

Book Review

Job's Illness: loss, grief and integration. Jack Kahn with Hester Solomon. London: Royal College of Psychiatrists. 1986. Pp 232. £10.00

Everyman's case history

Although Job was long believed to have been a real person and the Book of Job to be a poetic account of his life, as early as the third century a Talmudic master stated that "Job never was and never existed . . . It is a parable . . . Job is the representation of the human being". Jack Kahn's richly evocative psychological interpretation of the story of Job is firmly rooted within this tradition. Placing him alongside Prometheus, Oedipus, Ulysses and Faust, he views Job as a "biblical Everyman" whose story is "an allegory of the human situation . . . a representation of spiritual evolution, through physical and mental suffering, into a new identity".

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is to be commended for the reissue of this study. Dr Kahn's insights into the text derive consistently from his psychiatric training and practice, but are far from the narrowly reductionist approach often found in psychological analyses of biblical texts. This study is a model of sensitive eclecticism. Freud and the post-Freudians (Stekel, Fenichel, Erikson, Fromm) mingle with Melanie Klein and her British analytic successors (Winnicott, Milner, Bowlby). Radical practitioners like Laing and Szasz also come within Dr Kahn's scope, offering illuminating insights into the nature of Job's condition.

Job falls victim to the "double-bind" of being either a sinner within the traditional religious framework and viewpoint (his friends' judgement of him), or, if he denies his guilt, a rebel against the religious outlook of his time—in other words, he can be either "bad" or "mad". Jung's contribution to our understanding of the central significance of symbols for human consciousness underlies Dr Kahn's concluding analysis of the mythological imagery contained in God's words from the whirlwind: the hidden, untamed power of Leviathan is invoked and effects the final transformation of Job.

One of the joys of Jack Kahn's analysis is that he stays very close to the text itself, allowing it to determine his interpretation. He provides a subtle and enlightening reading of the opening of the story, often basing himself on the nuances of the Hebrew. (Unfortunately the few attempts to print the actual Hebrew script have all gone awry and would best have been omitted).

The first verse of the narrative describes Job as "*tam*", which can be translated as "blameless" or "perfect", and it is this "perfectionism" which Kahn sees as the root of his subsequent depression. Here he adduces the analyst Marion Milner's comment that in Job we have an example of an individual who, consciously intending good, comes to

believe that he *is* good—any flaws within himself are thus denied. Job's personality is then seen to have an obsessional basis, including compulsive behaviour—all designed to control his fate and his God.

"Every translation is an interpretation" Dr Kahn shrewdly comments, and as his analysis of Job's personality develops he pays precise attention to both the depth and range of meanings inherent in individual Hebrew words, as well as the content and imagery of the story itself. The narrator's description of events, Job's own speeches and the words of his comforters are all allowed to act as springboards for discussion on the symptoms and progress of Job's "creative illness". In the biblical account, psychosomatic disorders, obsessive and phobic states, depressive and paranoid feelings can all be seen to feature, the latter skilfully elucidated through the use of Melanie Klein's analytic theories, which are themselves beautifully summarised in a way which makes them comprehensible to the lay person yet not too simplistic for the professional.

At the heart of Dr Kahn's interpretation are his observations on the "therapeutic group" which is created once Job is joined by his friends. It is this forum, with its patterns of silences and cycles of speech, which provides the human setting in which Job can be healed, for "the very describing of feelings or of symptoms becomes a form of behaviour in which change is possible". Chapters 3 to 37 of the Book of Job contain, in some of the most difficult and majestic Hebrew of the entire Bible, a dynamic series of reflections on the mystery of unjust sufferings. The ancient Hebrews had little time, gift or taste for abstract speculation on existential questions. Instead we see a man breaking down, and then breaking through. Job protests against all the traditional pieties and platitudes and clichés spoken by his friends, all those deterministic, logical explanations of his suffering offered in kindness and in anger.

