>14</sup> A medical disaster arising from a case of failed cross-cultural communication between doctors and a Hmong girl’s family appears to illustrate the problem.<sup>15</sup> Fadiman narrates how American doctors diagnosed the girl, Lia Lee, with epilepsy and prescribed medicines. Her family, however, understood her as having “soul loss” and treated her with herbal remedies. Moreover, the Lees were unable to read English and administered the prescribed medications incorrectly. The parents and doctors struggled against each other because of the collision of their differing explanatory models, or etiologies, of the illness. In the end, the child suffered a major seizure, compounded by sepsis, which left her comatose and brain damaged.

Ironically, Fadiman’s narrative itself serves to illustrate problems associated with cultural projection. It has been criticized for having a very two-dimensional view of Hmong “culture” and anthropologists have viewed the work as stereotyping and romanticizing.<sup>16</sup> One way in which medicine has changed in response is through the use of studies of self-making, in which “narrative offers an avenue for linking personal experience to cultural knowledge ... [and] culturally based understandings shape or are reflected in stories about specific ... experiences with illness.”<sup>17</sup> Dasgupta emphasizes the need

14 Cultural competence in medical settings refers to “the professional capacity to work within the context of the language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of [patients’] racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups” (A. Jurecic, *Illness as Narrative* [Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012]).

15 A. Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997).

16 J.S. Taylor, “The Story Catches You and You Fall Down: Tragedy, Ethnography, and ‘Cultural Competence,’” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (2003): 159-181; M. Chiu, “Medical, Racist, and Colonial Constructions of Power: Creating the Asian American Patient and the Cultural Citizen in Anne Fadiman’s *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*,” *Hmong Studies Journal* 5 (2004): 1-36. One might also question whether a Western journalist who is neither a medical anthropologist nor an ethnographer should tell the story of a Hmong family; see J. Robbins, C. Stewart, and R. Shaw, “Syncretism/ Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis,” *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 4 (1995): 1001-1002.

17 C. Mattingly and L.C. Garro, *Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 28. Charon coined the term “narrative medicine” to refer to medicine practiced with the narrative skills of recognizing, absorbing, interpreting, and being moved by the stories of illness (R. Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006]). Similarly, Holt emphasizes the need for clinicians to reflect on and analyze narrative in order to track narrative convention in language, culture, and psychology (T.E. Holt, “Narrative Medicine and Negative Capability,” in *Literature and Medicine* 23, no. 2 [2004]: 318-333; B. Hurwitz, “Narrative and the Practice of Medicine,” *The Lancet* 356.9247 [2000]: 2086-2089;

for narrative and cultural humility, recognizing that there is a need to genuinely engage with people during illness, rather than writing off features of anguish as “cultural.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, failures of cultural competence risk tipping over into racism.

This material prompts biblical scholars to consider whether we have the cultural competence to engage meaningfully with descriptions of illness or of the dysfunctioning body in ancient Israelite texts. It is appropriate to note that the Hebrew illness vocabulary preserved in the Hebrew Bible is limited and, in the cases of Job and the Psalms, idiosyncratic.<sup>19</sup> It is difficult even to talk about Hebrew “culture,” because the texts in question come together over a period of time, are edited, and are possibly from different places. The sparsity of the data and the limits of the available evidence do not invalidate the question, but they do mean that we have to exercise extreme caution, to emphasize cultural humility, and to be aware of projection.

Although illness is universal, there is significant variety in illness metaphors and in the way meanings are constructed during and in response to illness. While it is anachronistic to compare biblical texts with modern research, the comparison is justified by the very fact that meanings and metaphors concerning illness arise at all. There are things to learn through comparing, and also through contrasting, provided we acknowledge that the materials we are bringing together are significantly dissimilar. Moreover, our aim is not to dilute the unique features in Psalms or Job. Instead, our aim is to trace areas of potentially significant similarities and differences.

## 1 “Illness” and Body Metaphors

Before we begin, it is important to clarify what we mean by “illness.” (“Disease,” which implies a biomedical perspective, is not our focus.) The study of illness is elusive partly because it depends on shared perceptions of what counts as “illness.” As Boyd argues, there is a part played by

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B. Hurwitz, T. Greenhalgh et al., *Narrative Research in Health and Illness* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004).

18 S. Dasgupta, “Narrative Humility,” *The Lancet*, 371.9617 (2008): 980-981. This links well with Ticiatti’s argument (in this volume) concerning Augustine’s hermeneutic of “humble courage ... to give ourselves as fully as we can, and the humility to receive ourselves from others as openly as we can.”

19 J. Barr, “Hebrew Orthography and the Book of Job,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 30 (1985): 1; E. Ullendorff, “Is Biblical Hebrew a Language?” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 34, no. 2 (1971): 241-56.

value judgements in determining what we mean by ... illness and sickness. In many cases this is not obvious, because most people ... make the same or similar value judgements about what these words mean and what are examples of what they mean.<sup>20</sup>

Pilch makes a similar point when he insists that “[c]ulture dictates what to perceive, value, express, and how to live with illness.... [c]ulture’s greatest contribution is the meaning given to the illness experience.”<sup>21</sup>

In an illustrative case, homosexuality was considered a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association until 1973. It is no longer considered an illness. Alcohol is another example: it is a harmful and highly addictive substance, yet normalized in many places as a drug taken during celebration or socializing. Determining what counts as illness (or as health),<sup>22</sup> depends on the meanings attributed to and the interpretations of “illness.” These meanings vary in different places, across cultures and across time.

