

BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY OF CLUJ-NAPOCA  
FACULTY OF REFORMED THEOLOGY AND MUSIC

Ecumene Doctoral School

JOB 31: AN ETHICAL MODEL OF ANTIQUITY

SUMMARY

Scientific coordinator:  
Prof. Univ. Dr. Zamfir Emilia Corina

Doctoral student: Şchiopu-Constantin Gheorghe

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## SUMMARY

### JOB 31 – AN ETHICAL MODEL OF ANTIQUITY

**Key words:** ethics, Job 31, exegesis, ethical model, duty, consequentialism, virtue, motivation, consequences, situationism, moral norms, antiquity, social categories, Old Testament.

Among the sources of ethical content and moral reflections in antiquity, Old Testament ethics is an important area for study and analysis. Specifically, Job 31 constitutes a chapter that opens complex perspectives on an ethical model that can represent, in synthesis, the ethics of the Old Testament. The present study is one of an interdisciplinary nature, aiming to determine the place of the ethics of chapter 31 of the book of Job in the context of the Old Testament, but also of the ethics of antiquity, in general. In addition to developing an overall perspective on Western ethics from antiquity and the moral systems of deontological, consequentialist and character order (virtue ethics), in the opposite work an exegetical analysis was carried out on the 31st chapter of Job and certain comparisons were made and connections between Old Testament and general ethics, following which an ethical model was highlighted that emerges in a harmonious way to the biblical text under discussion.

In the introductory chapter, the premises and issues of the research are presented, as well as its methodology and limitations. Thus, from the point of view of significance and relevance, Old Testament ethics has been rather marginalized among Old Testament studies in the last century. Among the reasons that led to this we mention: 1) the hermeneutic problem given by the distance between the two testaments, as well as that between the Bible and the modern era; 2) the fact that the ethics of the Old Testament is considered to be descriptive, and not prescriptive, and its norms cannot be applicable for the present; 3) there is a certain difficulty in approaching the ethics of the Old Testament because this would require an interdisciplinary study; 4) it usually starts from the premise that there is a certain incompatibility between the study of the Hebrew Bible and other sources of ethical reflection. Because the study of ethics in the Bible is considered to belong to theology and religion, and not to philosophy, there is a tendency on the part of both camps of researchers

not to pay due attention to the ethical categories that the two perspectives offer. However, in the present study we started from the premise that the writings of the Old Testament contain evidence that, despite the fact that they do not reveal a thought of moral philosophy in the generally accepted sense, they go beyond the simple observation of some ethical norms. Thus, when analyzing the ethics of the Old Testament, one must take into account both the ethical content and the reflection on morality given by the coordinates of the moral order and the divine command in the historical and theological context. In this context, for the doctoral thesis, we chose to study a text that belongs to the wisdom writings of the Old Testament, namely, chapter 31 of the book of Job. Being considered, among other things, a kind of synthesis of moral perception in the Old Testament, Job 31 has been in our attention to observe to what extent this text can be ethically relevant. Thus, we were interested in: 1) establishing what the ethical content of chapter 31 of the book of Job is; 2) to observe what the specificity of the moral reflection generated by the central character on his own behavior is; and 3) to outline an ethical model based on the moral framework, emergent to the text of Job 31. Therefore, because in the history of ethics, there are three basic trends in the attempt to encompass the functioning of human behavior in the realm of morality: deontological, teleological and characteristic (excellence of virtue), we set out to organize and define the ethical characteristics of the chosen biblical text, from the perspective of these categories. For this we tried to observe to what extent there is a certain compatibility between different ancient and modern ethical categories, and also to establish certain correspondences between the shades of ethical nature in Job 31 and the three directions encountered in ethical systems.

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As a methodology, the thesis constitutes an interdisciplinary study, and includes, in turn, an analysis of the literature written on the chosen text, with the aim of discovering the current state of research and the conclusions reached by other researchers regarding the ethical characteristics of chapter 31 of Job. In order to be able to build certain connections between Old Testament and general ethics, we thought it necessary to briefly discuss the main ethical perspectives and models as they appear in various philosophers of Western antiquity. Then, the exegetical analysis of chapter 31 was carried out, after which an attempt was made to establish a place for the ethics of Job 31 in the general framework of the Old Testament, in order, finally, to carry out a comparative study with the aim of observing to what extent the ethics elements discovered in the chosen biblical text may correspond to at least one of the three ethical systems: deontological, consequentialist and that of virtue. In addition to all this, the study intrinsically includes elements of theology, but also certain aspects related to history and anthropology. Regarding the boundaries of the study, we have to admit that it is not an exhaustive study that will establish all the differences and similarities between Old Testament ethics and Job 31, or between the ethical aspects of the chosen biblical passage and all the elements of ancient ethics. For example, it is not a study to analyze the nature of the moral philosophy of an ancient ethical system or to differentiate between the moral reflection on Job chapter 31 and the moral philosophical reflection of a Western model. Also, we did not intend to discuss the applicability of the ethics of the chosen biblical passage for the current contemporary

context, but to see to what extent, in interaction with other currents or ethical systems, there may be a certain correspondence or compatibility.

