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CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CHAOS AND ORDER:  
MAKING THE WORLD IN THE BOOK OF JOB

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## ABSTRACT

Setting their sights on the splash thrown up by Leviathan in chapters 3 and 41, many interpreters have argued that the conflict between chaos and order, as embodied in combat mythology, is a theme in the Book of Job. Although I agree that issues related to chaos and order are central to the book, the assumption that any discussion of chaos and order must be related to combat mythology does not stand up to scrutiny. Order and chaos, I maintain, are broader terms. I define them as “how the world ought to be,” and “how the world ought not to be,” respectively. Using these broader, and, I think, more accurate definitions, the Book of Job can be read as a long discussion about chaos and order, without requiring that we identify characters as forces embodying chaos or order who fight each other for control of the world, an interpretation which is an over-simplification of what is going on in the book.

As “how the world ought/ought not to be,” order and chaos are container terms, capable of being filled in a number of different ways. That is to say, we cannot look at Leviathan (or Tiamat) and extrapolate characteristics of chaos that are applicable across the board. Rather, what constitutes chaos or order will depend on the particular circumstances and point of view of the person doing the labeling. In this thesis, I identify three pairs of concepts around which chaos and order are commonly conceived: singularity/multiplicity, stasis/change, and inside/outside. Taking these pairs one at a time, I examine how the various characters in the Book of Job describe order and chaos. What emerges is not a dictum as to what constitutes order or chaos, but a number of possible visions of how the world ought and ought not to be, none of which is definitive.

At the end of the “conversation about chaos and order” that is the Book of Job, both God and Job make strong bids for their right to “make the world,” by deciding how it ought and ought not to be. In his speeches from the whirlwind, God identifies himself as the world’s creator, presenting an ordered world that is vastly different from what Job presumes order to be. Regardless of how Job’s response to God in 42:6 is understood—and it is interpreted in a great number of ways—in the epilogue Job can be seen to make his own bid for creator status, as he proceeds to inhabit a world that bears no similarity to the world God has just described. Job’s epilogue-world denies the ultimate reality of God’s whirlwind-world, but God’s whirlwind-world casts doubt upon the reality of Job’s epilogue-world. In this way, the book ends ambiguously; it curves back on itself, and the discussion about the nature of chaos and order continues, both within the book and beyond.

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PREFACE:  
SOME METAPHORS TOWARD A METHODOLOGY

*“Verbs Slowed to a Standstill”*

“It’s not so much A Sunday Afternoon/ on the Island of La Grande Jatte as the point/ of order according to Seurat—/ that bits of light and color, oil paints/ aligned in dots become the moment caught,/ verbs stilled to a standstill, the life examined./ We step back wide-eyed for a better look” (Lynch, 1-7). So writes Thomas Lynch about Georges Seurat’s pointillist painting in his poem “Art History, Chicago.” In this preface I want to think about the way I work with biblical texts, and, in particular, with the Book of Job. What Lynch describes in the lines quoted above might serve as a metaphor for what I do. I want to say that there is something of a pointillist aesthetic to the way I approach the Joban text, or, at least, pointillism as mediated by Lynch, without whose mediation it would not occur to me to compare my writing with Seurat’s painting. It is Lynch’s claim that Seurat’s technique causes verbs to be slowed to a standstill, allowing life to be examined in a way that it could not if its regular speed were maintained that prompts me to suggest a connection between what I am doing and Seurat’s work. In my writing I attempt to slow the text and ideas about it down so that they can be more carefully examined. What is really happening as the story passes by? Are there things that can be seen in slow-motion that would not otherwise be noticed? Can we learn something new by thinking about the individual, component parts of the whole that we would never learn by looking at the whole on its own? I am not, however, talking about a reading that relies on an examination of technical details to the exclusion of the whole. It is the whole that interests me, but I want to know how that whole has been put together and whether, if dismantled, it might be put together in a different way.

*Fiction and the Book of Job*

This dismantling and rebuilding is a never-ending process, at least where the Book of Job is concerned. Peggy Day observes, “The book of Job seeks to inspire thought, to endorse complexity, ambiguity, and paradox...and because of this very dialogue between the work itself and its audience it is in the final analysis multivalent” (Day 1988, 70). Whoever I may be, I approach the book from my particular situation, with my peculiar brain and the spirals along which my thoughts move, and the book, in its ambiguity and complexity, opens itself up to my particular peculiarities. What a pair we make: it my

fantasy text and I its dream reader. Can our interaction be anything other than imaginary, and, because imaginary, illicit?

Whenever I stop taking apart what I have put together, I have, in a sense, decided to create a fiction. In this thesis, I do make claims about what the Book of Job means. I haven't finished thinking about Job, however, and, in the future, I will no doubt take apart at least some of what I have claimed here. In this thesis, then, I do not profess to offer "unequivocal answers" (Clines 1990, 106) to the meaning of the Book of Job, but, rather, to suggest possibilities. It is possible to interpret the book the way I have here, but this interpretation is also something of a fiction. It hangs in the air, seemingly substantial, but it is really a mirage, the way all possibility—because it is only what might be and not necessarily what is—is a mirage. But while it shimmers in the air, there is something worthwhile about it. It deserves its moment.

### *"Playing Dostoevsky"*

Carol Newsom, in her article "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," recommends an enterprise which she terms "'playing Dostoevsky to the Bible'" (Newsom 1996, 305), by which she means bringing the various worldviews contained within the Bible into contact to allow them to quarrel and dialogue with each other. Newsom has already played a version of this game in her book *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, in which she takes seriously the positions represented by each of the characters and examines how they interact. In this thesis, I play another version of the game. In a way, my version is more structured. I listen in on the conversation around a particular topic—that of order and chaos, or, as I will define them in my introductory chapter, "how the world ought to be" and "how the world ought not to be"—viewing the topic from several different angles. I impose a kind of grid, into which the conversation can be fit and then try viewing the grid through different lenses. For this reason, the thesis circles around on several of the same passages, approaching them from different angles which yield differing interpretations.

To play Dostoevsky is not, however, only to allow different points of view to converse with each other. Rather, it is to write fiction. Dostoevsky was a novelist, after all—a creator of fictions. Newsom writes, "as the model...suggests, it would be a project which would self-consciously go beyond what the texts explicitly say to draw out the implications of their ideas as they can be revealed in dialogue with other perspectives" (*Ibid.*). To go beyond what the text actually says is to write a kind of fiction, to stretch out the mirage of possibility. In her own book, Newsom does not take her Bakhtinian analysis

of Job to this level. She is more accountable to the text, which is, of course, an entirely admirable approach. I do not mean to suggest that her book is defective. I only mean to say that it does not go where even she has suggested “playing Dostoevsky” might take an interpreter, a direction in which this thesis, by contrast, does go.

Reading the Book of Job, I take ideas apart to generate new possibilities, which are, by nature, fictional. This is a work of imagination. Imagination, compared with objective truth, does have an illicit tinge. I suspect, however, that it is where most of us live. Perhaps we ought to accustom ourselves to the squalor.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: DEFINING CHAOS AND ORDER

#### *Job as Chaos to God's Order*

The Book of Job has a history of being read as a locus of the interaction between chaos and order in the Bible. This is primarily because of the book's mention of Leviathan, generally understood to be a chaos monster. It is Job who first names the monster when, in his first speech of the poetic section, he calls for the eradication of the day of his birth, proclaiming, "Let those curse it who curse the Sea, those who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan" (3:8).<sup>1</sup> Then, God devotes the entire second chapter of his second speech to describing the power and glory of the water-dwelling beast which "has no equal" on earth (41:33a). In this way, the central poetic section of the book begins and ends with the splashing of Leviathan, leading some scholars to the certainty that chaos swims through its pages and provides a key to understanding its meaning.

Michael Fishbane sees in Job's call for the rousing of Leviathan a clear indication that Job himself is an agent of chaos. One who calls for the chaos monster to subsume creation must himself become a chaos monster—this is the logic of Fishbane's argument. He writes, "Job, in the process of cursing the day of his birth (v. 1), binds spell to spell in his articulation of an...unrestrained death wish for himself and the entire creation" (Fishbane 1971, 153). It may be Leviathan who has the real chaotic power, but Job, casting a spell with his speech, seeks to unleash that power from the bonds set for it by God and harness it for his own destructive purposes.

Leo Perdue, too, identifies Job as a chaos monster, claiming that in chapter 3, "Job has attempted to deconstruct the metaphor of creation by word with his own linguistic assault, thereby returning the world to the darkness of night" (Perdue 1991, 204). God's naming of Leviathan in chapter 41 serves as a combative response to the chaotic behavior and speech in which Job has engaged throughout the book. God speaks about Leviathan in order to reassert his control over Job, the most recent chaos monster who has challenged his authority. Perdue writes, "Those who challenge Yahweh's rule include Behemoth, Leviathan, the wicked, and now Job....Yahweh has come to engage chaos in battle, reassert divine sovereignty, and issue judgment leading to the ordering of the world" (*Ibid.*, 202).

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<sup>1</sup> All Bible translations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

Similarly, for Norman Habel, God chooses to speak about Leviathan precisely because Job's behavior has been characterized by a Leviathan-like chaos. Habel writes, "As in a mirror, Job is shown Leviathan stirring up chaos. Yahweh is hinting that Job has taken on heroic proportions and that like a chaos figure he has roused Yahweh to appear in a whirlwind and challenge him" (Habel 1985, 574). That is, although Job describes himself as allied with God, using his righteous power to "break the fangs of the unrighteous" (29:17a), God's description of Leviathan shows that Job is actually allied with chaos and must be subdued if order is to be upheld.

For these interpreters,<sup>2</sup> that the Book of Job has to do with issues of chaos and order is indicated by the naming of Leviathan. What the book says about chaos and order is that God has defeated chaos and holds it in check to maintain order, whatever the appearances to the contrary. Whoever accuses God of perpetuating chaos must himself be a force of chaos, for God is the unquestionable source of order.

### *Gunkel and the Comparative Method*

Why, though, should this interpretation arise from the mention of Leviathan? Why is Leviathan equated with chaos, a chaos in which Job participates and against which God fights? The Book of Job does not, after all, tell us that Leviathan equals chaos. Rather, this is an assumption which scholars bring to the text, a key which they use to unlock its meaning. To understand why Leviathan is viewed as chaos, we must turn to the comparative method and the work of Hermann Gunkel. In the comparative method, other ancient Near Eastern texts are used to elucidate the meaning of biblical passages by setting them in their larger cultural contexts, allowing scholars to glimpse the suppositions which may have been in the minds of the writers and which, therefore, form the background of the text even if they do not appear on its surface.

Chaos and order, as themes in the biblical text, were first brought to the attention of biblical scholarship through the work of Gunkel, who, in his 1895 book *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*, drew lines of comparison between certain biblical texts and the Babylonian epic *Enuma elish*, claiming that the Bible had been influenced by the Babylonian myth. Gunkel's comparative reading of Genesis 1 links *tehom*, the entity which is covered with darkness and over which a wind from God hovers at the time of

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<sup>2</sup> These three are not alone in viewing the Book of Job as a telling of the story of the *Chaoskampf*, with Job as a representative of chaos. I have simply chosen them as emblematic of this perspective. I might also include John Day who, notes that "The number of allusions to the *Chaoskampf* in the book of Job is most striking," and asks, "How are we to account for this fact?" He responds, as Fishbane, Perdue, and Habel do, "the imagery is employed because the conflict between the dragon and God provided an apt parallel to the book's theme of Job's conflict with God" (Day 1985, 49).

creation, with Tiamat, the monster which is defeated by Marduk as a prelude to the creation of the world in *Enuma elish*. Believing that *tehom* was a demythologized derivative of Tiamat, Gunkel applied the characteristics of Tiamat to *tehom*, even though *tehom* does not exhibit those characteristics outright, and concluded that Genesis 1 and *Enuma elish* are telling the same story, even though, on the face of it, the accounts are not the same.

In *Enuma elish* Tiamat is a pre-creation, watery being, existing before any part of the known world has been brought into being. She is the mother of the gods, who are conceived through her commingling with her consort, Apsu, also a watery being. The young gods born from Tiamat bother Apsu with their noise, and he hatches a plan to kill them. He tries to enlist Tiamat's help, but she refuses, citing the fact that it would be wrong to destroy what they have created. Before Apsu can carry out his plan, however, he himself is killed by one of his children, the god Ea. Later, the gods turn against Tiamat, and she girds herself to do battle against them. Seeing Tiamat arrayed for battle, the gods are afraid to face her. But Marduk, the youngest of the gods, offers to fight her on the other gods' behalf, on the condition that the gods will proclaim him supreme god after the battle. The gods agree to this proposal. Marduk fights Tiamat and wins, after which he splits her body in two, fixing one half above as heaven, and establishes his temple in Babylon. This, in brief, is the story told by *Enuma elish*. Tiamat figures as a central character throughout the epic, the climax of which is her battle with Marduk and the resultant creation of the ordered world, with Marduk's temple city at its center. For this reason, *Enuma elish* has been identified as a type of myth called the "combat myth" or *Chaoskampf*. In Genesis 1:1-2, by contrast, *tehom* does not figure as a character, but as something which exists in the background. It has no role to play in any drama which results in the creation of the world. It shares with Tiamat only the characteristic of being some sort of pre-creation water. That, and a potentially etymologically-related name are all the two seem to have in common.

In his study, though, Gunkel used these similarities to argue that what lay behind the vague description of *tehom* in Genesis 1 was the sharp description of Tiamat in *Enuma elish*. What exactly *tehom* is, though left ambiguous in the biblical text, could be made clear by referring the reader to Tiamat. Behind the single verse allotted to *tehom* in Genesis 1, lay a complete backstory. In *that* story, *tehom*, like Tiamat, was the matrix out of which the first acts of creation were born. More importantly, *tehom*, like Tiamat, was the chaos monster which had to be defeated so that the supreme god could create the

world.<sup>3</sup> Having made this link, Gunkel went on to argue that the theme of combat between chaos and order is present throughout the Bible, lying just below surface of the text. Having discovered Tiamat in *tehom*, Gunkel opened the way for scholars to discover references to the combat myth in other biblical passages. That is, wherever any aspect of the myth appeared in the Bible, Gunkel and others were encouraged, by the link between *tehom* and Tiamat, to posit the existence of the entire myth as a hidden backstory which could be used to resolve any ambiguities in the surface text. This is how, in the Book of Job, the water-dwelling Leviathan has come to be identified as the embodiment of chaos and God's mention of Leviathan has been understood to refer to his initial and ongoing order-creating battle with the monster.

### *Describing Chaos and Order Through the Application of the Comparative Method*

Through Gunkel's comparative work, the *tehom* of Genesis 1:2 was identified as chaos, and the struggle between chaos and order was identified as a regularly-appearing theme in the biblical narrative. It remained necessary, however, to define chaos and order at a more abstract level. To do this, scholars have studied chaos and order as they appear in *Enuma elish* and other ancient Near Eastern myths and have drawn conclusions based on the similarities between them. For those doing this work, it has been taken as a given that the term "chaos" should be applied to whatever existed prior to the creation, while the creation itself is properly designated "order." Susan Niditch, for example, beginning from the given that chaos is whatever existed in the pre-creation time, concludes that chaos is the state in which "all is vague and amorphous, darkness, nothing" (Niditch 1985, 15). She continues,

Like the *Enuma elish*, [Hesiod's] *Theogony*, and so many other cultures' creation myths, Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 tell of a progression from chaos to order, from stasis to movement and change, from timelessness to time, from formlessness to form, from a blob without man or other living things to a cosmos containing a world teeming with plant, animal, and human life. (*Ibid.*)

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<sup>3</sup> More recently, Bernard Batto has used other biblical texts to argue for the identification of *tehom* as a combative chaos monster. He writes, "Some scholars have tried to downplay the presence of mythic themes in Genesis 1:1-2:3, saying that any hint of a battle between the creator and primeval sea has been thoroughly suppressed in this biblical passage. It is true that the more blatant polytheistic notions have been suppressed, in keeping with the norms of Israelite religion and its emphasis upon the exclusive worship of Yahweh. But the image of creation as victory over an unruly primeval sea is still clearly visible. Confirmation may be found in Psalm 8, which is generally acknowledged to have close affinities with the P creation account....Behind Genesis 1:1-2:3 lies the same conception of the victorious divine warrior who retires to his palace to a leisurely kingship after subduing the foe" (Batto 1992, 79). Although Batto argues that "the image of creation as victory over an unruly primeval sea is still clearly visible" in Genesis 1, it seems to me that it is only visible by making comparisons, whether from within the biblical text or without. On its own, *tehom* is not combative; it is not even overtly contrary.

Niditch defines chaos as vague and amorphous, even to the degree of being nothingness. Chaos is timeless, formless, and simple in its lack of the multiplicity of life. Order, by contrast, has form and is characterized by multiplicity and the changeability which goes along with existence in time.

Norman Cohn, examining *Enuma elish* specifically, describes chaos and order in terms similar to those arrived at by Niditch. He writes,

*Enuma elish*...explains how primordial chaos was mastered, how the ordered world was created, how kingly rule was established to maintain cosmos. And all these achievements are portrayed as achievements of youthful energy and enterprise. It is the vital young storm-god who sets everything in motion....This would have been impossible without killing...Tiamat [who] has to be killed because she stands for inertia, the dead weight of the past: if...[she] had [her] way the gods would remain for ever inactive, nothing would ever change, and there would be no differentiation, indeed nothing would ever happen at all. (Cohn 1993, 48)

As in Niditch's assessment, chaos is here presented as undifferentiated, inactive and unchanging, while order differentiates things from each other and sets them in motion. The same picture is presented by Frank Moore Cross, who writes, "In the Babylonian creation epic...the conflict emerges from a clash between the primordial gods and the young gods....The struggle reflects the duality of reality: stagnation, sterility, death, chaos are ranged against life, violence, fertility in the cosmos" (Cross 1976, 332). Turning from *Enuma elish* to an examination of the primordial ocean of Egyptian mythology, the Nun, Cohn finds the same basic traits. He explains, "The Nun...was not an active force....The original chaos was an undifferentiated, unitary state, and the demiurge embodied the process of differentiation and definition. Whereas the original chaos was boundless, there were bounds to the ordered world" (Cohn 1993, 6). Mary K. Wakeman, surveying combat mythology across a variety of cultures comes to similar conclusions. She writes,

I would like to review the ways of defining the monster: (1) He is the devourer...that holds within himself water, the sun, children etc., preventing their differentiation....(2) He is the separator...that keeps apart death from life, dark from light, dry from wet, the father from the child, preventing intercourse and continuity....What makes 'the separator' such a villain is that he opposes change. He is as much a reactionary as 'the devourer' is a radical, denying all distinctions to affirm fundamental, underived being....To deny existence form is just as incapacitating as to deny form change. (Wakeman 1973, 39)

Across these examples, chaos is described as simple, unitary, formless, and changeless. By whatever means he creates, the creator god inaugurates an order which is characterized by multiplicity, differentiation, form, and change.

### *Identifying Chaos and Order*

Based on these scholarly presentations, chaos and order seem to be clearly defined terms, such that anyone equipped with these definitions should be able to identify chaos or order in any given situation. Chaos is the thing that is one, simple thing. It is the shapeless blob. It is the thing that doesn't move. It is what doesn't change. Order, by contrast, is the thing or space which contains many things. It has a definite shape, and the things which inhabit it also possess form. It is the thing which moves and changes. That is to say, if I spy something simple and static, I ought to be able to be sure that is chaos. Likewise, if I see something complex and changeable, I ought to be able to designate it order, with no second thoughts. In practice, however, chaos and order are not quite so easy to identify. Or, if they can be identified, it is generally not because of the characteristics detailed above. These characteristics may allow us to recognize chaos in the moments leading up to creation and to pinpoint order in the moment of creation, but they do not permit us to recognize them in any other situation, where, in fact, they may show quite different characteristics, even to the point of "trading places." The question to be asked, then, is whether the time surrounding creation is when chaos and order make their definitive appearances, allowing them to be characterized based on what they are like in those particular moments, or whether they might be better examined in some other situation.

To begin to answer this question, it is necessary to ask *why* creation has been selected as the definitive moment for the examination of chaos and order. It is also necessary to ask why it is taken as a given that the pre-creation state is chaotic and that the moment of creation represents an ordering move. It is very well to say that *tehom* is Tiamat and that both can be equated with chaos, but the question remains as to what makes them chaotic. Why is the battle between Tiamat and Marduk a battle between chaos and order specifically, and not just between two opposing sides, neither one more chaotic or orderly than the other? It is, of course, perfectly "scientific" to take something identified as chaos, examine it, and then proclaim the characteristics of chaos based on the examination of the specimen. This kind of approach runs into problems, however, when we cannot be sure that the specimen examined is actually chaos. How do we know that whatever existed in the pre-creation time and space is chaos? The scholars quoted above simply assume that the pre-creation being or state is chaos, and proceed to extrapolate the characteristics of chaos by examining it. It is not asked, however, what makes it chaotic in the first place; it simply serves as the model, and that it is chaotic is confirmed, albeit in a circular way, when it matches its own characteristics. So, let us return to these questions: Why is it assumed that whatever existed prior to the creation is chaos and that what

replaced chaos in the moment of creation is order? And why is it taken for granted that chaos and order are at their most definitive when described in relation to creation?

### *Gunkel's Focus on Creation*

To answer these questions we need to return to Gunkel and his work on *tehom* and Tiamat, which is, as noted above, the origin of the discussion of chaos and order in Biblical Studies. Gunkel's work began with the link he perceived between *tehom* and Tiamat, both of which appear in creation stories. The other instances of chaos he noted in the Bible were based on the link between *tehom* and Tiamat: because *tehom* was actually Tiamat, other watery beings appearing in the Bible could also be identified as Tiamat. Even if these other beings did not participate in creation stories, they were linked with creation because Tiamat and *tehom* were linked with creation and provided the means by which Gunkel identified chaos in the Bible in the first place. Because Gunkel *began* with creation stories and used those stories as the benchmark by which he identified chaos in other texts, the moments around creation came to be accepted as the definitive appearance of chaos and order. Once someone has laid groundwork in a certain way, subsequent work builds on that groundwork and its assumptions can come to be taken for granted. It is not, however, clear that this needs necessarily have been the case. It seems entirely possible that if Gunkel had started somewhere else—with some other occurrence of chaos in the Bible—*that* would be taken as the definitive instance instead and the characteristics attributed to chaos and order might have been quite different.

### *Problems with the Link Between Tiamat and tehom*

Even if the definitiveness assigned to the moments around creation can be seen to stem from Gunkel's having chosen those moments as the basis for his study, can it still be safely assumed that whatever existed before creation was chaos, and that the creation of the world necessarily entailed a movement from chaos to order? To answer this question, it needs to be asked whether, without the Tiamat connection, Gunkel would have viewed *tehom* as chaos. Is the Tiamat connection necessary to the identification of *tehom* as chaos, or is it simply incidental? Without the Tiamat connection, *tehom* is still something which existed prior to the creation of the world (even if it only existed as a void), and which the creation of the world displaced or destroyed, but can *tehom* on its own, without reference to Tiamat, really be called chaos? David Tsumura has argued that, although the words *tehom* and Tiamat are related, they are related not through one having derived from

the other, but as variant derivations of “the Common Semitic term \*tiham- ‘ocean’” (Tsumura 1989, 65).<sup>4</sup> Having severed the derivational relationship between the two, Tsumura, who assumes that chaos is a thing like Tiamat, concludes that *tehom* is not chaos. For Tsumura, then, it is not enough to say that whatever existed before creation is chaos. Chaos must possess other characteristics, which he sees manifested in Tiamat, but not in *tehom*, once *tehom* is no longer assumed to be Tiamat incognito.

If Gunkel were to accept Tsumura’s claim that *tehom* is not related to Tiamat, would he also agree that *tehom* is not chaos? It seems possible. That he begins his discussion of chaos and order by linking *tehom* with Tiamat suggests as much. If it were not necessary to link the two before beginning the discussion of chaos in the Bible, why would Gunkel bother doing so? If *tehom*, on its own, is clearly chaos, why bring Tiamat into the discussion at all? Why not just start with *tehom* and leave it at that? For Gunkel, though, *tehom* on its own does not seem to be enough to justify a discussion of chaos. It is only by establishing the connection between *tehom* and Tiamat that Gunkel is able to speak about chaos.<sup>5</sup>

The link between *tehom* and Tiamat is further challenged by J. Gerald Janzen who argues that the political statement made by Genesis 1 is deliberately at odds with that made by *Enuma elish*. He writes, “The Israelite and Babylonian creation stories represent not merely two different claimants for world rule, Yahweh and Marduk, but, by their differing accounts of the way the divine creator has brought the cosmos into existence, represent two different conceptions of life-giving and community-building power” (Janzen 1994, 464). For Janzen, whatever *tehom* and Tiamat may seem to have in common, it is no indication that the two are identical. Indeed, their similarities are intended to highlight what is more important, namely their differences. It is not only that *tehom* is not Tiamat,

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<sup>4</sup> David Clines simply takes for granted that *tehom* and Tiamat are not identical. He writes, “There is nothing in the OT to suggest that the battle was a stage in or precondition for creation (the reference to Tehom, the ‘deep,’ in Gen 1:2 is not to Tiamat, and does not indicate conflict)” (Clines 1989, 233).

<sup>5</sup> In Gunkel’s view Tiamat’s cosmogonic battle with Marduk provides the hidden backstory for *tehom*. Yet, as Janzen points out, Tiamat has a half-hidden backstory of her own: “In *Enuma elish*...the present account of cosmic creation out of divine conflict is preceded by an account of the generation of the deities by the intermingling of Apsu and Tiamat....At an earlier stage of the myth, these deities were the fundamental powers of nature and society, and the narrative of their birth would itself have provided an account of cosmic origins” (Janzen 1994, 462). In her previous incarnation, it does not seem that Tiamat would have been considered chaotic. There, she is emblematic of generative, rather than destructive, power. Her status as a chaos monster is a superimposed characteristic, just as *tehom*’s chaotic status has been superimposed by the posited link with chaotic Tiamat. Thorkild Jacobsen, too, points out that a more sympathetic portrayal of Tiamat seems to have been deliberately allowed to peek through the text of *Enuma elish*. He writes, “The onus of initiating hostility is consistently placed on the parents [Tiamat and Apsu]....But...part of this effect is countered...by the stress on Tiamat’s motherliness and by presenting her repeatedly in a sympathetic light....So odd is this sympathetic treatment of the archenemy, Tiamat, that one can hardly escape feeling that the author is here in the grip of conflicting emotions: love, fear, and a sense of guilt that requires palliation” (Jacobsen 1976, 187). It is as if the writer knows—and, at some level, regrets—that he is making of Tiamat something she is not, that he is, in effect, framing her. Perhaps those who want to make *tehom* into a chaotic Tiamat ought to feel similar chagrin at what is, essentially, a double-framing.

but that *tehom* is emphatically “not-Tiamat,” demonstrating that the world created by *Elohim* is not simply Marduk’s world “by another name.”

Whereas for Gunkel, *tehom* represents the biblical authors’ appropriation of the Babylonian myth, for Janzen *tehom* stands for their conscious rejection of it. As he puts it, “*Enuma elish*... would have been the cosmological mandate for Babylonian power at the time Genesis 1 was emerging in final form” (*Ibid.*), a time when it is likely that the biblical authors found themselves subjugated by Babylon’s power. Still other scholars have contested the link between Tiamat and *tehom* on the grounds that it presumes a reliance of the Bible’s authors on a Babylonian myth to which their access is only a matter of conjecture. If the biblical authors were not familiar with *Enuma elish*, it cannot be appropriate for scholars to use *Enuma elish* to fill gaps in the biblical text or to clarify obscure points.<sup>6</sup> Despite this objection, scholars are often reluctant to relinquish the idea that the *content* of *Enuma elish* lies behind the biblical texts, even as they question whether *Enuma elish* itself influenced the biblical authors. That is, although it may be generally agreed that *tehom* is not Tiamat, it has not been accepted that *tehom* is *tehom*; what *tehom* appears to be at face value—a substance which, if it is a substance and not merely the absence of substance, is inert and plays no active role in creation—is not taken to be what *tehom* actually is.

Scholars who have dismissed Genesis 1’s dependence on *Enuma elish* have shifted their attention to stories to which the biblical authors *would* have had access in order to determine *tehom*’s identity. The myths of Canaan have presented themselves as stories closer to home, available for adaptation in Israel. John Day writes, “Since the discovery of the Ugaritic texts from 1929 onwards... it has become clear that the immediate background of the Old Testament allusions to the sea monster is not Babylonian but Canaanite” (Day 1985, 4). The Baal cycle, in which Baal fights and defeats Yam (Sea) and Mot (Death), has, in particular, been pointed to as a likely source for the Bible’s *Chaoskampf* themes. Yet, although it is true that Yam, like *tehom*, is a watery entity, Yam and Mot are not pre-creation entities nor is Baal a creator-god.<sup>7</sup> In Canaanite mythology, El is the creator of

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<sup>6</sup> Although the majority of contemporary scholars agree that Genesis 1 is not dependent upon *Enuma elish* but is, instead, related to Canaanite mythology, not all hold this position. Janzen reads Genesis 1 as a deliberate rejection of Babylonian ideas about the creation of the cosmos. Batto, by contrast, argues that “the Priestly Writer...knew and utilized the Babylonian myth...Indeed, the conclusion that the Priestly Writer wrote out of the experience of the Babylonian exile seems unavoidable...[R]ather than a conscious polemic against *Enuma elish*, it is more likely that the Priestly Writer found the Combat Myth imagery better suited than the Eden story to convey his theological agenda” (Batto 1992, 80-81). But if Genesis 1 represents a conscious appropriation of *Enuma elish*, why is it not more similar? Why is *tehom* so unlike Tiamat that it is only by reading in details from *Enuma elish* and other myths that *tehom* can be seen to be like her? If the writer intended to tell the same story as *Enuma elish*, why did he not tell that story?

<sup>7</sup> Day discusses the various ways in which biblical scholars have dealt with these problems on pp. 10-18 of his 1985 book. He concludes, “the fact that the Old Testament so frequently uses the imagery of the divine

the world, and Baal battles Yam and Mot, not in order to create, but in order to gain supremacy and a temple for himself. It would be difficult to argue that *tehom* is somehow derivative of Yam or Mot, when they seem to have so little in common. Shared wateriness seems like an overly-weak link, unless we are prepared to entertain the possibility that any story about water might provide us with details about the identity of *tehom*. It might be argued that we are not talking about water in general but about *personified* water specifically. *Tehom*, though, is not personified. It is only by comparison with other myths about personified water that *tehom* is assumed to have a personality.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the argument that what *tehom*, Yam, and Mot have in common is that they are fought and defeated by a god is seriously flawed. *Tehom* can be seen as an enemy combatant only by being linked with Tiamat. If, however, *tehom* is not derived from Tiamat, but from some other figure in Canaanite mythology, it cannot be assumed that *tehom* is combative.<sup>9</sup> In

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conflict with the dragon and the sea in association with creation, when this imagery is Canaanite, leads one to expect that the Canaanites likewise connected the two themes" (Day 1985, 17). This conclusion, though, seems suspect. To say that the chaos themes in the Old Testament must be based on Canaanite myths and to explain the differences between them by reading back into the "original" what is only attested in the "copy" is to engage in circular reasoning. Samuel Loewenstamm makes an argument which can be seen to provide something of a corrective to the circularity of this logic. He writes, "The Biblical passages make us aware of the cosmological element in Ugaritic mythology which in the milieu of the Ugaritic court had so weakened that we would not have been able to discern its roots were it not for the large number of allusions to the cosmological mythology found in the Bible and in its parallels in Mesopotamian literature and the Midrash. This forces us to the conclusion that we should not see in Ugaritic mythology an immediate predecessor of its Biblical counterpart, but rather look for the origin of the common elements in West-Semitic traditions which not only pre-date the Bible, but also the Ugaritic texts" (Loewenstamm 1980, 359-60). Even so, the discovery of "cosmological elements" in the Ugaritic texts which would not have been visible but for comparison with the Bible remains a somewhat circular argument, especially when we consider that certain combative elements in biblical texts would not have been discovered except for by comparison with Ugaritic texts. Overall, it seems as if the existence of certain similarities between the two has led to the assumption of the existence of other similarities, which may not actually be there. Still, against my reasoning, Cross insists that the story of what happened between Baal, Yam, and Mot *is* a creation story. He explains, "it bears all the traits of the cosmogony. The conflict between Ba'l and Yamm-Nahar (Sea and River), Mot (Death), and Lotan are alloforms reflecting the usual conflict between the old gods and the young gods of the cult...The pattern of the cosmogonic myth could not be more evident" (*Ibid.*, 333-34). Yet, the majority of scholars have adopted the view that the battle between Baal and Yam and Mot is not a creation story or *would not appear* to us as a creation story if it were not for the link between cosmogony and *Chaoskampf* which is supposedly attested in the Bible. In direct opposition to Cross's view, Dennis McCarthy writes, "The OT scholar should be surprised when he finds that Ugaritologists ordinarily deny that anything like a creation story has been found at Ras Shamra....Are we so sure that the *Chaoskampf* with all its attendant themes is really a story of creation in any meaningful sense?...for us the word creation in its normal context must mean some sort of absolute beginning of our world, or we equivocate. Can we really say that this is what the *Chaoskampf* and all it implies is usually concerned with?" (McCarthy 1967, 87-88). I am inclined to agree with the majority view that what we have in the Baal cycle is not a creation account, at least not in any obvious way.

<sup>8</sup> Day argues that the lack of a definite article attached to *tehom* "is a remnant of the time long past when the term did denote a mythical personality," while at the same time recognizing that *tehom* "in Gen. 1:2 is not a divine personality hostile to God; rather it is here...the impersonal watery mass which covered the world before God brought about the created order" (Day 1985, 50).

<sup>9</sup> According to Day, "The form *thm*, comparable to Hebrew *tehom* is...attested in Ugaritic (cf. *Ugaritica* V.7.1, RS 24.244, 1=KTU 1.100.1) thus supporting the view that the Old Testament term is Canaanite" (Day 1985, 7). Later, he explains, "both *tehom* and Tiamat are derived from a common Semitic root. Moreover, the word occurs similarly as *thm* or *thmt* in Ugaritic to denote the cosmic waters" (*Ibid.*, 50). He does not, however, describe how these cosmic waters are described in the Ugaritic texts. Are they personified? Are they combative? Are they like *Enuma elish*'s Tiamat, or are they more like Genesis 1's *tehom*? If Genesis

any case, *tehom* clearly cannot be derived from Yam or Mot, when what links them is something they only have in common by way of Tiamat.

Why should there be all this opposition to taking *tehom* at face value if *tehom* on its own can be viewed as chaos? Why is it necessary to find a backstory to clarify *tehom*'s chaotic nature if chaos can be defined, most basically, as whatever existed prior to creation? That the hunt for the backstory is so vigorous indicates that, by itself, *tehom* cannot be shown to be chaos. This suggests that "whatever existed prior to creation" is not an adequate definition of chaos, which in turn shows that it cannot be taken as a given that the pre-creation state, as it appears in the creation myths, is chaos. This means that chaos cannot be defined simply by examining whatever existed prior to creation and extrapolating the characteristics of chaos from it.

### *Chaos and Order in the Created World*

We have seen that, following Gunkel's lead, scholars have studied the various ancient Near Eastern creation myths to arrive at a set of characteristics by which chaos and order can be identified. Chaos is said to be characterized by its lack of form, its stasis, and its simplicity or unity, while order is said to possess the opposite traits of form, change, and complexity or multiplicity. It is, however, less than certain that the pre-creation space/time/being can properly be designated as chaos simply as a matter of course, as is evidenced by the search for a backstory for Genesis 1's *tehom*. Yet, despite this objection, biblical scholars have not been totally out of line in identifying the moments around creation as a point at which chaos and order may be seen to engage with each other. Where scholars have been wrong is in identifying those moments as definitive, and in taking as a given that whatever existed prior to creation is chaos, when, it seems, pre-creation existence may not be the most essential characteristic of chaos.