Interpretations of illness are thus fundamentally social and therefore largely dependent on language.<sup>23</sup> To illustrate, a body of research emerged in the 1990s focusing on taxonomies of illness and on semantic illness network analysis, as a way of gaining access to social etiologies of illness.<sup>24</sup> While such taxonomy exercises were sometimes insightful, they failed to appreciate “the importance of ambiguity in illness categorization” and the “multiple ways of thinking about illness in varying contexts.”<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, they illustrate how

20 K.M. Boyd, “Disease, Illness, Sickness, Health, Healing and Wholeness: Exploring Some Elusive Concepts,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 26, no. 1 (2000), 12.

21 J.J. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 27.

22 On health, Leach’s observation “the model of ideal good health which ordinary members of the public pick up ... is closely related to the classical ideal of the youthful Greek athlete” illustrates this point. Health, in this Westernized example, is linked to ideas about strength and sexual vigour (E. Leach, “Societies’ Expectations of Health,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 1, no. 2 [1975]: 13).

23 Though, of course, we acknowledge that experiences are also individual and can vary from person to person because people “enact their illness and endow it with meaning”; see P. Conrad and K.K. Barker, “The Social Construction of Illness: Key Insights and Policy Implications,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51, no. 1 (2010): 71.

24 A. Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing and the Human Condition* (New York: Basic, 1988); B. Good, *Medicine, Rationality, and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); M.D. Good, *Pain as Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

25 M. Nichter, *Global Health: Why Cultural Perspectives, Social Representations, and Biopolitics Matter* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008), 70.



illness experiences differ widely between individuals, societies, cultures, and ethnic groups.

This is also illustrated by research into ethnophysiology, which studies “how bodily processes are understood in different cultures and how such understanding influences perceptions of health, physical development, illness, medicines, and diet”; this in turn influences perceptions of “what physical symptoms are deemed normal and abnormal at particular times.”<sup>26</sup> The point is also illustrated by the controversial concept of a “culture-bound syndrome”: a condition is considered “culture-bound” if it is specific to a belief system operating in a particular cultural context. As Lupton suggests, “[b]y virtue of the sociocultural meanings that are attached to ... bodily features, various assumptions are made about the self which are inextricably part of that body.”<sup>27</sup> Illness affects individual and group identities by disturbing the harmony between the physical and social being and therefore between social groups. To give meaning to experiences of illness therefore involves using a variety of discourses and cultural resources.

Sontag has fiercely attacked the idea of giving meaning to illness and the use of illness metaphors, arguing that illness metaphors and meanings “contribute to the stigmatizing of certain illnesses and, by extension, of those who are ill.”<sup>28</sup> Sontag’s work has been very influential, but her call not to read meaning into illness or use illness metaphors has not been obeyed. Direct critiques have emphasized the importance of metaphor for providing intellectual tools for communicating about suffering.<sup>29</sup> That is, “[a] significant feature of people’s talk about their experiences is the frequency with which metaphor appears

26 Nitcher, *Global Health*, 25. Pilch suggested, similarly, that the “West seems to prefer metaphors of war [while] ... the Taiwanese ... talk about being hit by ghosts” (Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 27). Note the differences here between “naturalistic” and “personalistic” etiologies of illness (G.M. Foster, “Disease Etiologies in Non-Western Medical Systems,” *American Anthropologist* 78, no. 4 [1976]: 773-782). While this statement, based on Kleinman’s work in Taiwan, is rather reductive it does serve to illustrate differences present in imagining and attributing meaning to illness. A more specific example emerges from the Xhosa-speaking people of South Africa, for whom tuberculosis “is associated both with a lack of hygiene and with witchcraft” (Nichter, *Global Health*, 43). This is an interesting example because it brings together both naturalistic and personalistic etiologies of illness. It also connects interestingly with Van De Wiele’s argument in this volume concerning naturalistic and personalistic perceptions of illness.

27 D. Lupton, *Fat* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 49.

28 S. Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and Aids and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador USA, 1990), 99.

29 B. Clow, “Who’s Afraid of Susan Sontag? Or, the Myths and Metaphors of Cancer Reconsidered,” *Social History of Medicine* 14, no. 2 (2001): 293-312; S. Raffel, E. Rhys, S. Sarlos, and B. Ball, *The Method of Metaphor* (Chicago: Intellect, 2013).



as part of what they say."<sup>30</sup> Meaning-making and metaphor have attracted significant attention both generally and, as we shall now discuss, within medical anthropology specifically.

Research concerning metaphor is large and complex.<sup>31</sup> However, it is necessary for understanding illness, insofar as "[b]odily suffering distorts the landscape of thought, rendering our previous construction incoherent and incomplete."<sup>32</sup> As a consequence, "patients routinely employ a wide range of metaphorical expressions as they talk about ... their subjective experiences of illness."<sup>33</sup> However,

Meaning resides not exclusively in the relationships between concepts ... but in their connection to the body and its skills and practices. Meaning emerges from the capacity to use bodily experience ... to think with metaphorically.... Metaphors are tools for working with experience.... Metaphor provides ways of acting on our representations, or of making presentations to others, that transform the conventional representation, unpack new meanings, [and] open up the situation.<sup>34</sup>

Metaphor is significant for illness because it is tied closely to bodily experience. It offers a way to express what is inexpressible and therefore allows one "to move from the abstract and inchoate of lived experience to [the] concrete and easily graspable."<sup>35</sup> Moreover, metaphor's open-endedness provides a flexible language through which to express pain. It also plays an important role in the development of thought and language, offering a resource through which to express new experiences.

