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## **Reading Against the Grain: A Narratological Inquiry Into the Atheist Affordance of the Book of Job**

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# **Reading Against the Grain:**

**A Narratological Inquiry Into the Atheist Affordance of the Book of Job**

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## 1. Introduction

Some of the core issues and problems debated within the study of atheism revolve around atheism's conceptualization and definition. Is atheism a culturally specific, complex structure? Or simply the natural human disposition? Like early sociologists thought (Buckley 2005, 13–17), meaning that atheism has always been with us (Coleman, Hood, and Streib 2018, 2). This kind of question, as well as historical investigations into how modern atheism emerged or changed overtime (e.g., McGrath 2006) are all central to the study of atheism. *Grosso modo* the debate revolves around the question of whether atheism is a complex culturally bound ideology or a lack of belief about God or gods. These two are not mutually exclusive, a natural faculty or disposition can be central to something cultural. Nonetheless these two positions do not see eye to eye when it comes to the question of what it means to be atheist.

If it is taken to be a culturally informed position, it risks being biased like all others. The lack of belief in a God, in contrast, can exist regardless of cultural context. The relation between atheism and Christianity is often used to argue that atheism is culturally dependent. One way this is done is by pointing out features shared between Christianity and atheism. This has been done by a number of theologians and historians (Robinson 1964; McGrath 2006; Milbank 1990; Davis, Milbank, and Žižek 2005; Altizer 1966; Cliteur 2009).

How atheism is portrayed consequently varies from atheism as “an absence of belief in the existence of God or Gods” (Bullivant 2013, 30), to atheism as various complex ideologies with detailed beliefs about metaphysics and morality (Vainio and Visala 2015). One of the reasons for this are the vested interests of different groups. For instance, atheist scholars may not want to be associated with religion because they deem it superstitious and accepting a genealogical connection to Christianity would entail a critical re-evaluation of scientific values. Christian theologians and historians argue that atheism is constituted by a Christian heresy (Milbank 1990, 3–5) or stress its kinship to Christianity relatively often (Clark 2015, 277–79). These projects, relating atheism to Christianity, self-professedly aim at resolving some kind of quintessentially modern nihilism, misunderstanding or alienation (Milbank 1990; Davis, Milbank, and Žižek 2005). Most scholars who argue that atheism is related to Christianity, often via secularism, base their claims broader historical argument or perceived philosophical and theological continuities (Cavanaugh 2011, 235–36; Harrison 2006, 100; Newman 2018, 14; 45; Buckley 2005). In contrast I will be investigating the Bible and determining whether it contains ideological elements of atheism or causes some

form of atheism. My contribution to the debate around cultural dependence of atheism is to offer a deeper understanding of the similarities and types of relations between atheism and biblical heritage. This can help us understand how modern Christian atheists, as well as atheists who have read the Bible operate, or come to believe what they do. This thesis also explores the ways in which Bible texts attain or maintain a personal connection to their readers, and how texts transfer ideas or influence practical realities of readers without material change.

### **1.1. Research Methodology**

In this thesis I will examine the relation between modern atheism and biblical text in a novel way by examining the atheist affordance of the Book of Job. I am interested in how the Bible can be perceived as priming people for, or actively promoting atheism. I chose the Book of Job because of its unique content and modern relevance. The Book of Job has been interpreted in varying ways, for example as the solution to the problem of evil or as a confession admitting to the moral bankruptcy of monotheism (Larrimore 2013, 4). The book of Job is uniquely sympathetic to different theological views (Coogan 2018, 735; Newsom 2009, 25). From a methodological perspective the Book of Job is not necessarily representative of Christianity, but it is uniquely relevant to modern culture, conceptions of evil and religious virtues, as well relevant in debates about morality in modernity (Larrimore 2014, 155–95). That the famous psychoanalyst Jung (2010) chose the Book of Job as the “prequel” to the gospels illustrates how important the Book of Job often feels on an onto-theological level to those who read it. Its modern day relevance and its sympathy to different views make the Book of Job a good subject of analysis, being relevant to atheism both intellectually and culturally.

The methodological framework I will be using is narratology. Narratology is the study of narrative. A narrative is the story told in a text. This should not be confused with the fabula, the chronological, “untold” events unfolding in a story (Bal 1997, 5). I am looking for textual traits that promote atheist interpretations. These textual traits will be conceptualized as affordance of that interpretation, in this case atheism. Affordance theory is an analytical approach part of a growing academic trend in the line of post-phenomenology (Stiegler 1998; Derrida 2004) and object oriented ontology (Harman 2019; Meillassoux 2008). Many within the different branches of these fields are unaware of this odd convergent

evolution of interest. These approaches increasingly focus on the objects and the way they interact with our consciousness, rather than how our consciousness acts upon objects.

My work will be in line with Davidsen's religious affordance theory, which is based on Gibsonian eco-psychology (Davidsen 2016). To go into more detail, Gibsonian eco-psychology is a brand of psychology which focuses on the idea that certain objects afford certain uses or ways to engage with them. A tree offers shelter, but also fuel for a fire. A tree in other words has the affordance of shelter. The affordances of a text are its different interpretations or uses. Rather than putting the entire responsibility of interpretation with the reader, affordance theory looks at how the object, in this case a text, promotes an interpretation. Davidsen's religious affordance theory concerns the religious affordance of fiction, for example Tolkien's works. His framework draws on religious narratives in general and can be used to analyze religious narratives proper as well.

Many narratologists who follow Davidsen's (2016; 2014) version of affordance theory, like Schlieter (2022), Hermann (2022) and Iles Johnston (2023) have all repurposed the idea of affordances and applied, looking for the possible uses of a text. They demonstrate the religious potential in non-religious texts or the way in which the fictional interacts with the religious. Affordance theory has primarily been used to deepen our understanding of how religious thought permeates human consciousness through literary works. Textual affordance analysis is a great way to investigate new religions and ideological innovation in general. It shows how religions adapt and persist using relatively static things like texts. In other words, affordance theory has been used to learn about how texts appear before human consciousness and explore what they do to it, rather than aiming at reconstructing the intention of an author of a text.

I want to avoid the debate of whether atheism is a religion. Consequently I will call the affordance I am looking for atheist affordance, rather than religious affordance. Even though I think that both atheist and religious affordance are specific subspecies of ideological affordance. Texts afford more than just religious, atheist, or even ideological readings. Though it would be interesting to look at the Marxist affordance of the New Testament, it must not be forgotten that texts also have more general, less intellectual affordances, like ritual or an escape from daily life. Intellectualism is a looming threat for anyone whose primary tool is their intellect. My theory is quite indebted specifically to Davidsen's religious affordance theory. We share an interest in the sub-dominant affordance of narratives. In his case, the religious affordance of fantasy fiction, in my case the atheist affordance of religious texts. The main differences between my theory and Davidsen's are caused by the subject

matter. I will be looking for various mechanisms that serve to verify and anchor the story-world in the real world (Davidsen 2016, 530). In contrast to religious affordance however, atheism can also be promoted by things that uncouple the in-story world from the real world, like logical inconsistency. Atheism nonetheless retains the regular mechanisms as well. Anchoring and perceived veracity in a text that, for example, makes God seem irrelevant, also afford atheism. I will explain the specific mechanisms and how they work in chapter 3.

I will limit myself to modern interpretations of the Bible because I am simply unable to properly reconstruct a renaissance or medieval consciousness. A modern consciousness is present without even trying, and so I will use that. Furthermore different groups throughout history and today read the Bible differently, not just in a figurative sense, but literally. Different traditions highlight different passages, or may prefer partial readings of a text (Seow 2013, 149–60). The fact that the Bible can be read as a library, a book or a quotation generator is certainly relevant to atheist affordance. I will not spend a lot of time on this, as it is quite simply the case that reading selectively is beneficial to any type of sub-dominant ideological affordance. Cherry picking is frowned upon for a reason. That is to say it can be expected, logically, that alternative or secondary ways of reading a text become less defensible when looking at a text as a whole rather than specific quotes, or when a biblical text is read in context of other biblical texts. In a collection of works like that of the Bible, a given text may have a lot of atheist affordance. However, if the message of the book serves to instruct or persuade readers, the relative number of intended religious mechanisms will likely grow quicker than the unintended atheist affordance. This makes atheist affordance comparatively weaker when taking into account how different biblical texts relate. I will look at the selected text as a whole. Analyzing texts as a whole suits my presupposed modern reader, who while wary of selective perception based on quotes simply lacks the dedication to read the Bible in one go or as one work. Besides this it is simply a relatively prevailing way of reading texts.

Traditionally, source and redaction criticism are the method used to get to the truth of the Bible. Respectively these two try to determine which sources are used by which text and determine how texts were edited (Tolmie 2012, 2). Though these two methods can reveal ideological information about the Bible to some extent, this is not relevant to my project. Sources and redactions are often not known or impactful for readers who are not themselves biblical critics of some sort. Because I presuppose a modern audience, I cannot expect our theoretical reader to be up to date on source and redaction criticisms, or theological debates. Instead our reader takes the text largely as it appears before them. There are few grounds to

claim that biblical authors hid a secret “atheist” message underneath the primary religious one with intent. Effectively this means that I am not looking for an original intent or reading. Because of this traditional biblical criticism will be mostly left aside, except when informing *you*, the reader of this thesis, about the context of the biblical texts discussed, or when biblical criticism concerns the narrative.

## **1.2. Structure of the thesis and corpus**

In order to determine the atheist affordance of the Book of Job I will need a typology of atheism. In chapter 2 I will be making a typology of atheism using that of Vainio and Visala (2015). Their typology is aimed at clarifying the theoretical difference between different atheisms, and so I have to adjust it for narratological purposes. I will argue that some of their categories can be merged on the basis of how they justify atheism. Besides this some of their categories are too monolithic and ought to be nuanced. After settling my gripes with their categorization I end up with two main justifications of atheism, moral and metaphysical. Another ideology called misotheism, entailing the hatred of God, will be introduced and explained in relation to atheism. Having made distinctions between these two atheist motivations and misotheist ideology it is time to address the narratological framework in chapter 3. Introducing the various textual mechanisms I will be looking for in more detail. Besides this I will introduce the term virtual faith based on Merleau-Ponty’s (1968, 18–20) notion of perceptual faith in order to delineate between mechanisms that pull the reader in or push the reader away from a text.