Even if the ancient myths do frequently present whatever existed prior to creation as chaos, and view the transition from pre-creation to creation as a move from chaos to order, the pre-creation time should not be seen as providing the quintessential example of what chaos is, from which all other instances of chaos are derived, simply because it was not in the pre-creation sphere that chaos was first noticed or experienced. The myths of origin are not original. In terms of experience, the pre-creation time did not come *before* creation but *after*. The writers of the myths, if they wrote chaos into their cosmogonic

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1's *tehom* is derived from a Ugaritic *thm* which is only similar to Tiamat in terms of wateriness, then we can hardly read traits of combative antagonism into biblical *tehom* from Ugaritic *thm*. It seems likely that if Ugaritic *thm* were like Tiamat, it would be unnecessary to try to link Genesis 1's *tehom* to Yam, a link which is a stretch, but which is necessary if *tehom* is to be shown to be a Tiamat-like being.

stories, did so because they experienced chaos in the *created world*. In this way, it was not primordial chaos which gave rise to chaos in the created world, but chaos in the created world which gave rise to the idea of pre-creation chaos. The quintessential example of chaos, then, ought to be something which exists in the created world, not something pre-existent. If it is described as pre-existent, it is because this characteristic helps describe how chaos is experienced in the created world. We are going backwards if we start with chaos in the pre-creation realm and move in the direction of the creation; such a movement may be chronological in terms of how the stories are told, but it is not chronological in terms of how the stories came to be written.

If it were correct to take as the quintessential example of chaos whatever existed prior to the creation, and if this chaos presented itself as a static, formless, undifferentiated blob, how would it be possible for chaos to continue to exist in the created world? Once change, form, and differentiation had been introduced, why wouldn't their opposites have ceased to exist? Differentiation and non-differentiation can hardly occupy the same place simultaneously. Yet, the ancient texts make clear that chaos was experienced as a living reality in the created world. The question is, within the created world, was chaos experienced as stasis, formlessness, and unity (which seems impossible), or was it experienced in some other way? And if it was experienced in some other way, *that way* of describing chaos would seem to be more primary than whatever appears in the cosmogonic myths.

In the ancient world, enemies and outsiders were frequently experienced as forces of chaos, and worldly realms outside "our own" were experienced as chaotic space. According to Cohn, "Like all peoples in the Ancient Near East, Mesopotamians took it for granted that victorious war...was an affirmation of cosmos" (*Ibid.*, 53) and that "By defending his realm and by conquering new territories a king was not only fulfilling the original, most basic function of kingship—he was also obeying the will of the gods," understood as extending the ordered realm by converting chaos to order (*Ibid.*, 41). Similarly, Bernhard Anderson observes, "The role of the king in both Mesopotamian and Egyptian understanding was to destroy the enemies who incarnated the chaotic powers that threaten the order of creation...similar claims were made within the Israelite cult in connection with the celebration of Yahweh's kingship" (Anderson 1987, 132). These quotations, it will be noted, are about order and not about chaos. It is order, and not chaos, that is the active force in victorious war. It is order that is extended when a king conquers new territories and people-groups. Yet, here it is tacitly assumed that chaos is also an

active force.<sup>10</sup> If victory in battle is a sign of the extension of order, then surely loss in battle is a sign of the extension of chaos. And what is a loss in battle other than an enemy victory?

Thorkild Jacobsen, puzzling over why Marduk's primordial enemy should have taken the form of water when "the sea, the Persian Gulf, lay far to the south behind vast marshes and could have played little part in the average Babylonian's experience of the world," reasons,

Some quite specific conditioning circumstances would therefore need to have been involved, and just such a one is the fact that, historically, Marduk's and Babylon's main antagonist from shortly after the death of Hammurabi to well into the Cassite period was precisely the 'Land of Ti'amat' (*mat tâmtim*), the "Sealand," which covered precisely the territory of ancient Sumer.<sup>11</sup> (Jacobsen 1976, 189-90)

Here, it can be seen that it was the Babylonians' experience of chaos in the created world which gave rise to their conception of chaos in the pre-creation time. Jacobsen continues, arguing that "In warring with the Sealand, Babylon...waged an upstart's war with its own parent civilization.... Understandably, therefore, Babylon might have felt...its victory to be in some sense parricidal. Understandably also it might have sought justification for its hostility...in seeing itself as representing...youthful vigor pitted against age and stagnant tradition" (*Ibid.*, 190). If Jacobsen's interpretation is correct, Tiamat's stagnancy is not an inalienable characteristic of chaos, but only of the particular chaos with which Babylon found itself at odds at a certain point in its history. More than this, Tiamat's stagnancy is a projected characteristic, a justificatory accusation and not, necessarily, an inherent trait.

Can an enemy victory be understood as an undoing of the form, changeability, and multiplicity that previously existed in the ordered world of the group that lost the battle? That is, does the description of chaos which we see in the cosmogonic myths apply here? In a sense, it does. By killing members of the losing group, the victors are responsible for plunging them into the chaotic realm of death, which itself may be characterized by formlessness, stasis, and the erasing of difference. But apart from being responsible for the deaths of members of the losing group, can the enemy victors be seen as responsible

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<sup>10</sup> In fact, Umberto Cassuto describes the same scenario from the perspective of chaos as the active force. He writes, "Whenever a people or ruler rose up and oppressed Israel it was as though the ancient revolt of the waters of the sea and the rivers at the time of the creation of the world was re-enacted" (Cassuto 1975, 98).

<sup>11</sup> Theodor Gaster, however, points out that "The primality of water...is found all over the world, among peoples living in the most diverse geographical conditions," attributing this to the fact that water, like wind, is one of the "Two things [which] have no shape or form...[and which] therefore, were regarded as primordial—not...as the actual substances out of which all else was brought into being, but as having preceded all other things in order of time" (Gaster 1969, 3). For Gaster, then, formlessness is the essential characteristic of whatever preceded the creation, meaning that whatever exhibits such formlessness must be a holdover from that time. But how can formlessness continue to exist once form has been instituted? Even if formlessness exists in a kind of "pocket" within form, it must be given form by the form which surrounds it, as the water of a lake is shaped by the shore.

for introducing formlessness, stasis, and simplicity, into the lives of the living members of the conquered group? Certainly, the cultural institutions of the losing group can be seen as being reduced to formlessness when the group is conquered by an enemy. Related to this disintegration of form is loss of differentiation, if differentiation is indicated by the existence of a variety of social institutions. We can imagine the conquered group saying, “We used to have order. Our society was organized into various social institutions. These institutions had a definite form and they formed the basis for differentiation within our society. Now that our social and cultural institutions are no longer in place, we have chaos instead of order.” Fair enough. At the same time, though, what the conquered group experiences is not only the overthrow of its existing form and differentiation, but the imposition of new kinds of form and differentiation. The old structures are not replaced with *nothing* but with *something* else. In addition, we must ask about chaos’s characteristic stasis. How is this aspect of chaos brought to bear on the conquered group? It does not seem that it is. If anything, being conquered must be experienced as change, while remaining unconquered would be experienced as stasis.

Indeed, in various Egyptian coffin texts, the ordered world is described as “Eternal Recurrence and Eternal Sameness” (Allen 1997, 17), which would seem to be a depiction of the ordered world as static. James P. Allen explains, “The word *dt* ‘Eternal Sameness’ denotes eternity as the unchanging pattern of existence, established at the creation. It is a stable concept...exemplified in the concept of *m’t* (Maat) ‘(natural) order’” (*Ibid.*, 11). This indicates that, although the pre-creation chaos may be characterized by stasis, and although the ordering process may represent change with regard to this stasis, once the world is ordered it, too, becomes static. Niditch claims that “Chaos is not a radical force but a conservative one...which calls itself into action to prevent dynamic change” (Niditch 1985, 17), but it would seem that order is equally conservative. Order may bring change to chaos, but after that change has happened and order has been established, its goal is to maintain itself, preventing change. In the created world, then, it is not chaos that is static, but order. Chaos, in the created world, is represented by change. When a group is conquered, it experiences this loss in battle as a change in the ordered status that it previously possessed. Cohn points out that although “every Near Eastern world-view showed an awareness not only of order in the world but of the instability of order. Nevertheless the ordered world was imagined as essentially unchanging” (Cohn 1993, 3). In this description, chaos is the active force. It is “restless and threatening” (*ibid.*) in its active antagonism to order and has as its goal the reclamation of order’s territory for its own. With respect to established order, then, it is chaos which is characterized by change.

### *Chaos and Order Trade Places*

Of course, if chaos were to overthrow order, it would itself become static; its efforts would be directed toward maintaining what it had achieved, in which case it *would be* a conservative force. In the pre-creation space, where chaos holds sway, it is conservative and static. In the post-creation space, however, chaos is—or at least can be—an agent of change. What chaos is shifts in the transition from pre-creation to post-creation time. In fact, as far as this characteristic is concerned, chaos and order seem to trade places. That chaos is capable of swapping this characteristic with order ought to give us pause in our efforts to define the two terms. The most we can say, in this instance, is that *some of the time* chaos is characterized by stasis, while order is characterized by change, but *at other times* chaos is characterized by change and order by stasis. Is the same also true of the other characteristics attributed to chaos and order?

In its pre-creation state, chaos is characterized by being simple, a unity. Explaining the ancient Egyptian phrase “before there were two things,” which designates the pre-creation time, Richard J. Clifford writes, “This statement is an explicit expression of the Egyptian view that before creation there was a unity, which could not be divided into two things.... ‘Two things’ and ‘millions’ both express the same thing—the diversity of the existent—which is denied for nonexistence” (Clifford 1994, 102). Is there any sense in which, in the context of the post-creation world, chaos becomes not “one and undifferentiated” (*Ibid.*), but the space of multiplicity, while order occupies the space of unity? I think there is. In the created world, order is what exists within a set of boundaries, while chaos designates everything that exists (even if its existence is characterized as “nonexistence”) outside of those boundaries. Mircea Eliade writes,

One of the outstanding characteristics of traditional societies<sup>12</sup> is the opposition that they assume between their inhabited territory and the unknown and indeterminate space that surrounds it. The former is the world (more precisely, our world), the cosmos; everything outside it is no longer a cosmos but a sort of “other world,” a foreign, chaotic space, peopled by ghosts, demons, “foreigners.” (Eliade 1961, 29)

In this formulation, the ordered world is equal to everything there is *minus* chaos. The chaotic space and its inhabitants are what are subtracted to make the ordered world. In this way, the ordered world is smaller than the whole.

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<sup>12</sup> Here, Eliade may be drawing too much of a distinction between “traditional societies” and modern ones. Indeed, as I will argue later in this introduction and more fully in chapter 5, the idea that “inside” is the domain of order, while chaos belongs “outside” is something *we* also believe. Eliade’s observations are correct, I think, but may suffer from being too narrowly applied.

The question, then, is whether this smallness makes the ordered world simpler than the whole. The answer depends on what the subtracted space contains. If it contains nothing, then the ordered world, though smaller, is not simpler than what is outside the ordered world. Yet, although the inclination of the ancient peoples may have been to characterize what lay beyond the boundaries of their own territory as nothingness, it is clear that there was something there. The very fact that war was seen as a means by which the outer chaos could be ordered indicates that what was there was not nothing. There were other people out there, inhabiting the space viewed as chaotic from the vantage point of “our world.” Those people, it seems certain, would have viewed their own territory as the ordered cosmos, while viewing “our world” as the realm of nonexistence. Yet, *we* clearly exist—that much is obvious. And if it is obvious that *we* exist, it must also be obvious that *they* exist. Given the fact that the chaotic realm is actually filled with existent beings, it must be said that the ordered world *is* simpler than what is designated as chaos. Our world, which we call order, is only one world out of many.<sup>13</sup> It is unitary. And the maintenance of order in our world depends on our defending our boundaries against the incursion of the many. Multiplicity is what must be kept out. When the domain of order is extended through our conquering of other people groups and their territories, the multiplicity of those others is reduced to the unity of us. They are eradicated, and what was theirs becomes ours; what was two (or more) becomes one. Chaos, then, in the post-creation world is not characterized by undifferentiated oneness, but by differentiation and multiplicity. In the post-creation world—where order is one piece cut out of a larger whole—it is order that is unitary and simple.

### *Excursus on Something and Nothing*

This last reversal in the meanings of chaos and order depends on the assumption that chaos, in its post-creation setting, is not the realm of nonexistence but is actually populated by a variety of existent entities. In a sense, as I have said, this is obvious. Anyone looking beyond the borders of his or her own world can see there is something there. Calling that something nothing is to identify it as a very particular kind of nothing, a nothing which, by any other name, is something. In fact, it seems doubtful whether even the chaos of the cosmogonic myths is actually nothing in the purest sense.

In *Enuma elish*, for example, Tiamat is the being designated as chaos. It is fairly obvious, even on the surface of the text, that she is not nothing but something. She figures

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<sup>13</sup> Although there are times at which “our world” may appear as chaos rather than order, the ordered world still presents itself as the world *we ought* to inhabit. See chapter 5, footnote 1 for further discussion.

as an active character in the story, and it is difficult to see how “nothing” would be capable of playing such a role. Looking beyond what seems obvious, though, there is a certain way of thinking about Tiamat which does cast her as nothing. *Enuma elish* begins with this description of the pre-creation world of Tiamat and Apsu: “When on high the heaven had not been named,/ Firm ground below had not been called by name,/...No reed hut had been matted, no marsh land had appeared...” (Speiser 1955, 60-61). Here, the primordial time is characterized as the time *before* everything now known came into existence. Inasmuch as what existed before has nothing in common with the created world, it can plausibly be considered nonexistent. We can follow this line of reasoning by engaging in a simple question-and-answer exercise:

“Did any of this exist back then?”

“No.”

“None of this existed?”

“No, nothing existed.”

The point is that because what existed before has no connection to the present order, it can safely be called nothing, even though it may have been something. If we continue with our question-and-answer game, however, we find that Tiamat’s equation with nothingness quickly wears thin.

“Was there really nothing there? I think I see something! What about that thing?”

“It’s nothing.”

“How can it be nothing? I’m sure I see something. Look, it’s moving!”

“It’s nothing.”

“But I see something there. Why is *that* thing nothing and not something?”

“Okay, you’re right. It’s not nothing, but it *ought* to be nothing. It doesn’t have anything to do with us or the way we do things here. Capisce?”

“Capisce. I get it.”

In order to see Tiamat as nothing, it is necessary to turn a blind eye and to agree that one does “capisce.” What does it mean to say “capisce”? Capisce, at least in its stereotypical usage by movie Mafiosi, implies a forced acquiescence to a proposal that would be denied if the threat of violence were not there to back it up. For example: “You were never here. You never saw anything. Capisce?” Of course, the one being asked to capisce *was* there and *did* see something. That’s the whole point of the demand. The same can be said of us in our role as questioner in this question-and-answer game. We *do* see something in what we’re being asked to accept as nothing. It is worth asking who our interlocutor is here: who is providing us with the answers and asking us to capisce—and does he or she have a gun to make sure we do as we’re told? With regard to *Enuma elish*,

it is Marduk, or someone who works for him, who is telling us what to think about Tiamat. And, as supreme god of the Babylonian pantheon, with control of thunder and the winds, it is something of an understatement to say that yes, Marduk does have a gun. As *Enuma elish* tells it, Tiamat is equivalent to nonexistence because, when she existed, nothing existed of what we now know as the world. A tricky little equivocation wipes her from the pre-creation slate. Marduk gets rid of the body by chopping it up and scattering its parts. “Body?” he asks. “There’s no body here. Nobody, nothing. Capisce?”

If Tiamat is not nothing but something, is the same true of the Egyptian version of the pre-creation chaos, the Nun? The Nun in Clifford’s explanation quoted above, is nonexistent because it is only one thing instead of many things. Surely, though, we must protest that *one thing*, even if it is not the world as we know it, is something not nothing. In addition, the Nun was, it seems, conceptualized as a locus of possibility. Out of its “nonexistent” depths came the first stirrings of differentiation and life. Cohn writes, “Within that dark, watery abyss lay, in a latent state, the primal substance out of which the world was to be formed. Also submerged somewhere within it was the demiurge who was to do the forming” (Cohn 1994, 6). Nun, then, though supposedly the site of nonexistence, is also something. It is “the primal substance out of which the world was to be formed.” If this primal substance continued to exist within the created world it would, it seems, represent not the threat of nonexistence, but the threat of possibility. Instead of threatening to overwhelm existence with its own non-being, thereby reducing existence to nonexistence, it would, rather, threaten to overwhelm what had already been created with still more creation, stirred up from its fecund depths, thus posing the threat of multiplicity and not of reduction to unity.

According to Clifford, the pre-creation depicted in Genesis 1 “certainly resembles...the Egyptian universe” in its pre-creation state (Clifford 1994, 113-14). Indeed, Catherine Keller reads Genesis 1’s *tehom* as being the same kind of something that Nun is—the watery matrix of possibility out of which the creation is shaped—and she calls the *tehom* chaos. Keller argues for a positive appreciation of this chaos, as that from which everything that exists has been formed (Keller 2003, 12, 26-28). Of course, as already discussed, pre-creation existence is not enough to designate a state as chaos. Tsumura, as we have seen, when he severs the derivational link between *tehom* and Tiamat, concludes that, unlike Tiamat, *tehom* is not chaos, despite their shared identity as pre-creation entities (or nonentities). For Tsumura, it is *tehom*’s nothingness which differentiates it from chaos, which he believes to be something, the kind of something that Tiamat is. He writes, “the phrase *tohû wabohû* in Gen 1:2 has nothing to do with ‘chaos’ and simply means ‘emptiness’ and refers to the earth which is an empty place, i.e. ‘an unproductive and

uninhabited place'...the earth is 'not yet' the earth as it was known" (Tsumura 1989, 43). Ironically, Tsumura's description of the way in which *tehom* is nothingness is very similar to the way in which Tiamat is argued to be nothingness because the world she embodies is not the world as we know it: what was then is not now, and, therefore, was never anything. Of course, Tiamat is active in a way that *tehom* is not, which is what allows Tsumura to distinguish between them, calling Tiamat chaos and *tehom* not-chaos.

To return to the point at hand, it seems clear that chaos (a category to which *tehom* may or may not belong), even in its pre-creation incarnation is not nothing, but a particular kind of something. It is a something that is completely unlike the world as we know it. In *Enuma elish*, what Marduk replaces with the created world is not nothing, but *something* else. This something else is chaos from Marduk's perspective, but from its own perspective must surely be order. Indeed, Clifford points out that *Enuma elish's* main concerns are political—having to do with rival lines of kingship—more than anything else. He writes, "[Marduk's] supremacy is derived from his having wrested primordial power from the line of Apsu-Tiamat-Kingu....The epic should thus be entitled *The Exaltation of Marduk* rather than *The Creation Epic*" (Clifford 1994, 93). If, even in the cosmogonic myths, chaos is not really nothing, it seems fair to conclude that within the created world chaos is not really nothing either. Now, as then, chaos is whatever is other. And, in the created world, there is a lot more of what is other than of what is ours. Thus, in the created world it is chaos and not order that is multiple and diverse.

### *A Working Definition of Chaos and Order*

We have seen that chaos and order are capable of trading certain characteristics depending on the situation. In certain situations chaos is characterized by stasis and order by change, while in others the opposite is true. In the same way, in certain situations chaos is characterized by simplicity and order by multiplicity, and in others, again, the opposite is true. In this regard, chaos and order are slippery terms. A definition arrived at by examining them in one situation alone cannot hope to be accurate, because in another situation they may appear quite different. Are they, then, completely indefinable terms? In a sense, yes. The *contents* of chaos and order can vary infinitely, and what is contained in either one depends largely on the location of the one doing the labeling. Chaos and order can, however, be defined by their relationship to each other, which does remain constant. Chaos and order, no matter what their contents, always figure as opposites. In

addition, chaos is always negative to order's positive.<sup>14</sup> Based on these relational characteristics, which do remain constant, I would like to propose a basic, working definition of chaos and order: order is the world as it ought to be, while chaos is the world as it ought not to be. Chaos contains whatever the world should not contain, while order contains whatever the world should contain, but what the two *actually* contain is variable.

Using this definition, we can see how whatever existed prior to the creation can be designated chaos and how the moment of creation can be viewed as a moment of ordering. What existed prior to the creation was the world as it ought not to have been, and what came into being with the creation of the world was the world as it ought to be, the world inhabitable by us and our god(s).<sup>15</sup> Of course, using this definition we can also see how whatever existed before the creation of the world as we know it can be designated as order instead of chaos. From the perspective of whatever existed before, whatever existed before was the world as it ought to be, and the advent of "our world" was a chaotic disruption of that order. We can be sure that Tiamat did not experience her own existence as chaotic.

For this reason, talk about chaos and order can only ever be an ongoing conversation. Because the contents of chaos and order shift depending on the perspective of the ones doing the labeling, it is impossible to make any kind of conclusive statement about what either term means. Marduk may have ordered the world by defeating Tiamat, but Tiamat remains present, a lingering threat. What she threatens is not so much an incursion of chaos into Marduk's ordered world, as an undermining of Marduk's claim that what he has established *is* order, while what she represents *is* chaos. If she were to regain control, she would call her own world order and would declare that she had vanquished the

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<sup>14</sup> Keller argues for a positive embrace of chaos, rather than a negative rejection, because, as she sees it, chaos is the material from which the world was fashioned by the creator god and, as such, plays an integral role in the created world. It is not certain, however, that the material from which the world was made *is* chaos. Keller believes that it is because she has accepted the idea that the definitive appearance of chaos is in the pre-creation time/space, a claim against which I have argued above. In addition—again based on the assumption that chaos is whatever existed prior to the creation—Keller believes that chaos has a particular content that does not vary. Interestingly, in contrast to Niditch, Cohn, and others, Keller characterizes chaos as a substance that embodies fluidity, flux, and change, descriptors she gets from the fact that the pre-creation entity is often a watery being. As I have argued above, however, the contents of chaos (and of order) are not fixed. Order and chaos are both equally capable of fluidity, flux, and change. If these particular characteristics are embraced, they become characteristics of order and not of chaos, as I will define the terms.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Balentine links the concepts of order and chaos understood as "the way the world ought/ought not to be," with the time of creation, writing, "When nature convulses with earthquake, flood, or famine, when disease strikes unawares, when a child dies, the universal existential response is 'Why?' ... Creation myths, couched as primordial descriptions of the way the world works and therefore of how human beings may understand and order their lives in this world, are the first and most generative resource for addressing these questions" (Balentine 2003, 352-53). Balentine's description is consonant with my argument that chaos and order are first experienced in the created world and then retrojected into the time of creation. The time of origins is not, therefore, when chaos and order make their quintessential appearance. Rather, chaos and order are as they appear to us *now*, in the present moment, and the present is explained by referencing an imagined past.

chaos monster, Marduk. But then Marduk would remain as the same kind of lingering threat, and so it would go on.

### *Looking for Chaos and Order in the Bible*

In a sense, the focus on the combat myth which has preoccupied biblical scholars investigating chaos and order in the Bible has not been misguided. Chaos and order *are* in conflict, even if the contents of each cannot be fixed. Various orders vie for the upper hand, viewing their opponents as embodiments of chaos. Where the preoccupation with the combat myth has led scholars in the wrong direction, however, is in the myopic focus on Tiamat and beings like her that it has engendered. The search for chaos in the Bible has been, in large measure, a hunt for the water-dwelling dragon, and “There she blows!” has been cried at every splash in the biblical text. I am not saying that no splash can be attributed to chaos. Some splashes may indeed be a sign that chaos has passed by, but chaos cannot be counted on to splash, nor, for that matter, can order be counted on *not* to splash. Chaos and order, as I am defining them, are not concrete things, one of which makes splashes and the other of which does not. Instead, they are ideas about how the world ought and ought not to be. For this reason, scholars searching for chaos and order in the Bible ought to be looking, not for fins or splashes, but for the expression of ideas about how the world ought, or ought not, to work. Biblical scholars on the lookout for the conflict between chaos and order, ought to turn their eyes to the conversations that are going on in the Bible. How do its books and characters talk to each other about the world, what it is like, and what it ought and ought not to be like? In these interactions, the Bible’s dealings with chaos and order can be glimpsed.

### *Chaos and Order in the Book of Job, Revisited*

This brings us back to the Book of Job. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, it is Leviathan’s splash that has led some scholars to cry “Chaos!” from their crow’s nests and to understand the interaction between Job and God in terms of a battle between chaos and order. Other scholars, countering this view, argue that God does not describe Leviathan (or Behemoth) as a chaos monster, but as a natural animal. Edouard Dhorme writes, “To bring the stupefaction of the hearer to its height, Yahweh resumes His description of wild beasts, now choosing the most extraordinary specimens. First the hippopotamus...(t)hen the crocodile” (Dhorme 1967, lix). For Robert Gordis, too, although the pictures of Behemoth and Leviathan have “overtones drawn from...Semitic

mythology,” they are meant to depict the earthly hippopotamus and crocodile (Gordis 1978, 467). According to Gordis, “There are two basic implications in the poet’s choice of these animals to be glorified. First, man who is only one of God’s creatures, is not the measure of all things and the sole test of the worth of creation. Second, man’s suffering must be seen in its proper perspective within the framework of the cosmos” (*Ibid.*). Likewise, Rebecca Watson points out that “The critical issue is that Leviathan is a creature of God which...is presented as possessing a wild beauty...its role sanctioned and appointed by God....This is not compatible with the idea of this beast as some form of pre-creation monster inimical to cosmic order and overcome...by God” (Watson 2005, 348). For these scholars and others, when God describes Behemoth and Leviathan he is not talking about chaos or about his battle with a chaos monster. He is simply talking about animals which are part of his creation, animals over which Job does not have control and which demonstrate that the world is bigger than Job has supposed it to be. As Watson puts it, “The presentation of Behemoth and Leviathan indicates that this is not about beasts epitomizing evil which God can or has overcome, but about their positive divinely hallowed place in creation, contrary to men’s limited, simplistic and anthropocentric perspective and expectations of good and evil and of how the world and God should be” (*Ibid.*, 360).

### *Leviathan as Decoy*

For the most part, I agree with these scholars’ assessments. I have argued above that splashing is a false indication of chaos. Chaos may splash, but order may also splash, so it makes little sense to comb the biblical text for occurrences of splashing, as if such occurrences can automatically be taken as evidence that the splashing thing is chaos. Leviathan makes a splash, but so what? This does not automatically mean that Leviathan is an embodiment of chaos. However, contrary to those interpreters who claim that God, when he speaks of Leviathan in the Book of Job, is not speaking about chaos, I want to argue that God *is* making a point about chaos. The point God is making is that Leviathan is not chaos.

According to Robert Alter, Job’s attempt to rouse Leviathan in chapter 3 makes reference to the cosmogonic combat myth—Job assumes that God’s act of creation involved the defeat and binding of the chaos monster—but God’s own language counters this assumption in its failure to make use of the idiom of war (Alter 1985, 100). God’s agency in the binding of the sea, for example, is described as that of a midwife who wraps the newborn baby in swaddling bands (38:8-9), not as that of a warrior who imprisons a

vanquished enemy. Similarly, Janzen, referencing Job's agonized query of chapter 7, "Am I the Sea, or the Dragon, that you set a guard over me?" (7:12) points out that "The irony is not only that God is not treating Job like Yam-Tannin but that that is not how the God who finally answers Job treats Yam-Tannin. For when, near the beginning of the divine speeches, God takes up the figure of Sea (38:8-11), it is not to describe the divine conquest of Sea...but the latter's birth" (Janzen 1989, 113). Keller, offering a related interpretation, writes,

The roaring two-monster finale...may be read as a recrudescence of the divine hero myth, defeating Job's existential defiance by a performance of the power that created order out of chaos and continues to discipline the chaos....Yet contrary to these readings, the text implies no conflict of deity with monster. On the contrary, God seems to delight in Leviathan's fitness to defend itself against all possible attacks. But Leviathan is not shown attacking. (Keller 2003, 134-34)

In these interpretations would-be chaos monsters lose their chaotic status because of how they are regarded by God. At issue are not the inherent characteristics of these beings or entities—the sea, Leviathan, and Behemoth are as wild as ever—but the nature of their relationship to God. God looks upon them and describes them not as his enemies but as his beloved creatures, and therein lies all the difference.

God's mention of Leviathan functions as a kind of decoy for the *Chaoskampf*. The writer who portrays Leviathan as not-chaos does so in the knowledge that readers—and Job himself—upon spotting Leviathan will think that what they are seeing *is* chaos. The presentation of Leviathan as not-chaos, then becomes a way in which the writer and God, as the speaking character in the story, engage with the readers and with Job in a discussion about chaos and order, that is, a discussion about how the world ought and ought not to be, what it ought and ought not to contain. When God shows Job Leviathan, he shows him his idea of how the world ought to be, his vision, not of chaos, but of order.

Leviathan splashes in God's second speech, and the splash draws the attention of those who are looking for chaos. The splash, however, although it can be understood to function as a sign that chaos and order are being discussed, does not tell us what the contents of the discussion are, what arguments are being made, or what conclusions are being drawn. It most certainly does not permit us to say that we already know how the conversation will go by making reference to *Enuma elish* or some other myth. We cannot assume that the occurrence of the splash indicates that *that* same story is being told. If it is the splash of Leviathan that alerts us to the presence of chaos and order as themes in the Book of Job, we may be grateful for the sign, but we cannot assume that it encapsulates all there is to be said. We must enter into the details of the discussion.

*Conversations about Order and Chaos in the Book of Job*

To enter into the details of the discussion, as it is carried out in the Book of Job, is what I propose to do in this thesis. The characters' suppositions about how the world ought and ought not to function form the central theme of the long conversation which makes up the book. Although I have argued that chaos and order cannot be defined based on their contents, it does seem that the discussion of chaos and order revolves around certain pairs of "content-themes." That is to say, there are particular characteristics which are often attributed to either chaos or order by those speaking about how the world ought and ought not to be. Looking at the pre-creation time as it is described by the ancient cosmogonic myths, the scholars discussed earlier in this chapter concluded that chaos is formless, static, and singular or simple, while order has form, permits change, and is multiple or complex. I have argued that these characteristics are not fixed, but move between chaos and order depending on the circumstance. Nevertheless, regardless of whether a given trait is understood to belong to order or to chaos, these pairs of themes are characteristic of the discussion about chaos and order. What should the world be like? Should it have a definite form or should it be formless? Should it be static or changeable? Should it be characterized by unity or by multiplicity? This is the shape that the discussion about chaos and order takes; these are the questions that inhere in the topic.

My aim in this thesis, then, is to follow the shape of the discussion, addressing these inherent questions as they are raised and answered by the various characters in the Book of Job. My inquiry will be organized around three pairs of characteristic "content-themes": simplicity/multiplicity, stasis/change, and inside/outside. It will be noted that I have not included form/formlessness as one of my chosen pairs, but, seemingly in its place, have opted to examine the book's discussion of inside and outside as related to chaos and order. The reason for this is simply that I did not find the relative merits (or demerits) of form and formlessness to be a topic of debate in the Book of Job. Perhaps, after all, the pair form/formlessness is never up for discussion in the way that simplicity/multiplicity and stasis/change are. Perhaps it is true that chaos is always formless to order's form. It seems unlikely that anyone would argue that the world ought to be formless; how could a formless thing even be a world? The mind boggles, trying to imagine it. At the same time, it is possible to conceive of a debate over relative degrees of form—in terms of hierarchies, for example, or social strictures—in which it might be argued that relative formlessness would be more desirable, and therefore more orderly, than a form that has become overbearing, and therefore chaotic. In any case, form and

formlessness have been left out of this thesis because, though relevant to the discussion of chaos and order, they are not relevant to the Book of Job as it participates in the discussion.

The pair inside/outside, which *is* relevant to Job, is, interestingly, seemingly even more inflexible than the pair form/formlessness. I have not written specifically about inside and outside and their relation to chaos and order in this introduction, but I have mentioned them in passing as if their allegiance can be taken for granted. For example, discussing the potential simplicity of order and complexity of chaos, I wrote, “Enemies and outsiders were frequently experienced as forces of chaos, and worldly realms outside ‘our own’ were experienced as chaotic space.” I was making a point about the pair simplicity/multiplicity, but to make my point I assumed that inside is order and outside is chaos. Why, then, am I including a discussion of this pair in this thesis? If inside and outside are fixed in relation to order, is there anything left to say about them? In fact, there is. As will be demonstrated when I examine this pair in detail in chapter 5, in his whirlwind speeches God defies all expectations—the characters’ as well as our own—by speaking of “outside” as the location of order. It is a radical move, one which calls into question the validity of using the terms chaos and order to designate parts of the world over against the world as a whole and the world as it ought to be over against the world as it is. Whether this move is accepted by those who witness it remains to be seen.

## CHAPTER 2

### ORDER AND CHAOS AS SINGULARITY AND MULTIPLICITY AT THE LEVEL OF CHARACTER

#### *Job's Ordered World*

There are two places in the Book of Job where Job describes, in detail, his vision of the world as it ought to be, that is, his idea of what an ordered world is like. The first of these is in the prose tale which begins and ends the book, sandwiching the poetic material between its two halves. The second is in chapter 29, which begins Job's final long speech in which he defends his righteousness, culminating in his dramatic oath of innocence in chapter 31. Although there is debate over how the various pieces of the book, marked out by their differences in genre, fit together—that is, should both prose and poetic sections be considered the work of one author simply making use of different genres to serve his purposes, or should the prose section be understood as a traditional tale which the author of the poetic section has used as a kind of “found object” in his artistic creation?<sup>16</sup>—I intend to treat the book as a unitary composition, because, in its final form, it appears as one work

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<sup>16</sup> The latter position is well stated by Gordis, who writes, “The poet, concerned with the problem of human suffering, needed a framework for his work. He found it in the traditional tale of a sufferer named Job, who maintains his faith and integrity, and is triumphantly restored to his former estate. The poet proceeds to retell the story, keeping the main features of the well-known tale intact” (Gordis 1978, 25-26). Claus Westermann, too, views the prologue and epilogue as parts of a traditional tale, arguing that, “The poet of the ‘drama’ chose to employ a story already current in the tradition of his people....The poet lets us recognize, and wants us to recognize, that he is appropriating an earlier, long since fixed story” (Westermann 1981, 7). A few scholars view the prose section not as a pre-existent tale appropriated by the Job-poet, but as something written and appended to the poem by a later author-editor. Among these is Naphtali Tur-Sinai, who writes, “the framework-story is younger than the poem. A later writer, drawing on a tradition known to him, composed a new story instead of the original one, which apparently was not available to him in its entirety” (Tur-Sinai 1957, 31). This view, however, is in the minority. Finally, still other scholars contend that one author is responsible for the book in its entirety. Habel detects a unity that underlies the book's apparent contradictions, arguing that “analysis of the narrative plot of the book of Job reveals an underlying structure which gives coherence to the work as a literary whole....The integrity of the work is evident in its overall construction, the setting of its characters, and the interrelationship of its several parts” (Habel 1985, 35). Janzen, too, perceives the prose tale as necessary to the poetry, claiming that the poetry “requires the prologue to set the scene for its own intense dialogical questioning,” which can only mean that “Either the prose sections were composed for specific literary effects by the author of the poetry or, what amounts to the same thing, the poet adopted (or adapted) for fresh purposes a story already extant in some form” (Janzen 1985, 23). Douglas Lawrie points out that although “The book teems with inconsistencies, discrepancies and so forth....Instead of using tensions as evidence of lack of unity, one can interpret them as an important part of the author's strategy....[T]hey are necessary to what we perceive as the greatness of the book” (Lawrie 2001, 138). In a similar vein, Peggy Day gives a common-sense reason for accepting the book as a unified whole, writing, “In theory I suppose it is possible that the main sections of the book do not really fit together, but if the theory is pursued to its logical conclusion, the book of Job in its present form has, and had, no meaning. If the juxtaposition of its parts was haphazard, message is eradicated. Thus it seems more profitable to posit a basic integrity to the book of Job, and try to make sense of the component parts in light of the overall composition” (Day 1988, 71). Even if scholars like Habel and Janzen, are wrong about the underlying unity of the book and the necessary presence of the prologue, it seems to me that Day's argument presents an acceptable reason for reading the book as a unified whole. If there is no whole, there is no book, and if there is no book, its meaning cannot be inquired into and discussed.

and not as two or more.<sup>17</sup> I will assume that it is possible to read the prose section in tandem with the poetic section, as if they concern the same characters and as if both sections are familiar with each other. This way of reading means that what Job says in the poetic section can be used to elucidate and illuminate what is said in the prose section, and vice versa. I will, therefore, use Job's speech of chapter 29 together with the prose tale to describe Job's idea of what order looks like.