In the first chapter, we tried to capture the current state of the research, first by sketching an overview of the studies that have been done on the 31st chapter of Job. Throughout history, there have been few studies devoted exclusively to the ethics of Job 31. Most commentaries argue that this text contains a deep introspection in which the central character makes a comprehensive assessment of moral behavior. In some monographs, it is argued that although Job 31 resembles certain negative confessions that belong to legal cases of extra-biblical literature from the ancient Near East, this chapter has a sui-generis ethical content, and is in harmony with the ethics of the Old Testament. Thus, Job 31 gives the image of an ethical ideal, in which the relationship between morality and religion is evident. The allusion is quite modest to duty-type ethics or consequentialist-type ethics, without taking into account the overall picture of an ethical model, which Job 31 could constitute. Throughout history, three major perspectives have emerged on this text: 1) it provides a fairly comprehensive picture of moral integrity; 2) it provides a moral introspection through the presence of a legal framework; and 3) the ethical content is given by moral norms and values, as well as by the presence of motivations and consequences related to the behaviors mentioned in the text. Regarding the ancient Western moral philosophy, we noted that ethics is about values and principles that regulate the standards of human living in relation to the self, the fellows, the environment, but also the divinity. Also, ethical elements take into account elements related to human nature and the meaning of life. Virtue, justice, goodness and the sense of shame are important categories of ancient ethics. In addition to raising questions and attempting answers about the nature and cause of an action, the motivation of the action is discussed and its outcome considered. Happiness (*εὐδαιμονία*) must be the ultimate goal of human endeavours. It involves practical wisdom and involves motivation, focusing on action that brings happiness or the ultimate good to man. And last but not least, the dichotomy between religious and ethical did not exist. Reporting to the deity had a very important role in the formation of the ethical system of a group of people or a people, and the likeness to Zeus constituted the central and indispensable part of the main ethical systems of antiquity.

On the whole, the ethics of Western antiquity focus more or less on certain elements that are specific to virtue, duty or consequences, but no theory exists exclusively on one of

the three ethical facets. These three directions will be found, in one way or another, in the history of ethics, inspiring the three basic ethical models of the modern and contemporary period. Therefore, in the present study, we considered that an approach to modern and contemporary ethical models is necessary for at least three reasons. First, there are three basic ethical models that somewhat encompass the main trends in ancient moral philosophy. Second, these models have as their primary source of inspiration ethical elements from antiquity, both from the area of Western moral philosophy and from the Hebrew Bible. And third, it helps us better outline the relevance of the present study. Among the three ethical models, we found that duty ethics prioritizes what is just or right, focuses on the individual's duties or obligations, contains collateral constraints on the individual's permissible actions, and is centered on the ethical agent. As for the ethics of results or consequences, it requires a person to act in such a way as to be end-oriented, aiming at the achievement of a certain goal. Virtue ethics considers how one can achieve excellence by cultivating various moral virtues. Among the virtues we have in mind there are certain contemporary values, which correspond, to a large extent, to ancient virtues such as loyalty, authenticity, integrity, honesty and altruism. From the deontological point of view, the ethics of the Old Testament are under the auspices of the divine command. The cornerstone of deontological ethics is the Decalogue (Exod. 20, Deut. 5), which is the standard example in most deontological reflections of the Old Testament. Regarding consequentialist ethics, it was found that the laws of a casuistic nature (as for example in Deut. 10:12-15; 27:15-26; 28:1-14, etc.), as well as prophetic provisions (as of example in Hos. 4:6; 6:1-3; Micah 6:8-15, etc.) offer many examples of this. Virtue ethics is particularly emergent in Old Testament narratives.

In the second chapter, after outlining the literary-thematic structure of Job 31, we performed the exegetical analysis of the text, aiming to capture as faithfully as possible the message the author intended to convey. By doing this, we were able to ascertain what are the basic elements of the ethical content contained in the text, as well as the dimension of the reflection on the moral behavior manifested by Job, in relation to himself, his peers and God. In the third chapter, the overview of the guiding ethical categories and the Old Testament correspondences with Job 31 was established. Within the Pentateuch, we traced the linguistic-ethical links with the Decalogue as it is reproduced in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, but also with the verses about curses in Deuteronomy 27 and 28.

Regarding the books of wisdom, we traced the correspondences between Job 31 and the book of Proverbs. We tried to capture the same thing in front of the prophetic books. In order to finally observe and outline certain similarities and differences between extra-biblical literature and Job 31. In the fourth chapter, I pointed out the ethical elements corresponding to those in ancient Western ethics, as well as the three mentioned models, reaching the following conclusions: From a deontological point of view, Job's duty is to God and to man. Job's moral ways (31:4) constitute those moral imperatives by which he claims to have led his life. Taken as a whole they form ten moral principles that can be subsumed in a suggestive and generic way under the name Job's Decalogue. Also, at the basis of the individual's duty to his fellow man, there are seven behavioral motivations: 1) Legal motivation; 2) The motivation of loyalty within a covenant; 3) The motivation of divine judgment; 4) The motivation of creation; 5) The motivation of the divine presence; 6) The motivation of loyalty to God; 7) The motivation of moral courage or freedom of choice. If we were to look from a consequentialist perspective, then it can be said that the results of Job's actions are found in chapter 31 in the five imprecations, which, in a positive wording, would aim at 1) Honoring God; 2) the satisfaction of work, (through the fruitfulness of the earth); 3) personal honor and family happiness; 4) the happiness of the ethical agent, but also of the beneficiary; 5) Abundance and order in the natural world.