Then I will analyze the Book of Job in chapter 4, I will be using the two justifications of atheism, moral and metaphysical, and misotheism, identified in chapter 2, to identify certain mechanisms within the text. I will argue that there is a particularly strong affinity with misotheism, the hatred of God. This is promoted through a number of mechanisms, some of which new to religious affordance theory. Finally in chapter 5, I will conclude that atheist affordance is prevalent in the Book of Job. Nonetheless this latent affordance has only become activated in a modern context where readers could read, compare and get out of Christianity relatively easily. The Book of Job serves a critical moment in the Bible, allowing for self-reflection about religion and promoting an early version of moral autonomy.



## 2. Atheism, Between the Positive and the Negative

Typically atheism is divided into two types (Cliteur 2009; Bullivant 2013). The first type is positive atheism, a type of atheism in which people have the active belief that there is no God or gods. The second type is negative atheism, in which people hold no particular belief about God or gods. I dislike this phrasing because negative, in this context, might as well mean that people have a negative view of God or gods or an idea containing a negation with regards to God or gods. Instead I call positive atheism ideological atheism, because it pertains to an idea or belief. Negative atheism I call indifferent atheism. Indifferent because there is no mental relation between the subject and any belief regarding religion. This is a good time to remember that I investigate atheism only with the purpose to identify narratological elements. Indifferent atheism cannot have any narratological elements, because these would turn indifferent atheism into either ideological atheism or religiosity or leave the reader unimpacted. Indifferent atheism is therefore irrelevant to our narratological analysis. If someone can remain indifferent to the existence of God, or does not gain any idea about God while reading, this means that the text was simply ineffective in transmitting ideological information.

What this means is that I must focus on “positive”, ideological atheism. This is where things get slightly complicated. Hypothetically atheism can be afforded in two ways. The first way is that the text promotes a message that is taken to be atheist, this is the standard way. This looks like regular religious affordance. The second way is when the text promotes itself as incoherent or internally dissonant on other grounds. Now this latter affordance is not atheist affordance proper. The reader learns to reject or distrust a single text, and may well be propelled towards a different religion or ideology instead of atheism. On the other hand losing trust in biblical texts can contribute to atheism and is also relevant to atheist affordance in a broader sense. In order to approach this issue with caution I will have to separate these two distinct affordances. I will call this latter affordance apostate affordance. Atheist affordance is what is caused by a text successfully conveying information. Apostate affordance is what happens when a text unsuccessfully conveys information causing the reader to disregard its value or question the reality of what is conveyed. I will discuss apostate affordance and how I should engage with it in chapter 3, when I discuss the narratological concepts I will be using during my analysis.

In conclusion, indifferent definitions of atheism are flawed for the purpose of narratological analysis. The Bible will force a reaction vis a vis the supernatural by sheer

exposure, turning any indifferent atheist either in an ideological atheist or a religious individual. If this is not the case the text simply failed to convey ideological information about the topic. There are two affordances that can be conceptualized to lead to atheism. The first is atheist affordance proper, the second is apostate affordance. Apostate affordance are the textual traits that lead to a reader disengaging with the content of the text or to question the reality of what is proposed by the narrator.

### **2.1. Scientific and Philosophical or Metaphysical Atheism**

Atheism can be subdivided in many groups or types, all of which have their own ideas about the world, some religions could even be viewed as atheist themselves (Coleman, Hood, and Streib 2018; Bullivant 2013). Let us begin by discussing the four main categories introduced by Vainio & Visala (2015, 487) Scientific, philosophical, tragic and humanistic atheism. These four share some interesting characteristics which I can use for our narratological analysis. Scientific and philosophical atheisms are most easily distinguished by discussing them in relation to each other.

Scientific atheism is the set of beliefs that holds that science will resolve the debate between theism and atheism. In other words science functions as revelation of the real truth. It is through investigation and scientific method that the world will come to know enough to definitively exclude God from our worldview (Vainio and Visala 2015, 491). This means that the question of truth in relation to God is seen as a scientific one. The difference with philosophical atheism is that philosophical atheism will often require something more. Philosophical atheisms believe that scientific findings need to be supplemented by a way of understanding those findings. Scientific atheism, in turn, relies on the trustworthiness of empirical perception. Merleau-Ponty, for example, requires the correct metaphysics in order to start understanding things appropriately (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 159–61; Vainio and Visala 2015, 487–88). This is because philosophical atheism fears misunderstanding things, because it is unable to totally rely on empiricism. (Vainio and Visala 2015, 488–92) propose that naturalism, the idea that all things are part of the natural, or physicalism, the idea that all things are physical, are central to both philosophical and scientific atheism. However in philosophy, especially phenomenology, it is often the question of how one gets to such a natural or objective view genealogically, rather than true acceptance of naturalism (Vrahimis 2015). This differs from scientific atheisms because the modern scientific, naturalist or physicalist view is taken as the starting point. This means that the claim that naturalism is at

the core of both philosophical and scientific atheism (Vainio and Visala 2015) is simply untrue. This does not mean that naturalism and for example Merleau-Ponty's (1964, 159–61) explicitly anti-naturalist atheist position have nothing in common. Both naturalist and anti-naturalist atheism share a prioritization in which the supernatural or the metaphysical is subsumed under the natural or physical. This means that anything that is categorized as supernatural will be explained in terms of the physical or natural. This effectively terminates the supernatural as a form of real existence turning it into something that appears as something that it is not (McGrath 2006, 67–78). This termination means different things for both naturalism and Merleau-Pontians. For Merleau-Ponty a notion of distance makes no sense without being an embodied being that can move in relation to an object (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 300–303). For the purpose of narratological analysis this means that there are not many specific metaphysical ideas that can be attributed to atheism besides the prioritization of the natural over the supernatural.

This notion of prioritization seems to align neatly with the relation between religion and atheism more generally. Take for instance Davidsen's (2014, 30) substantive definition of religion: "*Beliefs, practices, experiences, and discourses which assume the existence of supernatural agents worlds and/or processes*". Davidsen here essentially spells out that what religious people do is "assume" something supernatural. This supernaturality undoubtedly for him means "not real". For a religious person the supernatural is in some cases even more than real. This definition raises the question of whether this "assumption" mentioned (of which I doubt it is an assumption rather than a wrongful categorization) is really made by the religious individual. After all, for a religious person the supernatural is merely another, perhaps less common and more sacred, existence, in the sense that it exists both as real and as true. True, the sacred maybe does not always exist alongside nature physically, but it exists generally in the same category as nature exists. Atheism seems to invert this relation subsuming the supernatural under nature making it real, but not true. The supernatural then innately claims to be something it cannot be, above nature. Is the assumption not that certain things *cannot* exist because they are not natural instead? Supernatural simply means two different things for those who believe in the existence of supernatural things and those who subsume the supernatural under the natural. Essentially the word supernatural creates a false agreement in this definition, by meaning completely different, even opposite, things for different individuals. In any case it helps us understand that both scientific and philosophical atheism subsume the supernatural under the natural and prioritizes the natural.

It has been argued by Robinson (1964, 65–67), McGrath (2006, 84–89) and Harrison (2006, 100) that the centrality of truth and its role in modern sciences can be seen as an atheist trait. This differs from Christian views about truth in that it prioritizes truth over God. The idea being that if the truth, following empirical conventions, proved God to atheists they would cease to be atheists, and that this is not the case for Christians. Both theorists of truth (e.g., Heidegger 1954) and post-truth alike (e.g., Derrida 1976) emphasize the importance of the concept of truth. Nonetheless atheism cannot be defined using truth, convenient as though it would be. Christianity itself also places an emphasis on the truth setting people free. However there is a trend which emphasizes the importance of truth, regarding even the potential bad moral implications of any truth as secondary to the virtue of truth in itself. In other words, scientific and philosophical share two main ideological features; the prioritization of the natural over the supernatural and the general emphasis on truth as beneficent in itself.

Put into a question, philosophical and scientific atheism would look something like: “What does the world look like if we can no longer accept god?” There is a general shape in which this truth should come: metaphysically natural, rather than supernatural. With metaphysics I mean the way in which things are hypothesized to be in relation to each other. In this case it would for instance mean that “the natural” relates to “the real” and “supernatural” to “the unreal”. As I mentioned philosophical atheisms do not necessarily adhere to this, some also try to explain why these models can be believed or how they came to exist historically. Nonetheless they do tend to prioritize the natural over the supernatural.

Both scientific and philosophical atheism are projects to define the world as it truly is in the absence of God or gods. This explains both the inclination towards naturalism and the scientific atheist refusal to acknowledge any question with regards to what the empirical is and how we come to experience. These two atheisms share a concern of how the world really is, the true metaphysics of the world. Besides this they share a prioritization of the natural over the supernatural and a general emphasis on truth as intrinsically valuable. I will call these justifications of atheism *metaphysical atheism*.