Scarry's seminal monograph on pain included a chapter specifically on pain as the unmaking of the world, as shattering language through being world-destroying, and as reducing expression to a pre-symbolic language which

30 R.W. Gibbs and H. Franks, "Embodies Metaphor in Women's Narratives About Their Experiences with Cancer," *Health Communications* 14, no. 2 (2002): 139.

31 Some prominent publications include: G. Lakoff and M. Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); P. Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (London: Routledge, 2010).

32 L. Kirmayer, "The Body's Insistence on Meaning: Metaphor as Presentation and Representation in Illness Experience," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1992): 329.

33 Gibbs and Franks, "Embodied Metaphor," 140.

34 Kirmayer, "The Body's Insistence on Meaning," 334.

35 S. Low, "Embodies Metaphors: Nerves as Lived Experience," in *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, ed. T.J. Csordas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 139-162.

resists the world of communication and meaning.<sup>36</sup> Such extremes leaves no room for metaphor. However, Scarry's argument forecloses any discussion of pain less extreme than torture.<sup>37</sup> Indeed,

The very fact that there is an abundance of literature about pain, however, calls into question the validity of her argument in relation to milder or chronic pain. In fact, many writers who have produced memoirs about such manifestations of pain suggest that the primary problem they face is not how to find language for pain, but rather how to make readers receptive to stories of pain.<sup>38</sup>

In literature specifically addressing pain and illness, we find that metaphor used as a convenient tool through which to communicate about illness. Particularly appealing, perhaps, is that metaphor "provides the intellectual and linguistic tools for communication ... and yet also offers a plan for personal transformation in coping with illness."<sup>39</sup> Metaphorization of distress provides people with imaginative possibilities and rhetorical supplies which, though not symbolically resolving or particularly accurately representing conflict, allow the person room to maneuver when thinking about illness.<sup>40</sup>

The use of metaphor to talk about illness can also "challenge cultural clichés and facile explanations."<sup>41</sup> Scheper-Hughes emphasizes the subversive power of embodied metaphors in Brazil where "nervous attacks" have political meaning. These attacks breach social bodies; through them, sugarcane workers defiantly express the politically dangerous (and therefore unacceptable) condition of chronic hunger.<sup>42</sup> This embodied metaphor communicates in ways

36 E. Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

37 For critique see A. Koch, "Reasons for the Boom of the Body Theories in Humanities and Social Sciences," in *Menschenbilder und Körperkonzepte im Alten Israel, in Ägypten und im Alten Orient*, ed. A. Berlejung, J. Dietrich, and J.F. Quack (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 24; V. Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Jurecic, *Illness as Narrative*; J.E. Jackson, *"Camp Pain": Talking with Chronic Pain Patients* (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); M. Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press).

38 Jurecic, *Illness as Narrative*, 44.

39 Gibbs and Franks, "Embodied Metaphor," 141.

40 Kirmayer, "The Body's Insistence on Meaning."

41 Kirmayer, "The Body's Insistence on Meaning," 324.

42 N. Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

that bear some similarities to the concept of somatized "idioms of distress." As Nichter explains, "sociocultural constraints against opportunities for expression" prompt the use of "alternative modes of expression, of personal and cultural meaning."<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Lupton comments that illness "as symbol therefore serves to make moral distinctions in the attempt to control the social disorder it threatens."<sup>44</sup> In some cases illnesses, or somatized metaphors, can be counter-cultural and subversive, as when illness is equated with deviance; the symbolic nature of illness means that it threatens social order, making the ill person's stewardship of the body suspect and the ill person themselves a threat. This is visible in the everyday rhetoric of illness in the West, wherein "the basic terms 'poorly,' 'bad' and 'better' when speaking about health states the term 'sick' has itself become a powerful metaphor of moral condemnation."<sup>45</sup>

## 2 Body and Illness Metaphors in the Psalms and Job

We now turn to the Psalms and Job. Metaphor is "as important a constituent of poetry as parallelism, and ... they both achieve their effects through the juxtaposition of things that are alike and yet different."<sup>46</sup> Metaphor shapes and

43 M. Nichter, "Idioms of Distress: Alternatives in the Expression of Psychosocial Distress: A Case Study from South India," *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 5, no. 4 (2010): 379-408; M. Nichter, "Idioms of Distress Revisited," *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 34, no. 2 (2010): 401-416.

44 D. Lupton, *Medicine as Culture: Illness, Disease and the Body in Western Societies* (London: Sage, 1994), 99.

45 Lupton, *Medicine as Culture*, 99.

46 Berlin and Knorina, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 35. Brown's work is particularly important for metaphor and Psalms. It surveys clusters of related metaphors and associated semantic fields and draws on imagery from ancient Near Eastern iconography (W.P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002]). Attention to metaphor in the Hebrew Bible generally and in the Psalms and Job specifically is increasing (P. van Hecke, *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* [Leuven: University Press, 2005]; P. van Hecke and A. Labahn, *Metaphor in the Psalms* [Leuven: Peeters, 2010]; P. van Hecke, "I Melt Away and Will No Longer Live: The Use of Metaphor in Job's Self-Descriptions", in *Conceptual Metaphors in Poetic Texts: Processings of the Metaphor Research Group of the European Association of Biblical Studies in Lincoln 2009*, ed. A. Labahn [Piscataway: Gorgias, 2013], 69-90; B. Doyle, "Howling Like Dogs: Metaphorical Language in Psalm LIX," *VT* 54, no. 1 [2004]: 61-82; A. Basson, *Divine Metaphors in Selected Hebrew Psalms of Lamentation* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006]; S. Gillmayr-Bucher, "Body Images in the Psalms," *JSOT* 28, no. 3 [2004]: 301-326; K.E. Southwood, "Metaphor, Illness, and Identity in Psalm 88 and 102," *JSOT* 43, no. 2 [2018]: 228-46; A.R. Gray, *Psalm 18 in Words and Pictures: A Reading through Metaphor* [Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014]; F. Koppe, *Sprache und Bedürfnis: zur sprachphilosophischen Grundlage der Geisteswissenschaften*