### *The Prose Tale as Job's Daydream*

Although Job does not speak the prose tale, I want to claim that it represents his own ideas about the workings of the world, and not the ideas of some anonymous third person narrator. Taking this claim a step further, I want to argue that the prose tale is best understood as a fantasy concocted in Job's mind, a daydream from which he is rudely awakened by the intrusion of the poetic section. Imagine this: Job sits in his garden with his head leaning against one hand, staring off into the distance. He has already been out to sacrifice on behalf of his children. Later he will join the elders at the gate. But for now he has a few moments to himself. He sits in the shade and his mind slips into a daydream. In his mind's eye he sees the heavenly council. There is God himself, surrounded by his various functionaries. God speaks, and who should he happen to speak of but Job? God says, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil?" (1:8). A smile is visible on Job's face as he dreams these words. The smile remains when one of the functionaries, *hassatan*, asks, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side?...But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face" (1:10a, 11). The smile remains even when God authorizes *hassatan* to strike at everything Job possesses except his own body. Job's smile fades, however, when the scene shifts and shows first the theft and destruction of his livestock and servants, followed by the death of his children in a

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<sup>17</sup> Although I will read the book in its final form, in this thesis I will not deal with the Elihu chapters. Carol Newsom, who also reads Job as a unified work written by one author, makes an exception for Elihu's speeches, treating them as the interpolations of a reader who, hearing the debate between Job and his friends, could not help but join in (Newsom 2003, 16-17, 30). I am not qualified to offer any kind of decisive judgment as to when and by whom the Elihu speeches were written (and even those who are much more qualified tend to disagree with each other). I do not deal with Elihu in this thesis because, when he interrupts Job and the friends to speak his mind, he picks up on aspects of their conversation which are not central to my own reading. Alan Cooper writes, "I would liken the book of Job to a tangram, one of those puzzles with pieces that fit together in countless ways...[and] no combination can be said to be 'right' or 'wrong'. And the purpose of the exercise is to learn—about shapes, colors, and forms and, of course, about one's own way of handling and responding to them" (Cooper 1990, 74). In this thesis, then, I will be fitting the book of Job together in such a way that Elihu gets left out, not because he doesn't belong in the book at all, but because he doesn't fit in the book as I am reading it here.

freak accident. Job holds back his tears, setting his jaw as he imagines himself assuming the posture of mourning while uttering brave and dignified words: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (1:21). The scene returns to the heavenly council. God and *hassatan* appear again, and, once again, they speak of Job. Job watches, now with squinting, resolute eyes. Imagine he looks like George Clooney. He has a jaw that can express determination.

In the second heavenly scene, God once again praises Job for being blameless and upright, but *hassatan* challenges God to authorize the final test. “Skin for skin!” (2:5) he whispers, and God, barely perceptibly, nods his agreement, only catching *hassatan*’s sleeve to say, “only spare his life” (2:6). (Imagine, by the way, that God looks like George Clooney, too. It is fitting that Job and God should look alike in Job’s daydream.)

*Hassatan* nods. Turning on his heel, he strides from the room, his cloak billowing behind him. Now Job sees his body covered with sores. This time, tears do not threaten to fall. Job was ready for what was coming. He sits among ashes, but the look on his face is not one of suffering or self-pity. It is the look of a man who knows what he is about, a man who will not back down no matter what. Suddenly Job’s wife appears in the dream. He is ready for her. He knows what she will say, she and all the rest of them who do not know what it is to be blameless and upright. “Curse God and die,” she nags (2:9). He dismisses her outright, calling her a foolish woman.<sup>18</sup> Then he fixes her with his dark and brooding eyes and makes his Oscar-bid speech: “Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” (2:10). He watches her face as he speaks. He can tell that his words have sunk in despite her vapid foolishness. She has nothing to say in response.

Job’s friends arrive to comfort him and, seeing himself through their eyes, he does allow himself to indulge in self pity. His friends tear their robes and put ashes on their heads and weep aloud. Job sees how bad he has it. His eyes fill and a few tears trail down his cheeks. His friends sit on the ground around him. He is on the ash heap, slightly above them. They watch him, waiting to hear what he will say. But Job has already said what he needs to say. He presses his lips together and waits. Their eyes are on him, but his eyes are on the horizon. Finally, at just the right moment, God appears again, this time not in the heavenly council but directly in front of Job. Job has passed the test. His fortunes are

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<sup>18</sup> For Job to call his wife a fool is no small slight. In chapter 30, for example, Job calls the group he thinks of as the lowest of the low בְּנֵי נָבֶל. Although it might be argued that Job does not actually consider his wife to be a fool, given that he accuses her of “speaking as one of the foolish women would speak” (כַּדְבַר אִחַת הַנְּבִלוֹת הַדְּבָרִי) and not of being a fool herself, it would be difficult to distinguish one who merely speaks like a fool from one who is a fool. Urging Job to relinquish his integrity, Job’s wife can only be a fool, for to be a fool is not only to be stupid but to be morally lacking. That she offers Job the cursing of God as a viable possibility reveals her as one who has failed to understand what integrity means.

restored. Everything that was taken from him comes rushing back in double measure. He is richer than ever before. His daughters are the most beautiful women in the world and, by craftily granting them an inheritance, he arranges for them to stay at his side until he dies, as it is unnecessary for them to marry. His wife is somewhere out of sight, as she should be. Standing on the red carpet with the one of the most beautiful women in the world on each arm—(they are taller than he is, but they still make him look good)—Job’s face gets a faraway, reflective look, as if he is seeing it all again. He slowly nods his head a few times, as if to affirm everything that has happened. Then he smiles broadly and turns away to survey his great wealth. The dream ends. Sitting in the shade, Job stretches, satisfied.

As I have just demonstrated, the prose tale can be read as a fantasy that unfolds in the mind of Job. What, though, justifies this kind of reading? Is it supported by the text, or is it simply a fantasy in *my* own mind? If it is a fantasy in my own mind, it is one that overlaps, at least a bit, with someone else’s fantasy. David Clines also suggests that Job can be read as a kind of dream. He writes,

The author...has conceived or imagined his story...from much the same stuff...as he nightly created his dreams....What kind of dream is the book of Job? Obviously, it is a death-wish, a dream in which the unconscious explores the possibility of ceasing to be....In this fantasy, however, the dreamer does not only give shape to the death-wish; he also wills the overcoming of the death-wish...the restoration of what he has both feared and wished to lose.  
(Clines 1994, 11-12)

As Clines sees it, the entire book is a fantasy belonging to its author, who is not aware of his psychological need to both experience and triumph over his fear of death. In my view, however, the author *is* aware that the prologue and epilogue are parts of a dream. The prose tale is a dream he has given his character Job to dream.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Two other scholars present related understandings of the prose tale. Meir Weiss, although he does not use the terminology of dreams or fantasy, does regard the world of the prologue as a construct created by Job and his peers. He sees a connection between the sound of the word *אֶרֶץ*, the land in which Job lives and the word *עֵצָה*, “council” or “wisdom.” At the beginning of the tale, Job lives in a world constructed by his own wisdom and governed by the precepts of the wise man. According to Weiss, the “bet” between God and *hassatan* has, as its goal, the shattering of this fantasy world and the revelation to Job of what the world is really like. Weiss writes, “Satan, on God’s authority, destroys the logical, harmonious, ethical world of ‘the Land of Uz’, which being a speculative construction, the creation of the ‘wise’ over-sophisticated man in his own image, has no basis in reality.” (Weiss 1983, 82). Peggy Day argues that the prologue, because it belongs to the folktale genre (whether or not it pre-existed the composition of the book), necessarily depicts a made-up world, writing, “The folktale, by definition...is believed to be fictitious. Entering into the world of the folktale involves a suspension of disbelief, because...[it] need not operate according to the rules of observed reality” (Day 1988, 77). For Day, the fantasy does not belong specifically to Job or the author, but is a way of luring the audience into letting go of their preconceived notions about the world, so that when the poetry begins and the story shifts to the real world they will be more likely to accept its radical claims. Although none of these scholars reads the prose tale exactly as I do, they do agree with my claim that there is something about the tale which allows it to be pegged as fantasy.

*Job as the Only Real Character in the Prose Tale*

My claim that the prose tale is Job's daydream is supported by the fact that it is a one-man show, with Job as its only character. Even though other characters appear, they serve only to bolster Job's status as the one who really counts. For example, the tale begins with what seems to be a multiplicity of characters. There are Job's seven sons and three daughters, his "seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants" (1:2b-3a). All of this multiplicity, however, adds up to make *one*. The humans and animals numbered in these verses are Job's possessions, adding up to make him "the greatest of all the people of the east" (1:3b). The word translated as "greatest" in 1:3b is, of course, גדל, which also means big. Job is the biggest man because he is made up of the most material; his possessions attach themselves to his body, swelling it in size. The sons, daughters, servants, and livestock do not count for themselves; their existence is really Job's existence. James Crenshaw supports this inference, writing, "the seven sons and three daughters who perished in the rubble...were no more than extras in a biography of God's favorite. That is why so little is written about the injustice toward them. The spotlight focuses on Job so intensely that others hardly matter at all" (Crenshaw 1984, 58). When the first round of Job's affliction begins, it is his possessions which bear the brunt of the suffering. That Job is afflicted *through them* is a clear sign that they do not exist in their own right but are, instead, parts of Job.<sup>20</sup>

What, though, about God and *hassatan*? Surely they cannot be counted among Job's possessions, such that their separate identities can be rolled up into his. Yet, although God and *hassatan* do not belong to Job in the way that his children, servants, and livestock do, they too can be seen to count for him and not for themselves in that Job is the focal point of all their attention. In the heavenly council they talk of nothing but Job. As the story tells it, Job is not privy to this conversation and so has no idea why he is beset by suffering, but, at the same time, the scene seems staged for his benefit. The point of the scene is not to pose, in an abstract way, the question of whether there can be such a thing as righteousness unmotivated by the promise of reward and to set up an objective test for

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<sup>20</sup> In this, Job resembles the capitalist described by Elaine Scarry, who writes, "Capital...[I]t is the capitalist's body. It is his body...because it bestows its reciprocating power on him...He 'owns' it—which is to say he exists in such a relation to it that it substitutes for himself in his interactions with the wider world of persons." When hard times come, the rich man feels them not in his actual human body, as the poor man must, but in the surrogate body of his possessions (Scarry 1985, 264). This explains both why Job's possessions are attacked first, *as if* to attack them is to attack Job and why it becomes necessary for Job to suffer affliction in his own, personal body in order for God and *hassatan* to gauge his true response to the test they have set for him.

the resolution of this question. The point of the scene is to witness to Job's righteousness. Job is at the center, and without Job's presence there the discussion would not happen, even though Job is supposedly excluded from the scene. Job looms large for both God and *hassatan*, filling their field of vision so that they can talk of nothing else.

The so-called "bet" made between God and *hassatan* to test Job's righteousness has often been interpreted as sadistic, as harming Job for no good reason. It might be argued, then, that God and *hassatan* are not so easily reducible to Job, given their ability to harm him. Job may loom large even in heaven, but he is not so big that God and *hassatan* have no power over him. Instead, his bigness singles him out for torture. If he were not as big as he is, he would not be worth the wager. Indeed, Hugh Pyper, taking as his cue the detail that "bless" is often used in Job to mean its opposite, "curse,"<sup>21</sup> argues that if Job had not been supremely blessed by God, he would not have found himself *also* supremely cursed. Pyper views this as wholly negative: better not to be blessed than to possess the blessing that incurs curse (Pyper 2005, 58-60). Big as he is, Job is a pawn in the hands of God and *hassatan*; if he were smaller, they would not notice him and he would be better off all around, as Pyper sees it.

### *How Job is the Real Winner of the "Bet" Between God and Hassatan*

Yet, even though the "bet" causes Job's suffering, the way in which it adds to his bigness should not be overlooked. What Job has to gain by undergoing the test is not only validation of his status as one deserving of God's special focus, but confirmation that he is bigger and more righteous than even God. In the world of the prose tale, God's taking up of *hassatan's* challenge is exactly what Job wants. If God had simply answered, "Yes, I think so," to *hassatan's* query, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" *hassatan* would not have

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<sup>21</sup> There are four places in the book where the pi'el of בָּרַךְ, which usually means "bless," seems to mean its opposite, "curse" (or, more accurately, "blaspheme," for as Christopher Mitchell points out, curse "denotes pronouncement of an imprecation or spell to be effected by God, and God could hardly be invoked against himself" [Mitchell 1987, 161]): 1:5, 1:11, 2:5, and 2:9. This usage is often understood as piously euphemistic: the writer, not able to stomach the thought of making God the object of even potential curse, has chosen to write "bless" instead, and relies on the context to give his readers the clue that he is really talking about blasphemy and not blessing. Bruce Vawter writes, "Everyone recognizes that we are in the presence of a biblical euphemism of pious 'correction' of the text" (Vawter 1983, 29). Yet, although this is the dominant explanation of this usage of בָּרַךְ, some scholars argue that the real explanation is not quite so simple. Tod Linafelt makes a convincing case for "the undecidability of בָּרַךְ," proposing that the author, rather than intending his readers to immediately recognize that בָּרַךְ is being used to mean its opposite, has instead created in בָּרַךְ "the site of conflicted meaning." That is, in the author's use of בָּרַךְ, both meanings are presented as real possibilities, which calls into question what it means to be blessed and what it means to be cursed (Linafelt 1996, 162, 168). Pyper's reading of the blessing and cursing of Job—in which to have been supremely blessed is to be set up for the receipt of supreme curse—shares similarities with Linafelt's view.

been satisfied, but neither would Job. *Hassatan*, in fact, prevents God from answering “Yes, I think so,” by annexing to his question an indictment of God. He accuses, “Have you not put a fence around him?” (1:10a, my italics).<sup>22</sup> In order to fully answer *hassatan*’s question, God must not only answer for Job’s behavior but for his own. “Is it not true,” *hassatan* asks, “that you and Job are in cahoots and that money has traded hands under the table?” In order to clear his own name, God has to allow *hassatan* to test Job. It is a case of one partner to an illicit agreement handing his partner over to face the music while he makes a getaway out the back door. God hands Job over and beats a hasty retreat. But if God and Job are in cahoots in a money-for-good-behavior scheme, Job and *hassatan* are also in cahoots. By forcing God to test Job’s loyalty, a situation is set up in which, if Job passes the test, God will be in Job’s power. Testing Job’s loyalty, God becomes the disloyal partner when Job’s loyalty is proved.<sup>23</sup>

Job passes the first level of the test by worshiping God even when he has been stripped of his possessions, and the scene returns to the heavenly council. Now it is God’s turn to accuse the Accuser, saying, “[Job] still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason” (2:4). That God puts his complaint in these terms is not surprising. He refers back to *hassatan*’s original question, “Does Job fear God for nothing” (1:9). The same word—אָנָן—is used in both verses. Job has proven that he fears God for no reason, but Job’s passing of the test has rendered God’s justification for setting the test in the first place groundless. That God makes this comment indicates his acknowledgment that really one’s actions *ought* to be backed up by reasons. God knows that he *ought not* to have caused Job to suffer for no reason. In order to justify God’s testing of him, Job *ought not* to have passed the test. The original question, “Does Job fear God for nothing?” ought not to have been asked if it could be answered in the affirmative. God recognizes that he has been trapped by *hassatan*, but the one who stands to benefit from this entrapment is Job.<sup>24</sup>

In reality, God did not expect Job to fear him for nothing, as is shown when he acknowledges that he has done wrong by afflicting Job for no reason. Job and God had an arrangement that was working perfectly well, but now the stakes have been raised. Having been drawn into the trap, God must continue on the path laid out by *hassatan*. He must

<sup>22</sup> The italics are mine, but the Hebrew text also emphasizes the “you”: הֲלֹא־אַתָּה שָׂכַתָּ.

<sup>23</sup> David Robertson argues that when the shift from prose to poetry happens, we find ourselves so identified with Job that we join him in accusing God of misconduct. Robertson writes, “[The poet] has... altered what began as a test of Job’s loyalty to God into a test of God’s loyalty to Job” (Robertson 1973, 450-51). It seems to me, though, that this apparent reversal is already in place in the prologue. When Job passes the test, God’s having instituted the test is shown to be an act of betrayal.

<sup>24</sup> Roland Murphy, too, identifies the “bet” between God and *hassatan* as “a trap into which the Lord is snookered” (Murphy 2002, 549), though he views *hassatan*, not Job, as the one finally responsible for the snookering.

now allow *hassatan* to do physical harm to Job himself, so that Job can be proven to be sinful and God proven to be righteous. *Hassatan* acts swiftly, using his newly sanctioned power to inflict “loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head” (2:7), but Job again passes the test, speaking the magic words, “Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” (2:10), and advancing to the next level.

But what is the next level? Is it the final removal of limit from *hassatan*'s power, permission to strike Job dead? It cannot be. The terms of the test do not allow for Job's death. If God allows *hassatan* to kill Job, then God's guilt is sealed, because there is no way of knowing whether Job has passed or failed. God must concede that this is as far as the test can go, and that Job has passed it. Job is vindicated and proven to “fear God for nothing.” The one who is vanquished in this exchange is not *hassatan*, who only seemed to be Job's enemy, but God. In passing the test, Job has proven himself more righteous than God. James Harding supports this interpretation, writing, “Job must be more righteous than YHWH: Job has pursued righteousness within the framework of the moral order, whether or not he had an ulterior motive, a question that is never conclusively resolved. YHWH, on the other hand, has willfully and without moral justification, disrupted the moral order in allowing Job to be afflicted” (Harding 2005, 164).

What move can God make? How can God extricate himself from this check mate? He can't, really. All that he can do is restore Job to his former position of wealth and power, giving him even more, even double, what he had before. The restoration of Job's wealth is not, however, God's rewarding Job for passing the test; rather, it is tribute paid by the loser to the winner.<sup>25</sup> That the bet can be seen as a “set up,” which has, as its goal the glorification of Job, so that Job is proven more righteous than God, supports my claim that the prose tale is Job's fantasy, in which he is the only real character. It is Job who is the sole focus of the attention of God and *hassatan*, and Job himself can be seen to motivate their actions. When the workings of the “bet” are examined, it becomes clear that Job has masterminded the whole thing.

### *Enter More Characters, but Job Alone Remains Real*

Job's children, servants, and livestock have been shown to exist as mere appendages to Job. God and *hassatan* have been shown to be Job's puppets, figuring in

<sup>25</sup> Charles Melchert points out that the doubling of Job's fortunes in the epilogue echoes Exodus 22:9, which “pronounces ‘For every breach of trust, whether it is for ox, for ass, for sheep, for clothing, or for any kind of lost thing, of which one says, “This is it,” the case of both parties shall come before God; he whom God shall condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.’” Melchert continues, “By paying back double to Job, God accepts the legitimacy of Job's legal suit and implicitly condemns the God to whom Job has yielded” (Melchert 1997, 19).

the story only because of what they can do for him. A few other characters are mentioned, but they, too, are focused entirely on Job and appear in the story for his benefit and not their own. Job's wife is one of these. Various commentators note that it is strange that she appears only once and then disappears from the narrative, but that she makes even one appearance is equally strange. Why should she have survived the destruction visited on the rest of Job's family in *hassatan*'s first attack?

Her identity as the lone survivor matches that of the three servants who survive the catastrophes engineered by *hassatan* and return to report to Job about what has happened. Like Job's wife, those servants speak one line and then disappear completely from the story. In fact, they survive only in order to tell Job what has happened. If it were not necessary for a message to be delivered to Job, they would not have survived, but would have met the same fate as the others. It is for this reason that, having delivered their messages, they promptly disappear from the narrative. In addition, the device of having the servants report each disaster to Job allows "the spotlight [to] remain fixed upon Job" (Clines 1998a, 736), instead of having the reader's attention shift to the scene of each catastrophe. Fire may be falling from heaven, marauding hordes may be swooping in, tall buildings may be crashing to the ground, but we are blind and deaf to them; we have eyes and ears for Job alone, and what we see and hear comes to us through Job. Job's wife survives, the lone member of Job's family, like the lone servant from the site of each catastrophe, in order to interact with Job. Like the servants, she has her own message to deliver. She delivers it—"Curse God and die"—presenting Job with the cue that will allow him to prove his righteousness, and immediately disappears from the story.

Job's three friends, too, when they appear in the prologue, do not detract from Job's status as the tale's central and only real character. Rather, he is the absolute center of their focus, so much so that their presence serves only to make *him* even more present. We read,

They met together to go and console and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great. (2:11b-13)

There is a curious confluence of knowing and not knowing here. The Hebrew does not say that the friends *saw* Job as they approached, but that they "lifted their eyes"

(וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־עֵינֵיהֶם), indicating that they are actively looking for him. Lifting their eyes from a distance, the friends do not recognize (לֹא הִכִּירָהוּ) the one for whom they are looking, and yet, immediately upon *not recognizing* him, the friends lift their voices

(וַיִּשְׂאוּ קוֹלָם) to weep aloud for their friend, showing that, although they have not recognized him, they do know that he is the one they are looking for. That they recognize him even as they do not recognize him serves to highlight Job's centrality. The one upon whom the friends' eyes alight can only be Job, even if he does not look like Job. As the central, real character of the story, he is the only person whom it is possible for the friends to see. It is for this reason that when they lift their eyes and do not recognize him, they immediately recognize him and respond first with tears and then with silence.

The verbs which describe the friends' activity in this passage also serve to focus attention on Job. As the friends approach, their eyes and voices are lifted *up* to Job who occupies a higher plane than that on which the friends move. Reaching Job, the friends promptly sit *down* (יָשָׁבוּ) to allow themselves to continue to look *up* at him. Whatever the cultural meaning of the friends' throwing dust (עָפְרוּ) *up* toward heaven (הַשָּׁמַיְמָה) upon their heads (עַל־רֹאשֵׁיהֶם), it too serves to lower the friends in Job's presence: those who have dust upon their heads are lower than the dust. Job may be sitting among the ashes (בְּתוֹךְ־אֲפֵרָה), but the ashes do not cover his head as the dust covers the heads of his friends. However low he has been brought, the friends are quick to adopt positions of deference, raising their eyes to him and lowering their bodies.

Some commentators have noted that the friends' behavior represents a fully appropriate response to Job's suffering. The friends' silence indicates that they understand the depths of Job's suffering.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, that they tear their clothes and join him on the ash heap shows that they empathize deeply with him; they are as *with him* in his suffering as it is possible for them to be.<sup>27</sup> The friends' response is, no doubt, appropriate. Nevertheless, we should not overlook the fact that it causes them to lose their status as separate characters as they, too, are rolled into the conglomerate of Job's identity. Adopting the signs of his suffering and grief, they make clear that it is *his* experience that is of central importance. Although this may be seen as the behavior of true friends faced with the extreme suffering of one who is dear to them,<sup>28</sup> those who commend this behavior in the

<sup>26</sup> Page Kelley, for example, writes that the friends "not only came to visit Job with the best of intentions, but they also demonstrated the value of empathetic silence in ministering to one overcome with grief" (Kelley 1971, 480).

<sup>27</sup> Habel comments effusively on the bond between the friends and Job, as it is revealed in their initial response. He writes, "They weep in empathetic response to his tragic condition; they join him in abject self-negation by throwing dust on their heads and flinging it heavenward....They identify with Job as a man reduced to the dust....They are ideal friends who commiserate with Job as he suffers in perfect submission" (Habel 1977, 228). Elsewhere, Habel suggests that the friends' gesture of throwing "dust in the air upon their heads" (2:12) is "a rite which symbolically calls forth the same sickness on themselves as an act of total empathy. They are one with the dust of death and one with Job in his diseases" (Habel 1985, 97).

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that not all commentators view the friends' behavior in this positive light. Christopher Ash suggests that although "It is usual to say that [their silence] was the best thing they did...their silence

prose tale tend to discount the friends' speech when they do open their mouths and differentiate themselves from Job. Ward Ewing, for example, writes, "I am convinced that the best thing Eliphaz and the friends could have done would have been to continue sitting quietly. All would have been well had they simply been with Job in a quiet, accepting manner, a ministry of presence" (Ewing 1976, 49). Donal O'Connor concurs, writing, "Job's three friends consoled him with their tears and their silent presence....It was only when they broke their silence that they failed as comforters" (O'Connor 1995, 129-30). In this view, the friends ought to have remained silent. Only Job has the right to speak. If the friends must speak, it should be to concur with Job, not to voice dissent. Such readings, it seems, have bought into the vision of the ordered world that is being presented in the prose tale, a world in which there is—and ought to be—only one character of any real value.

Although in the prologue Job is stripped of his possessions and his health, and although he, who was the greatest man in the east, is reduced to sitting on the ash heap, he remains the greatest man *in the story*. When the friends come to comfort him, they are silenced because the man who was גָּדֹל has been overwhelmed by a suffering which is גָּדֹל. Yet, even in his suffering—indeed, precisely because of the *greatness* of his suffering—Job remains a towering figure. The tale, and all its characters are focused throughout entirely on Job. Although Job is reduced for a time, the end of the tale sees him restored, not only to his former greatness, but to a greatness double that by which he was originally characterized:

The LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all they who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him<sup>29</sup>; and each gave him

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may not have been as helpful as is often assumed....[I]t may be that their silence is not so much a silence of sympathy as a silence of bankruptcy: they are silent because they have nothing to say....[I]t is as if they call for the hearse and sit by Job with the coffin open and ready" (Ash 2004, 28). This reading of the friends' gestures is about as different from Habel's interpretation (given in the footnote above) as it is possible to be! Gordis, too, offers an understanding of the friends' throwing dust in the air that is the exact opposite of that proposed by Habel. He writes, "When the visitors see Job in his affliction, they throw dust over their heads heavenwards...in order to ward off the evil from themselves" (Gordis 1978, 24). Weiss concurs: "the action of Job's friends...is a magical act of self-defense: in order to ensure that the sores with which Job is afflicted...will not fall from heaven on them as well, they throw dust over their heads into the sky as they approach Job" (Weiss 1983, 76). Still, the majority of commentators view the friends' actions as indicating solidarity with Job, even if most are not quite as expansive on the subject as Habel is!

<sup>29</sup> These actions on the part of Job's family and acquaintances are the same as those the three friends intended to perform when they first sought Job out at the ash heap. In 2:11 we are told that, having heard of all this evil that had come upon him (בְּכָל־הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת הַבָּאָה עָלָיו), the friends set out to console (נָדָד) him and to comfort him (נָחֵם). The same verbs are used in 42:11 of Job's family and friends who show sympathy (נָדָד) and comfort (נָחֵם) Job for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him (בְּכָל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר־הֵבִיא יְהוָה עָלָיו). The difference between these two instances of consoling and comforting is clear: in chapter 2, the friends do not attribute the evil Job suffers to anyone, whereas in chapter 42 it is attributed to God. It is, it would seem, this difference which is at the root of the friends' failure to comfort Job as compared with the successful comforting in chapter 42. In chapter 2, although the

a piece of money and a gold ring. The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. (42:10b-12a)

At the end of the story, a multitude of characters comes rushing in, reversing the move of the prologue in which Job loses the multitude which once surrounded him. These characters, like those of the prologue, serve only to make Job bigger. Their focus is entirely on him as they comfort him, and they literally contribute to his aggrandizement with gifts of money and gold rings. Job's suffering is placed in context by his greatness at the end of the story. His being stripped down is shown not to have been a real reduction in his status, but a step on the path to further greatness. Although, as noted above, Pyper speaks disparagingly of Job's blessed status at the beginning of the tale, pointing out that it is blessing which singles him out for curse, Job himself, in the prose tale, can be seen to welcome the curse, precisely because it is a sign of his supreme blessedness. The curse, though it initially seems to reduce Job's size, eventually results in an increase in his size; at the end of the tale he is bigger than ever before.

### *Chapter 29: The Ordered World as a One-Man Show*

The prose tale tells a story that is really about Job alone, with none of the other characters figuring except as appendages of Job or as pointers to show where all attention should be focused. I have suggested that, given the tale's unilateral focus, the tale can be read as a daydream in Job's own mind. I have also said that the tale represents Job's vision of the ordered world, the way the world ought to be. These claims are corroborated by Job's speech in chapter 29. In this speech, Job is overtly painting a picture of the world as it ought to be, a world that existed, he claims, in the time before his suffering began. He begins his speech by wishing, "O that I were<sup>30</sup> as in the months of old" (29:2a), a wish that would return him to the realm of the prose tale, both in its pre-suffering beginning and its post-suffering conclusion. The link between chapter 29 and the world of the prose tale is highlighted by the word **מִזְמֶר**, which is used both in the description of Job's former status—he was the greatest of all the people of **מִזְמֶר** ("the east")—and to describe the time to which he wants to return—"O that I were as in the months of **מִזְמֶר** ("old," "earlier times").

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friends may defer to Job in general, they do not understand that he is bigger and more righteous than God. This is precisely what the friends and relatives of chapter 42—who lay the blame for Job's suffering squarely on God—do understand.

<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, what Job says here is actually "Who will give me...?" (**מִי יִתְּנֵנִי**), which seems to gesture toward the connection between what one possesses and what one is. Job was greatest because of what he possessed. To be what he once was, Job must again have what he had then.

The world which Job describes in chapter 29 is a world in which he is the central, real character. Job begins by remembering the special attention which he received from God in that world, saying, “God watched over me;...his lamp shone over my head, and by his light I walked through darkness;...I was in my prime...the friendship of God was upon my tent;...the Almighty was still with me” (29:2b-5a). Here, as in the prose tale, God’s eye is focused on Job, and the result of this focus is blessing: “my steps were washed with milk, and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!” (29:6). Granted, in other speeches of the poetic section Job has recognized himself as singled out by God, but for torture instead of blessing. (For example, in chapter 7 Job accuses God of being a “watcher of humanity”<sup>31</sup> [v. 20a] and implores, “Will you not look away<sup>32</sup> from me for a while, let me alone until I swallow my spittle?” [v. 19]) A God who can torture Job—really torture him, and not just *seem* to torture him, as in the prose tale<sup>33</sup>—can be seen to be a separate character from Job, capable of actions that do not have as their goal the bolstering of Job. In chapter 29, however, Job remembers a time when God was not a real, separate character, when God’s gaze was only favorable, and when God could only do to Job what Job wanted done, could only bless Job and not curse (or, could curse, but with the intended end result of increased blessing).

After describing himself as the center of God’s benevolent attention, and noting that, in those days, “my children were around me” (29:5b), another detail which serves to establish his centrality, Job goes on to describe himself as the center of attention for both the town’s leaders and its righteous poor. His portrayal of the way in which he is greeted by the important people gathered at the city gate is similar to the prose tale’s depiction of the arrival of the three friends. There, of course, the meeting takes place on the ash heap, but the configuration is the same. In chapter 29, Job says, “When I went out to the gate of the city, when I took my seat in the square, the young men saw me and withdrew, and the aged rose up and stood; the nobles refrained from talking, and laid their hands on their mouths; the voices of princes were hushed, and their tongues stuck to the roof of their mouths” (29:7-10). Newsom comments on this passage, “his entry...causes a reconfiguration of those present: Job sits, the young men withdraw, the elders rise and

<sup>31</sup> The verbal root used here is נצַר, whereas that used in 29:2 is שָׁמַר. Neither word, though, has connotations which are more overtly positive or negative than the other.

<sup>32</sup> The verb used here—שָׁעַר—is not just plain looking, but seems to connote looking with special attention. In Genesis 4:4, for example, we read, “And the Lord had regard (שָׁעַר) for Abel and his offering.” In Isaiah 17:7 we find, “On that day people will regard (שָׁעַר) their Maker, and their eyes will look to the Holy One of Israel.” What Job seems to be demanding here is that God make him no longer the center of his attention, for to be the center of God’s attention is to be the one who bears the brunt of his overwhelming power. In chapter 29, though, Job imagines God’s attention quite differently.

<sup>33</sup> See discussion on pages 48-49.

stand. Space is made for Job....When he enters, all others fall silent, their hands covering their mouths (29:7-10)” (Newsom 1994, 11). Indeed, the phrase translated “the voices of princes were hushed” might also be understood as saying that their voices “went into hiding” (a literal translation of the Hebrew נִחַבְּסוּ). Holding the poetic “were hushed” and the literal “went into hiding” together, we find that what is being described is both the princes’ self-silencing and space-making; the two go hand-in-hand.

In the prologue, it is the friends who arrive at the place where Job is already sitting, but their seeing him causes a similar reconfiguration. When the friends catch sight of Job their behavior changes immediately. They have been walking together, presumably talking amongst themselves, but when they see Job their own conversation stops, and is replaced by loud wails of mourning, accompanied by gestures of grief (2:12-13). Although the friends’ behavior may be understood as the fitting response to their friend’s affliction, there is more going on, which is illuminated by how Job describes his relations with his peers in chapter 29.

In both passages, the sight of Job occasions a complete redirection of attention towards Job. In chapter 29, young and old, nobles and princes, move aside to make room for Job at the center of their gathering. In chapter 2, the friends change their posture and their behavior to show that Job is the center of their focus: he is grieving, and so they grieve; he is on the ground, so they get down on the ground, too. In chapter 29, a hush falls on the gathering as the group waits to hear what Job will say. Job places great emphasis on this silence, saying, “They listened to me, and waited, and kept silence for my counsel. After I spoke, they did not speak again, and my word dropped upon them like dew. They waited for me as for the rain; they opened their mouths as for the spring rain” (29:21-23). Job presents himself as the only valid speaker. The important men of the town are silenced at the sight of him, because they know that he will speak the definitive word. They do not begrudge Job his superior wisdom, but recognize that it nourishes them as the rain nourishes the spring flowers. In the same way, in chapter 2, after the friends have changed their posture to show deference to Job, they too fall silent, their eyes on him, waiting to hear what he will say. In both scenarios, Job is at the center, surrounded by deferential silence which only he is authorized to break.

### *Job and the Social Hierarchy*

In chapter 29, a second group surrounds Job, one quite different from that made up of the city’s important men. This is the group of the righteous poor, Job’s help of whom is

the guarantee of his own righteousness: Job gives his care for the downtrodden as the reason for the deference shown him by the princes and nobles. The poor, too, show Job deference, silently awaiting his sustaining word. On the surface of it, there is nothing wrong with Job's care for the poor; nothing suggests that he does not do what he says he does, or that he does it only for personal gain, and yet, as Newsom points out, there is a darker side to Job's activities, unnoticed by Job himself. She writes,

What is troubling is that Job's identity as a person of righteousness and justice is inextricably bound up with the logic of inequality. There is a binary relationship of donor/recipient, dominant/subordinate that undergirds the moral thinking of such relationships....[S]uch a moral vision can encompass amelioration of suffering but not transformation of the structures that generate the inequalities that produce suffering. (Newsom 1994, 12)

That is, the poor must exist if Job is to retain his position at the top of the town's hierarchy. Since the deference shown him by the town's important men is based on his treatment of the poor, as Job himself indicates, saying, "When the ear heard, it commended me, and when the eye saw, it approved; because I delivered the poor who cried, and the orphan who had no helper" (29:11-12), the poor must continue to exist as a group in need of Job's help. Job cannot help them so much that they cease to require his aid. To do so would be to pull the rug of his righteousness out from under his feet.