## **2.2. Tragic and Humanist or Moral Atheism**

The other two large groups of atheism identified by Vainlo and Visala (2015) are tragic and humanist atheism. These are concerned with morality and progress. Tragic atheists

can be recognized by claims in the form of: “Concept x seems secular or atheist but it is really based in Christianity.” The implication in tragic atheism is that a relation to Christianity problematizes the concept in question. Tragic atheisms consider the ideas some societies have about morality and progress to be problematic theological remnants from Christianity. The reason why this carryover is problematic varies; from a loss of the underpinning beliefs to some innate flaw in Christianity. Famous among these atheists are Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Stirner. Nietzsche (2006, 58) calls for a transvaluation of values in his work “the Antichrist”. Stirner (1995, 158; 164) claims that humanism is merely the newest iteration of religion. Essentially, tragic atheism is the idea that religiosity no longer works practically, or leads to some terrifying result and that ridding ourselves of this influence will save us or help us. Like Jesus ridding the people of the corruption of the Pharisees. These thinkers tend to be quite anti-humanist. Interestingly this brand of atheism has also been adapted in Christian form, by way of the “death of god theology” (Altizer 1966). This theology aims to rid people of dogmatic and biblical influence and calls for a renewed focus on “the new prophets”, philosophers mostly, like Nietzsche and Hegel, in order to become true Christians (Altizer 1966, 15–28). There is a drive to become independent of Christian values. Besides this, tragic atheism often explains how ideas are related to Christian ideas. Oftentimes tragic atheists take the individual to be the new “ground” of what should come next, often preferring an individual subjectivist approach to morals and values over a public and objectivist approach, as both Stirner (1995) and Nietzsche (2006) do.

This individualism can also be present in Humanist atheism (e.g., Heidegger 1977). Humanist atheisms are nonetheless the opposite of tragic atheisms in some other regards. Humanist atheists believe in the objective existence of morality and progress regardless of Christianity (Vainio and Visala 2015). This brand of atheism can for instance be seen in the post WWII revival of Kantian ethics (Rawls 1999; Habermas 2003), or more generally in optimistic projects like that of the council of Europe and NATO. Thinkers like Rawls (1999), Habermas (2003) and Derrida (2003) all refer back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century revival of interest in stoic cosmopolitanism. In turn caused by Lipsius’ 17<sup>th</sup> century neostoicism (Leira 2008, 673–74). These thinkers all engage with ideas of a world community like that of Kant (2003). This means that they believe that morality and religion are at least separable from each other to some degree, even if religion has often been the medium through which morality has made itself known to the public. The argument that western moral order hinges upon the Christian God is not new, as is the idea that it has become flawed since the belief

in a God and his moral laws is no longer as widespread. (Nietzsche 2006; Anscombe 1981) This implies that humanist atheism has a *different* moral ground than Christianity. What this moral ground is varies between various principles. Some favorites are “reason” which is often seen as being both a religious and a non-religious principle in various contexts (Kant 2003), the individual (Heidegger 1977) or the “Other” (Levinas 2003). Generally speaking, morality not grounded in God is grounded in some type of quintessentially human attribute, even in bio-ethics (Singer 1975). Consequently religious-like behavior and ideas similar to religious ideas are not as heavily criticized for being religious in humanist atheism as they are in tragic atheism (Hewitt-Horsman 2006). This is conditioned upon these values being conceived of as being morally “Good” in their own right. From a narratological perspective I can expect this to be present in the Bible, as telling people why it is good to believe in God looks a lot like telling people that there are good things outside of God. If belief in God brings justice, justice itself must be worthwhile regardless of God. Effectively these two groups of atheism attempt to construct a moral order or a personal morality without God.

Both tragic and humanist atheism pose questions like “Can there be morality without there being an objective moral authority in the form of god?”. The tragic atheists’ claim would be that there is no morality without religion, mainly because morality as it is understood, is a deeply religious concept. Humanist atheists would likely deny this, perhaps claiming instead that religion is merely a morality with some extra fanfare. In either case these types of atheism are concerned with morality rather than metaphysics. Tragic atheism, regardless of its claims, seeks to replace some semblance of the order that was lost in the form of a unique and personal ethos or a set of personal values. As such I will pair tragic and humanist atheisms under the name of moral atheism. *Moral atheism* is then atheism motivated by the belief that morality exists regardless of God, or that there is no morality without God, but there should be something in place, like a personal moral.

### **2.3. Misotheism**

An ideology that is close to atheist is Misotheism. Misotheism is hatred of God. Hatred of God can motivate someone to stop believing in God, especially if there are alternatives to believing in God. Misotheism is sometimes argued to be atheist (Vainio and Visala 2015, 487) and sometimes to be definitively theist (Schweizer 2010). Nonetheless misotheism can exist both as theist or atheist belief. The difference between these two versions would be in the assumed type of existence of God. Atheist misotheism hypothesizes

that if there is a God, he should be hated. Theist misotheism on the other hand is just hatred of God. This view borders specifically monotheism and atheism. Schweizer (2010, 30) explains, misotheism only makes sense when there is no other God to choose from. Schweizer argues this in a classical context. I would argue that modern availability of various monotheisms or ideological alternatives to religion may well function in some way like a pantheon. A pantheon in which gods perhaps do not co-exist but in which all gods and ideologies are present as possible convictions to choose from. A modern example of misotheism is Phillip Pullman's (1995) "*his dark materials*" series. In this story children stage a revolution against the "authority", a stand-in for God. In relation to affordances, textual elements that promote hatred of God, may contribute to atheist affordance. It is likely that someone who hates God, in the modern context, chooses atheism, the dominant ideology in many places. The relation between atheism and misotheism is not 1:1 in the sense that not every misotheist will become an atheist. One thing that contributes to the similarity between misotheism and atheism is that misotheists are more likely to disengage from their religious community, religious ritual and religious practice (Schweizer 2010, 216–18). Misotheism does contribute and is commensurable with atheism in several ways. First, atheism offers a way out of the problematic relation with God (Schweizer 2010), and the religious community which opposes you. Second, you can maintain your belief that God is evil, if you want to, in atheism by making it hypothetical. Misotheism, put briefly, is a different type of ideology which can contribute to atheist affordance. Moreover misotheism is not a very stable ideology, as hating God defeats the purpose of believing in God in many cases. If you hate God, religion becomes less of a practical or ideological resource which in turn may reduce engagement with religion. Though it is not contradictory in every case, misotheism can be said to have internal friction, because religious messages are partially accepted, for instance, the existence of God but not his greatness.

For the purpose of a narratological analysis I have characterized and identified two different justifications of atheism. Moral atheism is the belief in the existence of a moral order without God or the loss of morality without God. Metaphysical atheism is atheism that prioritizes the natural over the supernatural and emphasizes truth as a value in itself. This means I have to identify the moral and metaphysical implications of the Book of Job and see if they are compatible with the categories of moral and metaphysical atheism. In essence, moral and metaphysical atheisms are different motivations of atheism, rather than types. Because it is rather tiresome to speak of morally motivated and metaphysically motivated atheism, I will still refer to them as moral atheism and metaphysical atheism. Finally I

discussed misotheism, and established that it is relevant to atheist affordance even though it is a different ideology than atheism. This leaves me with misotheism, moral atheism, and metaphysical atheism as well as apostate affordance to be taken into account when analyzing the text.

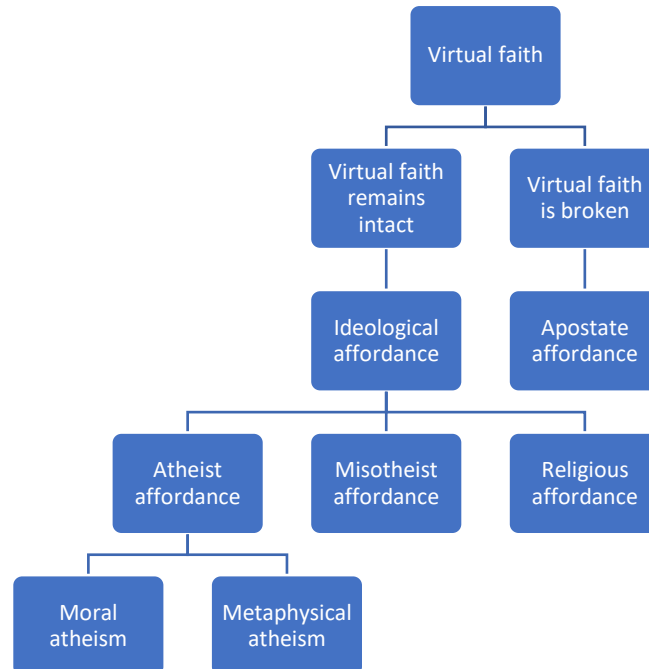
### 3. Virtual Faith and Textual Elements

In this chapter I will be explaining the theoretical framework I will be applying in the textual analysis in more detail. I have identified a number of different types of affordances which each differ either in the practical relation to the text (ideological and apostate) or the ideological content that is promoted (misotheism, moral atheism, metaphysical atheism). In the previous chapter, I already mentioned the notion of apostate affordance: a type of affordance that pushes the reader away from the text. This can happen when the text itself is no longer considered to be authoritative. In apostate affordance textual elements conflict internally. This leaves us with the distinction between ideological and apostate affordance. In order to explain how ideological and apostate affordance relate I will use the notion of virtual faith, derived from Merleau-Ponty's perceptual faith.

Merleau-Ponty introduces the term "perceptual faith" in his book "The visible and the invisible" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 18–20). Perceptual faith is a mode of perceiving resulting from a certain familiarity or a history of interaction with something (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 416–17). In other words, people believe that what they perceive is certain. This happens through a process in which people acquire what Dreyfus and Todes (1962, 561) interpret to be "virtual figures". Virtual figures are perceptions of reality that are no longer directly related to the original, unreflective, experience. The narrative of a text exists as virtual figure, none of the characters involved are experienced in the way they would were they perceived. Virtual figures develop into permanent figures by combining and developing multiple virtual figures through interaction with the things that cause them. When one lives in a house, touches it, or frequently sees it, the house becomes permanent on an unreflective level. When reading, images and concepts are constructed or recollected, in other words virtual. This means that using perceptual faith to describe that a text has to be taken for certain is unfitting, as the thing that is interacted with is itself virtual. Certainty of narrative content is the appropriation of virtual figures of virtual figures. As such I will use the notion of "*virtual faith*", combining the idea of a virtual figure with perceptual faith. The idea is



that first the virtual content of texts must be taken uncritically. This is a necessity in order to understand the narrative. This inverts the idea of suspension of disbelief which presupposes that a reader is primarily in a state of unbelief, which is then suspended. Philosopher Suits (2006, 385) agrees with me on this topic as he argues that a divide between fact and fiction is only possible as a reflective action. I am going further, as I presume virtual faith to be a prerequisite for understanding the text as having content rather than being words or letters on paper. It is, for instance, necessary to ascribe some form of agency to characters within a narrative. Regardless of existing entirely in the form of letters or concepts. Without this it is impossible to critically reflect upon the narrative or determine whether it is internally coherent. When it is determined that something is not coherent, for instance when characters change in personality between sentences unexplainedly, virtual faith diminishes. The entities within the text lose their reality and instead become arguments undermining the authority of the narrative and text as a whole. Diminishing virtual faith can also be afforded by a text itself. It is thus another type of affordance. If a text maintains virtual faith, it can start transgressing into our ideas about the world beyond the story. Virtual faith, in other words, denominates the border between ideological affordance and apostate affordances. This means the affordances relevant to atheism are related in the following way.