represents “how people perceive reality,” because metaphor is not limited to language; it shapes human thought and learning.<sup>47</sup> The body and body-related metaphors are particularly prevalent in the Psalms and Job.<sup>48</sup> This is particularly the case for lament Psalms set “*in extremis*,” because the “somatic quality of lament language creates an emotional immediacy and a *pathos* that pulls the audience into the suffering in a way more abstract language could not.”<sup>49</sup> That is, corporal metaphors are often used as part of the language of crisis.<sup>50</sup> As such, they are part of a generalized language of suffering employed by the Psalmist to emphasize and communicate distress.

### 3 קֶרֶב as “Innards”

One of the key terms in these metaphors is קֶרֶב. The term usually refers to the inner part of something, as illustrated by the expression קֶרֶב אִישׁ, “the inner

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[Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977]; C. Brüning, *Mitten im Leben vom Tod umfassen: Ps 102 als Vergänglichkeitsklage und Vertrauenslied* [Frankfurt am Main: Hain, 1992]).

- 47 Basson, *Divine Metaphors*, 38. As Bott explains, metaphor is not limited to language: “People gain knowledge from experience of the world and organize that knowledge into coherent mental representations called conceptual domains. On the basis of perceived similarity, conceptual metaphor systematically maps elements from a source domain onto elements of a target domain for the purpose of understanding” (T.J. Bott, “Disease, Illness, Sickness, Health, Healing and Wholeness: Exploring Some Elusive Concepts,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 26, no. 1 [2000]: 132). By providing the structure to express ideas and connect concepts, metaphor enables people to understand what is unknown by linking it to what is known.
- 48 Gillmayr-Bucher, “Body Images in the Psalms,” 302.
- 49 C. Mandolfo, “Language of Lament in the Psalms,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. W. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 124.
- 50 C.D. Vos, *Klage als Gotteslob aus der Tiefe: der Mensch vor Gott in den individuellen Klagepsalmen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). This language of crisis is mirrored in metaphors such as “death” (as) the “pit” or “Sheol,” which refer to the supplicant’s impending end (Brown, “Seeing the Psalms,” 26–27). It may be adopted by anyone reading the Psalms who identifies with the lamenting “I”—an identity afforded through differing (and sometimes contradictory) discourses of powerlessness (A.C. Cottrill, *Language, Power, and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual*, LHBOTS 493 [London: T&T Clark, 2008]). However, it is important to note that, while corporeal metaphors are frequently connected to crisis language in the lament psalms, this does not occur universally and we cannot be entirely sure that this is the intended function of body metaphors in the psalms. As van Hecke argues, “[G]iven the considerable cultural, temporal and—for most of us—geographical gap between our context and the one in which the Psalms were first composed, the exact meaning of particular metaphors often eludes us” (van Hecke, *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, xii).

person of a man” (Ps 64:7). In this example, the phrase parallels לֵב, “heart,” and refers to the inner or core human being—thoughts, desires, feelings, etc.<sup>51</sup> Though far less common, קֶרֶב can also refer to human internal organs in a non-specific way (perhaps analogous to the use of “entrails” to refer, in an unspecific way, to the internal organs of animals).<sup>52</sup> An example may be taken from Job, where Zophar the Naamathite describes for Job the lot of the wicked:

לֶחֶמוֹ בִּמְעֵיו נִהְפֵּךְ מְרוֹת פִּתְנִים בְּקֶרֶבוֹ

Then his food in his innards overturns itself  
it is the venom of snakes in his internal organs  
He will vomit up the wealth he swallowed  
God will cast them out of his stomach<sup>53</sup>  
He will suck the poison of snakes.

Job 20:14-16a

Zophar’s address is an elaborate metaphor of eating but not being satiated, in response to Job’s own metaphors of eating (Job 6; 12:11, cf. Deut. 32:32-33). The entire chapter uses the body’s processing of food as a metaphor for the “evil man” who is “forced to disgorge his ill-gotten gains.”<sup>54</sup> The metaphorical

51 קֶרֶב אִישׁ לֵב עִמָּק (Ps 64:6). The parallelism works on two levels. First, depth and the diligent search (expressed by the infinitive absolute and threefold repetition of the lexeme חָפֵשׁ) are equated. Second, man’s innards and completed iniquities are equated. There is also a sort of micro-parallelism in the second half of the stitch, between קֶרֶב אִישׁ and לֵב. This reinforces the semantic association between the two concepts (Berlin and Knorina, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 2008; J.L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry Parallelism and its History* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981], 49.) The heart is commonly understood as the seat of thought (Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 46), though it may also be interpreted as indicating feelings (Prov 15:13; 23:17) or wishes (Ps 21:2).