Job's position may depend fundamentally on the existence of the needy, which is certainly troubling, but it also depends upon the nobles and princes who must recognize Job as deserving of deference. Though less so, this is also problematic. The young men, elders, nobles, and princes who withdraw and are silent to make room for Job, cannot be central as Job is central. Although they are higher on the social ladder than the widow and the orphan, they must always remain lower than Job. God's chastisement of the friends near the end of the prose tale is a case in point. God says to them, "My wrath is kindled against you...for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (42:7). At first glance, this castigation seems out of place following the poetic section in which the friends have upheld the tenets of traditional piety against Job who has flouted them and who himself has just been accused by God of speaking "words without knowledge" (38:2b). In fact, God's discipline of the friends seems doubly misplaced, given that, if the poetry is set aside and the focus is shifted to the prose tale alone, we see that the friends are silent, waiting for Job to speak as they have always waited, showing him the deference they have always shown him, despite his reduced circumstances.

Some commentators explain the seeming non-sequitur of God's chastisement of the friends as indicating that the part of the prose tale in which the friends did speak has been

left out of the finished composition.<sup>34</sup> Yet, there is a way of making sense of God's criticism of the friends which does not presuppose a missing passage. Technically, the accusation God brings against the friends is not that they have spoken wrongly, but that they have not spoken *rightly* as Job has. Perhaps, then, they are chastised not for a sin of commission, but for a sin of omission.<sup>35</sup> Instead of speaking themselves—whether rightly or wrongly—they have always waited for Job to speak. They are punished, in effect, for making room for Job, for showing him the deference he seems to deserve, indeed does deserve. Job's central position is dependent upon that space being cleared for him by both the poor and the important men of the city. Job is rewarded for being where and what he is, but those upon whom his status rests are punished for their lower position, even though their position makes Job's position possible. The poor are punished with poverty that can never be fully alleviated if Job is to remain their righteous benefactor; the important men are castigated for their silence, which cannot be broken if Job is to remain at the center of attention. We may deem it unfair of God to chastise the friends for keeping silence when their silence allows Job to speak rightly, just as it is unfair for the poor to remain poor when they are responsible for Job's status, but this is how the world works in the prose tale and in chapter 29. The friends' silence enables Job's right speech, but this does not absolve them from not speaking rightly themselves. They, like the poor, are playing a no-win game.

### *The Chaotic World of Chapter 30: Job Displaced from the Center*

In chapter 29, Job describes the world as it ought to be, which, he contends, is the way the world used to be, before he began to suffer, and he wishes for the return of this world. For this reason, chapter 29 can be mapped onto the prose tale, which details the world as it was before Job's affliction began and the world as it is after he is relieved from his suffering. For Job, the ordered world is a world in which he is the only real character, upon whom all attention is focused. It is not, however, a world in which he is alone. Rather, he is surrounded by other characters, but these characters exist only to be of

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<sup>34</sup> Marvin Pope summarizes, "Some interpreters see it as an indication that the folk tale originally presented a pious and patient Job throughout...who continued to praise God and ignored his wife's advice to blaspheme and die. It has been suggested that the friends gave similar advice, which would explain the divine censure" (Pope 1965, 290).

<sup>35</sup> Donal O'Connor, although he does not link the friends' silence in the prologue with the silence of the townspeople in chapter 29 as I will below, does suggest that the friends are chastised not for anything they have said but for what they have not said. He writes, "The...text may well be interpreted as indicating that the friends remained silent...when the Lord would have preferred them to have spoken correctly of his providence as Job had done....They expressed no religious attitude to the tragedy of Job....Could it be that their very silence, their failure to bless God, as Job had done, is the reason for the divine reproach (43:7)?" (O'Connor 1995, 68).

service to Job. It is in this way that Job views the ordered world as a place of singularity and simplicity, rather than of multiplicity and complexity. In chapter 29, Job does not wish for relief of his physical suffering—indeed, he does not mention his suffering at all—but for a renewal of the order of the world, such that he is again at the center. His focus in this chapter is entirely on his former central status, which he contrasts in chapter 30 with the way he is treated now by social outcasts whose gaze does not identify him as the central character, but as someone who is even more of an outcast than they themselves. Job says, “And now they mock me in song; I am a byword to them. They abhor me, they keep aloof from me; they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me” (30:9-10). These derelicts keep their distance from Job, but when they happen to catch sight of him they spit or sing mocking taunts—almost as an aside—before moving on about their own business, which is where their focus lies. When Job says that he has become “as a byword” to these lowlifes, he uses the same word he used in 29:22 to describe his life-giving utterance for which his community waited in silence, מְלֵאָה. Where once Job was the speaker at the center of a circle of noble admirers, now he is the one spoken-of, as if his entire existence can be summed up by a mocking word casually dropped by men who are lower than dogs.

It is not his physical suffering that is the worst of Job’s predicament, but the fact that the physical suffering has toppled him from his former position as the central figure of the world in which he lived. In the prose tale, Job’s affliction, though it sends him to the ash heap, does not represent a chaotic disordering of the world because he remains at the center. There, God and *hassatan* are waiting to see what he will do and say, because what he does and says are of paramount importance. The friends, too, watch Job, silently waiting to see what the central character of the story in which they are supporting cast members will do. In chapter 30, however, Job presents a world overrun by chaos. Job has ceased to be the story’s central figure and has become a member of the supporting cast, serving to bolster others’ status by being the object of their mockery and disdain.

### *Multiplicity in the Form of the Poetic Dialogues*

Into the simplicity of Job’s ordered world, where he is the only one who speaks, breaks the multiplicity of the poetic dialogues, in which Job’s three formerly silent friends also speak. In the poetic dialogues, the three friends become characters in their own right. They have their own opinions to express, because, having heard what Job has to say beginning in chapter 3, they are no longer satisfied by his words. At first, the friends are reluctant to speak. It is as if they are waking up from a dream of nonexistence, as if they

are wooden dolls who, having been sprinkled with fairy dust, now find that they have turned into real people. Job, too, begins the poetic dialogues by waking from a dream. Stephen Mitchell describes the shift from prose to poetry as signaling “a change in reality.” He explains,

[T]he world of the prologue is two-dimensional....It is like a puppet show. The author first brings out the patient Job, his untrusting god, and the chief spy/prosecutor, and has the figurines enact the...story in the puppet theater of his prose. Then, behind them, the larger curtain rises, and flesh-and-blood actors begin to voice their passions on a life-sized stage. (Mitchell 1989, ix-x)

Peggy Day presents a similar account of the transition, writing “in chapter three...[t]he cardboard character of Job all at once becomes animated, and he rails against his misfortune” (Day 1988, 83).

I agree with these interpreters that the shift from prose to poetry is significant and that the worlds they present are different worlds, the first a fantasy and the second “reality.” I do not agree, however, that Job is on a par with the other puppets in the prologue. Rather, it is Job who is responsible for manipulating the other characters who are his puppets in his own personal show. Job is the one who dreams the scenario and its characters, and thus he must be said to be real, even if he also dreams himself, imagining how he would react to an anguish which he is not actually experiencing. With the onset of the poetry, it is not Job who has become real, but his suffering. His words and actions in chapter 3 are in direct opposition to what he has said and done in the prologue because he has discovered that his dream, in which he both suffers and triumphs over suffering without feeling any pain, has translated itself into the real world, and he is shocked to find that he is in agony and that he cannot bear it.

In a sense, when he enters the “real” world of the poetry, Job discovers that he is *less* real, because he is no longer the only real character. In his new situation, his suffering is worse, because it has ceased to be a mark of his central reality, and, by extension, the kind of curse that leads inevitably to blessing. In the new context, Job’s affliction is not a blessing masquerading as a curse, but a curse alone. Whereas in chapter 2 Job has closed his mouth insisting that he will never curse God but will hold fast to his integrity (something he could do because he recognized that the curse was a sign and promise of blessing), in chapter 3, Job’s new situation pries his mouth open and fills it with curses. The friends respond to these curses not with reverent silence but with criticism of Job. Although at first they are timid in their reprisals, couching them in polite formulas—“If one ventures a word with you, will you be offended?” says Eliphaz in the first of the friends’ speeches (4:2a)—as time goes on and they gain confidence in themselves while losing confidence in Job, they become more directly accusatory. Job, although he

responds to the friends, makes clear in chapter 29 that were the world as it ought to be, the conversation in which he is engaged would not be happening, because the friends would remain silent in his presence. The existence of the conversation in itself, regardless of what is being said, is a sign that all is not right with the world.

*Bakhtin, Vonnegut, and the Dialogic Style of the Book of Job*

Yet, conversation makes up the bulk of the book, and even Job's depiction of the ordered world in which there is no conversation is given as part of the ongoing conversation, thus making it only one view among many of the way the world ought to be. The friends do not respond to Job's vision of chapter 29, with its call for a return to the time before conversation began, but two chapters later Elihu butts in, adding yet another voice to the discussion. In this way, Job's call for an end to conversation only serves to generate more conversation. Because the book is structured around conversation, Newsom engages literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas about the dialogic nature of truth in her reading of the book. For Bakhtin, she explains, there are two types of truth, monologic and dialogic. Whereas monologic truth can be expressed by one person and is objective (in that *anyone* could speak it, whatever her circumstances), dialogic truth can only be arrived at in conversation between two or more people, each of whom is speaking from a unique perspective. In addition, because dialogic truth "exists at the point of intersection of several unmerged voices" (Newsom 2003, 22 ) it cannot be finalized. Monologic truths are truths which can be established as true for all time. Dialogic truth cannot be similarly fixed, for the simple reason that someone new may join the conversation, thus shifting the point of intersection. In Newsom's analysis, the Book of Job can be read as expressing exactly such a dialogic form of truth. She takes issue with commentators who read the book as if only one of its characters speaks the real and final truth. Such readings, it seems, buy into the vision of order as presented by Job in the prose tale and in chapter 29, in which other characters exist simply to bolster his own central reality. The commentators who read the book this way perform what Job is finally incapable of doing, that is, silencing the voices that have broken in and interrupted his solitary centrality.<sup>36</sup> Although Newsom takes seriously what Job has to say in the book, she also takes seriously what the other characters have to say, accepting that they, too, are real characters whose points of view contribute to the truth about the issues under discussion.

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<sup>36</sup> Or, perhaps, given that the book ends with a return to the prose tale, it seems to these commentators that Job does succeed in silencing the other characters who have been speaking "out of turn" in the poetic section. I will discuss the implications of the return to the prose tale later and offer an alternative interpretation.

If Newsom is right, the author has set the book up as a conversation in which truth cannot be assigned to one single character, as if only one character speaks what is right while the others have got it wrong. Even though in the epilogue God commends Job for being the only one to have spoken rightly, these congratulations cannot be taken at face value given that, in the poetic section immediately preceding, God has accused Job of speaking without knowledge. In fact, God's congratulation of Job for speaking rightly following on the heels of God's chastisement of Job for speaking wrongly serves not to single Job out as the only character in possession of a valid perspective, but to undermine the idea that the valid perspective can belong to one character alone. God, who seems, at one moment, to perceive Job's speech as wrong and, in the next, as right, cannot be deemed a wholly authoritative judge, capable of speaking a monologic truth which will hold up in dialogic circumstances. Instead, God, too, is shown to be an "embodied" character who speaks out of particular circumstances, one voice among many instead of *the* voice which transcends the many.

In Newsom's view, the Book of Job is similar to Bakhtin's "polyphonic novel," in which each voice is simply one voice among many, and no voice speaks authoritatively to the extent that the other characters' claims can be discounted. In a polyphonic novel all characters are equally real. In such a work, even the author cannot be considered more real than the characters, at least within the world of the book. The author does not speak from a position which is privileged, nor are those characters privileged who share the views of the author. Bakhtin explains, "The author of a polyphonic novel is not required to renounce himself or his own consciousness, but he must to an extraordinary extent broaden, deepen and rearrange this consciousness...in order to accommodate the autonomous consciousnesses of others" (Bakhtin 1984a, 68). To relinquish primary centrality and reality to allow for the real existence of other characters requires a significant effort on the part of the author, for the author of a work, simply by nature of being its author, is central to the work. Without the author, after all, the world encapsulated in the book and the characters inhabiting it would not exist. Because the characters exist only because the author exists, they are, naturally, of secondary reality and importance. Most novels are not polyphonic. Indeed, in Bakhtin's assessment, it is only Dostoevsky who has succeeded in writing novels which are truly polyphonic (Bakhtin 1984a, 6-7, 12-13).

The fact that an author must *choose* to write a polyphonic book—and the fact that most do not do so—raises an important question about the author's role in such a work. On the one hand, a characteristic of novelistic polyphony is that the author's position of privilege is relinquished, as other characters are given the right to speak as real beings. On

the other hand, that the author chooses to allow the world she is creating to function in this way, indicates that the author's point of view is still, at least in this respect, privileged. "How ought the world I am creating to work?" we can imagine the writer asking herself. The author of a polyphonic work would respond, "It ought to work in such a way that all the characters are real characters, as real as I am, who engage in real conversation with each other and with me." This, though, is only *one* way in which the question can be answered. It might just as easily be answered, "It ought to work in such a way that the character whose views represent my own is shown to be in the right," and, indeed, if Bakhtin is right about the rarity of polyphonic novels, this is how it is answered more often than not. On the most basic question of how the world of the novel will function, the author's position must be privileged, even if the author chooses that the world will function in such a way that no one point of view is privileged, including her own.

Bakhtin skirts this issue by taking it as a given that life in the real world—the world outside of novels—is itself polyphonic.<sup>37</sup> The author, in choosing to write a polyphonic book is not, then, choosing that the world of his or her creation will work in a particular way, but is merely choosing to mirror the way the world does, in fact, work. Kurt Vonnegut, in his novel *Breakfast of Champions*, makes a similar statement about the nature of reality. There, having inserted himself as a character into the book, he sits in a cocktail lounge amongst the other characters, and observes,

As I approached my fiftieth birthday, I had become more and more enraged and mystified by the idiot decisions made by my countrymen. And then I had come suddenly to pity them, for I understood how innocent and natural it was for them to behave so abominably, and with such abominable results: They were doing their best to live like people invented in story books. This was the reason Americans shot each other so often: It was a convenient literary device for ending short stories and books. Why were so many Americans treated by their government as though their lives were as disposable as paper facial tissues? Because that was the way authors customarily treated bit-part players in their made-up tales. And so on. Once I understood what was making America such a dangerous, unhappy nation of people who had nothing to do with real life, I resolved to shun storytelling. I would write about life. Every person would be exactly as important as any other. All facts would be given equal weightiness. Nothing would be left out. (Vonnegut 1973, 209-10)

For Vonnegut, here, to write about "life" is to write, if not in a strictly polyphonic manner as defined by Bakhtin, at least in a way that gives equal importance to all characters and all details, which is similar to what Bakhtin means by polyphony. In the same way, Vonnegut's joining his characters in the bar can be read as a gesture by which his authorial

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<sup>37</sup> Bakhtin writes, "This [the author's renunciation of his or her own privileged position] was a very difficult and unprecedented project... But it was essential if the polyphonic nature of life itself was to be artistically recreated" (Bakhtin 1984a, 68).

privilege is relinquished,<sup>38</sup> a requirement of Bakhtin's polyphonic novel. Yet, even as Vonnegut vows to write about "life," about the way the world really is, he recognizes that, in actuality, characteristics exhibited by the real world do not match his proposed vision of reality. In the world outside of novels, people behave as if a hierarchy of importance does exist; in "life" people are not given equal weight and equal say. Vonnegut blames novels for this, claiming that life has begun to imitate art. His vow to write about "life" is an effort to remedy this situation: he will imitate life in his art, so that life, imitating art, will actually imitate itself and be as it ought to be. There is, however, no guarantee that Vonnegut is right about what life is really like; his observation of life itself reveals that life is not like his idea of what life ought to be. It seems, then, that he is not merely mirroring life in his art; rather, his art represents his own ideas about what life and the world ought to be like. The same can be said of Bakhtin's polyphonic author. She is choosing the grounds upon which the world of the novel will function, and so, at least at that level, retains a privileged position within the book.

To return to the Book of Job, the point I am getting at is that the author of the book, even if he is writing a polyphonic work, is, in choosing to write how he writes, revealing his idea of what the world ought to be like. He is, therefore, making a statement about order and chaos as he sees them. If, in the prose tale and chapter 29, Job has shown that his own idea of an ordered world is a world that is unitary and simple, the author of the book, by forcing Job to come in contact with other real characters, shows that his own idea of an ordered world is one that is multifarious and complex. It is in this way that the author retains something of a privileged position in relation to the work.

Yet, at the same time, the structure set up by the author does allow characters other than himself to speak about order in ways which contradict his convictions. Perhaps the author's use of the prose ending for his book, which returns us to a world which is ordered on principles of unity and simplicity rather than multiplicity and complexity does gesture to the author's willingness to be one character among others instead of the one character who has determined the grounds of existence for all others. The book ends with Job's ordered world, perhaps indicating that Job has won the argument after all. At the same time, however, the prose ending cannot be read without the memory of what has come before, and in this way, it, too, becomes simply one of the voices and not the definitive, finalizing voice. In this way, the author both gives up and retains his privilege, and Job

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<sup>38</sup> Yet, even as Vonnegut seems to relinquish authorial privilege and to put himself on an equal footing with his characters by appearing in the novel, he, at the same time, realizes that he is "on a par with the Creator of the Universe there in the dark in the cocktail lounge" and he proceeds to take advantage of his position: "I shrunk the Universe to a ball exactly one light-year in diameter. I had it explode. I had it disperse again" (Vonnegut 1973, 200). Even though he claims to want to give all characters equal importance, Vonnegut, it seems, cannot help but make use of his position of superior power.

both wins the argument, and, in winning, annuls the need for any argument at all, and loses, because if he has won, he has won by arguing and the other voices in the argument cannot be forgotten.

### *Job's "Death Wish" as a Wish for Order*

When the poetry breaks in on the prose tale and Job discovers that he is no longer living in an ordered world, the first thing he does is to curse the day of his birth, wishing that he had never been born but had, instead, made the quick and painless journey from womb to tomb. The realm of the dead, as depicted by Job in chapter 3, ironically fulfills Vonnegut's description of "life" in the passage quoted from *Breakfast of Champions* above. In death, each person is exactly as important as every other. Job describes this world, "I would be at rest with kings and counselors of the earth...or with princes who have gold....There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest. There the prisoners are at ease together; they do not hear the voice of the taskmaster. The small and the great are there, and the slaves are free from their masters" (3:13b-14a, 15a, 17-19). Job presents death as the great leveler; everyone, whether slave or king in the world of the living is rendered equal and alike by death, which draws no distinctions. Strangely, though, the world of the dead, as presented by Job, is not a realm of multiplicity and complexity but of unity and simplicity. This is due to the fact that, although every person is exactly as important as every other person, no person is of any importance. The realm of the dead, where all are equal, is marked by its silence, not by the clamor of a multiplicity of voices, each one speaking from its own embodied position.

Dying at birth, Job would have left one place inhabited by him alone, and where he, therefore, figured as the only central character (the womb) for another inhabited by a group that has been reduced to a unity by the leveling power of death (the tomb). Although the realm of the dead is certainly different from the world of the prose prologue, both are grounded in a vision of order as unity and simplicity. Clines supports the idea that, here, Job depicts the world of the dead as the domain of order. He argues that Job "is experiencing a shaking of the foundations of cosmic moral order. He...longs for Sheol as a place where order reigns" (Clines 1989, 105). For Clines, Job understands Sheol to be the refuge of order because it is free from the turmoil which has engulfed his life. It seems to me, though, that Job recognizes Sheol as an ordered world because of its simplicity, a simplicity it shares with the world of the prologue.

In the prologue, as discussed, Job is the only real character. In Job's vision of the world of the dead, there is also only one "character"—death itself—into which all the other

characters—kings, counselors, princes, the wicked, the weary, prisoners, taskmasters, slaves, masters, the small, and the great—are rolled, losing their individual identity for the sake of the one big character, him with the cloak and the sickle.<sup>39</sup> Granted, Job, too, would be lost in this conglomeration; he would not be the *only* character, but would be *no* character. Yet, having discovered that he is no longer the only character—that God and his mother exist and have done him wrong—Job would rather cease to exist than continue to live hedged in by others, and it is significant that he wishes he could transition from one realm in which there is only one real character to another. In the trajectory of the book, however, things are moving in the opposite direction. Job’s mother and God have distinguished themselves by acting against Job—the one by giving birth to him, the other by fencing him in with meaningless suffering—and, following Job’s curse of chapter 3, the friends, too, will begin to distinguish themselves by arguing that Job is in the wrong.

### *Chaos and Order in Chapter 3*

The world of the living has become, in Job’s view, a chaos, characterized by multiplicity, and the world of the dead presents itself to him as the refuge of order,

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<sup>39</sup> Although in chapter 3 death is not personified, death was sometimes conceived of as a personified being in the ancient Near East. Nicholas Tromp explains, “The...tendency [to personify Death] is found undisguisedly in Ugaritic literature, e.g. in the Baal cycle, when Sir Death the Divine is the personal adversary of Baal...This tendency to personalize death is so universal that it can be labeled ‘archetypal’, i.e. corresponding to an innate structure or tendency of the human psyche...For Israel’s neighbours Death was an extremely real and concrete reality, a monstrous personal power waylaying fertility and life...Consequently the experience of death was not fundamentally changed in Israel and in the light of this fact the many occasions where Death is personified acquire a pregnant meaning. One can hardly wave this away with the remark that it is poetical play. This personification of Death, often reduced to hints and allusions, is most likely far from a petrified form of speech...This personification is given expression both directly and indirectly: directly where death is described as a person, called the Enemy, King, the Hungry One; indirectly, where his hands, feet and mouth, and his instruments are mentioned” (Tromp 1969, 99-100). Tromp goes on to point out that even the image of death as the grim reaper, “the now old-fashioned skeleton with a scythe on his shoulder” (*Ibid.*, 103) appears in the Bible, in Jeremiah 9:21-22, so I have some justification (if tangential) for using it in relation to Job. Personified Death does make an appearance later in the Book of Job, first in Job’s statement “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there” (1:21a), which “implies a personified death, as mother and womb” (*Ibid.*, 122). A more fully “enfleshed” Death appears later in Bildad’s references to “the firstborn of Death” and “the king of terrors” in 18:13-14, about which Tromp writes, “The context undoubtedly shows that this ‘King of Terrors’ can be no other than Sir Death: he is explicitly mentioned in the preceding verse, where his Firstborn appears” (*Ibid.*, 119). Still, it might be argued that Bildad’s personification of death as “the king of terrors,” is decidedly different from Job’s non-personified portrayal of death in chapter 3, as indeed it is. Bildad’s Death, like Jeremiah’s Reaper is an active force; he ventures out from Sheol to capture prey and drag them back to his kingdom. For Job in chapter 3, however, death, far from being an invading king intent on filling his coffers with bodies, is not even recruiting, not even accepting applications, as if the underworld is a kind of exclusive club that no one, not even its members, knows how to get into. So, perhaps I am wrong to speak of death as the only real “character” in the underworld as Job conceives of it. It might be better to speak of death as a kind of centripetal force toward which all the shades in its kingdom are drawn or as a kind of heavy body, like a planet, around which the shades are in orbit. I use the language of character, however, in order to make clear that, in the realm of the dead, death itself occupies the position occupied in the prose tale by Job, even if death is not a person but only a force or a heavy object or a great big zero. Even if death is not identifiable as having any kind of “self” or “being,” it is still true that all those who occupy the realm of the dead are part of death, even if death has no body apart from the bodies of the dead.

characterized by simplicity. Chapter 3 is one of the passages frequently identified as having to do with chaos by scholars, who, looking for the splash of the watery chaos monster, find it in Leviathan who is mentioned by Job. Of the day of his birth Job says, “Let those curse it who curse the Sea [or the day, depending on which vowel is deemed appropriate for יָם]<sup>40</sup>, those who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan” (3:8). Job’s description of the effective curse as preventing light from shining upon that day has led Fishbane to identify the words Job speaks as a “counter-cosmic incantation” which attempts to undo the order set in place by God at creation. Fishbane writes,

The whole thrust of the text in Job iii 1-13 is to provide a systematic *boulevard*, or reversal, of the cosmicizing acts of creation described in Gen. i-ii 4a. Job, in the process of cursing the day of his birth (v. 1), binds spell to spell in his articulation of an absolute and unrestrained death wish for himself and the entire creation. He assumed that the world both centered around and depended upon him. Consequently, Job utters his incantation in the throes of his present plight with the intent to banish the *causa materialis* of his condition. (Fishbane 1971, 153)

This interpretation assumes that what Job is calling up is a chaos which will overwhelm the order of the world and return it to its pre-creation state. The mention of the rousing of Leviathan, imagined as a pre-creation chaos monster à la Tiamat, is taken as support for this interpretation: why would Job mention Leviathan if his cursing of the day of his birth was not intended to effect a chaotic upheaval of the ordered world?<sup>41</sup> This interpretation,

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<sup>40</sup> It was Gunkel who first suggested amending *yom* to *yam* (Gunkel 2006, 37, 306), a change which has been picked up by many translators and commentators. The NRSV, for example, translates יָם as Sea (with a capital S, indicating reference to the sea as chaos monster, which is paralleled with Leviathan in the second half of the verse) instead of day. Pope, too, agrees with Gunkel’s emendation, writing, “Both this line [3:8a] and the following are patent mythological allusions, as Gunkel demonstrated....The cursing of an enemy and use of magic and spells as an indispensable part of warfare is well nigh universal” (Pope 1965, 30). Gordis, while agreeing with Gunkel’s suggestion, proposes a second emendation to make the verse more comprehensible, rendering 3:8 as “Let them curse it who rouse the Sea, those skilled in stirring up Leviathan” (instead of, as in the NRSV, “Let those curse it who curse the Sea...”). With this change “The verse thus receives a clear and appropriate meaning. Job invokes the creatures of chaos to emerge and destroy his ‘day’” (Gordis 1978, 35).

<sup>41</sup> Dhorme insists that the rousing of Leviathan “would mean the return to chaos and the end of the world. Such is exactly what those who curse the day desire, those for whom life is nothing but a series of evils. They would like to annihilate the existing order and to plunge into catastrophe. Instead of using the banal expression ‘those who desire the end of the world’, it was customary to say, like a proverb, ‘those who are prepared to awaken Leviathan!’ This is the meaning which appears to us the most probable” (Dhorme 1967, 31). Yet, Dhorme’s statement, here, can be picked apart in a way that is suggestive for my own argument. What kind of ordered world can be said to exist for “those for whom life is nothing but a series of evils”? For such people, it seems, the world would not appear as an ordered cosmos, but as a chaos characterized by never-ending catastrophe. It may be true that Job desires the end of the world, but he desires it because his world has become chaotic; he wishes not for an end to order, but for an end to chaos. Even though Dhorme disagrees with this position, the way he phrases his claim provides inadvertent support for it. Dermot Cox, too, makes claims that perform in a similar way. He first states that “Job’s curse is...more than a simple death-wish. It amounts to a desire for the total reversion of the order of existence instituted by God at creation” (Cox 1978, 43), but goes on to speak critically of the order of the world in which Job finds himself living, writing, “Job has escaped from the illusion of the friends that life makes sense, and has finally recognized the human condition for what it is. Such an awareness of the absurd is the experience of a person who, on the basis of philosophy or morality, has expected to find a rationally ordered cosmos, but who finds

however, is not entirely defensible. At a textual level, it has been pointed out that the apparent “undoing” of the created world described in Job 3 does not actually match up with the pattern of creation in Genesis 1. Clines points out that “although it is true that the darkening of day (v. 4a) reverses the act of the first day of creation, there are few other genuine correspondences (e.g., the reference to Leviathan in v 8 is not a reversal of the creation of sea-monsters on the fifth day, and the rest Job longs for in the grave in v 13 is no kind of parallel to God’s rest on the seventh day)” (Clines 1989, 81). That is, what Job allegedly attempts to speak into nonbeing is not exactly what God speaks into being in Genesis 1, but only shares certain features with it.

More importantly, the question of *why* Job should want to curse the world in such a way that chaos overwhelms order begs to be asked in response to Fishbane’s interpretation. Fishbane’s argument offers an implicit answer to this question—Job’s certainty of his own centrality within the creation means that, in order to remedy his personal situation, it must be remedied at the level of creation itself—but this answer is not fully satisfactory. It is not fully satisfactory because it fails to deal with what Job’s suffering must signify in the first place. Job’s suffering does not serve as an indication that world order *must be undone*, but as proof that world order *has come undone*. Having lost his central position, Job can be sure that chaos has already overwhelmed order; he has no need to call it up. What Job needs is a reordering of the world, which suggests that his cursing of the day of his birth has order, and not chaos as its goal. William P. Brown agrees with Fishbane’s assessment of Job’s birthday curse and the motivation behind it, writing, “As Job’s very life unravels, so must also the world. The dissolution of the cosmos is a punishment designed to fit the crime.” Yet, at the same time, Brown recognizes that in “the pit of deep darkness,” into which Job presumably wants to drag the world “exists a liberating new order.” He continues, “The subversion of creation does not...result in anarchic ruin....He imagines a radically different form of existence, one without trouble and fear, as inclusive as it is liberating....Life, not death, is the limiting foil. Chaos is the great liberator” (Brown 1999, 322-23). If what Job is trying to create with his curse is “a liberating new order” and “a radically different form of existence,” we should not think of him as calling up chaos as much as speaking into being a new kind of order. He is not uncreating so much as he is creating, and, although it might be argued that it is first necessary to uncreate in order to create something new, the counterargument can be offered that Job’s desire to re-create the world has arisen, in the first place, as a response to his having found his world

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instead, on the basis of immediate experience, a chaos impervious to reason” (*Ibid.*, 50). That is, although Job wants to bring an end to the world created by God, he is motivated by his discovery that God’s world is not a cosmos but a chaos.

already uncreated. He does not need to demolish what has already been razed; rather, he calls for the order of death as a reply to the disorder which has swallowed up the world of the living.

Thorkild Jacobsen and Kirsten Nielsen argue that the focus of Job's curse in chapter 3 is not the uncreation of the world but the striking of the day of his birth from the register of days, because it is a bad day and ought never to be allowed to appear again.<sup>42</sup> They read the Leviathan reference as an indication of the vehemence with which Job curses the evil day; he, and others like him who have also been the victims of bad days, are "prepared to hurl their execrations at full throat even if they wake up Leviathan" (Jacobsen and Nielsen 1992, 200). Job is not trying to rouse chaos but, rather, trying to curse the day of his birth with as much force as he can muster. This interpretation denies that the passage has anything to do with chaos and order at all. Watson offers a similar reading, which also denies the relevance of discussing chaos and order in relation to the chapter. She writes, "The most plausible explanation of v. 8a is thus that it refers to the cursing of a chosen day in order to make it ill-omened, probably in order to give rise to an eclipse....Consonant with this, reference to an eclipse-causing dragon seems likely in v. 8b, as many have perceived" (Watson 2005, 324-25). Leviathan, in this reading, is a dragon capable of swallowing the sun, who, having swallowed the days of Job's conception and/or birth will make his having been born impossible. For these commentators, there is no need to speak of chaos, but only of a suffering so severe that the sufferer must identify the day of his birth as evil and wish, in the strongest possible terms, that it and he be struck from the register of life.

Yet, commentators who do not wish to talk of chaos and order with regard to this chapter are holding to a definition of the terms which sees the combat myth as the only possible incarnation of the discussion. In this understanding, if what appears in chapter 3 is not a reference to the *Chaoskampf* no discussion of chaos and order is necessary. My broader—and, I think, more accurate—definition of the terms allows the discussion to

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<sup>42</sup> John Hartley presents an interpretation which seems to hover halfway between this reading and the reading that understands Job as plunging the world into primordial chaos. For Hartley, it is not the entire world that Job hopes to render chaotic, but only the day of his birth. He writes, "Job wishes that he had never been born, but the only way that such a wish could be realized would be to have the day of his birth removed from the calendar. As long as the day of his birth is recreated every year, his existence continues until his death. But if that day had never been created, he would never have existed....A counter-cosmic incantation reverses the stages God took in creating the world. It was believed that God created each day in the same way that he created the world (Gen 1:1-2:4). Thus every day, being a new creation, bore witness to God's lordship and his creative powers. In contrast, chaos is an unorganized and lifeless mass of water overshadowed by total darkness (cf. Gen 1:2). But since the day of Job's birth had already been created, the only way that Job might vanish would be to have that day returned to the primordial chaos. If no light had shone on that day, there would have been no life, no birth, particularly Job's. With this spell, Job seeks to become totally nonexistent" (Hartley 1988, 91). In this understanding, then, Job really does want to reverse God's creation and render it chaotic, but he intends his curse to apply only to a very small part of the creation, the day of his birth. His goal is not the undoing of the entire world, but only the undoing of himself.

remain pertinent even if Leviathan is not envisaged as a Tiamatesque chaos monster. That is, Watson (and Clines whom she quotes in relation to her argument [and Driver, whom Clines quotes!]<sup>43</sup>) can be right about Leviathan's identity and role and they, Jacobsen and Nielsen can be right that the intention of Job's curse is to effect the striking of his birthday from the calendar, but Job's speech of chapter 3 can still be read as participating in the discussion about chaos and order.

Beginning with chapter 3, the poetic section reinterprets the prose tale it has interrupted. Job's suffering which, in the prose tale was meaningful because of his central status, becomes, in the poetry, meaningless, as Job is shunted from his central position and made into one character among many.<sup>44</sup> Whereas previously Job's suffering was not a mark of the disruption of order, this is what it becomes in the poetic section. In chapter 3, Job recognizes that the world is not as it should be. His curse of the day of his birth is an attempt to remedy the situation, not through an increase of chaos, but through an increase of order. He identifies the realm of the dead as the domain of order, as is necessary when the realm of the living has been overrun by chaos: if life is chaotic, death must be orderly.<sup>45</sup> The realm of the dead resembles the ordered land of the living as described in the prose tale in that there is only one real central "character"—Death—into whom all other characters are absorbed; their existence is not their own and their presence serves only to make Death bigger. The centrality of Death means, of course, that in this world Job is not the central character. His reality is ceded to Death's reality.<sup>46</sup> Still, in terms of their simplicity the world of the dead and the world of the prose tale are alike, and if simplicity serves as the marker by which Job identifies order, then the world of the dead is an ordered world in a way that the world of the living in the poetic section is not. For this reason, Job's cursing of the day of his birth can be seen as an order-making activity. His

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<sup>43</sup> Clines writes, "It is preferable...to retain the Masoretic reading [instead of changing *yom* to *yam*] and see those who curse a day as 'enchanters or magicians reputed to have the power to make days unlucky' (Driver)" (Clines 1989, 86).

<sup>44</sup> Perhaps I should say "one character among several" instead of "among many." Yet, in Job's situation, any number greater than one qualifies as many. The same principle is at work in the ancient Egyptian phrase "before there were two things," in which, according to Clifford "'Two things' and 'millions' both express the same thing—the diversity of the existent—which is denied for nonexistence" (Clifford 1994, 102). For Job, the arrival of any additional real character might as well be the arrival of millions, in that the world has ceased to be organized around a single, central point.

<sup>45</sup> Habel notes that the Egyptian text *A Dispute Over Suicide*, too, presents death as the domain of order. He quotes, "Death is in my sight today/ (Like) the recovery of a sick man,/ Like going out into the open after a confinement./ Death is in my sight today/ Like the odor of myrrh,/ Like sitting under an awning on a breezy day.../ Death is in my sight today/ Like the longing of a man to see his house (again)/ After he has spent many years held in captivity. (*ANET*, 406)" (Habel 1985, 105).

<sup>46</sup> Brown writes that, in Job's chapter 3 vision of the world of the dead, "The topography of patriarchy is leveled out. Gone are Job's possessions" (Brown 1999, 324). Although it is true that Job imagines himself losing his status and possessions in death, I do not know that "the topography of patriarchy" is quite as leveled out as Brown presumes. Death assumes the role of patriarch formerly played by Job. Death, it should be noted, has plenty of possessions, of which Job is—or longs to be—one.

wish is to have remained in the ordered world where he began, to have inhabited first the womb and then its analogue the tomb. He attempts to achieve this through powerful words, strong enough to wake the dragon who will, perhaps, swallow up the day of his birth and allow him to skirt the chaotic world of the living.