Apostate affordance is in the advantage of atheism. When biblical authority is undermined, someone is not pushed to atheism but does gain ammunition to go there. Meaning that in some ways apostate affordance functions like misotheist affordance, supplementing atheist affordance in certain situations without being reducible to atheist

affordance in its entirety. It is standard in narratology to separate the author from the narrator. The author is the historical or real person writing a text, and the narrator is the in-story voice, and sometimes character that tells the story (Bal 1997, 16). In the case of this thesis, this separation allows for an isolation of authorial intent from textual traits. In the next section I explain specific mechanisms in relation to virtual faith and atheist affordances.

As stated in the section on methodology, religious affordance mechanisms exist in two types (Davidsen 2016, 530): anchoring mechanisms which attempt to anchor the story-world in the real world, and evidence mechanisms which validate the story-world. Anchoring mechanisms are textual traits that influence concepts outside of the story by replicating them in the narrative. Evidence mechanisms maintain virtual faith while anchoring mechanisms expand beyond virtual faith. A virtual figure of something in the text is related to a virtual figure similar to it outside of the text. An example of this is *onomastic anchoring* (Davidsen 2016, 535), which is specifically the use of place names to anchor something in a text to a place outside of it. Similar mechanisms using depictions of people instead can be seen in propaganda. Another of these mechanisms is *reader inscription* (Davidsen 2016, 536) in which the text addresses the reader, you. In other cases a character represents the reader. One way this is done is by having these characters, or the narrator asking possible questions the reader could have (Rhoads 1999, 56).

Evidence mechanisms provide the internal logic of a story and maintain virtual faith. Evidence mechanisms demonstrate the subjects of the story and their relations. This has the effect of familiarizing the reader with them, who then makes them into objects of cognition, rather than perception. The most prevalent evidence mechanisms are *demonstration*, which is when a text shows something to be the case (Davidsen 2016, 532). *Justification*, is a mechanism that justifies that which is shown with a source, or when the narrator claims to stand in for someone (Davidsen 2016, 534). Finally, a *teacher discourse* is when a character in the story explains something. The authority of the character, or of what they are saying is taken for real, and so the story-world becomes anchored in the real world or the character expands the in-story world through information. I take teacher discourse to be either an evidence or an anchoring mechanism depending on the referent of the specific information given by the teacher.

I would argue that most of these mechanisms, rather than promoting specifically “religious” affordance, are in fact ideological mechanisms that allow for a transfer of information from the text to the reader. By Davidsen’s own standard of religion none of these *require* a supernatural event to be conveyed. Davidsen however does define religion

to be quintessentially about the supernatural (Davidsen 2014, 30). This means these can also promote moral and metaphysical atheist as well as misotheist textual traits.

Rather than the mechanisms, above apostate affordance is supported through narrative dissonance. I take the term narrative dissonance from game developers and ethicists (Kampmann Walther 2019). These use the term ludo-narrative dissonance to indicate that the story told in a game does not cohere with the gameplay. For example: you have defeated a demon lord in a video game, but the demon lord’s armies are still present for gameplay reasons even though in the story these were supposed to disappear after your victory. This is ludo-narrative dissonance. Though reading may be a form of playing, I am removing the ludo part of it, because I do not want to engage in this comparison. In a text, narrative dissonance means that the narrative contradicts itself. The structure of this varies, as the narrative can contradict itself by being inconsistent or by having a character argue against it. Feldt (2011) argues that paradoxes can promote types of religious reading. This is something I have to contextualize during the analysis. Elements which promote apostate affordance demonstrate that the text is non-referential, the virtual figure created by the reader because of the text is not plausible even as a virtual figure within the text. This creates an awareness of the virtual nature of the text, which diminishes virtual faith. The mechanisms for apostate atheism promote internal incoherence. It is to be expected that apostate affordance is promoted by narrative dissonance. Taking all of the above in account this means that the textual elements I am looking for will be the following:

Misotheism	Moral Atheism	Metaphysical Atheism	Apostate affordance
Demonstrations or explanations of the immoral nature of God or the immorality of belief in God. Justifications of hatred for God	Demonstrations or explanations of The moral inefficacy or amorality of religion or God.	Demonstrations or explanations of the indifference or non-existence of God, the subsumption of the supernatural in the natural.	Demonstrations or explanations of the incoherence of the text or narrative.

#### 4. A General Introduction to the Book of Job

The book of Job is currently considered “wisdom literature”, and is part of the poetical books. These poetical books are meant to relate to the present rather than inform about the past (Coogan 2018, 729). It is precisely in this way that philosophers have engaged with it in the past century in what is called the theological turn (Hankins and Johnston 2014, 3). Wisdom literature means that it is not to be seen as a true story, but rather as a fiction about really existing characters. Though exactly which parts are fictional and how fictional is unclear. From the suffering of Job to the depiction of God, all has at one point been discredited or de-emphasized (Newsom 2009, 15–19). The psychoanalyst C.G. Jung (2010) in contrast interprets the Book of Job as the very reason for an incarnation of God on earth, to make up for the sin committed by God in this book. His is then a historical, religious, reading. Job is often read in a metonymical way. Metonymical language conveys something about the *relation* of the subjects (in this case the relation between Job and God, or the earthly and the divine), rather than the subjects, the historical figure Job, itself (Frye 1982, 26). The truth of the matter is left out of the question. Perhaps Jung’s colorful interpretation already gives away just how the odd the Book of Job is as a piece of biblical literature. Which self-respecting Bible text could fathom to convey such a message? The Book of Job is one of the most puzzling and mysterious works of the Bible. It contains unique Hebrew phrases leading found nowhere else (Larrimore 2014, 6). This has led to speculation about whether the book of Job was originally in Hebrew (Harvey 2022, 1). This is just one among many reasons to doubt the way the canonical Book of Job has been received. The possible inclusion of a new voice, in the form of Elihu, is another of such reasons (Newsom 2009, 200–203). Who Job is exactly has also been debated by theologians. For instance the place where the story takes place, Uz, implies that Job is a gentile to some. In Christian doctrine, the gentile nature of Job has been used to frame him as a proto-Christian. In a rabbinic context however this gentile background has been used to portray him as a blasphemer (Seow 2013, 158–62). What this means is that original authorial intent neither has a grasp of popular, nor of traditional interpretation. I must approach the Book of Job with particular caution because of this. Let me briefly explain the story beats of the Book of Job before I analyze virtual faith and atheist affordance.

The text consists of two parts, the framework consisting of the prologue and epilogue (1:1-2:13; 42:7-17 NOAB; all subsequent citations are from this version) and the dialogues and speeches in between them, the body (Harvey 2022). The prologue is a dialogue between God and a character named Satan, the nature of this character is contestable, but in this story he functions as a divine persecutor. Satan, a heavenly being (2:1) comes back from surveying the world. God asks Satan to consider Job (1:8, 2:3), a man who turns away from evil and is blameless. Satan responds to this by questioning Job's motivations (1:10, 2:4-5) claiming that Job is only fearful of God because he has everything he could ever want: a family, friends and riches. God gives Satan permission to harm him, in order to test this claim twice. First telling him that he should not touch Job (2:6). The second time, God allows Satan to harm Job with only the restriction of having to keep Job alive (2:6). Satan murders his children and destroys his property, but Job does not curse God. After this segment is the transition into the body of the text, in which Job dismisses his wife for telling him to curse God (2:8-10). His friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar come to meet him after hearing of his loss and start grieving (2:11-13).

The body takes the form of a dialogue between Job and his friends. Job will give in to his misery but not curse God, and one of his friends will question his virtue by arguing for a worldview in which the events are directly related to Job's morality. Notably, the figure of Satan is absent in this segment of the text and arguably the rest of the text, only to be alluded to by the category of heavenly beings in the epilogue (38:7). What is important, however, is that the story shows Job to be a tragic yet devout person. Each of his friends offers him reasons as to why he has been punished, from him or his children having committed a sin (8:2), to lack of charity (22:7-9), to being born from a woman (25:4-6) or lacking wisdom (37:14-24), but Job refuses to accept these as he knows that he is blameless. The story does very little to contest the idea that Job is blameless, even God in the epilogue does not engage with the question of blame. In fact, God does not even mention humanity, emphasizing the idea that humanity is nothing to God.

In the last segment of the body, Job demands a word with God. Then comes Elihu, a young man who has been waiting for this conversation to end. Elihu has waited because he respects age, or rather because he respects wisdom. He is angry at the friends of Job and Job for not having found an answer to his predicament (32:2-4). Elihu delivers a speech, which curiously is not mentioned later by God like Job's friends are. This means that Elihu is not fully discredited. In this speech Elihu explains that Job's misgiving is his lack of respect for the gap in wisdom between him and God. When Elihu is done, the final speech by God

himself, directed at Job and his friends, starts. God asks where Job was when God created the universe and its parts. Job briefly responds by saying that he repents (42:1-6). The debate in the body is largely about blame. Surprisingly the final speech of God does not even engage with this topic of blame, but is about his mystical powers of creation (38:1-41:34). In fact, the ending (42:7-17) of the story mentions that his friends console him for all the evil God had brought (42:12).