52 Gen 41:21; Exod 12:9; 29:13, 17, 22; Lev 1:9, 13; 3:3, 9, 14; 4:8, 11; 7:3; 8:16, 21, 25; 9:14; Job 20:14; Pss 5:10; 109:18; Mic 6:14; Sir 34:20; 11QT 15:6; 16:7, 13; 20:5; 23:15; 33:14; 34:11; 4 Q Jub<sup>e</sup> 21:8.

53 The Old Greek has ἐξ οἰκίας αὐτοῦ, “from his house” here. Perhaps a morphological error between οἰκίας and κοιλίας, or perhaps an example of the Greek translator’s theological toning down (D. Gard, *The Exegetical Method of the Greek Translator of the Book of Job* [Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1952]).

54 M.H. Pope, *Job* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), 139. The relevant language includes mouth (v. 12a), tongue (v. 12b), palate (v. 13b), bowels (v. 14a), innards (v. 14b), and belly (vv. 15, 20, 23). One also finds terms suggesting reactions of these organs to the food: savoring (v. 12), swallowing (v. 15), vomiting (v. 15), sucking (v. 16), not swallowing (v. 18a), and not enjoying (v. 18b) (C.L. Seow, *Job 1-21: Interpretation and Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013], 835).

linking of sweet or enticing foods with sinful behavior is relatively common.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, it is not uncommon for scholars to connect internal organs to conscience, as “the bearer of man’s spiritual and ethical impulses.”<sup>56</sup> However, particularly interesting in this example is Zophar’s moralizing connection between the dysfunction of the body and wickedness—especially the highly anthropomorphic, graphic role of the deity in causing the vomiting.<sup>57</sup> This linkage of illness and wrongdoing is common in the biblical material and well-recognized in scholarship.<sup>58</sup>

What does this striking, moralizing metaphor achieve? Opinions on the role of the friends vary. Pelham, for instance, sees the characters talking past each other in a dialogue “increasingly acrimonious, with each side insisting that the others’ words are useless.”<sup>59</sup> In contrast, Oeming and Drechsel view it as a type of therapy or pastoral care.<sup>60</sup> The context does not always make the cultural expectations attributed to illness clear. As Newsom argues, “[v]ery little information exists within biblical sources to show what the cultural expectations for consolation were in ancient Israel.”<sup>61</sup> That said, Job says that his friends are “miserable comforters” and “worthless physicians,” and previously protested that he “has a mind” and is “not inferior” to his friends—perhaps suggesting that his friends’ advice is not really helping (Job 12:3; 13:4; 16:2).

55 Clines cites Prov. 9:17 and 20:17 in comparison: “stolen water is sweet, bread eaten in secret is pleasant [to a man; but afterwards his mouth will be filled with gravel]” ... “bread gained by deceit is sweet” (D.J.A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, AB 17A [Dallas: Word, 1989], 488). Note also Prov 25:27 which suggests that eating too much honey is not good.

56 Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 66.

57 The Greek translator obviously found this idea distasteful, and replaced the term לֶחֶם with ἄγγελος. This is characteristic of the translator’s methods, which include theological toning down, anti-anthropomorphisms, and avoiding anything which might detract from the perfect character of God (Gard, *The Exegetical Method of the Greek Translator of the Book of Job*). By “moralizing” we mean judgmental communication, speech unhelpfully emphasizing personal responsibility, or advice that incriminates and disempowers the sick.

58 E.g. Deut 28:21-22, 27-28. Similarly, the simplistic question in the New Testament, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” is embedded with a range of assumptions about what counts as illness and why illness occurs (John 9:2).

59 A. Pelham, *Contested Creations in the Book of Job: The-World-as-it-Ought-and Ought-Not-to-Be* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 336.

60 M. Oeming and W. Drechsel, “Das Buch Hiob—ein Lehrstück der Seelsorge? Das Hiobbuch in exegetischer und poimenischer Perspektive,” in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen, Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14-19. August 2005, Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen*, eds. T. Krüger, M. Oeming, K. Schmid, and C. Uehlinger (Zürich: TVZ, 2007), 421-440.

61 C.A. Newsom, “‘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 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 347.

Strikingly, these categories of irrationality and immorality appear also in the modern medical literature. Thomlinson observes that in the United Kingdom and the United States, “primary care physicians reported viewing obese individuals as non-compliant (irrational) and weak-willed, sloppy and lazy (immoral).”<sup>62</sup> In both the ancient and the modern cases, implicit moral evaluation of the sick person’s agency as the prime mover, or Creator, of illness serves to demonize those who are ill. Illness, or metaphors of illness, becomes a symbol of social disorder and evokes fear. When Job talks about the tasteless food which makes him ill, he accuses his friends of seeing his calamity and being afraid (Job 6:20-21). Similarly, illness is described in modern research as something that “unsettles, and sometimes shatters, the most fundamental values and beliefs we hold.”<sup>63</sup> Lupton comments that “[i]llness and disease have long carried the symbolic meanings of loss of control, disorder, and chaos and threatened rationality.”<sup>64</sup> Zophar’s reaction is strikingly similar to modern, socially-situated attempts to read meaning into illness and illness metaphors. Job finds a language for pain which is disturbing and anthropomorphic: he pictures himself being attacked violently by a deity (Job 6:4, 9-10; 16:7-9, 12-14; 30:16-19). But, as in the example cited by Jurecic, he cannot make his friends “receptive to stories of pain.”<sup>65</sup> Instead, Zophar mobilizes Job’s hyperbolic language of the deity’s attack in order to re-assert the common link between illness and sin.