It is only when Elihu, a new participant in the group, suggests that God's ways are beyond human logic, that we see Job breaking through to a new understanding of his own imperfections and presumptions. Like many of us, he had created a God in his own image: all good, all just, all rational. He felt his source of suffering to be that God, who was breaking him "like a whirlwind" (9:17). Out of that same "whirlwind" (38:1) enlightenment comes. The source of pain is the source of revelation. Chapters 38 to 41 show us Job's inner experience of God. In Dr Kahn's pellucid interpretation this involves "the acceptance of indeterminism, which includes recognition of the irrational in man, the unpredictable in nature, and unfairness in the relationships of man and God".

One of the incidental delights of his study is his refusal to be sidetracked into conventional scholarly anxieties about sources and authorship. By respecting the integrity of the

book's final form and treating the unity of its presentation as given, he is able to throw new light on material which might otherwise appear redundant. A fine example of this is his analysis of chapter 28, the so-called "Hymn to Wisdom". Even a scholar as perceptive as Robert Gordis has taken this to be "clearly an independent lyrical poem . . . best regarded as an early effort by the poet to treat the theme which he later elaborated and deepened". Dr Kahn, on the other hand, shows how this chapter, with its imagery of buried treasure, which can stand as a metaphor for "the richness of the being of God which is always hidden from man's understanding", contains a key moment in Job's self-discovery: "wisdom resides in an awareness of the existence of forces which can never be completely understood".

It is Dr Kahn's wisdom that he has not attempted a definitive interpretation of Job's character. His human and humane treatment of the text opens it up for us to explore—and ourselves within it.

HOWARD COOPER

This review first appeared in the 14 March 1987 issue of *The Tablet* and is reproduced by kind permission of the Publisher.

St Andrew's Hospital

150th Anniversary 1838–1988

St Andrew's Hospital, Northampton, was opened in 1838. Then known as the County General Lunatic Asylum, it was built on land which once belonged to the ancient Priory of St Andrew. In 1870 it was decided to establish a separate County Asylum for pauper patients. This was built in Duston and was known as Berry Wood Asylum—now St Crispin Hospital; by the end of 1876 all pauper patients had been transferred there. The old County General Lunatic Asylum became purely private and changed its name to St Andrew's Hospital. It remained a non profit-making charitable foundation.

Entertainment was seen as an essential aspect of the treatment regime in order to divert the patient from his morbid

pre-occupations. In the 1800s excursions to local places of interest were made and in 1862 patients were first taken on holiday to Llandudno. Books, magazines and kaleidoscopes were provided for those confined to hospital.

In the past ten years the hospital has pioneered methods of behaviour management in a number of conditions, including behavioural problems in people who have severe brain injury. The hospital has specialised units for the treatment of a number of disorders including substance abuse, eating disorders and psychogeriatrics and treatment is available for the whole spectrum of psychiatric conditions. It has grounds of 100 acres and there continues to be a wide range of sporting facilities.

Mental Health Services

The present time is one of great change in British mental health services—in fact, greater than at any previous period in the last 150 years. One of the many problems of the current situation is the lack of information as to what is going on in different parts of the country, since many different strategies and paths are being followed, but no mechanism exists to collect information about these systematically. Therefore, the *Bulletin* would welcome accounts from

readers as to how the transition from institutions is proceeding in their particular area. Systematic data would be particularly useful but purely descriptive accounts can also be valuable. Clearly, the *Bulletin* cannot guarantee to publish all (or even most) contributions, but if there is a good response, the picture that builds up will allow the College to know much more about what is going on in British mental health services today.

British Holistic Medical Association

The British Holistic Medical Association Conference 1987 will be held at Churchill Hall, University of Bristol on 25–27 September 1987. The theme will be 'Relationship: Its

Role in the Healing Process'. further information: Roger Housden, BHMA, c/o The Open Gate, 6 Goldney Road, Clifton, Bristol (telephone 0272 742822/734952).