There are two questions to be asked at this point. The first is why, if Job's curse is intended as an ordering activity, he doesn't simply curse the day he began to suffer and attempt to set in motion a return to the way things were before. Indeed, in chapter 29, Job does envisage a return to order that takes place in the land of the living instead of in Sheol. The second question is whether, in cursing the day of his birth, Job intends to pull the entire creation into the realm of death, to make it as if *everything* had never been born, or whether it is only his own life Job is trying to strike from the register. The first question can be answered by pointing out that even if a return to the order of the prose tale were possible, Job's experience has shown him that such an order is not unassailable. His wish for a return to the months of old in chapter 29 aside, here Job seems aware that such a return is impossible. Even if order were to be reasserted, the guarantee of its stability has been removed. The only real way to guarantee order is, Job asserts, to seek it in the realm of the unborn and the dead, realms whose ordered stability cannot be assailed. An order that is shot through with the possibility of chaos is, Job might say, no order at all. Better, then, to guarantee one's experience of order by remaining where order cannot be troubled, the realm of the never-born, which merges with the realm of the dead.

This brings us to the second question: does Job envision the realm of the never-born as the guarantee of order not only for himself but for all creation, and does his curse, in consequence, attempt to render the entire creation never-born, for its own good? There is little indication in the chapter that Job is cursing anything other than the specific day of his own birth. Interpretations which read the combat myth into the chapter based on the mention of Leviathan are able to claim that he is cursing the entire creation, simply because the *Chaoskampf* has to do with the fate of the entire creation. Yet, if the combat myth is not relevant here, and I agree with those who do not think it is, then it cannot be claimed that Job's curse is aimed at a target larger than his own life. As Watson puts it, "Job 3:3-10 constitutes not a systematic dismantling of creation but rather expresses the much more limited wish never to have been born, uttered by a man undergoing immense suffering"<sup>47</sup> (Watson 2005, 322). For the same reasons it can be argued that Job is not

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<sup>47</sup> Clines, too, argues that "The point of this first stanza is to utter the vain wish that he had never been born. It is a vain wish and the curses it includes are inconsequential and ineffective because it is too late to do anything about it. . . . The language is fierce, but the curse has no teeth and the wish is hopeless. . . . The form is the form of a curse, but the function is to bewail his unhappy lot" (Clines 1989, 79). Norman Whybray concurs, writing, "in realistic terms these verses simply express Job's futile wish that he had never been

trying to undertake an ordering of the world, but only an ordering of his own life, which has been overwhelmed by chaos.

At the same time, however, the chaos in which Job finds himself is not simply a personal chaos, but a chaos that affects the whole world. Job's former status as the one real character at the center of the ordered world would seem to indicate that his personal experience of chaos is a sign that the entire world is engulfed in chaos. In this, Fishbane is right to see Job's sense of his own centrality as grounds for his cursing, not only the day of his birth, but the creation in its entirety. If Job is central to order, a reordering of his own life is as good as a reordering of the entire creation. Yet, the reordering which Job proposes is a reordering which snuffs him out from the world of the living and joins him to the unity of the kingdom of death. It makes little sense to say that the fact of his never having been born could restore order to the chaotic world of the living. Given this, and the fact that his focus is entirely on his own day of birth, it seem safe to say that his ordering curse is intended only for himself and not for the whole creation. Job curses the day of his birth so that he can escape from chaos and rejoin the realm of order, a realm he now believes exists only for the unborn and the dead.

### *Wickedness as Chaos/Righteousness as Order*

Although in chapter 3 Job wishes for death, seeing it as his only way of a return to a simple, ordered, world, the friends view death as the ultimate punishment and certain end of the wicked, and, therefore, the domain of chaos. Before inquiring further into the friends' views, it is necessary to establish how wickedness and righteousness are related to chaos and order. Generally speaking, the wicked can be assumed to be allied with chaos and the righteous with order. A righteous person behaves the way he or she ought to behave, and thus is a participant in the world as it ought to be, which is order, while a wicked person behaves as he or she ought not to behave, and is thus a manifestation of the world as it ought not to be, which is chaos. Ideally, an ordered world would be a world

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born....Despite some of the language employed, there is no justification for interpreting these verses literally" (Whybray 1998, 37). Tur-Sinai goes so far as to disavow that Job's words can even be considered a curse. He writes, "Job...does not curse but...expresses wishes, idle wishes, of course: those of a man bemoaning his past" (Tur-Sinai 1957, 46-47). Bruce Zuckerman takes a slightly different tack. He suggests that Job's words may be seen as belonging to the category of "lament-of-final-resort," the purpose of which is to attract the deity's attention, not so that death will be granted, but so that the sufferer will be restored to his former pre-suffering position. According to Zuckerman, this is how the friends' interpret Job's "curse" of chapter 3, as is evidenced by Eliphaz's gentle opening words, which do not condemn Job in the least (as they presumably would if he saw Job as cursing creation). Yet, although Zuckerman presents this as a possible interpretation of chapter 3, he later concludes that, in fact, Job does intend to utter a curse, and that he has taken up the convention of "lament-of-final-resort" only to flout it, as is shown by the accusations he will bring against God as his speeches continue (Zuckerman 1991, 125-26).

completely purged of the wicked. Yet, Job and his friends are willing to compromise on this point. They are willing to concede that the wicked may continue to occupy the ordered world, as long as they are in the process of being driven out.<sup>48</sup> Instead of being a world entirely without wickedness, then, the ordered world is a world in which wickedness receives its due, that is, in which it is justly punished. A chaotic world is a world in which either wickedness does not receive its due or in which the righteous receive the deserts of the wicked. Even so, when the friends or Job talk about the wicked, they are talking about chaos, and when they talk about the righteous they are talking about order.

### *The Chaos of Being Alone: The Friends' View of the Fate of the Wicked*

As the friends present it, to be wicked is to be fundamentally alone, a condition which becomes evident at death even if it has not been evident in life. For the wicked, death is the absolute end, and, dying, the wicked man is completely erased from the slate of the world. In his first speech, Bildad claims, “If they are destroyed from their place, then it will deny them, saying, ‘I have never seen you’” (8:18). In his second speech he expands on the theme, saying, “In their tents nothing remains; sulphur is scattered upon their habitations....Their memory perishes from the earth, and they have no name in the street....They have no offspring or descendant among their people, and no survivor where they used to live” (18:15, 17, 19). Zophar provides a similar description of the fate of the wicked in his own second speech, insisting that

Even though they mount up high as the heavens, and their head reaches to the clouds, they will perish forever like their own dung; those who have seen them will say, “Where are they?” They will fly away like a dream, and not be found; they will be chased away like a vision of the night.<sup>49</sup> The eye that saw them will see them no more, nor will their place behold them any longer...a fire fanned by no one will devour them; what is left in their tent will be consumed. (20:6-9, 26b)

Eliphaz too, claims of the wicked, “They were snatched away before their time; their foundation was washed away by a flood...and what they left, the fire has consumed”

<sup>48</sup> In fact, it might be argued that the wicked are necessary to the righteous, as those over against whom their righteousness is defined, just as the poor are necessary to the status of those higher up the social ladder, as Newsom has shown in her article “The Moral Sense of Nature.” (See the discussion on pages 45-46 of this thesis.) At the same time, it seems unlikely that Job and his friends would recognize that the wicked (or the poor) are necessary to their righteousness in this way.

<sup>49</sup> חזיון לילה. Zophar’s use of this simile is interesting. In 4:12-21 Eliphaz has described his own “vision of the night” (a voice which has spoken to him מַחְזוֹנוֹת לַיְלָה) and has used the words spoken by this night visitor to condemn Job. One would think that Zophar would be more careful about using a simile which could be seen to call into question authority claimed by one of his friends. At the same time, although both Eliphaz and Bildad use aspects of the spirit messenger’s claims in their arguments against Job, Zophar does not. Perhaps that detail combined with his use of this simile indicates that he is less accepting of the spirit’s authority than are his fellows. See the discussion of the spirit’s message on pages 135-40.

(22:16, 20b).<sup>50</sup> All three friends view the death of a wicked man as his absolute eradication from the land of the living. No one in the place he used to live remembers him. Indeed, even the land itself has forgotten him. He leaves no descendants, and any possessions he might have left behind as lingering reminders that he once lived, are consumed by fire. Zophar's specification that the fire that devours whatever the wicked might have left behind is "fanned by no one" is significant in this context. If the fire were fanned by someone, it would indicate that, actually, the wicked person had been remembered, even if by an enemy, instead of being absolutely eradicated by death. In addition, a fire fanned by someone might occasion retaliation against the fire starter, which would also show that the wicked person was remembered. The fire fanned by no one, by contrast, is simply part of the procedure by which death erases him from the face of the earth.<sup>51</sup>

The righteous man, by contrast, meets a death which does not efface his presence from the land of the living. Eliphaz, describing what Job's life and death will be like if he repents of the wickedness Eliphaz believes to be at the root of his suffering says, "You shall know that your tent is safe, you shall inspect your fold and miss<sup>52</sup> nothing. You shall know that your descendants will be many, and your offspring like the grass of the earth. You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, as a shock of grain comes to the threshing-floor in its season" (5:24-26). The righteous man, in stark contrast to the wicked man, is able to count on the continued security of his tent; no fire "fanned by no one" will assail it after he is gone, for its existence is guaranteed, both by the way he has lived his life, and by the many descendants he is leaving behind. The friends, although they do not accuse Job outright of being wicked until close to the end of their part in their dialogue,<sup>53</sup> imply throughout that if Job were to get his wish and die now, he would be met by the fate of the

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<sup>50</sup> Earlier Eliphaz has claimed of the wicked, "Their tent-cord is plucked up within them, and they die devoid of wisdom" (4:21). Interestingly, the word translated "tent-cord" is **רִתֵּן**, which can also mean "remnant" or "remainder." Eliphaz uses it this way in 22:20 to say "what they left (**רִתֵּן**), the fire has consumed." It is possible, then, to see in 4:21 another instance of Eliphaz's claim that the wicked leave nothing behind. It is not only the tent-cord of the wicked which is plucked up but anything that remains after this first act of destruction.

<sup>51</sup> One of the central tenets of René Girard's theory of the scapegoating mechanism is that the violence enacted against the scapegoat is performed "by no one." That is to say, because the entire community collaborates against the scapegoat, no one member of the community can be singled out as guilty, meaning that the scapegoat's death cannot be avenged. According to this theory, violence enacted "by no one" really means "by everyone." Girard reads the Book of Job as a story about scapegoating, in which the community attempts to pin its collective guilt on Job. The book, however, is finally a story about failed scapegoating, because Job refuses to agree that he is guilty, despite all indications to the contrary (Girard 1987).

<sup>52</sup> The word translated "miss" is **אָבַד**, which usually means to miss in the sense of missing the mark, that is, to sin. Its use here with the sense of "nothing shall be missing from your possessions," forges a link between possession and righteousness. If one does not sin, one's possessions shall remain intact, so that one does not miss anything.

<sup>53</sup> It is in his third speech that Eliphaz accuses Job outright of intentional wickedness, saying, "Is not your wickedness great? There is no end to your iniquities" (22:5).

wicked. His tent and all his possessions have, after all, already been destroyed in a series of freak accidents, not unlike the “fire fanned by no one.” In addition, any descendants he might have left behind have been wiped out. Job, like the wicked man, is utterly alone, and death would confirm both his loneliness and his wickedness.

As demonstrated above, the friends believe that to be wicked is to be fundamentally alone. Chaos, in this formulation, is a place of singularity rather than multiplicity. Even though the wicked are many, each wicked person inhabits a cell occupied by him- or herself alone, and when he or she dies that cell ceases to exist and leaves no memory of itself behind. The realm of the wicked—chaos—is simple as the friends conceive of it, while the realm of the righteous—order—is complex, made up of a multiplicity of people and things which are connected by relationship. The righteous person, instead of inhabiting a cell which separates him or her from the people and things with which he or she appears to share the world, is a member of an interconnected community. The righteous man is really connected to his tent, and, because of this, it belongs to him even after he has died. In the same way, he is really connected to his offspring, and they bear testimony to his existence even when, it would seem, he has ceased to exist. The righteous man does not, in fact, cease to exist, because everything he touches becomes part of him and continues to carry his presence in the world even if he is dead.

### *Order and Chaos as Characterized by the Configuration of Singularity and Multiplicity*

Although the friends, in their portrayals of the fate of the wicked, envision chaos as the realm of unity and simplicity, while for Job it is order that is unitary and simple, the fact that the righteous man continues to exist in the world after his death by means of his relationships and possessions shows that actually the friends’ and Job’s ideas about the natures of chaos and order are not as different as they might at first seem. For Job, order is unitary and simple because the multiplicity of things and beings that seem to inhabit order actually belong to one person, the central character around whom the ordered world is organized. Job’s children and possessions are not evidence of a true multiplicity, because they fully belong to him. Order, in Job’s view, is unity composed of complexity, simplicity made up of multiplicity. Although the friends view order as the realm of multiplicity and complexity, it is, similarly, a multiplicity that contributes to the continued existence of the one. The righteous man, who continues to exist after he is dead, swallows up the multiplicity of objects and beings who are separate from himself; their existence bears witness to him, instead of to themselves, just as Job’s possessions and children bear

witness to him instead of to themselves. In the same way, the wicked man who inhabits a unitary world devoid of real relationships can also be seen to inhabit a world that is characterized by multiplicity, in that no being is subsumed by any other. The wicked man's son, for example, always remains separate from his father and, as such, is capable of being a real character, bearing witness to himself instead of to his father; the righteous man's son, by contrast, is subordinate to his father and his own existence is swallowed up by his father's, as he is responsible for bearing witness to his father.

The observations made above require a reassessment of the terms in which I have described Job's and the friends' understandings of chaos and order with regard to ideas of multiplicity and singularity. Although previously I have noted that Job views order as singular or simple and chaos as characterized by multiplicity, while the friends view chaos as simple and order as complex, these claims are shown to be problematic because of the way in which Job's and the friends' conceptions of chaos and order overlap. That is, Job and the friends view chaos and order similarly even though they speak differently of how they are characterized with regard to singularity and multiplicity. What the friends describe as multiplicity is, in fact, the same situation that Job describes as singularity, and what the friends call singularity is what Job calls multiplicity. Here, we are potentially in for trouble. If it turns out that it is not only chaos and order that reject stable definitions, but that the "content-themes" which I am using to explore the way in which chaos and order are discussed also trade meanings, then we are in a pickle. We will need new "content-themes" with which to explore the potential meanings of the "content-themes" we were using to explore the potential meanings of chaos and order. And how can we be sure that the new "content-themes" will not themselves break down, requiring that we address them at a deeper level as well? If what we mean by simplicity and multiplicity is as interchangeable as what we mean by chaos and order, we had best abandon this line of inquiry, as it will only lead us into muddle, and not to clarity as is desired. I do not, however, think that this is the situation we are dealing with.

Hitherto, I have used one term, *either* singularity *or* multiplicity to describe how Job and the friends conceptualize chaos and order. The problems encountered arise from this approach, and are solved when we recognize that chaos and order need not be characterized as either one or the other (that is, as *either* singularity *or* multiplicity) but can be described as embodying a particular relationship between the two. When Job speaks of order, he speaks of a single central character surrounded by a multiplicity of characters. These surrounding characters are not *real* characters in the same way that the central character is real, but their presence is necessary nonetheless. The central character depends upon the presence of the surrounding characters for his status, and, if the

surrounding characters disappear or shift their focus away from the central character, chaos ensues. This is, in fact, what Job describes as having happened to him in chapter 30 and which designates the current world as chaos. In chapter 29 Job expresses his deep longing for all eyes to again turn their gaze to him, a situation which would signify that the world had returned to its ordered state. Job may view order as primarily simple, but its simplicity relies on the presence of a multiplicity of characters arranged in a very particular configuration.

When the friends say that the fate of the wicked is to be fundamentally alone, they may be presenting a view of chaos as the domain of singularity, but this version of singularity is completely different from the ordered singularity that Job has described. For the friends, chaos is simple, in that each of its inhabitants exists as his or her own center, with no reference or relation to any other inhabitant. There are a multiplicity of characters, but each character possesses his or her own point of singularity. Whereas in Job's vision of order, the multiplicity of characters are arranged around and focused on the single, central character, in the friends' vision of chaos, each character is focused only on him or herself. In both depictions, both singularity and multiplicity are present, but they are configured differently.

For the friends, each person who inhabits chaos (which one does by being wicked) is completely and utterly alone, despite there being a multiplicity of people inhabiting chaos. Although Job believes that order is characterized by having one central character, he does not envision the inhabitants of the ordered world as fundamentally alone. Although he alone is at the center of the ordered world, his aloneness there is made possible by the multiplicity of beings who surround him and bolster the reality of his existence with their existence. Neither are those who contribute to his centrality in the ordered world alone; they are joined to him, so much so that they become part of him (hence the idea of order as unitary and simple), but this does not render him or them alone in the sense that the friends mean when they speak of the wicked as alone and of the realm of chaos as the realm of loneliness. Indeed, Job will show that he agrees with the friends' assessment of chaos and order when, in chapter 19, he asserts "I know that my *go'el* lives" (19:25a).

*The Expectation of a Go'el: Job Rejects the Friends' Assertion that he is Fundamentally Alone and, Therefore, a Chaotic Figure*

In chapter 19, Job responds to Bildad's claim that the wicked "have no offspring or descendant among their people, and no survivor where they used to live" (18:19), a

description which is surely meant to identify Job as one of the wicked, given that it matches his own situation, even though Bildad does not accuse him of wickedness outright.<sup>54</sup> Job rejects Bildad's veiled accusation, countering, "know then that God has put me in the wrong" (19:6a). Although he insists that he is not one of the wicked, the description of his own situation that Job goes on to give is consonant with the picture of the fate of the wicked that Bildad has just painted. Like the wicked man who dies and is not remembered, so Job is not remembered by those who once loved him; he is an alien to them, and, in the obliteration of their memory of him, it is as if he is dead and forgotten. Job laments,

He has put my family far from me, and my acquaintances are wholly estranged from me. My relatives and my close friends have failed me; the guests in my house have forgotten me; my serving-girls count me as a stranger; I have become an alien in their eyes. I call to my servant, but he gives no answer....All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me. (19:13-16a, 19)

Although Bildad has correctly observed his situation, Job insists that Bildad has incorrectly interpreted the meaning and implications of his suffering. His loneliness, he claims, stems from God's unwarranted enmity: "know then that God has put me in the wrong, and closed his net around me....I call aloud, but there is no justice" (19:6, 7b).

Although in his vision of the world as it ought to be, Job was alone as the central character, his centrality was made possible by the cast of supporting characters who were ranged around him, giving him their full attention. It is a different thing altogether to be alone at the periphery, where one is denied the status of real existence by those who ignore one's presence and one's words. Even the lowly members of Job's household—his servants and serving-girls, who, by virtue of their station are required to pay attention to him—ignore him, treating him as a stranger, refusing to answer him when he speaks to them. In this aloneness, it is as if Job does not exist.

Job, like the friends, recognizes his aloneness as a chaotic situation. If the world were as it ought to be, he would be acknowledged by his family and friends. Yet, although the friends view aloneness as the mark that one is a chaotic figure, and, seeing Job

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<sup>54</sup> Newsom insists that "the poems describing the fate of the wicked (chaps. 15, 18, 20) should not be understood primarily as veiled attacks on Job," and cites as support the fact that "When he [Job] replies to them (chap. 21), Job does not take them as such but assumes that he and the friends are arguing over the nature of the world" (Newsom 1999, 249). Although I agree that, fundamentally, Job and his friends are arguing over the nature of the world—over whether it is currently a chaos or a cosmos—I do not see how the friends' descriptions of the fate of the wicked, which also describe Job's situation, cannot be taken as assertions that Job is among the wicked. Job recognizes that the friends are not on his side; he knows they do not believe in his innocence. In chapter 6, he has lamented, "My companions are treacherous like a torrent-bed, like freshets that pass away, that run dark with ice, turbid with melting snow" (6:15-16) and in chapter 13 he has cried out against them, "As for you, you whitewash with lies; all of you are worthless physicians" (13:4).

abandoned, identify him with chaos, they contend that it is right that he should be abandoned and alone. In the world as it should be, it is right for the wicked to be abandoned even by those whose job it is to serve them. Thus, for the friends, although Job is marked as a chaotic figure by his aloneness, the fact that he is so marked is a sign that the world is functioning as it ought to function, that order does, in fact, prevail. For Job, his abandonment means the opposite—all is not right with the world.

In this chapter, though, Job does not go on to make the argument that the chaotic state of the world is evidenced by the prosperity and popularity of the wicked and the suffering and loneliness of the righteous, as he does elsewhere. Instead, Job suddenly changes his tack. Although in the chapter so far he has described himself as abandoned by his former intimates, now he claims that he is not, in fact, alone, despite appearances to the contrary. There is someone who stands with Job, and this solidarity will one day become apparent. The one who will stop Job from being erased from memory Job calls “my Redeemer.” He says, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side” (19:25-27a).

The word translated Redeemer is *go'el* (גֹּאֵל), which can mean either an “avenger of bloodshed (who by killing the murderer of one’s relatives, clears away the crime)” or can refer to the “duty of the male relative of s. one who has died leaving a childless widow to **deliver** her from childlessness by marriage...the man in question being called *go'el deliverer*” (*A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 52). Samuel Balentine offers a more extended explanation of the term, writing,

The term גֹּאֵל comes primarily from the field of family law. It designates the nearest male relative...who is duty bound to protect and preserve the family when his kinsman is unable to do so. The responsibilities of the גֹּאֵל include buying back family property that has fallen into the hands of outsiders...redeeming a relative sold into slavery...marrying a widow to provide an heir for her dead husband...and avenging the blood of a murdered relative....In religious usage God is described as the גֹּאֵל of those who have fallen into distress or bondage....It is noteworthy that God’s responsibilities as גֹּאֵל include pleading the case (גִּבּוֹר) for those too helpless or too vulnerable to obtain justice for themselves. (Balentine 1999, 274)

Given the range of possible roles a *go'el* might play, it must be determined not only *who* Job believes his *go'el* to be, but *what* he expects his *go'el* to do. On both these questions, scholars are deeply divided, and the literature about these 3 verses (19:25-27) is immense. Some scholars (including Clines, Good, Pope, and Terrien) assume that chapter 19’s Redeemer is the same figure referred to in chapter 9 as an “umpire” (9:33) and in chapter 16 as Job’s “witness in heaven” (16:19), whereas others hold that the figures are distinct.

This, though, is not the most important point of contention. There are two main camps of opinion on the identity of the *go'el* into which scholars may be divided. One camp holds that when Job speaks of his *go'el* he is speaking of God. Handel, when he inserted Job's claim "I know that my Redeemer liveth" into his *Messiah*, indicated his membership in this camp,<sup>55</sup> and many readers of the Book of Job, having heard the line in the *Messiah*, assume that when Job speaks of his Redeemer he is speaking of God. Indeed, this is the traditional scholarly position, and is probably held by the majority of scholars today. Those who identify the *go'el* as God claim that Job is voicing his belief in the God who will redeem him over against the God who has afflicted him. Job, in effect, believes that eventually, God, who has made a mistake in causing Job to suffer, perhaps through an attack of temporary insanity, will realize his mistake, come back to his right mind, and affirm Job's innocence, even if Job is dead.<sup>56</sup> Gordis provides a compelling representative statement of this position, writing, "In all of Job's speeches two themes have been heard setting one another off, like point counterpoint. Again and again Job has attacked the God of power, but with equal frequency he has appealed to the God of justice and love. Now the two themes are united in a great climax as Job appeals 'from God to God'" (Gordis 1965, 88).<sup>57</sup>

In contrast to those who hold that Job's *go'el* is God invoked against God, the second camp of scholars argues that this formulation makes no sense. Samuel Terrien, for example, writes,

Against this prevailing interpretation it may be argued that (a) the *go'el* cannot be God, for Job has heretofore consistently thought of the Deity as an implacably hostile being, and (much more important) continues to do so in the remaining part of the poetic discussion (cf. 27:2); (b) it is hard, if not impossible, to believe that Job, who has just declared that God persecutes him (vs. 22), at once would completely reverse his position and declare that God is his eternal vindicator (vs. 25).<sup>58</sup> (Terrien 1954, 1052)

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<sup>55</sup> I am not suggesting, of course, that Handel meant to enter into the scholarly argument over the identity of the *go'el*. He simply assumed that by his Redeemer Job meant God.

<sup>56</sup> *When* Job's eventual vindication will take place and *what* it will look like are also matters of intense debate. Will it happen after he is dead, or sometime during his lifetime? If he is dead, will he be resurrected to experience his vindication, or will he experience it, somehow, while still in Sheol? The language of verses 25-27 is difficult, perhaps corrupt, meaning that the debate is unlikely to be settled. Edwin Good cautions against assuming too much certainty for one's interpretation of these verses, writing, "If only we could decipher verses 25-27. Without rewriting what is written, I cannot, except for the first line: As for me, I know that my avenger lives. Even so, the hazard is to think one can say too much" (Good 1990, 257). As when, where, and how Job's redemption will take place are not central to my argument, I will not discuss these questions further.

<sup>57</sup> Others in the "God-is-the-*go'el*" camp include Westermann, Dhorme, Hartley, Whybray, Rowley, Driver, Gutierrez, Cox, Kinet, and J. G. Williams.

<sup>58</sup> Terrien offers several additional reasons for rejecting the idea that the *go'el* is God, but the reasons given here are most representative of the position overall.

Although commentators in this camp agree that it makes no sense to speak of God as the *go'el*, they disagree as to who the *go'el* might be, if not God. Marvin Pope proposes that the *go'el* be thought of as serving “the same function as the personal god of Sumerian theology, i.e., act as...advocate and defender in the assembly of the gods” (Pope 1965, 135). That is, Pope envisages the *go'el* as a divine being, a member of the divine council, who will intercede with God on Job’s behalf, an interpretation which is shared by Habel. Clines, on the other hand, argues that Job has no *go'el* but himself; his own cry for justice must act as his redeemer, as Job has no one else to rely upon. Clines writes, “This remains a fact, whatever happens to Job himself; his words cannot be unspoken, and they indeed go on speaking for him as his kinsman-champion” (Clines 1989, 460). Bruce Vawter presents a similar interpretation, writing, “In Job’s understanding, his vindicator may have been simply Job himself, or the merits of his case which is Job existentially” (Vawter 1983, 52). Peggy Day offers yet another interpretation. In her view, the three intercessors called up by Job, in chapters 9, 16, and 19 are ironic references to the satan. Job does not know what we know, namely that there *is* someone who stands between him and God and speaks to God about him, but this one is his accuser and not his defender. She writes, “Job may be looking forward to intervention by a third party who will prove to be his ultimate salvation from the grave, but the audience knows that the only active divine third party is seeking to drive Job to his grave, not rescue him from it” (Day 1988, 100-01). Although most commentators assume that the *go'el* is a heavenly figure of some kind (whether a divinity other than Yahweh or the personification of Job’s testimony (which lives on in heaven), Raymond Scheindlin suggests that the *go'el* is simply “an unknown kinsman [who] will come forward [sometime in the future], read the record, take up his case again, and gain the vindication he has been seeking, even though Job will not live to see it” (Scheindlin 1998, 91).

It seems to me that the arguments against viewing God as the *go'el* are not fully convincing. I agree with Norman Whybray’s assessment that

Job vacillates in his attitude towards God. Although he regards him as his enemy and as the one who has deliberately wrecked his life, there remain moments when he continues illogically to place some kind of hope and trust in him. Indeed, this fluctuation of belief is an essential aspect of the author’s presentation of Job. It shows Job to be a human being bewildered by what has happened to him. (Whybray 1998, 94-95)

It seems entirely plausible that Job could conceive of God as both his attacker and his Redeemer. Job knows that he is being attacked by God, but he also knows that, in attacking him, God is acting against his own true nature. It is, therefore, conceivable that Job would hope—indeed, would believe—that some day God will be recalled to himself

and will then act, if not to end Job's suffering because it is too late for that, at least to clear Job's name.<sup>59</sup>

Although I think that it is possible that when Job speaks of his *go'el* he is talking about God, I agree most fully with Janzen's suggestion that, even though Job affirms the existence of his *go'el*, he does not actually know who this *go'el* is. Janzen writes,

The point is precisely that, in the face of a universe whose earthly and heavenly figures...are all against him, Job imaginatively reaches out into the dark and desperately affirms the reality of a witness whose identity is completely unknown to him....Faith manifests itself not in allegiance to a figure known to be there, but in naked and blind affirmation of what is unknown, yet which must be there if one's own truth ultimately matters.<sup>60</sup>  
(Janzen 1985, 125)

That is to say, Job's beliefs about himself, about God, and about the world as it ought to be lead him to faith in the existence of a *go'el*. For Job, such a being must exist, for, if he does not exist, then Job must concede that his beliefs are fundamentally misguided, and Job is not ready to make that admission. He insists that the world in which he finds himself is not the world as it ought to be, but he also wholeheartedly believes that his vision of the way the world ought to be is shared by God, the world's creator. The gap that exists between the world as it is and the world as it ought to be both makes necessary and offers proof for the existence of a *go'el*. The work of the *go'el*, whose existence Job affirms, is to bring the world as it is back into line with the world as it ought to be.

If it is not necessary to determine exactly *who* the *go'el* is—if Job does not know the identity of his *go'el* himself, as Janzen posits—then the important question becomes *what* Job expects his *go'el* to do. Indeed, it is primarily disagreement over the activity of the *go'el* which seems to be behind the lack of consensus over the *go'el's* identity. Those who view the *go'el's* job as pleading to God on behalf of Job argue that the *go'el* cannot be

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<sup>59</sup> Along these same lines, Dirk Kinet writes, "Job does not want to give up the God he has believed in; yet he is reluctantly compelled to recognise the God he has experienced in suffering. So he hopes, believes and demands that the God of his faith will vanquish and again supersede the violent and unjust God of his experience. He claims the restoration of the picture of God he had believed in" (Kinet 1983, 33). Walter Brueggemann, looking beyond the Book of Job, finds throughout the Old Testament situations in which the Israelites attempt, through their words, to "mobilize Yahweh to be Yahweh's best, true self," an indication that there are times in which Yahweh does not act as his "true self." Brueggemann continues, "The genre of complaint (lamentation) is an expression of candor about the reality of life experience that is incongruent with Yahweh; at the same time it is an expression of hopeful insistence that if and when the righteous Yahweh is mobilized, the situation will be promptly righted" (Brueggemann 1997, 321). Job's belief that God-as-God-ought-to-be will redeem him from God-as-God-ought-not-to-be can be seen to belong to this tradition.

<sup>60</sup> Crenshaw, too, contends that Job is unaware of the identity of his *go'el*. As Crenshaw understands it, what Job describes in 19:25-27 is a vision he has had of a time when God is again on his side. Job's recounting of this vision is deliberately vague, as Job can hardly understand it himself. Crenshaw writes, "As his strength ebbs, Job ponders the meaning of this vision. Who is this kinsman? What can it mean that someone calls the deity to task for cruelty? When will all this vindication take place? And will God actually stand alongside Job once more as friend, or will divine anger burn continually against him? Such reflection taxes the mind beyond belief, so Job succumbs to the moment and awaits the end" (Crenshaw 1984, 74).

God. How can God plead with himself? Someone else must do that job. However, those who think God is the *go'el* seem to envision the *go'el's* work differently. For these interpreters, the *go'el* is not a witness or an arbiter, but the one who sets Job's situation right, an activity properly undertaken by God. What, then, does Job expect his *go'el* to do? I have written above that the *go'el's* job, as Job understands it, is to transform the world as it is into the world as it ought to be. Is it possible, though, to be more specific about the work of the *go'el*, especially in light of the understanding of the roles played by *go'elim* elsewhere in the Bible?

Crenshaw supposes that the Redeemer to whom Job refers corresponds to the first definition of the term given in the *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Crenshaw writes, the *go'el* is “an avenger of blood, who, according to Num 35:19; Deut 19:6, would vindicate Job's death by punishing the guilty....The issue here is revenge, for Job has abandoned any notion of justice”<sup>61</sup> (Crenshaw 1989, 771). I am not sure, though, that the issue is primarily revenge. Granted, after affirming the existence of his Redeemer, Job goes on to warn the friends, “If you say, ‘How we will persecute him!’ and, ‘The root of the matter is found in him’; be afraid of the sword, for wrath brings the punishment of the sword” (19:28-29a). Yet, the one identified as responsible for Job's situation is primarily God, and not the friends. If vengeance is to be had, it ought to be had against God first and foremost and only against the friends secondarily inasmuch as they have followed God's lead. Some commentators' rejection of the notion that God is the *go'el* is partially based on the idea that it makes no sense to think of God being called upon to take revenge against himself. Job, though, does not make any mention of revenge being taken against God by the *go'el*, even though he does recognize that God is currently acting as his enemy. If Job does not speak of any vengeance against God, it must be that he expects his *go'el* to play some other role.

Common to both definitions of the *go'el*, as given in the *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, is the idea that the *go'el*, however he fulfills his role, functions to show that the dead man is not alone and to ensure that, though dead, he is not forgotten. By avenging a murdered man against his killers, the *go'el* makes the claim that the murder was not justified, and he does so by identifying himself with the dead man,

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<sup>61</sup> Crenshaw is not alone in holding this view. Good, for example, agrees with this assessment, writing, “I take the basic metaphor to be the traditional function of the *go'el haddam*, the ‘avenger of blood’....When someone was killed by a member of another tribe or clan, the injured clan appointed one of its members to procure vengeance on behalf of the deceased....The less violent sense of *go'el* in the Book of Ruth, as a kinsman who buys back the clan's property, strikes me as less consistent with the context” (Good 1990, 102). Williams, too, avers, “The *go'el* is primarily a redeemer of blood, a near kinsman who achieves revenge on the one who has harmed or slain his relatives....Remember, in ch. 16 Job has spoken of his death. There he calls for a witness. Now he expresses certainty...that he will have an avenger who will slay his murderer” (Williams 1971, 244).

identifying himself as someone who is on the dead man's side. He cannot be wiped from the face of the earth, because there is someone who will remember him and act on his behalf even though he is gone.<sup>62</sup> This same function—of ensuring that the dead man is not erased and his memory obliterated—is fulfilled by the *go'el* who marries his dead relative's wife so that she is able to bear children. The children born to the *go'el* and the woman he has married do not belong to the *go'el*. Rather, it is as if they are the children of the dead man. The *go'el* ensures that the dead man is not forgotten by making it possible for his line to continue.

Coming as it does on the heels of Job's lament that he has been abandoned by all who once loved him and in the context of the friend's claims that the wicked, like Job, are utterly alone and, when they die, are forgotten to the extent that it is as if they never lived, Job's affirmation that he knows he has a *go'el* must be taken as an assertion that he is not alone and, though he may die of his affliction, he will not be forgotten. Whatever the *go'el* does, he will do in the name of Job, ensuring that Job's name is not forgotten and that Job is not, consequently, branded as one of the wicked who die and are no longer remembered. As part of his description of what his *go'el* will do, Job seems to envision the *go'el* as enabling him to be reconciled with the God who is now treating him as an enemy. Job says that as a result of the *go'el's* redeeming work "I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side" (19:27a). Instead of avenging Job's suffering upon the God who remains his enemy, the *go'el*, by showing solidarity with Job, will be able to bring God around to Job's side as well. By standing up for Job and remembering him, the *go'el* makes it possible for God to remember Job. By showing God that Job is not alone, the *go'el* proves to God that Job is not one of the wicked.