Two interesting occurrences of the term קִרְבָּ as “innards” appear in Psalm 5 and in Psalm 109. In both cases there is a sharp divide between the psalmist and the wicked/unrighteous, and in both cases corporeal language surrounds the reference to the “innards”:

כִּי אֵין בְּפִיהוּ נְכוֹנָה קִרְבָּם הוּא קִבְּר־פִּתּוֹחַ גְּרוֹנִם לְשׁוֹנָם יִחְלִקוּן

For there is not faithfulness in their<sup>66</sup> mouth, their innards are wickedness

62 J. Tomlinson, “Power, Prejudice and Professionalism: Fat Politics and Medical Education,” in *Handbook of Primary Care Ethics*, ed. A. Papanikitas and J. Spicer (Boca Raton: CRC, 2017), 160.

63 H. Carel, *Phenomenology of Illness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3.

64 Lupton, *Fat*, 50.

65 Jurecic, *Illness as Narrative*, 44.

66 Leningrad reads the collective singular “his mouth,” referring to the “enemies” mentioned in the previous verse. BHS suggests בְּפִימוֹ “in their mouths,” using the archaic, poetic third-person plural ending -מוֹ; this is based on Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Jerome, which also have the third person plural ending.



Their throat is an open grave, they say flattering things<sup>67</sup> with their tongue.

Ps 5:10

As with many psalms, Psalm 5 distinguishes between the “righteous” psalmist and the “enemies,” here described as “fraudulent” (Ps 5:6). The psalm fits reality to a strict, dualistic moral calculus. It also uses a rich chiasmic parallelism. Four body parts are mentioned: mouth is paralleled with tongue (instruments of speech) and innards are paralleled with throat (instruments of digestion, and in the case of throat of speech). This produces a link between discourse and digestion, in a metaphor similar to that used by Zophar.<sup>68</sup> Through juxtaposing innards with the throat as an open grave, a metaphor of infected internal organs emerges. As Terrien describes it, their innards<sup>69</sup> are “a nauseating abyss.”<sup>70</sup> The metaphor serves to emphasize the mortal danger of associating with the psalmist’s enemies: their deceitful talk emerges from the rotting grave of the unburied dead which is their throats—beyond which lie internal organs infected with wickedness.

Psalm 109 uses a similar image:

יִלְבַּשׁ קִלְלָה כְּמִדּוֹ וְתָבֵא כְּמִים בְּקִרְבּוֹ וְכִשְׁמֵן בְּעֵצְמוֹתָיו

Just as he clothed himself with cursing as his garment  
So too, let it [cursing] come into his innards as water and as oil within  
his bones.

Ps 109:18

This verse occurs late in the psalm, following a number of jussives (vv. 8-14) that read like curses and concern the hoped-for fate of the psalmists’ wicked

67 The root חלק usually means “to be smooth,” though it can have nuances of “easy,” as with the punning label “seekers of smooth things” at Qumran. Here it occurs in a metaphorical sense of one who “flatters” (4Q169).

68 It is also worth mentioning the morphologic (and, to some extent, phonological), similarity between innards (קִרְבֵּי) and grave (קֶבֶר). To elaborate, Berlin describes several types of parallelism and notes that “Morphologic parallelism involves the morphological equivalence or contrast of individual constituents of the lines.... sometimes the boundary between morphologic and syntactic parallelism is indistinct” (Berlin and Knorina, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 31).

69 קִרְבֵּי may be taken literally or metaphorically here, to refer to the innermost self.

70 S.L. Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 107.

enemies.<sup>71</sup> The focus of the verse is on the body and its adornments. The line begins with the jussive simile of the body bedecked with cursing; the cursing motif carries over into the second part of the line, where it saturates the internal organs like fluid.<sup>72</sup> The proximity sharpens the image begun in the preceding verse: the curse which once emerged from the enemy's body is now close to him, while blessing is far. Indeed, the curse is now internalized in his organs.<sup>73</sup> This complex juxtaposition of concepts—cursing entering one's body instead of exiting from it through the mouth (v. 17)—may serve as a metaphor for illness. The parallelism in the second line (innards/water, oil/bones) sharpens the metaphor: the innards and bones are saturated, leaving no part of the enemy's body untouched by cursing. Unlike the example in Job, there is no simplistic logic connecting wickedness with illness. Rather, the illness metaphors emerge from a description and a curse. This contradicts Hogan's claim that “illness was God's punishment for ... sins” in the Psalms, which “express the anguish of the righteous man who, nonetheless, experiences illness and suffering.”<sup>74</sup> In both psalms, the illness metaphors indicate that the sin-illness link is not the reality the psalmist faces.<sup>75</sup> Instead, the psalmist uses the medium of cursing to wish that his opponent's own curses would be internalized—perhaps suggesting that his opponent is vigorous and strong. Likewise, in Psalm 5 the psalmist wishes destruction on his adversaries, suggesting they are alive and healthy.

These somatic metaphors indicate that the author imagines the body and illness using a generalized language of misery. The perspective in both cases is not one who is ill and wants others to be receptive to their pain. Rather, the reality perceived and communicated links the dysfunction of the internal organs with corruption. Those who are wicked and false are assigned metaphors that seek to re-connect wrongdoing and bodily affliction, deviance and disease. By doing so using the language of prayer, the Psalmist seeks to construct an explanatory model for illness through metaphor—which, ironically, is at odds with his own experience.