Having briefly summarized the narrative structure of the text it is important to reconstruct some of the most typical readings of the book of Job. The Book of Job lends itself well to be taken as an intellectual text in which the friends of Job all represent different theological outlooks which are all related in that God is somehow involved with morality and Job represents the voice denying this. This turns the text into an argument, or the biblical answer to theodicy, the problem of suffering (Newsom 2009, 1). Another prevalent reading of the Book of Job is as a self-help book of sorts (Larrimore 2014, 20). In this interpretation the book is a guide to those subjected to struggles in faith, or unwarranted suffering. This text then is something meant to help people overcome difficult times by teaching them patience and modesty when it comes to wisdom of the divine. Newsom (2009, 203) argues that misunderstanding the Book of Job is a partially caused by textual traits. One such textual trait is called polyphony by Mikhail a literary scholar Bakhtin (Green 2000, 30). Polyphony refers to the many voices in a given text. This make the message of a text appear ambiguous or deliberative. In the Book of Job, historical context, rather than diffusing or ambiguating the message of the text, instead gave it a more monolithic and coherent interpretation. This happened through selective reading, (Larrimore 2014, 117–18) and likely also redaction, like the insertion of Elihu (Newsom 2009, 200–203). Meaning that there is more room for interpretation in the Book of Job than it has been historically known for.

One such intertextual narrative is the Testament of Job, a text in which Job explains that what happened was really an attack of Satan (Newsom 2015, 239). Moreover, in this narrative, God announced that Job would suffer and that he would be redeemed beforehand. Polyphony according to Newsom (2009, 20), is limited by historical context and promoted by intertextuality, but can nonetheless be intra-textual. I take polyphony to simply mean the plurality of voices and presented positions in the text, rather than an interpretative mode. This is relevant to the affordances of the Book of Job, and will be discussed in the next section. In the next section I will be taking the things that maintain virtual perception, or extend understanding of the virtual content of Job beyond the text, and relating it to the three

ideological affordances related to atheism in order: Moral atheism, metaphysical atheism and misotheism.

#### **4.1. Ideological Affordance**

The ideological affordance of Job is promoted by things that maintain virtual faith in the Book of Job or connect the content of the book with things outside of the book like the reader or the location. The mechanisms that maintain virtual faith in the Book of Job are mainly dialogues and demonstration. The main demonstrations are in the framework. In the body of the text God is all but absent until the final speech. Without the demonstration of the framework, it would be uncertain if Job is really a blameless man. The framework then also serves to justify Job. The teacher in the story can be conceptualized to be either Job or God: Job because debates against those who doubt him, while being justified, God because he teaches the friends of Job that they are wrong. One of the ways in which this text tries to go beyond the limits of the narrative is various forms of reader inscriptions and role models. A character can set moral standards through contrast with different standards (Rhoads 1999, 124). Job is contrasted with his surrounding friends to make him seem just. This makes him into a role model. Role models are not exactly reader inscriptions, as those try to directly address or try to pre-empt reader commentary or questions (Rhoads 1999, 99). Role models are hypothetical examples for behavior. If you are in a situation like Job, you should behave like Job. This bypasses the condition of having to be right about the reader, like when attempting to guess their questions. Questions only inscribe the reader when they actually are posed by the reader. A hypothetical situation in contrast does not require it to be the exact situation of the reader. Readers are inscribed through polyphony (Newsom 2009, 10), the many different theological positions that can represent the reader in the text. Polyphony, in this case also means that there are different perspectives present which do not cohere. This makes the Book of Job realistic; people disagree in it like they do in the real world. Newsom also argues that it is this that leads to cherry picking interpretations of Job. Polyphony in the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, is when a text offers multiple perspectives not just on the level of the characters but also on the level of utterances of characters and the narrator (Green 2000, 33-35). In the case of the Book of Job, several characters mention opinions they do not agree with. One such opinion is godlessness (15:34-36), the reader can nonetheless engage with these because of them being mentioned. On the level of the narrator, polyphony

in the Book of Job is promoted by distance, the narrator as a voice itself does not address the opinions in the text, except when Job dismisses his wife (2:10). Cherry picking is beneficial to any dominant or subdominant affordance of a text, as explained in the introduction of this thesis. It allows for a reader to take parts of a text and de-emphasize or discredit those less coherent with the others. The intellectual content of the Book of Job is so diverse and specific, that when constructing it as a narrative the intellectual discourse becomes monologic. Monologic means that only one of the intellectual perspectives offered is retained when reconstructing the narrative as a whole (Green 2000, 33). An example of this is in the introduction to this chapter. In order to understand all the separate positions of the friends of Job, Elihu, Job and of God, one usually reduces the story to a set of intellectual propositions without interaction. One of the elements facilitating this simplification is the framework. The framework of the story of Job provides the narrative structure in which Job is blameless, essentially reducing the relevance of the polyphony when it is considered as a narrative rather than an intellectual text. All in all, these things make it so that the story seems coherent, does not break virtual faith, and expands it. These initially seem to only benefit religious affordance, however this is not the case. I will discuss this in the next segments, detailing moral atheism, metaphysical atheism and misotheism and finally apostate affordance respectively.

#### **4.2. Moral Atheism in the Book of Job**

The moral atheism in Job is conveyed through demonstration and arguments of both God and Job. This may seem contradictory, as Job and God do not doubt the existence of God. This is true, however a text representing something as existing merely causes the reader to accept it *within the narrative* in order to understand it. What happens in the Book of Job is that there is little reason to expand this existence of God beyond the narrative. This can cause God to be disregarded, while other parts of the text are not. The only anchoring of God in the real world is through the introduction and the whirlwind speech. In contrast the debates between the friends are very realistic and interactive, making them applicable to the real world outside of the text. The introduction expands virtual faith as it explains the story of Job to have historically taken place, and the speech of God because it implicates God in the existence of the world. This goes against the traditional reading of Job as a wisdom text. The Book of Job being a wisdom text is only mentioned in either paratext or metatext, not in the



narrative itself. Paratext is text surrounding a text, like the title, metatext is a text commenting on a text (Genette 1990, 4–5). Nonetheless the text itself claims Job to have existed (1:1-2). The demonstration of moral atheism in Job takes place mostly through an unresponsiveness of God, God not acknowledging morality and God being unaware of human sensibility. God respectively does not answer Job, does not mention morality or blame, and lets Job be harmed, as well as restoring him in an arguably inhumane way.

### **The Restoration**

Biblical scholar Newsom (2015, 238–42) sees an increase in interpretations and reiterations of the Book of Job in which the restoration is either scandalized or left out. New interpretations often either ignore God’s restoration, or leave out his speech. Besides the historical context changing, I think the text itself enables this through a number of traits: polyphony, narrative dissonance and linguistic difference between the framework and the body of the text.

The polyphony makes God’s voice just one of many. This allows the reader to construct a position for themselves on the intersection of the different positions in the text. The message of the text then varies between positions of the reader. This de-emphasizes the narrative, in which God is central and puts him out of focus. The emphasis comes to lie on the dialogical content of the text, the narrative as a whole a background to the debate (Bal 1997, 142). This happens because the speeches of each character are seen by the narrator. The narrator announces the characters with phrases like “Then Job answered” (6:1). This means that the text is not in their respective perspectives, but outside of the speeches. The field of vision in the text is then on these characters for most of the text, the narrator, figuratively speaking, aimed at Job and his friends for most of the text. Literary critic Mieke Bal (1997, 144–50) calls this focalization.

Narrative dissonance in Job is addressed by the book itself. The friends of Job indicate that the narrative in which Job is innocent but suffers, is internally incoherent. Nonetheless the friends of Job question this incoherence. This serves to mollify the “contradictory” or as narratologist Feldt (2011, 258) puts it impossible elements of the narrative. This impossibility is instead embedded in the story. This means there are types of narrative dissonance.

- *Un-hermetic narrative dissonance* occurs when something conflicts or is impossible by the standards of the narrative and this is addressed in the narrative. In this case, Job's unjust suffering, which is questioned by his friends.
- *Hermetic narrative dissonance* occurs when something conflicts or is impossible by the standards of the narrative but this is not addressed in the narrative itself. The restoration of Job, which goes against the idea that Job's suffering was not a moral event.

Narrative dissonance can emphasize a moral atheist reading of the body of the text. This has to do with the level of the narrative. Narratologist Mieke Bal (1997, 52–53) explains that narratives can be embedded in each other and have differing types of relations. In this case taking the narrative to be separate from the text of the actors, the dialogue, can put the focus on the actors, Job, Elihu, and his friends. The body of the text which addresses the contradiction is then on a different narrative level. What is discussed in the body are the events in the framework. This in turn causes the framework to retreat to the background (Bal 1997, 142–43). Un-hermetic dissonance is the driving force of the dialogue in Job in its entirety: if there were no contradiction addressed then there would be no dialogue. In relation to moral atheism un-hermetic narrative dissonance is that which allows for the reader to invalidate Job's friends arguments for natural theology, and an interrelation between God and suffering. Because Job's friends address the contradiction with unbelief about his situation, while the reader knows that Job is right, this emphasizes Job's position that he is not immoral for suffering over that of his friends. Polyphony and Un-hermetic narrative dissonance then serve the same purpose: one emphasizes the intellectual content of the text the other separating the part of the text in which the intellectual content takes place.