It is here, incidentally, that the punishment of the friends becomes an issue. It is not Job's *go'el* whose primary function is to avenge Job against the friends who have deserted and mistreated him, rather it is God who, reconciled with Job through the solidarity of the *go'el*, will punish the friends for what they have done, even though they were only following his lead. Verses 28-29, in which Job speaks to the friends about the coming judgment are not a declaration that the *go'el* will avenge Job against them, but are a warning to them not to cast their lot against him, even if God seems to have done so for the time being. After the reconciling work of the *go'el* has taken place, God himself will punish the friends for siding against Job, who has now been proven righteous through the *go'el*.

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<sup>62</sup> For this reason, it seems unlikely that Clines is right that the *go'el* is merely Job's testimony about his innocence. If Job has only himself, if he is well and truly alone, then he has no *go'el*. Such a realization would hardly merit the exultant tone Job takes in the passage, let alone Job's claim that he knows his *go'el* lives.

The work of the *go'el*, as Job imagines it, is to bring an end to the present chaos and return the world to its ordered state. The way the *go'el* will achieve this goal is by showing solidarity with Job, and thereby proving that Job is not alone. Why, though, should this activity bring about the reordering of the world? Surely such a grandiose outcome can hardly be expected from the simple act of siding with Job. To comprehend the connection between the *go'el's* act and the outcome Job envisages, we must remember Job's understanding of the ordered world, as presented in the prose tale and chapter 29. The ordered world, as it existed before Job's affliction, was a world in which Job was the central character. The *go'el*, then, must not only stand up for Job or plead his cause, the way a lawyer might, but must treat him the way he was treated when the world was characterized by order and not chaos. The *go'el's* attention must be focused on Job and he must stand beside Job in such a way that he becomes an extension of Job, making Job bigger, more real,<sup>63</sup> just as in the prologue Job was made great by his many possessions, servants, and children and as in chapter 29 he is made great by the town's elders and nobles and its righteous poor. The *go'el's* job, then, is to act as if the world is ordered as it should be, to act as if it is centered around Job, and, in so doing, make that world a reality once again.

In affirming the existence of his *go'el*, Job shows that he agrees with the friends' assessment of aloneness as a mark of wickedness and, therefore, of chaos. His own seeming aloneness he identifies as a false indicator. Although he appears to be alone at the moment, he is not fundamentally alone, because he has a *go'el* who, by showing solidarity with him and acting on his behalf, will reconcile him with God. After his death, Job will be numbered among the righteous and not forgotten like the wicked. Yet, the fact that Job places his hope in a *go'el* who, by definition, usually acts on behalf of one who is dead, shows that he despairs of the world working as it ought to work while he is still alive, that is, anytime soon. He and the friends may have similar ideas of what constitutes order and chaos, but they disagree about how the world as it currently is should be characterized. For Job it is a chaos in which he, a righteous man, has been left utterly alone, while for the friends, Job's aloneness is a sign of his wickedness and of the ordered working of the world.

### *God's Speeches: Multiplicity as Order*

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<sup>63</sup> This is the case even if the *go'el* is God. As argued above, in the prologue God's attention is entirely focused on Job, so much so that God cannot be said to act of his own accord but follows movements choreographed by Job.

If there is one thing that can be said about God's answer to Job from the whirlwind, it is that it presents a world characterized by multiplicity. A quick scan of the speeches reveals that in them God speaks of a great number of things and beings: sea and land, darkness and light, hail, snow, rain, lions, ravens, mountain goats, wild oxen, ostriches, horses, eagles, the wicked, the proud, Behemoth, and Leviathan, among others. What God thinks about this diverse multitude is perhaps less obvious, but hardly so. Waves of positive assessment seem to rise off the page as God describes the many members of his creation. God's opening words, following his initial challenge, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?...I will question you, and you shall declare to me" (38:2, 3b), set a positive tone for his description of the multifarious world, despite the fact that they are couched in the more negative language of questioning. God begins by asking Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?" (38:4-7). Four things are established in this passage. First, the questioning format and God's sarcastic tone—"surely you know!"—show that God is going to say something different from what Job has said so far. This, in fact, is what has already been established in God's opening challenge of 38:2. In Hebrew, the "words without knowledge" which God accuses Job of having spoken are *מלין בלי־דעת*. The word *מלין* is a plural of *מלה*, the same word used by Job in 29:22 to describe his utterance for which his community waits with bated breath. What is implied, it seems, is not just that Job's railings against God have been "words without knowledge," but that the words he has spoken about the order of the world, which he has detailed in chapter 29, have also been without knowledge. In addition, God's sarcastic "surely you know!" (*כִּי תִדַע*) echoes his opening "you shall declare to me," in which the verb is the Hiphil of *דע*, which instructs Job not just to answer God but to make something known to him. Job is being challenged to teach God something he doesn't already know. Whether this demand is meant to be heard as fully sarcastic or whether it does contain an element of God's really wanting to know what Job has to say is somewhat open to debate. Although I think it is possible to read the book as making the claim that Job does have things to say to God which God does not already know, here God's challenges seem to be sarcastic: Job does not know the answers to the questions God will pose about the creation of the world and so cannot be called upon to be God's teacher. Or, at least, that is what God believes the situation to be.

Second, the subject of the passage indicates that what God has to say will be about the nature of the created world. Together, the tone and the subject reveal that if Job has insisted that he knows what the world ought to be like, God has some surprises in store for him. Third, in his description of his founding of the world, God claims that the world has been intentionally created to be as it is; the world which God will describe in his speeches is the world he intended to make, the ordered world. Finally, as a related point, God characterizes this world as good, as is shown by the joy experienced by the heavenly beings at its creation. Although some scholars view God's speeches as non-sequiturs which fail to answer Job's complaints,<sup>64</sup> this opening passage, with its focus on the creation of the world, announces that the speeches are intended to answer Job's claims about the world—the way it is, the way it ought to be, and the way it ought not to be.

Peggy Day points out that God's speeches make sense "if we understand the interaction between Yahweh and the satan to involve a challenge of world order" (Day 1985, 82). That is, if the book is not primarily about innocent suffering, but is instead about the order of the world, then God's speeches, the burden of which is to show Job how the world is ordered, are highly pertinent to the question at hand. A related view is offered by Janzen, who writes, "Given the prominence of creation throughout Job's argument with his friends, it is no surprise that Yahweh's address to Job comes as a portrayal of the origins and character of the cosmos" (Janzen 1994, 467). That God follows this initial claim—that the world as it is created is good and a source of joy for the heavenly beings—with a description of the world as inhabited by a profusion of beasts, can only mean that he views this multiplicity as essential to the world's order. It is not necessary to go through the speeches and discuss in detail God's depiction of each animal he names. It is enough to say that there are a lot of them, and that God's joy as he speaks of them is evident. A more useful way to engage with the whirlwind speeches on this topic is to ask how they can be seen to address the claims made by Job and his friends about the way the world ought to be. As has been discussed, for Job and his friends, to inhabit order is to live in a simple world where, nevertheless, one is not alone. To inhabit chaos is to live in a complex world, where, nevertheless, one is alone.

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<sup>64</sup> Daniel O'Connor writes, "When eventually the Lord addresses Job out of the whirlwind there is no court case, and no witness to testify to Job's integrity. Moreover there is total silence on God's part on all the positions taken up by the three friends, and by the story of the Prologue" (O'Connor 1985, 84). O'Connor goes on to list 8 issues brought up in the prologue and dialogues which God does not address. Luis Alonso-Schökel, however, cautions against viewing the Yahweh speeches as failing to address the issues at stake in the book. He writes, "The fact is that the commentator's judgment depends on his expectation of what will happen when God intervenes....We cannot read these speeches without bringing to them some kind of expectation; but we must not judge them without taking account of the expectation factor, which conditions us as we read and as we form our judgment" (Alonso-Schökel 1983, 45). He goes on to list 5 ways in which God's words *do* address Job's questions and the claims of the friends.

How, then, do God's speeches deal with the beliefs about order and chaos held by Job and his friends? They deal with them by presenting an ordered world that is utterly different from that envisaged by Job and his friends. Edwin Good remarks that, far from being unrelated to the questions asked in the dialogue, Yahweh's speeches respond directly to those issues but reject the claims on which they are based (Good 1990, 56). It is this rejection which is often mistaken for a failure to engage with the concerns that have been central to Job's discussion with his friends. Where Job has seen order as simple, organized around a single central point, God's ordered world is diffuse. There is no central point on which the animals fix their gaze and to which they cede their status as real characters, even though it might be tempting to claim that, in the world described by God, God himself is the only real character, the one upon whom all eyes are focused. If this were the case, God's depiction of the ordered world would be no different from Job's. The central character would be different—God instead of Job—but the overall configuration would be the same.<sup>65</sup>

Henry Rowold has suggested that the implied answer to all of the questions asked by God from the whirlwind “is not merely, ‘No, I can/did not,’ but rather, ‘No I can/did not, but you (Yahweh) can/did’” (Rowold 1985, 201), a view shared by Habel (Habel 1985, 529), and by Whybray, who writes, “the answer to the questions ‘Can you...?’ ...and ‘Who can...?’ ...can only be ‘Only Yahweh can!’” (Whybray 1998, 169). Coming to the same conclusion, Michael V. Fox explains the way in which God's questions can be understood as rhetorical. He writes,

One asks a question so obvious that the answer is inevitable...because it asks something which both the questioner and his auditor know, and which the questioner knows that his auditor knows, and which the auditor knows that the questioner knows he knows. The existence of this circle of knowing that one knows etc. is shown by the fact that the auditor realizes that he is not expected to answer the question...God asks almost exclusively rhetorical questions in this unit. Most of the questions ask “who?”, the inevitable but unspoken answer being “you, God.” (Fox 1981, 58)

If these scholars were right, it might be correct to say that, despite the apparent multiplicity of the world God depicts, it is actually a simple world, given that God's own focus is not on the diverse multitude of creatures it contains, but on his own creative activity. God's speeches, then, would not be intended to direct Job's gaze out in a variety of directions to take in the great multiplicity of the world, but to direct his gaze to God as the power responsible for everything Job sees, the only real character in a world whose existence emanates from his own and which, without him, would cease to be.

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<sup>65</sup> Much as, in chapter 3, Job is able to conceive of Sheol as an ordered realm because of Death's singular status as its central reality.

### *The Attention of the Animals*

Yet, although it is true that God presents himself as the creator of the world, he does not present a world in which all eyes are on him and him alone. Although some of the animals acknowledge him as the one but for whose sustaining care they would be unable to survive, most direct their attention elsewhere. God begins his animal discourse by asking Job, “Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert? Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?” (38:39-41). Here, the young ravens look to God to provide food for them, just as, it might be said, the righteous poor in chapter 29 look to Job to provide sustenance for them and to act as their defender. Yet, if the ravens’ attention is focused on God, the lions, for whose feeding God depicts himself as equally responsible, do not seem to have God in their gaze, or, indeed, on their mind. It may be God who provides for them, but the lions have their eye on their prey as they crouch in their covert and wait for it to draw near. In fact, with the exception of the ravens, none of the animals named by God are looking at him. The wild ass has its eyes on the ground as “it ranges the mountains as its pasture, and it searches after every green thing” (39:8). The ostrich, which ought, perhaps, to be looking at its eggs or its offspring if it isn’t going to look at God, is instead watching the horse and its rider (39:18b). As for the horse, it is completely focused on the battle (39:21). It is not only the horse’s eyes that are fixed on the fight, but its ears and nose as well: “it cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet. When the trumpet sounds, it says, ‘Aha!’ From a distance it smells the battle” (39:24b-25a). The eagle watches the battlefield and spies its prey, the dead who have fallen there (39:29-30). Leviathan, the final beast in God’s litany “surveys everything that is lofty” (41:34), which might be taken as an indication that Leviathan is looking at God, given that God can certainly be considered as “lofty.” However, if Leviathan does include God in its gaze when it “surveys everything that is lofty” (41:34a), it cannot be said that this gaze designates God as the central real character, to whom Leviathan surrenders its own reality. The verb translated “survey” in the NRSV is plain old 𐤒𐤍𐤒, which does not tell us much about the quality or direction of Leviathan’s gaze. The word “survey”, however, connotes a looking down. The translators’ choice of this word instead of “looks at” draws support from the second half of the verse: “it is king over all that are proud” (41:34b). One who is king over the proud naturally looks down

upon the lofty. If anyone is confirmed as a real character by Leviathan's gaze, it is Leviathan and not God. Everything Leviathan surveys is below it and belongs to it.

This, though, does not mean that Leviathan occupies the position formerly occupied by Job (in chapter 29) and potentially occupied by God (in Rowold's and others' suggestion of the intended answer to God's questions). That is, God does not show Job an ordered world which is simple, but in which it is now Leviathan, rather than Job or God, who holds the central position. God directs Job's attention to Leviathan, but not to Leviathan alone. Neither do the other animals focus on Leviathan; Leviathan may survey them, but their gaze is elsewhere. Instead of focusing Job's attention on one central character, God's questions direct Job's attention out to the multiplicity of animals which inhabit the complex, diversely populated world.

### *The Aloneness of the Animals*

If God's version of the ordered world is not consonant with order as envisioned by Job, what can be said of God's take on the picture Job and his friends present of chaos? Is what Job and his friends call chaos the same thing as what God calls order? To a degree, the answer is yes. God's ordered world does bear similarities to chaos as defined by Job and the friends, but the two are not identical. Job and his friends have supposed that, in a situation in which there is no central character around whom all others are organized, the inhabitants of the world must be fundamentally alone. The loneliness of the wicked and of Job as one of the wicked is a central feature of the friends' discourse. If the creatures inhabiting the world God has created are not organized around a central figure, are they alone as Job and his friends suppose the wicked to be alone? The question is difficult to answer. God does not dwell on the loneliness—or lack thereof—of the animals he describes. On the one hand, God's description of the young deer which leave their parents once they are strong enough to fend for themselves “and do not return to them” (39:4b) and of the ostrich which abandons its eggs and the young born from them, caring little whether they survive or not (39:14-16), is not unlike the friends' description of the wicked who are unable to provide for their children and whose offspring do not remember them. Bildad, for example, has said of the wicked, “They have no offspring or descendant among their people, and no survivor where they used to live” (18:19), and Zophar has said that the children of the wicked are forced to “seek the favor of the poor” (20:10a), because their parents are unable to care for them as they should. Are the deer-parents alone like the wicked whose children forget them, and are the ostrich-children alone like the children of the wicked who are not cared for by their parents? The answer might be yes, except that

God does not assign any stigma to the kind of behavior practiced by the young deer and the mother ostrich, nor does abandonment by children or parents seem to negatively affect the ones abandoned. Rather, the abandonment of parents and children is presented as a natural occurrence and not as a sign of any kind of particularly chaotic behavior on the part of those doing the leaving or those left. Granted, God does describe the ostrich, in its lack of care for its eggs and offspring, as a fool, and the friends have equated fools with the wicked. (“I have seen fools taking root, but suddenly I cursed their dwelling,” Eliphaz has boasted in his first speech [5:3].) The foolish ostrich, however, is not censured for its foolishness; rather, its foolishness is part of its God-given nature, a characteristic which makes it a unique creature and thereby contributes to the multiplicity of the creation. Although deer and ostriches are left by children and parents respectively, this does not seem to render them alone in the sense that the friends mean.

In general, the animals in God’s speeches are not described as interacting with other members of their species or with members of other species. Some animals feed their young—like the eagle, which searches out the battlefield, so that its young ones may suck up the blood that has been spilled there (39:30)—but others are not depicted as doing so. The wild ass and wild ox are specifically described as spurning the company of humans. The wild ass eschews the “tumult of the city” (39:7), preferring to range the mountains alone. The wild ox will not stay on the farm or give his attention to the farmer, thereby becoming part of the unity of the farm (39:9-12). Whether or not these animals are alone does not seem to be part of God’s consideration in his designation of them as valued members of the creation. A complex world, filled with a multiplicity of beings does not seem to automatically give rise to the kind of aloneness that Job and the friends envisaged as the lot of the wicked, whose multiplicity was contrasted with the singularity of the ordered world. Multiplicity does not breed aloneness, or, if it does, such aloneness is not problematic. In fact, when God describes the wild ass which “ranges the mountains as its pasture” (39:8), the word translated “pasture” is רעהו, a word which also means “intimate friend.” Job has used it with this meaning in 6:14 to lament his friends’ treatment of him: “Those who withhold kindness from a friend (מרעהו) forsake the fear of the Almighty.” It seems possible, then, that God is describing the mountains not only as the pasture of the wild ass, but as its friend. Nature provides companionship even for those who seem companionless, a companionship which Job has failed to perceive as a possibility. In any case, when he reveals his care for the animals he names, God shows that *he* does not leave them alone, but is present with them in their wild and (potentially) lonely habitations. This

is surely an indication that these animals are not alone, for the aloneness of the wicked, as presumed by Job and the friends, was primarily evidence of their abandonment by God.

### *The Question of Power in God's Speeches*

Having seen how God's speeches answer (and reject) Job's and his friends' assumptions about the singularity of order and the multiplicity of chaos, let us return to the claim made by Rowold and others that all of God's questions to Job should be answered, "You alone did" or "You alone know." Some of God's questions surely imply the answer that these scholars suggest. For example, God does not ask, "Where is the way to the dwelling of the light?" because he wants Job to give him directions. God already knows the way to the place where light dwells and thinks it most likely that Job does not. Likewise, when God asks Job to tell him who it was determined the measurements of the earth, the implied answer is certainly, "you alone did." Habel argues that God's questions and their implied answer are "intended to focus on God as the only possible power who could perform the action described in the question" (Habel 1985, 529). Indeed, a great number of scholars seem to interpret God's words from the whirlwind as serving primarily to demonstrate his power over against Job's comparative weakness, even if they disagree over whether this demonstration of power is good or bad.

Among those who view God's display of power positively is Walter Brueggemann, who writes, "While scholars explore what appears to be the subtlety of these responses of Yahweh, it is evident that the ground of Yahweh's response is in power" (Brueggemann 1997, 390). About the issues at stake in the Book of Job, Roland Murphy asks, "Is the whole question at bottom an issue of power...and not of justice?" and answers, "God...is redefining the problem...shifting the focus from justice to the broader notion of sovereignty over the universe" (Murphy 1999, 96). Pope concurs, writing, "God assails [Job] with questions he cannot answer...The purpose is to bring home to Job his ignorance and his folly in impugning God's wisdom and justice...Since man has not God's power, he has no right to question God's justice" (Pope 1965, 250, 267). Those who judge God's display of power negatively include Jack Miles, John Briggs Curtis and Carl Jung. Miles declares, "Few speeches in all of literature can more properly be called overpowering than the Lord's speeches to Job from the whirlwind...But therein lies all their difficulty. The Lord refers to absolutely nothing about himself except his power" (Miles 1995, 314). As Miles sees it, it is because God has subjected Job to unjust torture and, therefore, "has something to hide," that he puts on such a show of power; the fireworks are intended to obscure God's culpability (*Ibid.*, 316). In the same way, Curtis

observes “The tenor of the entirety of the Yahweh speeches is that of the overwhelming power and majesty of God as compared with the frailty and ignorance of Job” (Curtis 1979, 497), and concludes, “A god so remote, so unfeeling, so unjust is worse than no god,” a conclusion that he believes is shared by Job, as shown by his final response to God’s words (*Ibid.*, 510). Finally, Jung condemns the god who “comes riding along on the tempest of his almightiness and thunders reproaches at the half-crushed human worm” (Jung, 1954 16-17).

Yet, I wonder whether these scholars are right that the issue of who holds the power is really what is at stake in God’s speeches. Although some of God’s questions may be intended to highlight Job’s ignorance and powerlessness in relation to his own knowledge and power, it cannot be assumed that everything about which God asks Job he already knows and has already done. Although it might be possible for God to do all the things he challenges Job to do, this does not mean that he actually chooses to do them, or that he views them as things that must be done in order to maintain order. If the issue is who holds the power and the implied answer is “God,” I wonder whether that power is of a different sort and serves a different purpose than some of the above scholars suppose. For example, is it power that permits God to know where the mountain goats give birth (39:1)? Is it power that has allowed God to “let the wild ass go free” (39:5)? These do not seem like questions calculated to convince the hearer of the speaker’s *power*. It may be a demonstration of omniscience to show that one knows where the deer calve, but its not a terribly compelling one. A more likely response from Job, instead of a cowering “O omniscient God, you alone know,” might be an incredulous “Who cares?” What does it matter to Job where the mountain goats and the deer give birth? And what about letting the wild ass go free? What kind of power does that show? God has done no better than human beings with respect to the wild ass. He has not managed to tame it; it is not pulling *his* cart, any more than it is pulling Job’s.<sup>66</sup> So God let the wild ass go free? Everyone has to, because the wild ass cannot be domesticated. And if God’s point is that he is responsible for the un-domesticability of the wild ass and ox (which does, in fact, seem to be what his questions are intended to convey), then his power is of quite a different sort.

Power is generally understood as power *over* something and not as letting something go free, which is, properly speaking, a *relinquishing* of power. These questions do not seem to demonstrate God’s omniscience or omnipotence as much as they

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<sup>66</sup> Some interpreters assume that what these animals will not do for Job they will do for Yahweh. Milton Horne, for example, writes, “The deity asks Job about whether the wild ox ‘consents,’...to serve Job. The implication of this question is that the wild ox does indeed consent to serve Yahweh, but also, that he is free not to do so” (Horne 2005, 139). Yet, it is not at all clear that the wild ox, if it is as free to choose to serve Yahweh as it is free to choose to serve Job, *does* choose servitude. It is the freedom of the animals which is emphasized and not their servitude, whether freely chosen or not.

demonstrate his care for what is insignificant from human perspectives. God indicates that he knows where the deer calve not to prove his omniscience but to show that this kind of knowledge *matters* to him. He cares about the deer and the mountain goats. Perhaps the more likely implied answer, then, is not “you alone know,” but “you know and you care” or “you know because you care enough to know.” The implication, if this is the case, is not that it is impossible for Job to know because Job lacks God’s power, but that if Job thought it was worthwhile to know such a detail, he too could know it.<sup>67</sup> It is knowledge, though, that is of no material benefit to him, so if he is to care enough to know, it must be for another reason, namely that he cares about the deer and the mountain goats, that he recognizes their importance in and of themselves, that he sees them as real characters with real, independent value, and that he accepts that the ordered world is characterized by multiplicity instead of singularity.

### *Leviathan and God’s Power*

Just as the questions about the animals in chapters 39 and 40 do not have the demonstration of God’s power as their primary goal, neither, I would argue, do the questions about Leviathan in chapter 41. About Leviathan, God says, “Any hope of capturing it will be disappointed; were not even the gods overwhelmed at the sight of it? No one is so fierce as to dare to stir it up. Who can stand before it? Who can confront it and be safe?—under the whole heaven, who?” (41:9-11).<sup>68</sup> If the interpretation held by Rowold and others is correct, then the questions asked here must be understood as implying that, although Job cannot stand before Leviathan, God can and has done so; although Job cannot hope to capture Leviathan, that is precisely what God has done. God asks Job who there is “under the whole heaven” who is capable of confronting Leviathan with impunity, and answers, if Rowold is right, “God alone.” If Leviathan is viewed as a chaos monster, then the implication is that only God has the strength to bind chaos and keep it at bay, a feat which Job cannot perform and which, therefore, disqualifies Job from

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<sup>67</sup> Dale Patrick points out that today, “We can, at one level, answer those questions thundered at Job.” This, though, does not exhaust the import of God’s whirlwind speeches. Patrick continues, “The voice from the whirlwind censures us and invites us to take our place in a community of beings empowered by a creator who delights in the flourishing of life.” In Patrick’s view, as in mine, it is not Job’s inability to answer the questions that is at stake. Although contemporary humans *can* answer many of the questions put to Job, this does not mean that we are any closer to accepting that God’s vision of the world as it ought to be is a world rightfully inhabited by a diverse multiplicity of creatures, instead of presided over by a single species, namely, our own.

<sup>68</sup> This translation is based on the emendation of the Hebrew לֹא־יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה־לֵּי, “to me” or “mine” to מִי־יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה־לֵּי, “who is he?” an emendation supported by Pope. Gordis, Dhorme, and Habel read לֹא־יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה־לֵּי, “no one,” which has a similar force. In general, these lines (9-11; Hebrew 1-3) are difficult and scholars offer a variety of translations.

calling God to account for what he perceives as a breakdown in the order of the world. John Day endorses this view, writing, “It is clearly implied that Job, and, by implication, humans generally, are unable to overcome these creatures and that only Yahweh has control over them” (Day 2002, 103). Cyrus Gordon, too, contends that the questions put to Job about his ability to control Leviathan are meant to imply “that God had put a hook through Leviathan’s nose or lip, and tied his tongue, rendering him harmless,” a feat of which Job would not be capable (Gordon 1966, 3). Similarly, Hartley maintains that in the Leviathan and Behemoth pericopes, “Yahweh challenges Job to demonstrate his prowess by defeating in mortal combat the ominous creatures Behemoth and Leviathan. If he cannot master these symbols of cosmic powers, he will have to abandon his complaint. Furthermore, Yahweh is arguing that he masters every force in the world” (Hartley 1988, 518).<sup>69</sup> Trygve Mettinger points out that

Behemoth and Leviathan are not Hebrew’s appellatives for the hippopotamus and the crocodile; and what is more they occur without the definite article, as proper names....Thus, the names themselves, especially Leviathan, have unmistakable mythical overtones. One gets the idea that these animals stand as symbols of the dark, chaotic side of existence. (Mettinger 1997, 12)

Even if Leviathan is not understood to be a mythological chaos monster on the order of Tiamat, this interpretation still views Leviathan as something that must be bound if God’s ordered creation is to be upheld. Whatever Leviathan is—whether uncreated chaos monster or chaotic creature—it needs to be controlled if the world is to be as it ought to be, and God is the only one with the power to control the beast.

Against this interpretation, though, it must be noticed that the first nine verses of the Leviathan chapter have certain things in common with the verses about the wild ox in chapter 39. There, God asks: “Is the wild ox willing to serve you? Will it spend the night at your crib? Can you tie it in the furrow with ropes, or will it harrow the valleys after you? Will you depend on it because its strength is great, and will you hand over your labor to it? Do you have faith in it that it will return, and bring your grain to your threshing floor?” (39:9-12). Is the answer, “The wild ox will not serve you, *Job*, but the wild ox will serve me, *God*. Your lack of control over the wild ox is indicative of your weakness relative to my power”? I do not think it is. The passage does not seem to be making the case that God has managed to domesticate the wild ox for his own purposes, while Job has failed in the same endeavor. Rather, God seems to be saying that the wild ox has no

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<sup>69</sup> The list of scholars who interpret the Leviathan and Behemoth passages in this way is long. As the position has already been explicated by the scholars quoted above, however, I will not quote from the rest. Additional scholars who are of this persuasion include Tur-Sinai, Murphy, Habel, Whybray, Cox, and Ash.

obligation to serve anyone—neither Job nor God—and this is how it has been created.

Compare this passage with the beginning of the Leviathan chapter:

Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook, or press down its tongue with a cord? Can you put a rope in its nose, or pierce its jaw with a hook? Will it make many supplications to you? Will it speak soft words to you? Will it make a covenant with you or be taken as your servant forever? Will you play with it as with a bird, or will you put it on a leash for your girls? Will traders bargain over it? Will they divide it up among the merchants? Can you fill its skin with harpoons, or its head with fishing spears? Lay hands on it; think of the battle; you will not do it again! Any hope of capturing it will be disappointed. (41:1-9a)

The two passages are not dissimilar. In both, God asks Job questions about his ability to control wild beasts so that he can depend upon them for his livelihood. God claims that, just as the wild ox cannot be tied in the furrow with ropes to pull the plow, so Leviathan cannot be led about on a rope or a leash. The wild ox will not feed at any person's manger—he will not exchange his services for the goods that belong to human beings—so Leviathan will not make a covenant with any person, will not enter into a give-and-take arrangement and be bound to human control. The wild ox will not bring the farmer's grain to the threshing floor and thus contribute to the farmer's livelihood, nor can Leviathan be captured and killed, turned into meat that can be sold in the market. The farmer and the fisherman cannot use these animals for their own benefit.

But if Job cannot use Leviathan for his own purposes, can God? If Leviathan will not make a covenant with Job, is the implication of God's questions that Leviathan *will* make a covenant with God? Or that although Job cannot harpoon Leviathan and put his flesh on sale in the market, God can? Although a number of scholars have seen this passage as demonstrating God's power over Leviathan, when we compare the Leviathan passage with the passage about the wild ox, such an assumption seems mistaken. The similarities between the passages seem to argue for a similar interpretation of both. The point is not that God can conquer Leviathan, but that Leviathan has been created as an unconquerable beast, allowed to live its own life apart from humanity and also apart from God. Whatever the intended answers to God's questions, their purpose is not to focus attention on God's power and to contrast it with Job's weakness. Rather, their purpose is to focus Job's attention on the diverse multiplicity of real characters that inhabit God's ordered creation. Where God's power is revealed is in his creation of this complex world, but, in creating real creatures God relinquishes power rather than hoarding it for himself. Some of that relinquished power falls to Job, but—and this is central to the point God is making—not all of it.

*The Place of Human Beings in God's World*

Although God's speeches contain a multiplicity of animals, they are noticeably short on humans, who appear only in oblique references. When God speaks of rain, asking "who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens, when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together?" (38:37b-38), it is possible that the human form appears in that massed earth, echoing the Genesis 2 creation story.<sup>70</sup> In the next chapter humans are laughed at by ostriches and carried into battle by horses (38:18-25), but in both cases the focus is on the animals, not the humans. The prey, spied on the battlefield by the eagle, is certainly partly human, or at least *was* before it met its bloody end (39:26-30). Finally, the speeches are addressed to a human being. That it is Job to whom God speaks about this world in which humans appear to be on the sidelines surely boosts the importance of humans which the content of the speeches denies.

Some interpreters make much of this last detail. Balentine is convinced that God's speeches are intended to function "as a radical summons to a new understanding of what it means for humankind to be created in the image of God" (Balentine 1998, 260). In his speeches, God models for Job what it means "to participate in the governance of the world with power and glory that is only slightly less than God's" (*Ibid.*, 269). Similarly, Janzen writes, "To be a human being is to be a creature who is yet God's addressee and whom God confronts with the rest of creation vocationally" (Janzen 1985, 229). In the readings proposed by Balentine and Janzen, God's treatment of the animals serves as a model for how Job ought to behave. If God does not include human beings in his picture of the world, it is because God himself stands in for human beings. In this way, far from being absent from the speeches, humans are well represented. This interpretation is attractive. There is much to be said for a reinterpretation of what it means to have power and for a reevaluation of how human power should be exercised. Yet, I do not know that this is the correct way to read God's speeches. This interpretation allows humans to be taken out of the center, but immediately puts them back in, insisting that they have been transformed. The transition is too quick.

It seems to me that when God takes humans out of the center, he really takes them out. The message is not, "Human beings have power, but have been misusing it, and now I, God, am providing a new model of what power looks like." Rather, the message seems to be, "Human beings have no real power. The power they affect is illusory. And if, by

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<sup>70</sup> "The LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth...but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2: 5b, 6-7). This link was suggested by Professor Diane Jacobson in an unpublished lecture at Luther Seminary in 2003.

chance, they happen to come into power, it is because they have stolen it, not because it has been given them by God.” This, of course, is an unbearable statement, so it is no wonder Balentine and Janzen offer their interpretations. Although the fact that God addresses Job serves to keep Job “in the picture” of creation, a picture which, otherwise, would hardly seem to include him, it does not give Job the status of the central character that he has previously claimed for himself. Humans are part of the creation, too, and contribute to its multiplicity, but they are deliberately slighted in God’s speeches due to their tendency to claim so much importance for themselves that their presence makes the world simpler instead of more complex.

There is one additional reference to humans in God’s speeches. In 38:13-15 and 40:10-14 God speaks of a particular human group, the wicked. Does God present the wicked as contributors to the multiplicity that makes up the ordered world, and, therefore, of value? God does not seem to rate the wicked as positively as he rates the animals he describes, yet neither does he call for their eradication. If Job and his friends have supposed that the ordered world is a world in which the wicked must be punished and from which they must be ultimately purged, God’s version of order seems to allow the wicked to remain, a part of order, albeit one that is constrained. God asks, “Have you commanded the morning since your days began...so that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it?...Light is withheld from the wicked, and their uplifted arm is broken.” (38:12a, 13, 15)

Later, he challenges,

Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on all who are proud, and abase them. Look on all who are proud, and bring them low; tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. Then I will also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can give you victory. (40:10-14)

It is tempting to assume that what God challenges Job to do is what he himself does. If Job is strong enough to bind the wicked in the world below, God will acknowledge that Job has the right to be God and will surrender his position to Job. Those who read these speeches as a battle between God and Job see in these verses the pronouncement that only if Job can crush the wicked as God does will Job be deemed worthy to question the validity of God’s actions.

It is, however, not entirely clear that what God challenges Job to do here is something he does himself. In addition to the fact that throughout his own speeches Job has repeatedly accused God of allowing the proud and the wicked to flourish, God’s own words cast doubt on this claim. God’s description of the wicked in chapter 38 presents a

different picture of God's dealings with them. Those verses seem to show that the projects of the wicked are limited by natural processes that God has set in place, and not by God's direct intervention. Most scholars seem to agree with this interpretation.<sup>71</sup> Hartley, for example, writes of this passage, "Yahweh counters Job's complaint with the position that his own command of the light confines the work of the wicked. He has contained the wicked within limits just as he has stayed the encroachment of the sea against the land" (Hartley 1988, 497).

In addition, God speaks only of placing a limit on the activities of the wicked—breaking their "uplifted arm"—and not of eradicating them altogether, which is what he suggests that Job try to do. These verses call the interpretation of 40:10-14 as a summons to Job to try to do what God does into question. God's subsequent description of Leviathan as "king over all that are proud" (41:34b) further problematizes this interpretation.<sup>72</sup> God's chapter-long description of Leviathan is not a rant against an enemy which must be defeated, but a paean to the mighty beast by a creator rejoicing in his handiwork.<sup>73</sup> If God himself routinely abases the proud, he ought to abase Leviathan first of all, but this is not what he describes himself doing. Those who interpret God's questions in chapter 41, "Can you draw out Leviathan with a fish-hook, or press down its tongue with a cord?" (41:1) etc., as evidence that God himself has bound Leviathan and is challenging Job to the same test of strength, are surely wrong, as discussed above.

But if God does not abase the proud and tread down the wicked, why does he instruct Job to try to do so? What God challenges Job to do is to remake the world as Job thinks it ought to be. Job has insisted that, in the ordered world, the wicked are punished

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<sup>71</sup> Matitiahu Tsevat disagrees with this common interpretation, but takes his disagreement in a different direction than one might expect. For Tsevat, it is not that God directly punishes the wicked instead of relying on the world's natural processes to constrain their evildoing, but that the wicked are not constrained or punished at all. Even though daybreak might provide an occasion for limiting the actions of the wicked, that occasion is never seized by God and Job has no power to make use of it himself (Tsevat 1980, 30, 33).

<sup>72</sup> The word translated "proud" in 40:11b-12 is **גָּבַר**, whereas in 41:34, "proud" translates **בְּנִי־שָׂרֵי**. That different words are used may, admittedly, indicate that the proud whom God challenges Job to abase are not the same proud over whom Leviathan is king. Yet, at the same time, it is possible that pride is pride and that the two groups are the same—or at least have the same prideful attribute—even though different terms are used.

