

end the Holocaust is incomprehensible, the Germans inexplicable. This leaves Levi with a painful void that can never be filled, the evil that passes all understanding (Levi, 174–75). This is not the Dostoevsky paradigm, but neither were the Germans practitioners of mundane evil. If the Germans are inexplicable, then the Holocaust is inexplicable, and we are left with the “excess” of evil with which we began. Forti’s fellow countryman is no help here.

Yet Forti makes a considerable contribution, particularly her claim that when one makes “improving one’s own life the absolute, universal law of your conduct,” then people will acquiesce to anything, any power arrangement. Like the Socratic philosopher, one must live with death constantly in mind, knowing that mere life, life on any terms, is of little worth.

The trouble with this conclusion, which seems about right, is that for most of us this requires religion, community, or both. Only if we live in the penumbra of the sacred, or are ensconced in community, does it make sense to give up one’s life, or even one’s comforts, for the truth. Forti sometimes forgets this, which is why she is tempted to see the Czech dissidents as products of thought, not of dissident community. And it is why, I think, of all the works of Arendt that she deals with, she never mentions “The Revolutionary Tradition and Its Lost Treasure.” For it is there that Arendt grasps that revolution is not primarily about thought, but about being with others in a way that what one says and does matters. This idea is not alien to Forti. She makes a contribution to it. But it is not the theme of her book.

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H. H. Shugart: *Foundations of the Earth: Global Ecological Change and the Book of Job*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. Pp. xii, 370.)

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Shugart’s latest book takes on the question of what we know about the workings of nature, and it does so through the correlation of cultural artifacts and scientific knowledge. The cultural artifact is the Book of Job, and the scientific knowledge that Shugart brings to bear hails from his home field of ecosystem sciences. So how does this correlation work? Briefly put, it works in two ways: historically and methodologically.

We will take the historical first. In each chapter, Shugart explores a question from the Whirlwind Speech in the Book of Job (Job 38–42) as if that question were posed to a contemporary scientist, like himself. Each question is approached from a historical perspective, in that the Joban context is taken

into account, and it is then answered by our guide, Shugart the ecosystems scientist. In between these two parts of each chapter, there is often a “history of science” interlude where previous answers to the Joban questions—restated as contemporary scientific questions—are presented. The final product offers a historical overview of each question that runs from biblical (and sometimes pre-biblical) times to the present scientific and political conversation about such issues as sea-level rise, domestication of animals, and the conservation of biological diversity.

If you are saying to yourself, “Job does not bring up these issues,” then you are not reading Job with the eyes of a scientist. Methodologically, Shugart makes a significant entry into the Bible and Ecology conversation. To take a previously mentioned example, Job and the contemporary problem of sea-level rise. The Book of Job does not explicitly address this issue, but Shugart’s method of reading opens the biblical book up to correlation with this modern problem. Shugart cites Job 38:8–11, in which God asks Job, “Who shut in the sea with doors ... and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped?’” Of course, the answer to this rhetorical question is that God did these things and Job did not, and Shugart acknowledges this, while also massaging the question into one about sea levels and their historical changes owing to anthropogenic climate change. He shifts the focus of the question away from “who” and toward the subject matter of the question, and finally the ethical question becomes, “Who has transgressed these limits?” Though Shugart states early on that the Book of Job seeks to situate humans in nature rather than treat them as dominating overseers, the ethical force of his method is to focus on human action in nature. Shugart points out that in the Book of Job there is “a minimization of humanity’s importance in the fabric of nature” (183). While this is so, and Shugart emphasizes the autonomous workings of nature and the limits of human knowledge, the reader is left with a focus on the actions of contemporary humans, who do have the possibility of controlling nature. We are not Job, afflicted by natural forces beyond our control, but rather we are now God, asking rhetorical questions of ourselves. “Who prescribed bounds for the sea?” Do we have to stay within those limits? Shugart’s answer is a resounding yes while cautioning that not everyone agrees with him.

This book enters three important conversations. First, in the Bible and Ecology subfield of biblical studies, this book should be read alongside recent entries from Ellen Davis (*Scripture, Culture, Agriculture* [Cambridge University Press, 2009]), William Brown (*The Seven Pillars of Creation* [Oxford University Press, 2010]), David Horrell (*The Bible and the Environment* [Equinox, 2014]), Carol Robb (*Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit* [Fortress, 2010]), and Norman Habel (*An Inconvenient Text* [ATF, 2011]). While the first chapter covers basic material and would not be especially engaging to biblical scholars, moving past that, I think there is a methodological contribution. If the Bible has any bearing on contemporary issues, might approaching

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it as though it were asking us questions be an interesting way to engage it? Second, Shugart seems to want to situate this book within the ongoing religion-and-science conversation, and if that is the case, it could only be part of the popular conversation, and not the academic one. Shugart does not offer a theory of religion, so what he thinks religion is remains unarticulated. The Bible, and even the Book of Job, have competing theories of religion. That being said, the popular religion-and-science conversation is worthwhile, and contains such eminent scholars as E. O. Wilson and Bill McKibben. And within this conversation, Shugart is distinctive in arguing for the overlapping concerns and questions that comprise both science and religion, and for explaining the science thoroughly and clearly. From this perspective, he highlights the humanistic significance of ancient cultural artifacts for science as representative of enduring existential questions. Third, I would pair this book with Leon Kass's *The Beginning of Wisdom* (University of Chicago, 2003). Both are scientists working on humanistic problems rather than purely theoretical ones, and they decided midcareer to incorporate the Bible into their humanistic inquiries.

The ethical import of this book is significant. It provides an engaging and understandable summary of scientific knowledge for the lay reader. We need more books that do this very thing, if we are to address climate change through the political process. Additionally, Shugart argues that we are not done with these questions, either as humanists or as scientists. They need further investigation and ongoing research as humans and nature continue to change in light of a shifting climate. And most importantly, he exhorts us to pay attention to the shifting sources of funding for scientific inquiry, and argues that neither humanity's nor nature's best interests are served by commercially funded research.

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