A final factor that makes this separation even more evident is a linguistic difference. Linguistic differentiation may seem like a literary and not narrative quality, nonetheless it has been used to enforce narrative structures. An example is fantasy author Patrick Rothfuss' (2011) use of iambic pentameter, a rhyming meter, when his story takes place in the mystical fairy realm of his books. He contrasts this with less metric prose in the normal story-world. Similarly in Job the framework is in relatively simple language, and the dialogues, which are visceral and emotional. Theologian Harvey (2022, 1) likens the transition between body and framework to transitioning from a children's educational book to Shakespeare. The language in the opening is quite straightforward, whereas the body is poetical. This has even

caused doubt on whether the framework is a pietistic or heuristic, later addition to the text (Harvey 2022, 3). This has a number of different effects, each will be treated in their respective ideological sections of this chapter. For moral atheism this separation is only relevant as a separation of the text into two. God, in the introduction, seems robotic by comparison to the characters in the dialogue, or even his whirlwind speech. Linafelt (2021) has dedicated an entire study as to why this separation is there. He concludes that the framework is not just a part of the narrative, but is the entirety of the narrative (Linafelt 2021, 701). This would suggest that a non-narrative intellectual reading of Job is in fact possible, and combined with the above factors likely a close to atheist reading. I think however this is too focused on only literary qualities, and not an intuitive way of reading initially. In conclusion all of these textual elements contribute to a reading in which the framework is less emphatic, or discredited. Although I think the reading that Job is restored in an insensitive way is mostly hinged upon modern sensibilities and conceptions of omnipotence of God. The de-emphasis of the framework or the ending is however textually afforded.

### **The Silence**

Keeping in mind the textual traits that separate the body and the framework of the Book of Job, God's silence during the body also becomes more meaningful. Regardless the silence of God is a contentious topic. Silence of God in general will be interpreted either as the complete freedom of God or the fact that God is planning something (Korpel and de Moor 2011, 1–52). Though theologians have also noticed atheist interpretations of the silence of God, both in philosophy and in literature (Korpel and de Moor 2011, 26). In the context of moral atheism, the silence of God in the body of the Book of Job can be seen as the moral indifference of God. This interpretation is also seen in many theological and philosophical readings (Seow 2013, 158–60). Though God restores Job at the end, he does not do so out of moral duty. Instead God shows no intention of answering Job on Job's conditions. God waits until all Job's friends have spoken to intervene. Taking into account the idea that moral atheism requires the separation of God from morality, this silence can be taken as a demonstration of that very fact. The intellectual nature of the text stresses this very separation after all. When God does show himself he does not do so for moral reasons. Another effect of God's silence is the portrayal of Job as a morally autonomous figure (Newsom 2015, 165–66). Moral autonomy for those not familiar with Immanuel Kant is the idea that morality is motivated by duty in itself. In Kant's philosophy a person does not need

guidance from God or social factors to get to moral law, only reason. Moral autonomy then is not exactly moral atheism, but it comes close in that morality is not the reason why God is relevant (Kant 2015). Job does not need moral guidance, he wants an explanation of his misfortune. God's silence then emphasizes this portrayal as him being morally self-sufficient. Job does not represent moral atheism. Nonetheless he does come close in that he has a sense of morality which does not require to question himself on the basis of what happened to him. Instead he asks why all of the narrative unjustly happens. This means that for Job morality itself is not related to God. Job does not come close to metaphysical atheism, but his position is theoretically is closer to moral atheism than it is to a natural theology. In relation to virtual faith, the ideas about morality in the text can be easily applied outside of the text. If Job is seen as role model this may give the reader the idea that there is indeed no relation between morality and God, pushing them a step closer to the idea that God is irrelevant.

### **The Speech**

Ironically, in this light, a moral atheist reading is promoted by the whirlwind speech at the end of the text (38:1-41:34), even if God gives it. In this speech of God, he explains that he has nothing to prove and that he has created the world. The Book of Job demonstrates that even if God exists, he does not care about human morals. God's whirlwind dialogue is a teacher discourse in which God teaches the reader that he does not concern himself with morality by means of ellipsis. God does not even mention morality in his list of things he created, implying that it may not even be real. The text does very little to anchor God to reality outside of his speech. The speech anchors God by implicating him in the mortal realm, as its creator. God however does not explain how this is relevant to Job nor does he give something to ascertain this creative relation in the real-world. The speech may as well not be addressed to Job. God does not give a sign by which our world is recognizable as his creation concretely. An example could be a prophecy. Besides this the text does not provide any reason for the reader to extend their virtual figure of God to the real world.

Another textual element that affords a moral atheist reading of Job is the discourse between Job and his friends. The friends of Job and Elihu all present natural theologies, in which God is directly morally related to the world (4, 8, 11, 15, 18, 20, 22, 25, 32-37). These friends are however discredited in the narrative, as they are explicitly discredited by God in the ending. These are another type of teacher discourse, in which the characters teach what

is wrong. In a monologic reading of Job, all of the friends' ideas are then discredited. If this is taken seriously, it affords moral atheism, or the disregarding of God wholesale. Within these dialogues both atheism in the form of godlessness (15:34-36), and a position in which God is passive (19:1-25), are referenced. Interestingly these positions are not just alluded to, but are explicitly mentioned. Sternberg (1985, 127–28) explains that allusion is used for polemics in the Bible. An example are the sea monsters in Genesis 1:21. In this chapter God creates sea monsters. These sea monsters are, Sternberg (1985, 127–28) argues, the same as those in other eastern mythologies. The implication is then that God created the monsters other and by implication lesser gods, struggled against. Nonetheless the references seen in Job are different from this. The position of godlessness is actually mentioned, and this is visible even for readers who are not godless themselves. Allusion is used because it does not mean relating your own ideas to that of others. By mentioning the godless the text actually places them in the ideological framework of the text. This contrasts with Genesis, which does not give place to the eastern gods in the text by ignoring them, but not the monsters they fought against. The textual allusion in Genesis is only visible to a reader familiar with the sea monsters. The allusion in Genesis then maintains the illusion of self-sufficiency, where as the Book of Job acknowledges other positions. The fact that godlessness, and the moral inefficacy of god are mentioned alone then relates biblical ideology to these positions. This opens up possible intellectual engagement with these positions. All combined I have encountered the following mechanisms promoting moral atheism in the following places:

***Mechanism***

***Textual element/(Place in text)***

<i>Demonstration</i>	God's silence/(2:14-37:24), Gods ellipsis of morality/(38:1-41:34), restoration of Job/(42:10-17)
<i>Polyphony</i>	Friends of Job and Elihu/(4, 8, 11, 15, 18, 20, 22, 25, 32-37), God/(38:1-41:34),
<i>Un-hermetic narrative dissonance</i>	Framework-body/(1:1-2:13; 42:7-17)

<i>Teacher discourse</i>	Whirlwind speech/(38:1-41:34), Friends of Job and Elihu/(4, 8, 11, 15, 18, 20, 22, 25, 32-37) Job/(19:1-25)
<i>Linguistic separation</i>	Framework-body/(1:1-2:13; 42:7-17)
<i>Reference</i>	Godlessness as a position/(15:34-36), Moral inefficacy of God/(9:1-35, 16:1-22, 19:1-35, 24, 27, 29:1-20)
<i>Justification</i>	Framework/(1:1-2:13; 42:7-17)

What would a moral atheist mode of interpretation look like? In a moral atheist interpretation the emphasis lies on the discredit of Jobs friends, the separation of the body and the framework of the text and the moral autonomy of Job. God’s role is reduced to a disaster of sorts, and his speech at the end only emphasizes his distance from morality. After all, he created it. The text itself is then not necessarily interpreted as a morally atheist text, but rather a text that uses God as a character to describe why you should not really care about him even if he were real. In relation to virtual faith, this interpretive mode is not one that anchors virtual faith. Rather the virtual, fictional, nature of the characters is emphasized and the intellectual debate is taken to be applicable as a virtual figure in the real world. In the next section I will discuss metaphysical atheism, which is much less emphatically present.

### 4.3. Metaphysical atheism in the Book of Job

Metaphysical atheism is atheism on metaphysical grounds, the idea that God does not exist or only does so as a fiction. Two of the traits of this type of atheism, as I have previously identified, are the emphasis of truth as in itself valuable, and the prioritization of the natural over the supernatural. Truth is thematically important in the narrative, Job refuses to lie when confronted with his friends. Moreover God punishes the friends of Job for not speaking “what is just” about him (42:7). The text itself, however, does not address why this is important. Given that both Job and God, in a traditional interpretation, are in the right, this stands out, why be aporetic about why truth or speaking justly is important? If truth is taken to be morally important, more so than even the suffering of Job, this may well be a prefiguration of truth as valuable in itself regardless of consequence. Some of the textual

elements that conveyed a separation of morality from God also help to create a separation between the divine and the mortal. Such a separation, between natural and supernatural is needed before there can be a subsumption of the supernatural in the natural. I can not assume the supernatural is really sub- or regularly natural if I do not divide the two. It is no surprise then that the same textual traits that promoted a separation between framework and body, and God from the mortal promote atheism. Metaphysical atheism however is not promoted by all things that separate God and morality. Where moral irrelevance may promote a moral atheist view, moral irrelevance can still mean metaphysical existence and relevance. There are some things that fundamentally impair the metaphysical atheist readings of Job, like the fact that God's acts are the prime mover of the story. This makes it difficult to view him as irrelevant non-existent or sub-natural. The story needs to be taken as a fiction in order to transmit metaphysically atheist reading. There are elements of the text that promote this.

### **Fictionality**

One might be confused at this point, after all would fictionality not be part of apostate affordance rather than ideological affordance? The affinity here seems to lie in the fact that disregarding some parts of the text is beneficial to an atheist reading. Apostate affordance can lead to partial disregard of a text as well as its entirety. Nonetheless fictional texts do not promote less virtual faith than historical texts. In apostate affordance virtual faith is diminished or broken. Fictionality does not imply a broken virtual faith, rather a virtual faith that is more or less explicitly bound to the in-story world. In this case I find myself in the paradoxical situation in which the text promoting readings of itself as virtual, that is as a story or narrative contained in a story-world, is beneficial. In other words the question becomes whether this text affords a metaphorical or fictional reading. In the case of the book of Job, one can take God to be the force of nature or bad luck for example. Genette (1990, 764) argues that there are in fact textual elements that denote fictionality. He shows this using a separation of three categories, the author (A), the narrator (N) and the character (C). When the author and the narrator are the same, the text is non-fiction, or factual (A=N). When the author is not a (A≠N), it denotes fiction argues Genette. The relation of characterhood to the narrator then denotes the role of the narrator in the story as an actor (Homodiegetic) or outside of the story (Heterodiegetic). Textual traits that promote a fictional reading (A≠N) are those that make it impossible to believe that the author is the narrator. One such textual trait is omniscience. This is textually apparent because the narrator of fiction knows things that the author could not know. For example private thoughts of

multiple characters. In fantasy fiction the narrator has access to non-existent worlds. The narrator of Job is omniscient, as they know both what happens in the divine realm, and the dialogues between Job and his friends. In biblical tradition however (A≠N) does not denote fiction but inspiration. Sternberg (1985, 63) found three features with which an inspired author is identified within the Jewish tradition.