<sup>73</sup> Those scholars who insist that Leviathan is God's enemy are relying too fully on preconceived understandings of what Leviathan is and not on God's words themselves. Perdue attempts to explain God's praise of Leviathan (and Behemoth) as like the song of "a heroic warrior of romantic epic, in the prelude to deadly battle" which "praises the enchanting beauty and fearsome power of these two mythical beasts who must again be subdued to ensure the ongoing of the good creation" (Perdue 1991, 262). That is, as Perdue sees it, God's praise of Leviathan is a way of praising himself as the conqueror of this mighty foe. Although this interpretation provides a way of making sense of God's praise of Leviathan while still viewing Leviathan as God's enemy, I do not find it convincing. It depends too much on the idea that Leviathan must be the evil chaos monster, even though God does not actually speak of Leviathan in this way. Perdue has, in effect, asked, "How can we understand God's praise of Leviathan, given that Leviathan is evil?" and has come up with an explanation. There is nothing in the passage itself, however, that supports the claim that Leviathan is evil in the first place. Perdue's (hypothetical) question could just as easily be answered, "God praises Leviathan because God loves Leviathan," an answer that is supported by the text.

and the proud brought low. Time and again, Job has castigated God for failing to uphold this order. What God dares Job to do is not to beat him at his own game—to do what God already does—but to exhibit enough power to change the rules. Some scholars see God’s challenge to Job as an admission of his own failure to make the world as it ought to be, a world from which evil is excised. Athalya Brenner writes, “God is in fact conceding that he cannot dispose of the wicked and of evil....God...rules the world...but has little or no control over evil” (Brenner 1981, 133). Gordis concurs, writing, “Were Job able to destroy evil in the world, even God would be prepared to relinquish His throne to him—a moving acknowledgment by God Himself that the world order is not perfect! (40:6-14)” (Gordis 1965,12). These scholars, though, do not see God as challenging Job to “change the rules,” but, rather, to make the world how both he and God agree it ought to be but which God, for some reason, has failed to create, an interpretation with which I do not agree.

If Job is able to structure the world as he sees fit, that world will come into existence. If not, it will not, for the world God has created is not a world in which the wicked are routinely snuffed out by God’s direct intervention. It is here that the issue of power is brought to bear on God’s speeches. God is not saying, “I alone have the power to crush the wicked and defeat Leviathan,” and, by demonstrating Job’s inability to do these things, denying Job’s right to question him. Rather, what God is saying is that he has the power to have created the world as a world in which a great multiplicity of creatures, including Leviathan and the wicked, live. Dale Patrick describes this world: “There is ordering, but no suppression of counter-power....The order includes violence and catastrophe, but these are not a struggle...of all with each; the aim is the flourishing of each species within a niche in the community of life” (Patrick 2001, 113). If Job has enough power, Job can create a different world, one from which Leviathan and the wicked are banned, a simple world organized around Job as its only real character. But Job does not have that kind of power, at least God doesn’t think he does.<sup>74</sup> The ordered world described by God in his speeches is a world characterized by complexity and inhabited by a diverse multitude of real characters. God may work to contain these characters, but he does so in the service of complexity. His power is not a power which conquers, but a power which sets free.

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<sup>74</sup> The prose epilogue may cast some doubt on this assumption, as will be discussed later.

### CHAPTER 3

#### ORDER AND CHAOS AS SINGULARITY AND MULTIPLICITY WITH REGARD TO BEHAVIOR AND BELIEF

In the previous chapter I have been inquiring into chaos and order as related to singularity and multiplicity at the level of character. I have suggested that the characters in the book view situations as chaotic or orderly based on the way in which its characters are configured. Job sees the ordered world as configured in such a way that there is one central character surrounded by a multiplicity of other characters, all of whom contribute to the importance of the central character who alone possesses real existence. The friends see chaos as a situation in which a multiplicity of characters inhabit their own solitary centers, each member of the multiplicity utterly separate from every other, and therefore fundamentally single. For God, as he reveals himself in chapters 38-41, it is order which is complex, inhabited by a great variety of real characters. The relation between singularity and multiplicity and chaos and order can also be explored at the level of behavior and belief. That is, it is not just configurations of characters which can be viewed as participating in either chaos or order, but the ways in which individual characters choose to think and act. To explore this aspect of the discussion about chaos and order, I will examine the book's use of the path as a metaphor for life and the way it is lived.

#### *"How Many Different Ways...?" Excursus on the Metaphor of the Path in a Gospel Song and in Proverbs*

There's a gospel song by the Louvin Brothers that asks the question, "How many different ways can you reach that city, where angels sing God's praise for soul-redeeming love?" and answers, "There's only one way in which you can enter, and your key is you record above," before breaking into the jaunty chorus, "No, you can't go by plane, 'cause they ain't got no landing field, and you can't go by train, like some folks sing about, and you can't go by ship, 'cause they ain't got no harbor. Through grace by faith if you're made whole, you'll meet him in the clouds."<sup>75</sup> The song plays on the metaphor which describes life as a road down which one travels and one's decisions about how to live as a way or a path, treating this metaphorical path as if it is an actual path potentially accessible to various modes of transport. In the end, however, there is only one mode of transport which will enable one to reach "that city," and it turns out not to be a mode of transport at all, but a way of acting and believing. In this way, the song moves back and forth between

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<sup>75</sup> The Louvin Brothers. "You'll Meet Him in the Clouds." *Keep Your Eyes on Jesus*. Capitol Records, 1963.

imagining the road to heaven as a real road and a metaphorical one. The point of the song is that there is only one way that leads to heaven, and heaven can be reached only by getting on and staying on *that* path, a path characterized by right behavior and right belief. “How many different ways?” No different ways. There’s only one way.

In making the confident claim that there is only one way, the song simultaneously assumes that, although there are no different ways to reach the heavenly city, there are a multitude of different ways *not* to reach that city. The song names three—plane, train, and boat—but it could easily name more, given that there are any number of different transport options. If we were to ask “What about by pogo stick?” or whatever new transport option has popped into our minds, we can be sure the song would answer, “No, you can’t go by pogo stick, ’cause they ain’t got no...place for a pogo stick to go,” albeit with better rhymes. There is one way of acting that is the right way, and a multitude of ways that are the wrong way. Likewise, there is one way of believing that is the right way, and a multitude of ways that are wrong. To believe in Jesus is to be on the right path, the songwriters would contend, while to believe in anyone or anything else as the mediator of salvation is to be on the wrong path, of which there are, by extension, a wide variety.

We can imagine the one right path shining like gold—perhaps it is the yellow brick road—in the midst of innumerable wrong paths, dim and muddy. Something like Tolstoy’s dictum that “All happy families are all alike, but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion” (Tolstoy 1954, 13) is at work here. Happy families are on the yellow brick road to heaven, while unhappy families...well, they might be anywhere. (Anywhere *else*, that is.) From the point of view of this gospel song, order is singular and chaos is characterized by multiplicity. There is only *one* path anyone ought to be on. For the world to be as it ought to be, everyone should be on the one path. This is evidenced by the fact that the one path leads to heaven, which is itself the world as it ought to be. Although everyone in the earthly world is not on the one path, the heavenly world provides a space in which the world as it should be is able to exist. The only people who reach the heavenly city are those who are on the one path, meaning that in the heavenly world *everyone* is on the one, right path. If you’re on a different path, you just can’t get there.

This gospel song, obviously, postdates the Book of Job by a long, long while, and, on top of this, belongs to a religion which did not even exist when the book was being written. The song’s idea of the one path is clearly drawn from New Testament teachings. Jesus’ claim, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me” (John 14:6), provides the clearest analogue. The Old Testament, however, also uses the metaphor of the path to describe right behavior. Stephen Geller points out that, in the wisdom literature “‘Path’ (*derek, natib, ma’agal, ’orah*) is almost a code term

for piety [see Prov. 3:17; 4:11; 9:6, etc.]....He or she who finds wisdom finds life, its paths are paths of life, and so on” (Geller 1987, 169). In Proverbs 7 and 8, for example, we see first the strange woman seducing a youth down the path that will lead to his destruction, and then Woman Wisdom, who calls youths to walk down her path, which is the path of righteousness, and leads to abundant life.

In this depiction, though, it would seem we are not presented with one right road and a multitude of wrong roads, but with only two roads, one of which is right and one of which is wrong. A person can either choose the path of Woman Wisdom, who points with outstretched finger and calls with a clear, loud voice, or he can choose the path trodden by the strange woman, who walks with swaying hips, casting beckoning glances over her shoulder and motioning the hesitant youth to follow with a crook of her finger. Yet, at the same time, Woman Wisdom is a singular figure. She is described in Proverbs 8:22-31 as the first of God’s creation, with whose assistance the rest of creation was brought into being. The strange woman, by contrast, could be anyone. The speaker in Proverbs 7 introduces her as simply “a woman” (Prov 7:10) who approaches a foolish youth hoping to seduce him. By comparison with Woman Wisdom she is anonymous. While there is only one Woman Wisdom—look at her credentials!—there could be any number of strange women. Crenshaw points out that Woman Wisdom invites her guests to “a sumptuous banquet in a royal palace,” whereas “her opposite, Madam Folly, plies her trade like a common harlot” (Crenshaw 1977, 356). The one is royal, one of a kind, while the other is common, a dime a dozen.

The only thing required of the strange woman is that she lead one down any path other than the one belonging to Woman Wisdom. Although this path may be conceptualized as one path, it is not *one* in the way that Woman Wisdom’s path is one. The strange woman of Proverbs can be seen to stand for any number of strange women, each of whom has her own path down which she tempts naïve youths. These paths can be thought of as one path in that they all lead away from the abundant life promised by Woman Wisdom, but, in reality, they are a number of different paths. “How many different ways can you fail to reach that city?” There are a multitude of different ways. You can follow this strange woman or that one. You can ride on the back of her motorcycle or stroll with her hand in hand. There is, though, only one way to have Life, and that is to follow Woman Wisdom down her singular path.

*The One Right Path in Job’s “Hymn to Wisdom”*

Chapter 28, often designated the “hymn to wisdom,” identifies one right road of behavior and belief and contrasts this one right way with the multitude of ways in which it is possible to go wrong. Before analyzing what the chapter has to say on this subject, however, I first want to make the argument that the hymn represents Job’s views. That is, although Job may say different things about metaphorical paths elsewhere in the book, the hymn can be understood as spoken by him and representative of how he thinks about order and chaos.

In some ways, the hymn to wisdom seems out of place in the book. Commentators disagree over who speaks it. It is placed among Job’s speeches, and so would seem to come from his mouth, but the pious words of the hymn seem out of place following on the heels of Job’s accusations against the God who has turned against him for no reason. How can Job, who insists God is acting unjustly, affirm fear of the Lord as the only route to wisdom? Some scholars suggest that the hymn must be a later interpolation, inserted into Job’s mouth as a way of tempering his impiety. Pope writes, “Some of the difficulties...appear to have been produced by pious tampering with the text by well-meaning meddlers who felt compelled to mitigate Job’s shocking charges against God....The poem on Wisdom...is almost universally recognized as extraneous” (Pope 1965, xxv).<sup>76</sup> Others suggest that the hymn represents the book’s author’s own view, placed at this point to tell us what conclusions we should be drawing from his work, in case we are feeling a bit at sea. Habel writes, “I now accept this poem as integral to the Book of Job and view it...as the poet’s own commentary on the efforts of the preceding participants to probe the hidden side of wisdom and understand the riddle of Job’s case” (Habel 1983, 144). Westermann, too, views the hymn as providing a concluding authorial comment on the friend’s arguments, writing, “Chapter 28 is a final word on...[the friends’] theology; it is the radical combating of a theology which thinks it has information, in the form of available wisdom, about God’s dealings with mankind” (Westermann 1981, 137). In a similar vein, Paul Fiddes reads the hymn as “an intermezzo or a chorus, awakening all the participants [in the dialogue] to areas of mystery and the unknown” (Fiddes 1996, 186).

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<sup>76</sup> Terrien, too, writes, “There can be little doubt that this magnificent poem on the inaccessibility of wisdom to man does not belong to the discourses of Job....It is not written in his style; it is not connected with the Joban context” (Terrien 1954, 1099). Dhorme, while agreeing that chapter 28 does not quite fit where it has been placed in the book argues that, nevertheless, its “author may very well be the same as he who wrote the poetic debate” (Dhorme 1967, li). For Dhorme, the hymn to wisdom is the result of a later burst of inspiration which came to the author after he had finished the bulk of the book (*Ibid.*, xcvi-ii). Similarly, Vawter, while viewing the chapter as an interpolation, sees it not as contradicting the message of the rest of the book, but as reinforcing it. He writes, “The best guess is that chap. 28 is a subsequent addition to the Book of Job, but an addition...of an author who understood what the Book of Job was all about and decided to reinforce it with his own contribution” (Vawter 1983, 77). Vawter’s suggestion is interesting. Yet, I have to wonder why, if the hymn fits the book as he thinks it does, he views it as an interpolation and not as a statement by the author about the point he is trying to make. That is, if the hymn reinforces the book’s meaning, why is it necessary to view it as having originated elsewhere?

Offering an alternative interpretation, Newsom reads the hymn, neither as a later interpolation nor as the view of the author, but as another genre-voice in the polyphonic conversation of the book (Newsom 2003, 170).<sup>77</sup>

It seems to me, though, that despite its apparent incongruity, the hymn *can* be read as issuing from the mouth of Job. Although the hymn does not jibe with the accusations about God that Job has been making in his speeches, it is consonant with the prologue's description of Job as "one who feared God and turned away from evil" (1:1b). Even though Job has been insisting that God has made him his enemy for no reason, Job also insists throughout the book that he is one who fears God and turns away from evil. God happens to be in the wrong with regard to Job, but that does not mean that Job does not fear God. Job rails against God who is not acting as he ought to act, while at the same time fearing God who is as he should be.

The hymn to wisdom serves to identify Job as a sage. Wisdom, far from being inaccessible, is accessible to those who believe and act in a certain way, and Job, despite his suffering, is still the supreme example of the man of right belief and right action. The hymn, thus, justifies Job's words. Identifying him as the wise man *par excellence*, the hymn offers support for his claims, even when those claims put God in the wrong. The hymn's placement, before Job's final long speech, is apropos. In chapter 29, Job casts his memory back over the days in which his right belief and behavior earned him the blessing he deserved. In chapter 30, he contrasts his present situation with the way things used to be. Then, in chapter 31, he makes his oath of innocence, insisting that he still fulfills the requirements of righteousness. Chapter 31 is a litany of the ways in which Job has turned away from evil, which is the corollary to fearing God. If we consider chapter 28 as belonging to Job's final speech, we see that he begins by setting out the qualifications of the wise man and ends, in chapter 31, by depicting himself as one who meets those qualifications. There is no reason why, in this context, chapter 28 needs to be considered pious speech that is at odds with what Job has to say, and which must, therefore, be the speech of someone else. Job never says that he has stopped fearing God and turning away from evil—in fact, he insists that he has continued to do so in all his speeches; his

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<sup>77</sup> Elsewhere, Newsom gives an overview of recent scholarly inquiry into the provenance of the hymn. She writes, "The question of the speaker of the passage...is answered in one of several ways. Some (e.g., Hoffman 1996:278-85; Coogan 1999:205) adhere to the view that the poem is a late redactional addition. Others see the poem as an original part of the book of Job, but independent of the other voices in the text (e.g., Fiddes 1996:186; Newsom 1996; 2003a: 169-71), or as the voice of the narrator from the prose tale (Cheney 1994:42-48), commenting upon the dialogues. Not surprisingly, given the continued interest in final form readings, several scholars have attempted to read ch. 28 as part of Job's long monologue, since it follows his speech in ch. 27 without any indication of a change in speakers....A recent new twist on the issue has been proposed independently by Clines and Greenstein, both of whom would attribute ch. 28 to Elihu" (Newsom 2007, 162).

contention, rather, is that although he has upheld his part of the bargain, God has not acted rightly toward him.

I am not alone in reading chapter 28 as Job's words. Scholars such as Janzen, Whybray, Childs, Good, Seitz, and Lo also read the chapter as spoken by Job, though with differing interpretations as to its meaning. Whybray reads the chapter as indicating that Job is "already on the way towards the self-assessment that he will make in ch. 42, when he will at last have encountered God and listened to God's account of himself. He now declares his conclusion, that neither he nor the friends nor any human being possesses wisdom at all. Wisdom is the possession of God alone" (Whybray 1998, 21). Janzen, too, sees the chapter as Job's comment on what has come before, his recognition of the inaccessibility of wisdom for humans (Janzen 1985, 187-88). For Good, by contrast, chapter 28 is an ironic pronouncement. Job asserts that he is wise because he knows that it is necessary to be afraid of God, because God is wicked. Knowing this, he distances himself from the evil God, thereby avoiding evil (Good 1990, 292-93). Alison Lo views the hymn as first, Job's admission that human beings do not possess wisdom, and second, along similar lines as those proposed by Good, as evidencing Job's anger at the world which does not work as he believes it should. She writes, "The failure of his friends' counsels drives Job to seek wisdom and address to God directly (ch. 28). But his 'fearing God and shunning evil' in the past did not save him from his present suffering," (Lo 2003, 51). As Lo sees it, chapters 29-31 grow out of Job's angry realization that, although he has feared God and shunned evil, wisdom has not been vouchsafed to him. Finally, Brevard Childs and Christopher Seitz read the chapter much as I do, as Job's testimony to his own wisdom. Childs writes, "The effect of placing chs. 27-28 in the mouth of Job is to reinstate him as a sage" (Childs 1979, 542), and Seitz concurs, "chapter 28, even if originally independent, is now assigned to Job, thus reinstating him as a wise man, alongside his role as the righteous sufferer" (Seitz 1989, 13).

In Proverbs 7 and 8 it is obvious that the path is being used as a metaphor for the way a person chooses to live her life. Woman Wisdom and the strange woman are not gesturing toward literal paths that run through town (although walking down a particular path in town may be the equivalent of following the way of one woman or the other). At the outset, Job's hymn to wisdom does not seem to be using the path as a metaphor for life at all, but to be referring to actual paths. Yet, as will be seen, the metaphorical usage is present, and it is the metaphorical usage with which the hymn is actually concerned. Job's hymn, like the Louvin Brothers' song, plays with the metaphor, pretending to speak of actual paths, but, in the end, revealing that it is the metaphorical path of behavior and belief that is at issue.

The hymn begins by describing the ways in which humans have probed the depths of the earth, in order to extract valuable metals and precious stones. It creates the impression that it is relaying a success story, sounding a tribute to human power and ingenuity. We can imagine its words spoken by an announcer in an old-time newsreel, his jaunty tones praising progress and the spread of wealth. There is, however, one small glitch in the first part of the hymn (verses 1-6) that troubles its triumphant tone. In verse 4, continuing its description of the miners who have penetrated deep into the earth, the hymn says, “They open shafts in a valley away from human habitation; they are forgotten by travelers, they sway suspended, remote from the earth.” For a moment the marching band stops playing, and we see the miners, deep underground, suspended in midair by their ropes and grappling hooks, darkness and silence all around, solid ground who knows how far below or above them. They hang there, swaying slightly, far from human habitation and lost to human memory. In fact, these miners are being described in the same terms the friends use to describe the wicked who have died. They are similarly alone and similarly forgotten, inhabiting a similar darkness deep within the earth. The implication is that the path taken by these miners has not led them where they ought to be. Like the path taken by the youth who followed the strange woman in Proverbs, the paths taken by the miners have led not to life, but to death.<sup>78</sup>

That the miners have not chosen the right path is hardly noticeable in the triumphant pomp of verses 1-6; it is only upon rereading the hymn in the light of how it ends that the miners’ mistakenness becomes evident. In the same way, verses 7 and 8, which at first seem to be merely participating in the hymn’s praise of human ability, must be reinterpreted once the hymn’s conclusion has been read. In their initial context, verses 7 and 8 seem to be making the point that even the mightiest of wild beasts cannot compete with humans when it comes to seeking out the treasures that the earth has to offer. In these verses, path imagery is used as we are told, “That path no bird of prey knows, and the falcon’s eye has not seen it. The proud wild animals<sup>79</sup> have not trodden it; the lion has not passed over it.” If path imagery has not been used in verses 1-6, verses 7-8 cause it to be retroactively inserted. What path is it that the great birds of prey have not been able to

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<sup>78</sup> Ellen Van Wolde, although she does not link this passage to the friends’ depiction of the wicked, does argue that the human activity of the first part of the hymn is meant to be understood negatively. She observes that the focus shifts from human activity to the earth which bears the marks of human enterprise, writing, “There it lies, with holes, with burnt slags, turned upside down. This is what this so-called wisdom does” (Van Wolde 2003, 33). According to Van Wolde, the hymn reveals that what is thought of as wisdom is a destructive force and invites humans to engage in a new kind of wisdom, one which is not destructive but creative (*Ibid.*).

<sup>79</sup> The Hebrew phrase here is בְּנֵי־אִשָּׁה, the same phrase which is translated “proud” in 41:34b, perhaps supporting the argument that Leviathan is king of a very specific group of the proud—“proud wild animals,” and not “proud humans.” But, because these are the only two appearances of the phrase in the Bible, it is difficult to come to a conclusion either way.

sight from their airy heights? And what path is it that lions and other proud beasts have not trodden? It is the path discovered and trodden by human beings as they have delved deep into the earth, bringing its hidden recesses to light. To have executed these feats of engineering is to have walked a path, and it is a path down which the animals, for all their might, have not been able to travel. In verses 9-11, the hymn's praise of human endeavor reaches its climax. Humans have overturned mountains, cut channels in rocks, discovered the sources of rivers, and have found every hidden precious thing that the earth's depths contain. Human beings have mastered the world. Their paths have led them to victory, as is evidenced by their possession of the spoils of the earth.

Suddenly, however, the poem changes tone and shifts focus, when, in verse 12, it asks, "But where shall wisdom be found?" This question undermines everything that has come before, in its implication that, of all the things humans have laid hands on, they have failed to find the one thing worth having. It is in the light of this question that the miners dangling in their caves must be read not as participants in a success story but as evidence of human failure. In verses 13-20, the undermining effect of verse 12's question is taken to the next level. Although verses 7-8, with their claim that the great beasts do not know the path, seemed to imply that human beings *do* have access to the important paths, that assumption is struck down by verse 13, which reads, "Mortals do not know the way to it, and it is not found in the land of the living." Although human beings have trodden many secret paths, they have not, the poem says, trodden the one right path, which, as in Proverbs 8, is the path of wisdom. The hymn continues by insisting that wisdom is not concealed in the depths of the earth, neither can it be purchased with the gold and jewels that can be extracted from those depths. In addition, we are told that it is "concealed from the birds of the air" (28:21b), a claim which necessitates the reinterpretation of verses 7-8. The path which is not known by the birds and the wild animals is not, after all, a path with which human beings are familiar. It is not the path by which human beings have penetrated deep into the earth, nor is it any path by which they have sought out the earth's secret material treasures. The path referred to in verses 7-8 can only be the path which leads to wisdom. In retrospect, it matters not at all that the animals do not know the paths of human ingenuity, for those paths are shown to be the wrong paths, leading only to death. Where those verses seemed to pay tribute to human beings, in reality they do not; they look forward to the announcement of the only path that matters, the path of wisdom.

Strangely, God seems to be able to find wisdom in the created world in a way denied all living things. The hymn claims, "God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens" (28:23-24). The path which humans and animals, for all their wide-ranging activity,

cannot discover, is discovered by God who ranges still farther. This would seem to imply that searching out the deep and secret places of the earth is not actually the wrong way to undertake the search for wisdom, but, rather, does not bear results for humans or animals simply because they cannot travel far enough. The way is not wrong in itself, but the required path is too long. Yet, although the hymn does, at one point, seem to say that finding wisdom requires not a change of path, but simply the ability to travel farther faster, its subsequent claims indicate that this is not the correct interpretation. The hymn goes on to describe God finding and establishing wisdom as part of his creative work: “When he gave the wind its weight, and apportioned out the waters by measure; when he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the thunderbolt; then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out” (28:25-27). Wisdom, although it cannot be found by searching out the secret depths of the earth, is, in fact, the foundation on which the earth was built; wisdom is inherent in the workings of the world.<sup>80</sup> The world works as it ought to work, because God has ordered it on principles of wisdom. Although wisdom is present in the world, living creatures can have access to it, not by carving up the earth and laying hands on it, but by fearing God and departing from evil (28:28).<sup>81</sup> God is the one path. “I am the way,” says God. “No one comes to wisdom except by me.”

With God’s declaration that the way to wisdom is to fear the Lord and depart from evil, the chapter’s use of the image of the path as a metaphor for the way one lives one’s life is made evident. Most of the hymn has not seemed to be using metaphorical language, but to be speaking of actual searching, actual traveling down actual paths. In the light of the hymn’s ending, however, what has come before is made metaphorical. The hymn reinterprets its description of the paths down which human beings have walked in their search for the earth’s precious and secret bounty. It is no longer talking about mining or voyages of discovery, but about ways of living. The right way of living is characterized by fear of the Lord and turning away from evil, that is, by a certain kind of belief and a certain kind of behavior. As in Proverbs and the gospel song, there is one right way. If we were

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<sup>80</sup> In support of this reading, Habel writes, “wisdom is apparently the deep and mysterious principle behind all other laws, principles, and designs of the cosmos....That is, wisdom is...the ‘first principle’ or ‘model’ which precedes and informs the creation of the cosmos” (Habel 1983, 145).

<sup>81</sup> Some scholars contend that verse 28 is an interpolation and, therefore, should not be read as contributing meaning to the chapter as a whole. Pope writes, “This verse is suspect on several grounds....After the poetic elaboration of the point that wisdom is inaccessible to man, the definition of an entirely different kind of wisdom seems rather abrupt. The divine wisdom by which God created and regulates the cosmos is beyond man’s grasp and ken....This is a standard affirmation and formulation of the conservative school...which is appended as an antidote to the agnostic tenor of the preceding poem” (Pope 1965, 183). Geller, too, insists that the verse does not fit, writing, “Verse 28 is altogether too bold and bland a statement of traditional piety for such a subtly orchestrated context.” He allows, however, that the verse may be original to the poem, noting that, “One may allow that a poet who has displayed the greatest art may suddenly stumble with both feet” (Gellar 1987, 174). I, however, read the verse as integral to the meaning of the chapter, as it is spoken by Job.

to map the gospel song onto the hymn to wisdom we might sing, “No you can’t find it in the depths of the earth, ’cause they ain’t got no wisdom there, and you can’t follow the birds, ’cause they don’t know the path, and you can’t pay your way, ’cause they don’t take no currency. But fear the Lord and depart from evil and wisdom you will find.” Or something like that.

Like the gospel song, the hymn moves between the metaphorical and the actual, and for it, as for the song, the actual is something of a ruse or joke. The hymn is not trying to make a point about mining, just as the song is not saying anything about the validity of planes, trains, or ships as modes of transport. It is not that actual mining is wrong. Mining is a metaphor for a way of living that is not the one right way. In the hymn, there is one right way and a multiplicity of wrong ways. In the first part of the chapter (vv. 1-6, 9-11), people are shown engaged in a variety of activities—mining the earth, overturning mountains, finding the sources of rivers, etc.—akin to traveling by plane, train, and ship in the gospel song. None of these activities—or, more importantly, their metaphorical equivalents, whatever they may be (and it does not matter what they are specifically, it only matters that they represent ways other than the one true way)—leads to wisdom. Wisdom is found through one specific path of belief and behavior and one only. In addition, the fact that God established wisdom as foundational to the creation (vv. 25-27) means that to follow the path of wisdom is to follow the path that is in tune with the creation and the way it works; it is the path of life. To follow any other path leads to death, to the miners dangling in their caves, forgotten by the living.

### *“Fenced In”: The Breakdown of Job’s One Right Way*

In chapter 28, Job makes the claim that there is one right path of belief and behavior, while there are a great number of paths that are not the way. Order is singular, characterized by one way of being, while chaos is multiple, in that it can be any way of being other than the one way of order. There are other places in the book where Job uses the path as a metaphor for the way one lives one’s life. In chapter 3 Job asks, “Why is light given to one who cannot see the way, whom God has fenced in” (3:23).<sup>82</sup> In chapter 19, he laments, “He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness upon my paths,” (19:8). Although at first Job bemoans the light that is on his path, and then bewails the darkness, the situations are analogous. He laments the light of life,

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<sup>82</sup> Hebrew lacks “Why is light given.” Pope translates more literally, “To a man whose way is hidden, Whom God has fenced about?” (Pope 1965, 27). The idea that Job cannot see the path he ought to take is still present, however.

because, in his accursed situation the light does him no good; it is like darkness. In both verses, Job describes himself as fenced or walled in by God. God has deprived him of the ability to travel along his path.

But how is Job using “way” and “path” here? Is he using them as metaphors for the way life is lived? Clearly, he is not talking about actual paths. He is not saying that his affliction has affected his eyes so that he cannot see to walk around town. He is using “path” metaphorically, but as a metaphor for what? What “way” is it that Job cannot see? In chapter 3, he wishes he were dead because he cannot see how to live. He asks why life is given to one who cannot see the way to live. In his new situation, stripped of his blessing, Job can only fumble around blindly. Previously, he knew how to live. He was blameless and upright. He helped the poor widow and the orphan. In fact, in chapter 29, Job says that in the days before his suffering, he “was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame” (29:15). It seems probable that Job is not just saying that he helped these people get around town, that he was their seeing-eye dog and their wheelchair, but that, as one who knew the way to live, he was able to offer guidance to those who lacked his moral clarity and alacrity. This reading is supported by Job’s claim, at the end of chapter 29, “I chose their way and sat as chief” (29:25a). In return for this right behavior, Job reaped blessing.

This is not to say that Job’s righteousness was in any way the behavior of a mercenary. That is not what is at stake here, even though *hassatan* has caused Job’s suffering in order to test whether he serves God for nothing. It is not that Job is blameless and upright *so that* he can reap the reward for that behavior. He is simply blameless and upright, and, throughout the speeches of the poetic section, he insists that he is clinging to his integrity. (He does not see the words he speaks against God as in any way compromising his righteousness; he says what he says in order to set his listeners—both God and the friends—straight on the record of his integrity.) Although the reason for Job’s righteousness is not the promise of reward, he does presuppose that righteousness and blessing go hand in hand and experiences his suffering as a rupture in the world as it ought to be. It is not that Job expects to be paid for his righteousness, but that he believes that, because one *ought to be* blameless and upright, this kind of behavior is a contribution to the world as it *ought to be*. To be righteous is to be in tune with the way the world works, to participate in its fundamental order. When one is living in a way which is consonant with the way the world is set up, it is only natural that one should experience blessing, as, for example, when one eats healthful foods one experiences good health.

Job is a person who likes to eat healthful foods. He doesn’t eat them because of the reward they offer, but, nevertheless, he expects to be healthy because he eats them. When he suddenly discovers that he as sick as it is possible to be, he feels that the world has

turned upside down; he cannot make sense of anything. This is why Job says that his path is in darkness. He does not know how to live. His righteous behavior, which he thought participated in the workings of the world, has been shown to be irrelevant. What should he do? Should he persist in his righteousness? Is it even *right* to be righteous? If by being righteous one is not participating in the world as it ought to be, what rhyme or reason is there to righteousness? Perhaps it is wickedness which is in tune with the order of the world. Perhaps one ought to behave in a different way entirely. Or perhaps there is no way that one ought to behave. Perhaps there are no deep structures. Perhaps the world is not organized in any way at all. There is darkness on Job's path because he does not know any longer how he ought to live his life. He is stymied. He cannot go this way or that way, because he cannot see where he is going; he does not know what he ought to do.

In these verses, we see Job struggling with the idea that there is one right path. This is the presupposition behind his laments. He can no longer see the way that is right, and so he cannot go anywhere. He makes a similar observation on a larger scale in chapter 12, where he laments,

[God] leads counselors away stripped, and makes fools of judges. He looses the sash of kings, and binds a waistcloth on their loins. He leads priests away stripped, and overthrows the mighty. He deprives of speech those who are trusted, and takes away the discernment of the elders. He pours contempt on princes, and looses the belt of the strong. He uncovers the deeps out of darkness, and brings deep darkness to light. He makes nations great, then destroys them; he enlarges nations, then leads them away. He strips understanding from the leaders of the earth, and makes them wander in a pathless waste. They grope in the dark without light; he makes them stagger like a drunkard. (12:17-25)

The upheaval God causes on a grand scale in the social world is the equivalent of erasing the right path for those who are affected. The kings, counselors, priests, princes, elders, and nations who find themselves first endowed with power and then overthrown are deprived of the knowledge of how they ought to live. If behavior has no bearing on what one's life is like, then one cannot choose to walk a path of any kind, and one is left wandering in a pathless waste. There is no right way to go. The word translated "waste" here is **תִּהְיוּ**, the same word which appears most famously paired with **בְּהָרָה** in Genesis 1:2 to describe the pre-creation state. It appears two other times in Job, first in 6:18, which reads, "The caravans turn aside from their course; they go up into the waste (**תִּהְיוּ**), and perish," and then in 26:7: "He stretches out Zaphon over the void (**תִּהְיוּ**), and hangs the earth upon nothing." All three times the word is spoken by Job, as is only fitting given the chaos he believes the world to have become. As can be seen, in Job 26:7, as in Genesis 1:2, **תִּהְיוּ** describes the world before creation, which is to say the world before it became

the ordered world. The waste in which the caravans and the former leaders lose their way is not simply a kind of backwoods wilderness; it has cosmic dimensions. To be without a path, as Job sees it, is to be returned to the pre-creation void; it is to be unable to live as a created being in the ordered world.

For this reason, the eradication of the one right path does not result, in Job's view, in a multiplicity of right paths—an opening up of possibility—but in the deterioration of the metaphor of life as path. The kings, counselors, nations, and so on are not presented with one right path, like the path pointed out by Woman Wisdom in Proverbs 8, and a multiplicity of wrong paths, like those of the strange woman or women in Proverbs 7. They are not presented with choices about how to live and the consequences of those choices. Instead, no path is shown them, and no one beckons, neither Woman Wisdom nor the strange woman. They set out with no clear idea of what they have chosen and no clear idea of where they are going. No participation in the workings of the world is possible, for the workings of the world are entirely subject to God's whim. Job's own experience mirrors the upheaval wrought upon the kings, princes, nations, etc. described in these verses. He, too, has found himself first exalted—a condition which he assumed was a result of his behavior—and then brought low, a condition which he cannot reconcile with his behavior. In this way, he, too, has been made to wander in a pathless waste, groping and fumbling like a drunkard.

It needs to be emphasized that Job's experience of "wandering in a pathless waste" does not mean that he has ceased to believe in the existence of the right path, despite his use of the adjective "pathless" (לְאֵין־דָּרֶךְ) and the noun דֶּרֶךְ. Job continues to believe that the right path does exist, even though it is not, for the moment, evident where it lies. The pathless waste created by God's capricious setting up and overthrowing of various groups does not reflect the true condition of the world. It is a deception brought into being by God's acting how he ought not to act. The ordered world, in which there is one right path, one right way of living, continues to exist *somewhere*, if only in the stratosphere like one of Plato's forms, and to this path Job wants to remain true. The right path, however, has been obscured, and he and others in similar situations of upheaval fumble through a pathless waste, not because the right path has ceased to exist in a real sense, but because they cannot see where it is.

Later in the book Job laments his inability to find God on the path where he ought to be walking. Job says,

If I go forward,<sup>83</sup> he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold. My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured in my bosom the words of his mouth. (23:8-12)

As Job sees it, God has departed from his own true path; Job searches for him in the place where he ought to be, but is unable to find him there. This means that the right path is not defined by its being whatever path God happens to be on, but possesses its own identity, independent of God's presence. Elihu, in his aggravated response to Job, will deny that it is possible for God to quit the one true path, saying, "God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him? Who has prescribed for him his way, or who can say, 'You have done wrong'?" (36:22-23). For Elihu, it is God's presence which makes a path right; there is no such thing as a true path which exists independent of God, enabling people to judge whether or not God is in the right. It is a given that because God is God, he is in the right and the path he is on is the right path. From Job's perspective, though, this is not the case. Although in his speeches of chapters 3-27 Job has described his life as so darkened that he can no longer see the right way to go forward, he has also insisted throughout that his current predicament is not due to his having strayed from the path of righteousness. He may not be able to advance, but he is not where he is because he took a wrong step, and, in fact, it is precisely because he has made no misstep that he is unable to advance. He was on the right path, but, somehow, the right path has not led him where the right path goes.

