



# **The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor (New Slant: Religion, Politics, Ontology)**

*Antonio Negri*

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In *The Labor of Job*, the renowned Marxist political philosopher Antonio Negri develops an unorthodox interpretation of the Old Testament book of Job, a canonical text of Judeo-Christian thought. In the biblical narrative, the pious Job is made to suffer for no apparent reason. The story revolves around his quest to understand why he must bear, and why God would allow, such misery. Conventional readings explain the tale as an affirmation of divine transcendence. When God finally speaks to Job, it is to assert his sovereignty and establish that it is not Job's place to question what God allows. In Negri's materialist reading, Job does not recognize God's transcendence. He denies it, and in so doing becomes a co-creator of himself and the world.

*The Labor of Job* was first published in Italy in 1990. Negri began writing it in the early 1980s, while he was a political prisoner in Italy, and it was the first book he completed during his exile in France (1983–97). As he writes in the preface, understanding suffering was for him in the early 1980s “an essential element of resistance. . . . It was the problem of liberation, in prison and in exile, from within the absoluteness of Power.” Negri presents a Marxist interpretation of Job's story. He describes it as a parable of human labor, one that illustrates the impossibility of systems of measure, whether of divine justice (in Job's case) or the value of labor (in the case of late-twentieth-century Marxism). In the foreword, Michael Hardt elaborates on this interpretation. In his commentary, Roland Boer considers Negri's reading of the book of Job in relation to the Bible and biblical exegesis. *The Labor of Job* provides an intriguing and accessible entry into the thought of one of today's most important political philosophers.

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