71 D.R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964). Cf. Jer 18:21.

72 The link between cursing and illness also occurs in Deuteronomy (Deut 28:28, 60-61).

73 A similar logic occurs in the curse section of Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty “enters into your flesh, so may they (the gods) cause this oath to enter your flesh, the flesh of your wives (variant: brothers), of your sons, and of your daughters” (lines 622-25).

74 L.P. Hogan, *Healing in the Second Temple Period* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1992), 25.

75 Indeed, as Lindström argues, “explicit references to sin and forgiveness in the Psalms ... [are] very few in number” (Lindström, *Suffering and Sin*, 7). Nevertheless, as Zahl's argument (in this volume) illustrates later theologians such as Augustine felt content to read concepts such as original sin into the psalms when considering the moral valence of embodied human experience.

Understanding illness through metaphoric and religious language is relatively common. As Littlewood and Lynch argue,

The social anthropology of sickness and health has always been concerned with religious cosmologies: how societies make sense of such issues as prediction and control of misfortune and fate; the malevolence of others' the benevolence (or otherwise) of the mystical world; how human life may match some overarching ultrahuman principle; all this in terms of local understanding and explanations of the natural and ultra-human worlds—as organized ritual (or other) practice, and as principles of social order and organization.<sup>76</sup>

By constructing metaphors that connect illness to wrongdoing, the psalmist makes meaning through religious cosmologies. By using religious cosmologies to construct and “make sense of” the terse interface between himself and his enemies, the psalmist seeks to create a simplistic binary world, wherein infected innards and bones can be equated with negative behaviors (such as cursing) and wickedness can be equated with death. Unfortunately, of course, no such duality exists. Nevertheless, this type of binary patterning in metaphors and somatic language is common—in present-day settings as in the ancient psalms. For example, Lupton cites Olivia Newton-John's reaction to breast cancer: “I was puzzled that this had happened to me, because I eat sensibly, exercise regularly, don't smoke and hardly ever drink.”<sup>77</sup> Although lacking a religious cosmology, the logic is similar to the psalmist's: an attempt to create a binary world wherein bodily dysfunction is the domicile of the iniquitous while the upright experience health. As Lupton argues, Newton-John's claim is telling: “in an age in which a lifestyle choice rather than an act of God is viewed as the cause of disease,” those who are ill “are placed in a position in which they must justify themselves.”<sup>78</sup> Although Lupton distinguishes “lifestyle choice” and “act of God,” the logic of the psalmist and the logic of Newton-John are the same: humans have control over their health. One asserts this control by avoiding sinful behavior (the psalmist) or by avoiding bad lifestyle choices (Newton-John). Reality, however, does not match these constructed worlds:

76 R. Littlewood and R. Lynch, *Cosmos, Gods and Madmen: Frameworks in the Anthropologies of Medicine* (New York: Berghahn, 2016), 1.

77 D. Lupton, *Medicine as Culture: Illness, Disease and the Body in Western Societies* (London: Sage, 1994), 101.

78 Lupton, *Medicine as Culture*, 101–102.

the psalmist’s “enemies” are still able to threaten, and Newton-John and many others experience cancer despite sensible lifestyle choices.

#### 4 מַעָה as “Innards”

Having examined some uses of the term קֶרֶב as “innards,” we turn to מַעָה. This word has a wide semantic range and can mean belly or womb, guts, genitals, bowels, or inner person more generally.<sup>79</sup> Two examples will be explored in detail. The first is from Psalm 22:

כַּמִּים נִשְׁפַּכְתִּי וְהִתְפָּרְדּוּ כָּל-עֲצָמוֹתַי הֵיחָ לִבִּי כִדּוֹנָג נָמַס בְּתוֹךְ מַעֵי

Like water I am poured out and all my bones are out of joint  
My heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my innards.

Ps 22:15

As in Ps 109:18, fluids are used here as similes (here water and wax, rather than water and oil), in conjunction with specific body parts (bones and innards). The picture is of “illness and death, a metaphor that may symbolise recession of joy ... a sickness in spirit.”<sup>80</sup> The metaphor of the dissolving body is similar to Ezekiel’s depiction of corpses whose bones have fallen apart (Ezek 37:7). Terrien suggests that the “pathological state of the patient may result from mistreatment ... from a demonic world to which diseases were attributed.”<sup>81</sup> As in Psalm 109, the issue is mortal danger—but in this psalm the danger has been realized. The psalmist describes being encompassed by “bull of Bashan,” likened in the preceding verses to a ravenous lion (Ps 22:12).<sup>82</sup> Such animal imagery and metaphor is used frequently to communicate pain and its origins (Ps 5:9; 17:12; 57:4). The parallelism here emphasizes bodily dysfunction. Bones, usually contained and solid, are out of joint and fluid-like. Likewise, the heart has seeped down in the innards. The image is of dismemberment and disintegration.

A second body image using מַעָה emerges in Job 30:

79 2 Sam 20:10; 2 Chr 21:15 [twice], 18, 19; Ps 22:15.

80 J.W. Rogerson and J.W. McKay, *Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 100.

81 Terrien, *The Psalms*, 232.

82 Bashan was a fertile pasture, thus the cattle were strong and large (Deut 32:14; Amos 4:1).

מִעֵי רִתְחוּ וְלֹא־דָמוּ קִדְמֹנִי יִמִּי־עֹנִי

My innards boiled and were not quiet  
The days of affliction confront me.