*1. Privileged access*

*2. Writing competence*

*3. Objective presentation*

The first refers to access of internal thought and emotion of characters in a story. The second refers to certainty about the story, for example a doubting character in the story represents a unknowingness of the author. Objective presentation means not letting resentment or emotion influence how things are represented by the narrator, this can however be worked around by having characters express this. Sternberg (1985, 33) also notes that an authors perceived authority is related to their anonymity in Judaism: not being known evades personal critique. Sternberg notes that this is no longer the case more generally in modernity. I agree, Genette's (1990, 764) definition of fiction as the separation of author from narrator is textually expressed precisely by the criteria that would have expressed inspiration originally. Writing competence according to classical standards is unrealistic to a modern audience, they enforce an image of an inhuman narrator, who must nonetheless be human. For Christians and Jews inspiration denotes supernaturality, and as such these text should not be human.

In the Book of Job a similar mechanism appears on the level of characters. God speaks in ostensibly clear objective language without much emotion, whereas Job and his friends speak with more personal language. Mieke Bal (1997, 47) draws a line between personal and impersonal language. Personal language is when the narrator retells the story from a first or second person perspective, when the language spoken in the text is directly represented. Impersonal is then when the narrator tells of the things the actor says. Using Bal's criteria both God's speech and Job's laments are personal language, and occur on the same level of narration. Regardless Jobs language is emotional, this is signified with phrasing like "oh" or him asking for pity (19:21). This makes Job seem human, but God, superhuman or unrealistic. Another such linguistic differences is the introduction when messengers inform Job of his misfortune (1:13-19). All use the exact same phrasing, in which the event is described and the messenger ends it with saying: "I alone have escaped to tell you". The stylistic pattern of repetition can alienate the reader. After all, how come



three people speak exactly the same, albeit personal, language. This originally is a poetic device used in storytelling to make a text more memorable. However, when different characters speak the same words this poses an epistemological issue combined with the fact that their speech is personal: how can different people come to say different things in the exact same phrasing (1:13-19). Usually repetition is a sort of muscle-memory exercise with the goal of having both the storyteller as listener better remember the text, Dobbs-Alsopp (2015, 105) argues. With the prevalence of silent reading, this mechanism can cause distrust in its stead. After all the wording is presented in quotation marks, yet it is not really quoted. The narrator therefore becomes someone prone to misrepresent the content of the story. This may break virtual faith, but it can also inspire fictional reading, where the details are less emphatically read. This has to do with the level of narration (Bal 1997, 52–54). Meaning that if this misrepresentation is taken to be embedded, it is part of the narrative, the narrative can be trusted while the narrator no longer can be. If the narrator is taken to be eponymous with veracity of the narrative then it breaks virtual faith.

Most of the other mechanisms that promoted a moral reading, like polyphony and reference are more limited in metaphysical atheism, as only the section in which the godless are mentioned insinuates some kind of metaphysical atheism. Gods speech, ignoring human morals, does not insinuate that he does not exist. In this it only enforces a metaphysical atheism when read metaphorically, like when God is taken to represent something different, nature for example. The separation of the body and framework here is relevant ideologically because it allows for a subsumption of the body over the framework, linguistically. This is promoted through the differentiation between dialogue and God's language, which for is more impersonal than that of Job. Furthermore un-hermetic narrative dissonance also plays little role, because the separation it emphasizes is about the moral relevance and not the existential relevance of God. The contradiction is after all not if Job suffers but why. Only God's silence in the body combined with linguistic separation of the body and framework here work to emphasize the intellectual nature of the text and focus on the dialogue, allowing for metaphysical doubt. Focalization on Job and his friends is also needed for a metaphysical atheist reading, God's teacher discourse now diminishes metaphysical atheist affordance. If one prioritizes the body over the framework this is oddly analogous to the subsumption of the supernatural in the supernatural, this is opposed by God's appearance at the end. There is also emphasis on truth, but it is unclear what the claim specifically is. Finally Feldt (2011, 261–62) argues, that coincidence leaves the reader in doubt in some biblical texts. One can imagine all of the situations in the Book of Job being merely happenstance, however it is

clear that the coincidence of all events leading to Job’s suffering are intended. The narrative would not make sense without it. A man with bad luck, without God’s meddling is of less theological value. This leaves us with the following mechanisms:

<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Textual element/(Place in text)</i>
<i>Demonstration</i>	God’s silence/(2:14-37:24)
<i>Polyphony</i>	Friends of Job and Elihu/(4, 8, 11, 15, 18, 20, 22, 25, 32-37)
<i>Teacher discourse</i>	Job’s speeches/(2, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 16, 19, 21, 24, 27, 29, 30, 31)
<i>Linguistic separation</i>	Framework-body/(1:1-2:13;42:7-17), Job-God/(2, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 16, 19, 21, 24, 27, 29, 30, 31, 38:1-41:34)
<i>Reference</i>	Godlessness as a position/(15:34-36)
<i>All knowing-narrator</i>	The entire text, repetition (1:13-19)

A metaphysically atheist reading would thus be one that takes advantage of the textual mechanisms that enforce the fictionality of the narrator and the implausibility of the way specific characters act, to mean that the text is not literal or historical. The virtual faith would be intact, nothing about the narrative is doubted, but just the way in which elements of the narrative are represented by the narrator.

#### **4.4. Misotheism**

Misotheism is the hatred of God. It is no coincidence that Professor of English Bernard Schweizer (2010, 28–30) in his book on the historical development of misotheism introduces the concept using the Book of Job. It has been noted by Newsom (2015, 141–42) that even though many of the protagonists of the Bible are put to the test, Job’s suffering is on a higher level. Schweizer (2010, 28–30) identifies two main misotheist elements to the narrative of Job. First, Job’s wife who represents the misotheist position by asking Job: “do

you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die” (2:9). This is meant to convey that God is not worth Job’s dedication in the eyes of his wife. Schweizer (2010, 30) even calls Job’s wife the original misotheist. The other element he identifies are the willingness of God to put Job to the test not once, but twice. This is demonstrative of God’s evil. Schweizer (2010, 29) argues that the whirlwind speech serves to diminish misotheism by having Job accept that God is not accountable (38:1-41:34). This may be the case but Job’s restoration (42:10-17) contradicts this, by having God repair something he would not have to if he were not accountable. This is a monologic way of reading the text. In it Job is taken to be authoritative, which still does not justify his suffering. Job’s lamentations then amplify the fact that what God did is evil, justifying God’s evil as something that is real.

### **Misotheism in Context**

Another argument Schweizer (2010, 30) makes is that misotheism is related to monotheism. He says that in polytheistic and henotheist religions (in which one god is acknowledged in a pantheon of divinities), arguments between gods are natural, part of the religion. Misotheism then only works is if it subverts a religion dependent on worship of one God. To say that in conclusion all misotheist textual elements are by definition atheist would be too easy; misotheists, Schweizer (2010, 30; 54; 127–48) argues, are often pushed to polytheistic revivals of pagan Gods or non-trinitarian outlooks of Christianity. Modern misotheists, Schweizer (2010, 149–72) notes, often also take the Holocaust as a historical example of Gods despicability, giving misotheism an ideologically laden historically real event. Larrimore (2014, 156) argues that the transition from misotheism to atheism lies in the possibility of choice for atheism, the issue of how God and evil co-exist becomes the issue of whether God or evil exists. Since evil is for many empirically there, people choose the latter. This means there are contextual reasons that work both for and against misotheism. On the one hand modern tragedies enforce a view in which God is evil (Schweizer 2010). On the other hand increasing access to different ideological options and alternatives throughout modernity pose a threat to misotheism turning it into atheism or different outlooks.

Textually there is a certain affinity between previously found atheist affordance and misotheism. Anything that makes God seem aloof, or separate from mortal life can be taken as a sign of how inhumane and despicable he is. God’s silence, how he does not address morality, all support misotheism. The relatively simple language of the framework

emphasizes the aloofness of the divine realm. Polyphony also promotes misotheism, by focusing the story on how bad Job feels (e.g., 17:1-16), and increasing the emphasis on Job's wife regardless of her small role. The wrong teacher discourse of the friends in which they explain false conceptions of morality, also help misotheism by showing that most people have a wrong idea about God. This teacher discourse then becomes a demonstration. Job becomes a cautionary tale. On the other hand metaphorical readings of the text, like in metaphysical atheism, which keep virtual faith contained within the story world, hurt misotheist affordance. If the depiction of God is not deemed realistic in the book of Job it gives no reason to hate God outside of the narrative. Concretely the things that separate framework from body on the level of the narrative contribute to misotheist affordance because they make God seem aloof. The elements that cast doubt on the framework do not, because they make God seem unrealistic. The un-hermetic narrative dissonance between body and framework emphasizes Job's innocence and serve to discredit God's actions, by showing what God does, followed by the doubt of the friend:

<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Textual element/(Place in text)</i>
<i>Demonstration</i>	God's silence/(2:14-37:24), Gods ellipsis of morality/(38:1-41:34), restoration of Job/(42:10-17), Friends of Job and Elihu/(4, 8, 11, 15, 18, 20, 22, 25, 32-37), God's wager/(1:8-12, 2:1-5), Job's suffering/(1:13-21, 2-8)
<i>Polyphony</i>	Friends of Job and Elihu/(4, 8, 11, 15, 18, 20, 22, 25, 32-37), God/(38:1-41:34),
<i>Un-hermetic narrative dissonance</i>	Framework-body/(1:1-2:13; 42:7-17)
<i>Teacher discourse</i>	Whirlwind speech/(38:1-41:34) Job/(19:1-25)
<i>Linguistic separation</i>	Framework-body/(1:1-2:13; 42:7-17)

<i>Reference</i>	Moral inefficacy of God/(19:1-25), Questioning God's reason or morality/(9:1-35, 16:1-22,19:1-21, 24, 27, 29:1-20)
<i>Justification</i>	Framework/(1:1-2:13;42:7-17), Job's lamentations/(3:2-26, 6:8-30, 7:1-10, 10:1-22, 12:13-22, 17:1-16, 19-1-21, 23 , 24, 26 ,27, 28, 29, 30, 31)

Misotheist affordance, as can be seen is then the most emphatic sub-dominant ideology in the text. Misotheist interpretations take both the framework and the body of the equally text seriously, and argues that God is evil because of the framework of the story.