If we summarize the order of maximum satisfaction from a consequentialist perspective, Job 31 gives a certain priority according to the content of the actions and the magnitude of the results. Thus, happiness does not begin with the greatest good for the most, but it begins with divine honor. Then, according to the saying, good is its own reward, the ethical agent is the first to be blessed with happiness, when he chooses to do good. Thirdly, there follows the happiness of the poor, but also of the enemy and the stranger. Finally, nature bears fruit abundantly, not hindered by thorns and weeds. Therefore, based on the 31st chapter of Job, we can add that the complete spirit of the ethics of utility must first be completed with the commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" ( Deut. 6:5).

If we were to approach Job 31 also from a situationist perspective, then it can be said that the life circumstances, exemplified in this chapter, are given by the 18 hypothetical situations: there are two situations of man that aim at the relationship with himself, 12

situations in the relationship with peers and four situations related to the relationship with God. Although the situations presented in Job 31 clearly highlight existential reality, none of them exemplify a concrete moment in life, but rather they are particularities of a way of life. Thus, the tendency is to generalize situations, making each circumstance mentioned highlight more than a certain principle of action in a given situation or a certain solitary virtue among other personal manifestations. All the presented situations find a teleological correspondent especially in the spoken imprecations, but they highlight not so much the result, but above all the fact that the value of the action is given by a harmonious moral character as a whole.

Related to virtue ethics, it can be said that what Job did in the form of a *modus vivendi* is revealed by what he was in relation to himself, to his fellow men and to God. The five virtues that configure the excellence of Job's moral character are: 1) loyalty, which is of the commitment type, the principle type, and the social type; 2) authenticity, which is given by sincerity and autonomy; 3) integrity, which represents moral steadfastness, the principle of clean hands, and the state of being morally intact; 4) honesty which is given by truthfulness and justice; and 5) altruism which is given by altruistic interest manifested through motivation and purpose, excellent self-love, prioritization of self-interests, and excellence in social relationships. Therefore, none of the three perspectives can hold the right of exclusivity, nor can it capture, as a whole, the ethical complexity emerging in chapter 31. The moral behavior of the ethical agent must be analyzed under the lens of the three ethical systems: deontological, consequentialist and the one based on virtue ethics, to have the overall picture of the ethical model in Job 31. The basic characteristics of this model are:

1. The whole model has to do with the behavior and character of a single ethical agent.
2. The attempt to capture a holistic picture of the morality of the ethical agent, only from the perspective of an ethical theory, would be insufficient.
3. Motivation plays a central role in each of the three systems present, in that it gives value to action, defines the consequences of choice better, and virtue is authentic according to the *excellence* of motivation.

4. The ethical agent develops and manifests itself in a certain social, historical and epistemological context. It is a theocratic, monotheistic framework other than the Hebrew one.
5. Every life situation reveals both the moral imperatives and the virtues underlying the choices made by the ethical agent.
6. In every ethical approach, the results of choices or behavioral consequences are present.
7. In all three dimensions of the ethical structure, the transcendent is present. Moral imperatives are of divine origin, and the motivations and consequences of actions gain ideal validation only in the balance of God's justice.

Finally, the main conclusions of the research were outlined, emphasizing, among others, the relevance of the study, and also presenting certain discussions and recommendations that emerge from this thesis. Thus, in order to consider a discussion regarding the functionality of the ethical model, discovered in Job 31, an analysis regarding the actuality and universality of the moral principles discovered in this chapter, the reliability of the virtues, the nature and value of the actions, as well as the evaluation of the results is important them in the current context. An analysis of the relevance of motivations for the present time is also necessary. After a specific analysis of each category, an evaluation of the ethical model as a whole is important.

So, it can be said about chapter 31, of the book of Job, that it represents a reflection on the own morality of an ethical agent, in this case the central character, and reveals a series of behaviors, motivations and consequences. Secondly, the ethical content of this chapter consists of elements of a deontological nature given by ten norms and seven motivations, in elements of a consequentialist nature, in which 18 situations and five consequences are found, and in elements of ethics of excellence in which they were recorded, by default, five virtues. Thirdly, we outlined a complex ethical model in which the ethical agent harmoniously incorporates in his behavior specific elements of ethical systems of the deontological, consequentialist and moral virtue types. The complexity of the ethical pattern revealed in Job 31 is astonishing in content and form, and invites us to reconsider our attitude to the Old Testament ethics in general and to this chapter in particular. The interconnectedness of the component parts of this model and the harmony

of the whole could constitute a point of inspiration in the realization of a unique and functional ethical approach for the world of the third millennium.