Job 30:27

The phrase “days of affliction” occurs twice within this chapter; it is used in Lamentations to describe calamity (Job 30:16, 27; Lam 1:7). Like the previous two examples, this chapter of Job refers to the body poured out and bones pierced (Job 30:16-17).<sup>83</sup> The use of רתח to describe innards “boiling” suggests a metaphor for pain like “the boiling of meat in a pot ... or for the churning up of the sea by Leviathan.”<sup>84</sup> Because the verse occurs in Job’s description of disappointment about his new circumstances, Clines emphasizes that the מַעֲרָה are affected by emotion, but “not ‘as the seat of the emotions’ ... Jer 31:20; Cant 5:4 ... Lam 1:20; 2:11; Isa 16:11; 63:15; Jer 4:19.”<sup>85</sup> The term is corporeal: מַעֲרָה is not just a metaphor of “the inner self or being” but a reference to the physical body.

In both Psalm 22 and Job, the body metaphors constructed are wholly social. The psalmist is being attacked; Job is nostalgic about his former life. In both cases, the body is connected to the reactions of the community. The body is the focus, but the problems communicated by the protagonists are beyond the body. Corporeal language using internal organs emphasizes the broken boundaries of the physical body. The somatic image of fluidity, rather than stability and permanence, may also point to these characters’ interpretations of their social contexts as mortally perilous. Nichter’s theory of idioms of distress—idioms that emerge as alternative, symbolically loaded, modes of expression and are ignited when there are constraints against normal expression through speech—may be helpful here.<sup>86</sup>

The possibility that social context might be more relevant than the description of bodily pain itself raises some new ways of thinking about this material. Might both be seen as counter-cultural, subversive modes of expression? If so,

83 Reference to bones which “burn” and skin that is blackened also emerges towards the end of the chapter (Job 30:29). There are several similarities between the metaphors here and in Psalm 102, including isolation, signaled using the imagery of the owl (Job 30:29; Ps 102:6). Brüning argues that the smoke in Job 30 and Psalm 102 can be understood as a reference to the transitory nature of life (Brüning, *Mitten im Leben vom Tod umfassen*).

84 D.J.A. Clines, *Job 21-37* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 1009. Clines refers here to Ezek 24:5, Job 41:31 [23].

85 Clines, *Job 21-37*, 1009.

86 Nichter, “Idioms of Distress”; Nichter, “Idioms of Distress Revisited.”

both texts are more than a character—“I” or Job—describing their circumstances. The images and metaphors that graphically capture the fluid nature of the deteriorating body point to a sociocultural reality, which these characters are attempting to undermine and change. This prospect aligns well with literature on social protest. As Mandolfo explains, using the examples of female lament and Job,

Of special note in the Greek witness is evidence that female lamentation sometimes functioned as social protest.... Laments gave women a rhetorical platform that they otherwise would not have had. For instance, women apparently used lament language in part to subvert the prevailing social status quo, to bemoan one's social position, or any number of other challenging situations. Likewise, recent work on the lament psalms suggests that certain psalms can be understood as levelling a challenge to the prevailing ideologies surrounding the psalmist. Relatedly, Job's laments are best understood as a sustained critique of the dominant theodic ideology espoused particularly in Deuteronomic texts.<sup>87</sup>

Mandolfo's argument resonates with Gottwald's work on socioeconomic oppression and Israelite society structures.<sup>88</sup> However, the continuity with our case ends where subversive protest occurs in symbolic form, metaphorically bewailing the fluid, dysfunctional body. Material that links illness and deviance is relevant. As Lupton argues in the case of obesity, illness may be designated as “originating from either accidental or wilful ‘deviance’” and “the sick person categorized as either ‘innocent’ or “deserving” of his or her fate ... [i]llness as symbol ... serves to make moral distinctions in the attempt to control the social disorder it threatens.”<sup>89</sup> If interpreted as a form of social protest using the body, metaphors of bodily dysfunction and degeneration serve to align the protagonists with deviance. That is, illness metaphors are used as a weapon of symbolic protest to draw attention to issues of violence (Psalm 22) and to the injustice of reacting to innocent suffering as though it was deserved (Job).

87 Mandolfo, “Language of Lament in the Psalms,” 121; cf. C. Mandolfo, *God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002).

88 N.K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

89 Lupton, *Medicine as Culture*, 98-99.

## 5 Conclusion

In this essay we illustrated the potential usefulness of recent work in medical anthropology—specifically literature on illness metaphors and behaviors—for biblical interpretation, despite its methodological challenges. Key themes common to modern research and biblical texts included the problematic—and in both cases problematized—link between illness and wrongdoing. Zophar’s attempt to create and maintain a binary conceptual universe, wherein the body functions well for those who behave well and badly for those who do not, is undermined by Job’s protestations. Similarly, contemporary language surrounding conditions such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, lung cancer, cirrhosis of the liver, obesity, and sexually transmitted diseases is often inflected with moralizing categories, ignoring the role of chance in these illnesses. In both sets of literature, there is a desire to reconstruct the link between illness and behavior. It was suggested that this derived from a desire to find “meaning” (not just conditions) in the body and its function, using religious cosmologies in which “lifestyle choices” and “punishment by the gods for wrongdoing” might be equated. Perhaps the most interesting possibility concerned Job 30 and Psalm 22, in which body metaphors were used to subvert and shift social boundaries. Read from this perspective, we suggested that body metaphors might be used subversively, with social power mobilized by emphasizing the weakness and vulnerability of the body.

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