#### **4.5. Apostate Affordance**

Apostate affordances are those elements of a text that break the virtual faith of a narrative. Like a cat's pawprint on a hyperrealist painting, it reminds the reader that they are looking at a painting instead of the content of a painting. To the onlooker, a smudge or pawprint may serve as an example of the incompetence of the creator, or remind the viewer of the painting's existence as a painting rather than what it depicted. Essentially the painting becomes embedded in the real world, rather than displaying its own internal world. Narrative dissonance is what I like to call the literary equivalent of such a pawprint. I have already introduced the hermetic and un-hermetic variants of narrative dissonance. It is important to denote a third variant. A narrative can become unrealistic not only by its own internal logic, but also by external logic, held by the standards of realism of the real world. These two can overlap, but only one of them is textual. An example is saying the Gospel of Mark breaks virtual faith because it has demons, and resurrections. This is applying real-world logic to the story-world. Resurrections though miraculous in the story-world of the Gospel of Mark, are real in the story-world. Hermetic narrative dissonance is then the line where on the one hand the narrative is held to its own standards, but does not address incoherence. One such example is the contradiction in the restoration of Job (42:10-17). In the narrative, restoration makes no sense as Job's suffering itself is not moral, and there is nothing to restore, because God is not accountable. This dissonance is not addressed, putting the responsibility of believing the text, not in the text but in the reader. Feldt (2011) argues that this can help promote a vision of the fantastic. In our framework the fantastic is merely the complete

confusion of virtual faith with perceptual faith. This requires repeated engagements with God as a concept. A virtual figure, and by extension virtual faith, can only become perceptual faith through a complicated process of perceptual familiarization or interaction (Dreyfus and Todes 1962; Merleau-Ponty 2012, 312–61). Feldt (2011, 259–61) theorizes that repeated hyperbole can prepare a reader for accepting even *seemingly* unaddressed contradiction, or un-hermetic narrative dissonance. This still works in our framework, so long as the *hyperbole* is somehow addressed in the narrative. Job does not really prepare the reader for contradiction regarding his restoration. Why would I believe that Job is restored if the entire text argues and shows that God does not concern himself with mortal affairs? This puts doubt either on part or the text as a whole. Partial disregard of a text can supplement moral or metaphysical atheist affordance, because it de-emphasizes the existence of the divine in the text. Hermetic narrative dissonance is the main way in which apostate affordance is promoted. The difference between framework and body can cause a sense of authorial distrust. Is the text edited, am I seeing the text as intended? Similarly the narrator's all-knowingness denotes fictionality (Genette 1990, 764). The claim that the story happened in the introduction becomes another dissonance, related to the fictionality of the narrator. Moreover the idea that the text is misrepresented by the narrator can be caused by the same repetition of personal speech as in metaphysical atheism. Newsom (2009, 200–205) identifies a similar issue with Elihu, whose language differs from the rest. Elihu quotes the others verbatim and is neglected in the rest of the narrative. These things combined not only place doubt on him from a source critical perspective, but as misplaced within the narrative, giving a general sense of artificiality to his segment of the text.

A final mechanism is reader exclusion, parallel to reader inscription, which happens early in the text. The text goes as follows: “But he said to her, ‘you speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of god but not he bad?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips”(2:10). Needless to explain this rejects female readers, Job not only calls his wife foolish, but the narrator justifies Job in doing so. The narrator justifies men that discredit women on the basis of rationality, enforcing the age-old prejudice that women are irrational.

Apostate affordance is related to metaphysical atheist affordance because metaphysical atheism is promoted by partial or metaphorical readings. However it occurs to me that an complete apostate reading of the Book of Job promotes religious affordance: if the Book of Job is seen as non-sense, there is no need to deal with the problems it causes for God. Apostate affordance is a type of affordance that can help promote any type of reading

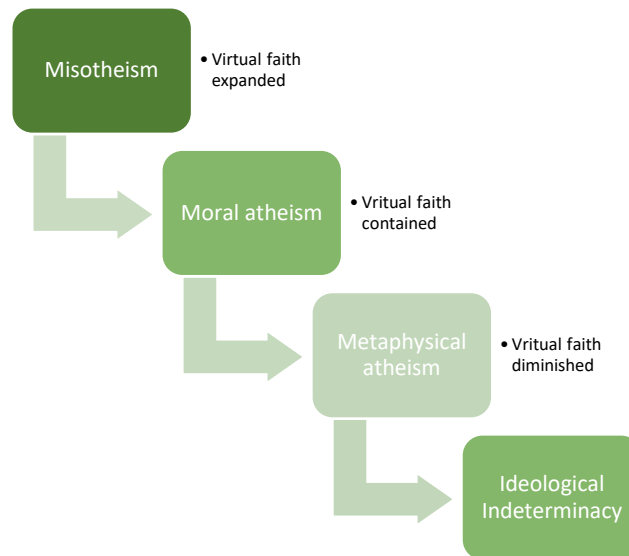
caused by a disregard of the text. Curiously the fact that disregarding the Book of Job may actually help the Bible, illustrates just how atheist or misotheist the Book of Job really is. These are the textual mechanisms promoting apostate affordance:

<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Textual element/(Place in text)</i>
<i>Hermetic narrative dissonance</i>	Restoration/(42:10-17), Introduction/(1:1-2), Elihu/(32-37)
<i>Linguistic separation</i>	Framework-body/(1:1-2:13; 42:7-17)
<i>All knowing-narrator</i>	The entire text, Repetition/(1:13-19)
<i>Reader exclusion</i>	Job and narrator/(2:10)

An apostate reading of this text is one in which parts of the texts are seen as false or wrong, or the entirety of the text is seen as non-sensical. The mechanisms that promote apostate affordance are those that break virtual faith by showing the text as a story rather than a “real” event or cast doubt on the text as a plausible narrative.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion the affordances I have analyzed and their respective mechanisms serve to demonstrate that the Book of Job is a foot of doubt in the biblical doorway to piety. The Book of Job’s historical and literary significance in modernity show how it continues to resonate with misotheists, atheists and religious people alike. In my analysis I have noticed a number of affinities between different types of atheism, and the textual mechanisms that promote them within the Book of Job. Moral atheism and misotheism serve to supplement each other, even if moral atheism requires a less strict reading of the text. Metaphysical atheism is facilitated by a strongly delineated virtual faith in segments of the text, and apostate affordance can supplement this. There is a correlation between more explicit atheisms and selective readings of the text. Virtual faith is a useful conceptual framework when looking for atheist affordance. Davidsen’s religious affordance theory and his mechanisms served my analysis well, allowing me to go beyond a theory in which readers only read texts conventionally. Virtual faith denotes the transition between different atheist or atheist adjacent modes of interpretation. I have illustrated this below:



A completely apostate mode of reading disregards the text entirely and as such does not cause any specific kind of ideological transfer. Interestingly, partially apostate modes of reading do not diminish ideological transfer but instead emphasize it. How the text's ideological content is framed within the text is a big part of how it is interpreted. What narratology offers is a way for an understanding texts not just as singular arguments promoting a singular view, but also of sub-dominant or polemic readings and their influence.

In my analysis I tried to look at the textual elements alone. This means I have intentionally underemphasized historical context in my reading. Nonetheless it is historical context that changes the practical meaning of words, and as such no text is complete even without historical context. I agree with Bakhtin that humans are porous (Green 2000, 29-30). For me this means that there is no factual delineation between text and interpretation. Any text can only exist as narrative when interpreted, otherwise it is merely ink on paper. Text delineates the conditions of possibility of genuine and intuitive interpretation. Text serves as the horizon of interpretation, the invisible background within which interpretation is guided, but not forced, to central points of the narrative. I try to walk a middle ground between complete deconstructivism claiming that writing is completely contextual, and the hardline logocentrism in which text is universal and eternal. Interpretations cannot change too much without losing its identity as part of the text, or too little without becoming irrelevant and forgotten.

In the case of the Book of Job, it is historical condition that has elevated it to the important text it is today, as well as opened up the possibility of controversial interpretation. Both social and technological innovation have contributed to this. The transition from scroll



to codex enabled new reading styles and more widespread publication (Stroumsa 2016, 3–4). The printing press served to broaden the audience of the bible even further, and of competitors (Anderson 2016, 18–19). It is the availability of ideological alternatives that enables apostasy in the first place. In part due to the growth of atheism as a comprehensive ideological system, and the influx of ideas in the enlightenment era and colonialism (Graeber 2021, 1–5). Cultural developments make switching between or leaving religion increasingly easy and accepted. I find it intuitive to think that the Book of Job has at least sparked some doubt during its centuries of service as “odd one out”. the Book of Job has had its due in influence regardless of how directly it was related to atheism. The Book of Job is for many an argument against God, be it his existence or how worship worthy he is.

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