An analogous situation would be if I set out on my familiar walk from my flat to the University, and, without deviating from the way, ended up arriving at Ibrox Stadium, which is nowhere near the University. I would be certain that I had not taken the path to Ibrox Stadium, and, finding myself there I would not know how to advance. My entire spatial frame of reference would collapse. Not only would I not know how to get to the University, but I would not know whether, if I were to retrace my steps, I would end up back at my flat. The right turns have led to the wrong place, rendering all turns potentially wrong.<sup>84</sup> Job oscillates between not knowing which way to go, now that the path he was on has not led where it was supposed to lead, and insisting that he does know the way—that it is the same as it always was. Job insists that the fault lies with God who has

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<sup>83</sup> The Hebrew here is 𐤀𐤓𐤐, the same word translated "east" in 1:3 and "old" in 29:2. The word means all three things. Yet, just as its use in 1:3 and 29:2 highlighted the fact that Job's desire to return to the "months of old" is a desire to be again "the greatest of all the people of the east," its use here suggests a possible link with those sentiments. Here, Job's going forward (𐤀𐤓𐤐) can be understood as an attempt to be as he was before, to live as he used to live. He finds, however, that he is unable to be who he once was because God is not with him, or, at least, this is how it seems to Job whose suffering is not alleviated no matter what he does.

<sup>84</sup> I have already suggested this above, using the example of healthful eating leading to ill health, but perhaps this example makes the point more clearly.

deviated from the right path. To return to my analogy, it is not that I have taken the wrong path to the University, but that the University itself has moved, swapping places with Ibrox Stadium. The question then becomes, what determines the rightness of the path? Is my path still the path to the University even though the University has moved? Or does the fact that the University has moved mean that now there is another path which is the right path to the University?

The obvious answer is that the location of the University determines the correct path. The path which used to lead to the University does not remain “the path which leads to the University” if the University has moved. If the University is no longer where it once was, I need to find out where it is and get on that path, instead of standing where I am and insisting, over and over again, “But *this* is the way to the University.” Job, though, in the passage quoted above (23:8-12) does make this kind of claim. He insists that there is and has always been only one right path. That the path has not led him where it was supposed to lead him does not change the fact of the path’s rightness, nor is the path’s rightness invalidated by God’s desertion. It is the path itself that is right, regardless of where God has gone.

Job’s words about paths have three aims. First, he testifies to the existence of the one, true path—that is, to one right way of being in the world—even if the path has been obscured or erased from the world. The one true path remains the one true path, despite the fact that it has not led him where it ought. Secondly, he insists that this is the path God ought to be on. God ought to travel the path of right behavior, and Job attempts to recall him to his rightful place. Thirdly, Job insists that he himself has never strayed from the right path. In the passage quoted above, he makes the point that although God is not where he ought to be, when God returns to his place, God will see “the way that I take... I have kept his way and have not turned aside” (23:10a, 11b). Job stands outside Ibrox Stadium, insisting that he has followed the path to the University, and, by means of his insistence, trying to recall the University to its rightful place.

### *Job Questions the Existence of the One Right Way*

Job’s belief in the one right way is firm. In chapters 28-31 he culminates his discourse by professing himself certain that one right path exists and that he is and has always been on it. In chapter 28, he identifies himself as one who walks the path of wisdom, and in chapter 31, he proclaims himself innocent and, therefore, undeserving of suffering, saying,

If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot has hurried to deceit—let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!—if my step has turned aside from the way...then let me sow, and another eat; and let what grows for me<sup>85</sup> be rooted out. (31:5-7a, 8)

Although Job's speeches reach their ending climax with this affirmation, Job's belief in the one right way, though firm, is not so unyielding that he never questions its existence in the course of his speeches. Standing outside Ibrox Stadium day after day he cannot help but question not whether he has, in fact, taken the route he tells everyone he has taken, but whether one really has any guarantee of where any path leads. With the world as he thought it was having collapsed around him, he wonders whether that world is really as rooted in reality as he would like to think. Is it true that there is one path that is right in and of itself, and that this path is the way down which God, the world, and human beings *ought* to travel, even if, at the moment, they do not? Or is the pathless waste the true situation of the world? Does the University have no obligation to return to its old place? Is it, instead, free to go where it will, so that one can never be sure of the path that will lead to it, and it is utter foolishness to stand waiting in the old place, using one's presence as a kind of reminder: "*This is the place. Where I am is where you belong.*" Job ends his speeches by professing absolute certainty that "*This is the place*" and "*Where I am is where you belong.*" Yet, before he arrives at this certainty, he does express certain doubts.

The most striking of these occurs in chapter 17, where, in response to Eliphaz's second speech, Job says,

[God] has made me a byword of the peoples, and I am one before whom people spit. My eye has grown dim from grief, and all my members are like a shadow. The upright are appalled at this, and the innocent stir themselves up against the godless. Yet the righteous hold to their way, and they that have clean hands grow stronger and stronger. (17:6-9)

This is a perplexing passage. Job has finished the previous chapter by asserting his own innocence, claiming that despite God's violence against him, "there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is pure" (16:17). Job himself would seem to be on the path of the righteous, yet here he is critical of the righteous who "hold to their way." What would Job have the righteous do? Get off the path he himself refuses to abandon despite his

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<sup>85</sup> The word here—**אֲשֵׁרֵי**—also means "my offspring," and is the same word used by Eliphaz to indicate the offspring of the righteous man in 5:25: "You shall know that your descendants will be many, and your offspring (**אֲשֵׁרֵי**) like the grass of the earth." Making his oath of innocence, Job speaks as if he possesses the attributes of the righteous man, as if he has offspring who could be rooted out were he found guilty. What is interesting, of course, is that Job's offspring have already been "rooted out." One has to wonder about the resources Job draws on to make his oath of innocence. Does Job really have anything left to lose? In fact, by the logic of the oath, Job has already been declared guilty. He has already been stripped of possessions and bodily health. However, because he believes himself to be righteous, he takes the stance of the righteous man to whom none of this has already happened, hoping that he will not be called upon to relinquish what he no longer actually possesses.

suffering? Equally strange is his observation that those who have clean hands—presumably the same people as the righteous, whose hands are clean because they have held to their way—grow stronger and stronger. This has certainly not been his own experience. He has clung to the path of the righteous and has grown weaker for his efforts. If the path of the righteous is leading where it ought to lead—to blessing—for some of the righteous, why would he want those particular people to quit the route? Surely, they are the ones who ought to stay on the path. If anyone ought to abandon the way of the righteous, it is Job himself who, though he has followed the right path, has ended up in the wrong place. Is Job’s criticism of the righteous simply a petulant expression of jealousy? Perhaps. Would he really prefer it if the righteous abandoned their way? It is hard to imagine that, if pressed, he would answer this question in the affirmative. What, then, is he saying? What is the meaning of his critique?

We can only understand what Job is saying by remembering that he is speaking to specific people—his three friends—and that his words are directed to them. The righteous described in verse 9 are not the righteous in the abstract, but Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar in particular. The friends, in their descriptions of the fate of the wicked presume that the paths of wickedness lead in one direction, while the path of righteousness, down which they themselves are traveling, has its own proper destination. In chapter 8, Bildad has asked, ““Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh? Can reeds flourish where there is no water?”” and has answered, ““While yet in flower and not cut down, they wither before any other plant. Such are the paths of all who forget God; the hope of the godless shall perish. Their confidence is gossamer, a spider’s house their trust” (8:8-14). In chapter 18, he will again describe the path of the wicked, saying,

Their strong steps are shortened, and their own schemes throw them down.  
For they are thrust into a net by their own feet, and they walk into a pitfall. A trap seizes them by the heel; a snare lays hold of them. A rope is hid for them in the ground, a trap for them in the path. (18:7-10)

Bildad knows very well what the paths of the wicked are like and where they lead. Such paths lead to suffering and early death; the suffering of the wicked is a direct outcome of their behavior, of the paths they have trod, which are, by nature, lined with traps and snares. In the speech to which Job is responding directly in chapter 17, Eliphaz, though he does not use the metaphor of the path, has described the fate of the wicked in similar terms, saying, “they will not be rich, and their wealth will not endure, nor will they strike root in the earth; they will not escape from darkness” (15:29-30a). Later, Eliphaz will use path language to unreservedly accuse Job of wickedness, asking him, “Will you keep to the old way that the wicked have trod?” (22:15). The old way trod by the wicked leads to loss

of possessions, suffering, and untimely death; it leads, in short, to the exact spot where Job is standing. For the friends, it is as plain as day that the reason Job is standing in front of Ibrox Stadium instead of in front of the University is because he has walked the path leading to Ibrox instead of the path leading to the University. What could be more obvious? The path of the righteous does not lead to Job's present location; the only way to get where he is is to walk the way of the wicked.

Job's accusation that "the righteous hold to their way, and they that have clean hands grow stronger" is directed at the friends, in the same way that the friends' accusations about the fate of the wicked are directed at Job, despite being cast in the third instead of the second person. But why should "holding to the way of the righteous" be an indictment? Job's accusation addresses his friends' belief that the path of righteousness leads inevitably to blessing, while the path of wickedness leads inevitably to suffering. Job considers himself living proof that this is not the case. Part of the friends' "holding to the path of righteousness" is their belief that their own path cannot lead to where Job is standing and its corollary that Job, because he is where he is, has followed the old way trod by the wicked and not the path that they themselves are walking. Job sees that his suffering does not lead his friends to question whether it might be possible for the path of righteousness to lead to suffering, but, rather, to cling firmly to their own path which, so far has not, and, they believe, will never, lead them into his kind of affliction. They stay on the path that has made them strong, believing that blessing follows where they walk and refusing to accept that Job, too, has never walked any path but the path of righteousness. This is the meaning of Job's indictment.<sup>86</sup>

These verses (17:8-9) constitute Job's most striking questioning of his belief in the existence of the one right path. Although he does not, here, disavow the existence of the right path in the abstract but only in his actual, concrete situation, the bitterness with which Job accuses his friends of keeping to the way of righteousness indicates that he harbors mixed feelings about the path of righteousness in and of itself. He is not certain that to keep to the path of righteousness, when faced with suffering such as his, is, in fact, right, if those keeping to that path must condemn him in order to ensure their righteousness and the blessing they believe comes with the territory. Although, in this way, we can make some sense of Job's derogatory comments about those who keep to the path of righteousness, his words remain perplexing. It is difficult to know whether, here, he is rejecting belief in the existence of one right path and a multitude of wrong paths, or whether he is simply

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<sup>86</sup> Clines interprets the passage in a similar way, writing that Job's critique of the righteous is "against their intelligence, which will not let them question their conviction that any sufferer must be a godless person" (Clines 1989, 397).

angered by his friends' behavior. Yet, if he disapproves of his friends' behavior while, at the same time, viewing them as traveling the path of righteousness, with the path serving as a metaphor for behavior and belief, he must be taking some issue with the idea of the one right path. If the right path is not right in all situations—that is, if there are times when a person ought to deviate from the path—then the whole paradigm of one right path versus a multitude of wrong paths is knocked apart and replaced by the idea of a multitude of paths, the rightness or wrongness of which depends on the situation in which a person finds him or herself. In this view, order is constituted not by one way of behaving but by a multiplicity of ways, and chaos is constituted by the claim that there is only one right way no matter what the situation. Given Job's situation—which represents something novel in his and the friends' experience—the friends ought not hold to what they consider to be the one way of righteousness. Instead, they ought to leave that path for another more suitable to the situation, and be ready to move again when the situation shifts. Of course, Job does not affirm this view in the end, and here he only hints at it. The confusion caused by the verse arises from Job's failure to develop his thought and also from the fact that what he seems to mean is quite different from what he presents himself as believing in the majority of his speeches.

The other place where Job questions the model of one right path is in his description of the wicked who prosper despite saying to God, “Leave us alone! We do not desire to know your ways” (21:14). Granted, whenever he speaks about the prosperity of the wicked Job is clear that such a situation does not represent the world as it ought to be. Yet, although there are times when Job imagines the world as it ought to be as existing somewhere, if only as an abstract form of perfection which presents the possibility of earthly embodiment, there are other points at which Job seems to despair of this possibility.

In his speech of chapter 21, Job makes the claim that it does not matter how a person chooses to live. Job finds this fact appalling. He says, “Look at me, and be appalled, and lay your hand upon your mouth. When I think of it I am dismayed, and shuddering seizes my flesh” (21:5-6). What appalls and dismays Job is not his suffering *per se*, but what it means about the way the world works. Job's suffering, along with the prosperity of the wicked, discounts his belief in the one right path. Both he and the wicked are living proof that no such path exists. It is not that the paths have been reversed, but that there is no way of knowing where any path leads. In fact, no path leads to any fixed destination. No behavior has specific guaranteed consequences, for the only guaranteed consequence of life is death. Job says, “One dies in full prosperity, being wholly at ease and secure, his loins full of milk and the marrow of his bones moist. Another dies in

bitterness of soul, never having tasted of good. They lie down alike in the dust, and the worms cover them” (21:23-26). Although, for the friends, untimely death is the penalty for wickedness, for Job, here, death is what comes to all and has nothing to do with which path one has chosen to tread. The fact of human mortality renders one’s choices irrelevant, one’s ways a mere passing of the time. Whether one is wicked or righteous, one cannot escape the end which nullifies whatever came before. To his friends who insist that the wicked do, in fact, suffer malign consequences for their actions, Job responds, “How...will you comfort me with empty nothings? There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood” (21:34). Job would like to be comforted by the friends’ words; he would like to believe that each path is a journey to a specific place, but his experience has taught him that this is falsehood.

Job abandons the idea of the one right path not because it no longer represents his idea of order, but because it has no basis in reality. Unlike the previous passage examined, here Job does not gesture toward a different vision of order, in which a multiplicity of paths present themselves as potentially right. Rather, his vision of order remains the same, but he understands that he lives in a world in which order is impossible. God’s capricious behavior and the inevitability of death mean that the world as it actually is can be nothing but chaos. The world has never been nor will ever be the kind of order that Job envisions; it will never be as it ought to be. As I have said, Job will not, in the end, affirm this statement, but will make his oath of innocence in the firm belief that he has a ground on which to stand and that God will recognize his vision of the way the world ought to be as his own and set things right.

In this passage, though, Job seems to approach the idea that God’s vision of order may not be his own. He does not say this outright, but it is implied by his recognition that the world has never been and will never be the way he thinks it ought to be. The world, as created by God, is chaos as far as Job can tell. Yet, it seems that Job would have a hard time believing that the world created by God is not the world as God thinks it ought to be. To say that something has gone wrong with the world renders its chaotic state comprehensible, but to say that it was created as chaos makes no sense. If the world is, has always been, and will always be a place in which there is not one right path, but a multiplicity of paths leading in any number of directions, none of which is more right than any other, then it follows that this is God’s idea of how the world ought to be. It remains to be seen whether, in his own speeches, God confirms Job’s depiction of the way the world is and affirms this world as conforming to his own understanding of order.

*“How Many Different Ways...?” The Multiplicity of Paths in God’s First Speech*

When God responds to Job in chapters 38-41 he, too, makes use of the language of the path or way, but seems to use the terms non-metaphorically, in reference to actual roads and not to ways of behaving or believing. Yet, as has been seen in the gospel song quoted at the opening of this chapter and in Job's chapter 28 hymn to wisdom, it is possible to play with the terms in such a way that, while one seems to be talking about actual paths, one is really speaking metaphorically. I want to contend that although God seems to be speaking about actual paths, his description of these paths is intended to address Job's description of the metaphorical paths along which one lives one's life. In his first speech, God asks Job,

Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?...Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home? Surely you know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great! (38:16-18a, 19-21)

Here, God asks Job whether the paths he has walked have led him to the extreme ends of the earth. There is debate about how the book's author intended God's questions to be answered, as discussed in the previous chapter. Rowold and Habel argue that the implied answer to all of the questions "is not, 'Who knows?' or 'I did not,' but 'you alone did'" (Habel 1985, 529). If this is correct, then Job's unspoken answer to God's question "Have you walked these paths?" should be understood as, "No. You alone have traveled the paths leading to the earth's extremities." Janzen offers a counter-reading of the implied answers to God's questions. Referring to this passage specifically, he writes,

*Is it the case that Job in no sense has ever taken darkness to its territory and delimited its sway through an act which images what God did in Genesis 1:3-5?...one cannot gainsay the fact that Job's periodic imaginative ventures of hope toward God...do in fact delimit the darkness in which his own life is engulfed. At least in these ways Job has seen the gates of darkness and from there has commanded a morning. (Janzen 1985, 237)*

For Janzen, Job has walked these paths, at least in a sense. In his suffering he has trod the paths of darkness; he says as much in chapter 19 when he laments, "he has set darkness upon my paths" (19:8b).

But if it is true that, in some sense, Job has walked these paths and can answer God in the affirmative, we must ask whether he has seen any value in this journey, and the answer to that question would seem to be "no." If Job is able to answer "yes," it must be a "yes" tempered by regret, an "unfortunately, yes." From Job's perspective, to walk the paths leading to the gates of the deep and to the place of deep darkness is to stray from the

one right path. If Job is able to answer “yes,” he must view it as a sign that the world is not as it ought to be; he has been thrust off the path of order and onto the paths of chaos where he gropes his way through deep darkness toward he knows not what. If Job answers “No, I have not,” to God’s questions about the paths he has walked, it must be with some pride. Job has walked only one path—the path of righteousness—and it is based on his having stuck to this path that Job is able to affirm his innocence and call on God to answer him (“Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!” [31:35b]). Likewise, in chapter 28, Job has sung of the one path to wisdom, a path characterized by fearing God and departing from evil; it is down this path and this path only that Job has walked, avoiding the mistaken paths taken by others. Indeed, in that chapter, Job has described the miners who delve deep into the earth, bringing light to its deepest darkness, and has rejected those paths as leading to death.

That God questions Job about what paths he has traveled is apropos. What Job has been asking for throughout the book is for God to appear and examine his paths. In chapter 23, he has said, “My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside” (23:11), and, in his oath of innocence has sworn,

Does he not see my ways, and number all my steps? If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot has hurried to deceit—let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!—if my step has turned aside from the way...let what grows for me be rooted out. (31:5-7a, 8b)

Job has expected God to question him about the paths he has traveled, and he has been ready to answer, “I have not traveled any path except the one true path.” Job expects that when God sees the path he has walked God will realize that he has been made to suffer unjustly and will be swift to set things right. Sure enough, God questions Job about paths, and Job has his answer ready. If he does not blurt it out at once, it must be because of a dawning uncertainty about the answer God would consider correct. Job is all set to say, “No, of course not. You know I have not walked those paths,” but, given the context of God’s questions, it must occur to him that God would prefer the answer to be “yes.”

Unlike Job, God does not seem to view order in terms of the one right path and chaos in terms of the many wrong paths. Instead, as God presents it, there are a multiplicity of right paths, and the more of them one has walked the better off one is. It is not that there is one path to wisdom, as Job supposes, and that, having walked that path, one will be wise, but that there are many paths leading to wisdom, and, if one hopes to be wise, one must walk them all. That is, it is not that all paths lead separately to wisdom, and that if one chooses one or the other one will end up being wise. Rather, it is that one must walk this path *and* that path *and* that other path *and* still another in order to gain

wisdom. As God sees it, such wide-ranging movement is the ideal; Job has been limited rather than enriched, as he supposes, by clinging to his one path and avoiding all others.

Indeed, if Job is entitled to answer “yes” to God’s questions about whether he has traveled the paths to the dwelling of darkness and the gates of death and from there has groped his way along the path to the dwelling of the light by virtue of his having suffered, as Janzen proposes, he can only lay claim to this answer by abandoning his insistence that there is only one right path from which he has never strayed. In order to *want* to answer “yes” Job must change his beliefs about what the ordered world looks like. He must recognize his suffering as valuable experience, permitting him access to paths which he would not otherwise have traveled, instead of as a walling up of his access to the right path (3:23; 19:8) or a breaking down of the barriers protecting the right path from being disturbed (30:13-14). There is some irony here. Job cannot hold to what he considers his integrity if he hopes to answer “yes” to any of God’s questions; to answer “yes” he must affirm that he has left the one path behind and has traveled down ways which he considers wrong. At the same time, to answer “yes” would increase his standing before God, because it would prove that he, Job, has traveled the multiplicity of paths necessary to gain wisdom. Before God appears, Job believes that God wants human beings to travel the one path of righteousness and not to stray from its way. When God begins to speak, Job discovers that God has quite another thing in mind. For human beings to do what they ought to do and to be what they ought to be, they need to travel as many paths as possible. It is no wonder that Job cannot find God on the path he is traveling. Job has previously lamented, “If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him,” (23:8-9). Job’s plan has been to stay on the path and wait for God, in whose footsteps he believes he is following, to return. In his speeches, however, God reveals that Job’s one path is not God’s only path. To follow in God’s footsteps is to move in various ways, and God’s questions challenge Job to follow by walking the many paths of life.

As his speech continues, God details the variety of ways by which the many creatures of the world live. The wild ass “ranges the mountains” (39:8a). The wild ox will not “harrow the valleys after you” (39:10b), that is, the wild ox will not follow in the paths designated by human beings, but, like the wild ass, will follow its own ways. The ostrich lays its eggs in the paths of other animals “forgetting that a foot may crush them, and that a wild animal may trample them” (39:15), but even such seeming stupidity is not condemned by God. If Job thinks he has identified the one path to wisdom, God throws a wrench in Job’s suppositions by saying, “Well, there are other things besides wisdom. Look at the ostrich. It follows the way of foolishness, and, not only do I approve, but I set it on that

path in the first place.” The horse follows a path leading into battle—“It paws violently, exults mightily; it goes out to meet the weapons... With fierceness and rage it swallows the ground; it cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet” (39:21, 24)—also arguably a path of foolishness which God does not condemn. God depicts hawks and eagles soaring through the sky, looking not for wisdom as Job had claimed in chapter 28, a quest in which they are unsuccessful, but for blood, which they do find; having found it, they drink deeply of its life-giving draughts, succoring their young with the blood of the slain. In his depiction of these animals, God describes himself as the creator and guardian of a great multiplicity of paths, a great variety of ways of behaving, which are certainly not reducible to Job’s one right way. “Are the birds of prey in the wrong because they do not find wisdom?” God can be understood to be asking Job. God’s answer would seem to be, “No. They are not looking for wisdom, but for blood. They are not on the wrong path.”

God speaks not only of the ways animals live, but of the ways in which natural phenomena occur. He asks, “Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no one lives, on the desert which is empty of human life, to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass?” (38:25-27). The way followed by this rain and these thunderbolts would seem, from a human perspective, to be the wrong way. It would make more sense for God to ask Job, “Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on the land where people live, so that the fertile ground is able to bear crops and sustain human life?” How impressed can Job be with a God who sends rain in the wrong direction and down the wrong paths? If God’s intention in his speeches is simply to “wow” Job, to overwhelm him with depictions of his power by comparison with which Job is puny and insignificant, as some would argue, his examples are all wrong. That God describes his activity as providing a way for the rain to fall on uninhabited land indicates that he is making a different point. The point being made, as in the case of the animals who eschew captivity and/or wisdom, is that a multiplicity of paths are valid. The path which leads to uninhabited land is not the wrong path, and rain falling on such land is not falling where it ought not to fall. It is falling where it ought to fall, and its falling on the land where no one lives is not an example of chaos but of order. Rain is not confined to one right channel, from which it should not deviate, but falls everywhere, on all sorts of landscapes.

In his first speech, God presents Job with a world in which there are a multiplicity of right ways and not just one, as Job has supposed, and challenges Job to change what he believes about the singular way in which one ought to live and the multiple ways one ought not to live. Whether Job relinquishes his own beliefs and adopts God’s point of view is uncertain. However, if he does cling to his own claim that there is only one right

path, he now does so in denial of what God has identified as his own paths. That is, Job can no longer claim that he has kept to the path followed by God, or the path that God ought to follow. God, in affirming a multiplicity of paths, disputes Job's claim that there is one right path down which both he and everyone ought to travel. For Job to stay on his one path and affirm its superiority over all others is for him to disagree with God, which is, in itself, a recognition that there are a multiplicity of paths and not just one.

## CHAPTER 4

## ORDER AND CHAOS AS RELATED TO TIME: STASIS AND CHANGE

*The Temporal Dimensions of Order and Chaos*

Whereas the second and fifth chapters of this thesis deal with spatial aspects of chaos and order, this chapter addresses their temporal dimensions;<sup>87</sup> it is concerned with how chaos and order are perceived in time. There are two ways of thinking about this. First, it may be asked *when* chaos and order are believed to exist. For example, is chaos located sometime in the past, or is it something experienced now, in the present? Does order accurately describe a past time or does it describe a time looked forward to, in the future? In the myths of Eden and Apocalypse, order is designated as belonging to the past and the future, while chaos characterizes the present time.

The second way of thinking about the temporal dimensions of order and chaos is to ask about how they *relate* to time, a question which is somewhat more difficult to formulate. That is, it is not *when* chaos and order appear in time that is the issue, but what they do with time once they have appeared. For example, if the appearance of an ordered world is anticipated in the future, what happens to time once that ordered world has arrived? Does time stop, rendering the ordered world static and stable, a world, essentially, without time, or does time continue, meaning that the ordered world is open to change? And what about chaos? If the present is designated chaotic time, is that chaos timelessly static or is it timefully changeable?

In this chapter, I will deal primarily with the ways in which the characters in the Book of Job answer the second kind of question about chaos and order as they relate to time. As regards the first kind of question—the *when* question—the characters do answer it, and I will touch on their answers. It is, however, the second question which elicits answers about the actual nature of order and chaos, as they are perceived. The first question only tells me *when*, it does not tell me *what*. The second question, by contrast, is formulated to tell me *what* chaos and order are like as they relate to time, so it is this question which can actually reveal characters' beliefs about how chaos and order are constituted.

*Stasis and Utopia*


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<sup>87</sup> Chapter 3 uses a spatial metaphor to address a non-spatial dimension of chaos and order.

Although scholars like Niditch and Cohn describe chaos as static and timeless and order as characterized by change and movement in time,<sup>88</sup> this depiction is quite counterintuitive, as discussed in the introductory chapter. It seems far more natural to conceive of order as static and of chaos as characterized by change. That this is the case is borne out by utopian fiction, in which, once the order of utopia has been achieved, nothing ever happens. Once things have become as they ought to be, any change must only serve to disrupt that order. Of utopian fiction Jean Pfaelzer writes, “There is no extended conflict, because utopia marks the end of history; without history there can be no fictional activity” (Pfaelzer 1981, 120). The Talking Heads song “Heaven,” can be seen to make a similar point. In the first verse David Byrne sings, “Everyone is trying to get to the bar. The name of the bar, the bar is called Heaven. The band in Heaven plays my favorite song. They play it once again, they play it all night long.”<sup>89</sup> Between verses which detail the unchanging nature of heaven, Byrne sings the chorus, “Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens.” Once the *when* of heaven has been reached, time stops; the same things happen over and over, but this is not a problem, for, as Byrne sings, “It’s hard to imagine that nothing at all could be so exciting, could be so much fun.” Once the ordered world has been established, in which one can hear one’s favorite song all night long, there is no need for anything else. To change the record can only be to make things worse.

Of course, not everyone has the same favorite song. In Maurice Sendak’s children’s story *Very Far Away*, a group of characters, including a horse, a sparrow, a cat, and a boy named Martin go off in search of a place “very far away” which will fulfill all their desires. Once they reach that place, however, they quickly fall into quarrels over whose version of “very far away” ought to hold sway. The horse, for example, believes that “Very far away is where a horse can dream...The way I used to dream in the deep blue grass” (Sendak 1957, 20), but this is not a place which has room for cats who believe that “Very far away is where a cat can sing all day, and nobody says, *hush cat!*” (*ibid.*, 26). Although “very far away” can be reached, it does not maintain its status as “very far away” for long. Discovering that the place they have found cannot fulfill all their ideas about what the world ought to be, the characters soon disperse. Although Sendak’s book tells the story of a failed utopia, it falls short of describing a dystopia. Kenneth Roemer explains dystopia as, “an imaginary alternative that is much worse than the present...the negative image of utopia...the depiction of a bad time and place” (Roemer 1981, 3).

There is more, though, to dystopia than Roemer’s description suggests. In fiction, dystopia is not simply “the depiction of a bad time and place,” but of a utopia gone wrong.

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<sup>88</sup> See chapter 1, pages 10-11.

<sup>89</sup> Talking Heads. “Heaven.” *Fear of Music*. Sire Records, 1979.

In this way *Very Far Away* comes close to being dystopian fiction. What keeps it from becoming a picture of dystopia is that the place “very far away” turns out to be no worse than the world the characters inhabited before going there. It is not better, as they expected, but it is not worse, either; it is the same kind of place as any other place. When their utopia fails, the characters simply pack up and go home, having lost nothing but an afternoon and their illusions. In dystopian fiction, by contrast, the utopian situation is prolonged past the point where it has become evident that it does not satisfy all the characters’ hopes and desires. Sendak’s book could be made into dystopian fiction if all the characters were forced to remain “very far away” and submit to one vision of how that place ought to be: if all the characters were required, for example, to dream dreams of deep blue grass and to acknowledge that this activity is essential to the maintenance of utopia. A dystopia is a utopia taken too far, a utopia in which one idea of how the world ought to be is enforced, and in which no change is possible, and yet, in this, the similarity between the two designations is revealed. In both, one idea of how the world ought to be is maintained and in both, no change is possible. In both there is only one song being played again and again. Whether the world seems utopian or dystopian depends on whether you like the song enough to hear it over and over again, forever. Chances are, if there is more than one person in such a world, it will be a dystopia, not a utopia.

Although, above, I have suggested that it is counterintuitive to think of chaos as static and order as changeable, this discussion of dystopia lends support to this counterintuitive notion, or at least shows how we might conceive of chaos as static and order as a state in which change is possible. Gary Saul Morson, responding to a newspaper headline describing the toppling of a statue of Lenin in Ethiopia, reflects,

Over the past two and a half years, this scene has been repeated in numerous countries governed by regimes proclaiming that the end of history has been reached. Statues of the man who established the final system...were overthrown in a kind of ritual return to ‘history.’...Like executing the tsar, overturning Lenin was a kind of metahistorical act, in this case asserting the openness of time. (Morson 1994, 1)

Implicit in Morson’s observations is the claim that the “end of history” proclaimed by Lenin was not all it was cracked up to be, not because it was not static, but because stasis leaves much to be desired. At the same time, Morson acknowledges that human beings “hunger for the end of time” for, in his view, timelessness equals certainty (*Ibid.*). If there is no time, there is no change, and if there is no change, one always knows what will happen in the future (if the term “future” is even applicable in such a situation).

On the one hand, the appeal of stasis is obvious. It almost goes without saying that once an ordered world has been arrived at, no further change ought to be necessary, for

change can only upset the stability of what has been achieved. On the other hand, there are ways in which stasis can be seen to be undesirable, to be an aspect of chaos and not of order. Among these is the fact that order which is prolonged, with no room for change, tends to turn into chaos, not because it changes, but because the characters who inhabit it change. Once I have heard my favorite song a million times, it may no longer be my favorite song. It may, in fact, be my least favorite song. Additionally, problems arise from the issue of “conflicting utopias.” For a static order to remain order it needs to be a world occupied by only one person, the person whose favorite song is being played. For those who never liked the song in the first place, the static world can only be a dystopian chaos.

In the Book of Job, the characters answer the question of the relation between chaos and order and time in several ways. For Job, who views the ordered world as simple, order is static, as would be expected. The friends, while they agree with Job about the stability of order, focus on describing the change which afflicts the lives of the wicked, designating them as chaotic beings. When God speaks from the whirlwind, he presents an ordered world that is changeable, basing the orderliness of change on the multiplicity of creatures which share the world.

### *The Static Nature of Order in the Prose Tale*

In the prose tale, Job presents an ordered world that is essentially unchanging. Although there is a kind of “blip” of change in the middle of the tale—where Job is reduced from being “the greatest man in the east” to being a pauper afflicted with horrible sores—the end of the tale brings a resolution that is, arguably, a return to its beginning. That is, whatever happens in the middle of the story, its beginning and end are essentially the same and, in their sameness, they render the intervening difference insignificant.<sup>90</sup> It might be asked, of course, what the point of telling such a story is. If the end and the beginning are the same, why bother telling a story at all? Indeed, stories seem to require change, often embodied in conflict, if they are to be considered stories. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan defines narrative fiction as representing “a succession of events,” where an event is defined as “something that happens” (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 2). If there is only one event, one thing that happens, there would seem to be no story. And if nothing happens there is even less of a story! A story with no change—with no conflict—is no story. Is it true,

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<sup>90</sup> Here, I am dealing with the prose tale on its own, ignoring the intervening poetic material. Read in the light of the poetic section, the prose ending does not figure as a return to the beginning. I will discuss this in more detail below.

then, that the prose tale is static, and, if it is true, is it correspondingly true that it is not a story but only a kind of fragment?

Let us take the second part of the question first. The prose tale does not read like a fragment. It reads like a proper story. It begins, as proper stories should, with exposition, introducing the characters and the situation. A conflict follows this introductory material, as *hassatan* calls into question the motivations lying behind the behaviors of both Job and God. (Job has not served God for no reason, and God has been too quick to supply Job with reasons for worship.) In order to resolve the conflict, God allows *hassatan* to afflict Job, proving that he himself is not guilty of putting a protective fence around Job, and allowing Job to prove that his righteousness is unmotivated by selfish factors. Following the resolution of the conflict, the story concludes with the removal of Job's affliction and the restoration of his status of "greatest man in the east." The prose tale, then, can clearly be seen to fulfill the requirements of a story, which would seem to indicate that it is not, after all, static. Stories are not static, and if the prose tale is a story, then it, necessarily, is not static either.

Yet, I come back to the fact that Job, in the prose tale, ends up essentially where he begins, with one distinction, which may be major or minor depending on the lens through which one views it. Job begins and ends the tale as the "greatest of all the people of the east." He begins and ends as the tale's central character, surrounded by a multitude of others whose focus is on him. What changes from beginning to end is that Job's fear of God is proven to be unmotivated by external factors. At the beginning, *hassatan* is able to advance the possibility that Job may not fear God "for nothing," but at the end this is no longer available as a possibility. Job is proven to act in one way and not in another. How much this change is seen to matter depends on how much value we accord the proof. In fact, it is equally true of Job at the beginning of the tale as at the end that he fears God for nothing. Job himself has not changed. What has changed is how we are able to view Job; previously, it was possible to surmise that Job feared God for something instead of nothing, but now Job bears a special seal, informing us that he has been tested and is guaranteed to fear God for nothing. What is required of Job in his passing of the test is not that he change, but that he stay the same, exhibiting the same behavior during the test as he exhibited before the test began. This is a crucial detail. At one level, change happens in the story, in that Job, who was great, is, for a time, brought low. At another level—I would argue the more important level—change is what does not happen. Change is what Job successfully avoids, even as he is assailed by changes from without.

Job, though beset by changes in his circumstances, does not himself change. If he appears different at the end of the tale, it is only because our perception of him has

changed and not because he himself has changed. Indeed, if our perception of him has changed, it is precisely because he himself has not changed, allowing us to view him, now, as a stable entity instead of as a being capable of change! In addition, the significance of this change in perception is further minimized if we accept that the prose tale is Job's daydream, as I have already suggested. If whatever seems to happen in the tale only happens in Job's mind, then whose perception are we talking about? If Job imagines the story, then the one perceiving would seem to be none other than Job himself. Can we say that Job's perception of himself changes as the tale progresses? I do not think we can. Job knows at the beginning of the tale that his righteousness is guaranteed. He has *hassatan* and God set up the test in the way they do because he is certain he will pass it. He is certain that he will not change, no matter how much (imaginary) pressure is applied. It seems fair to say that Job, at the end of the tale, views himself no differently from how he viewed himself at the beginning. The guarantee of his unmotivated righteousness provided by his passing of the test does not change his perception of himself. It is, in fact, a gratuitous guarantee, a guarantee "for nothing."

If Job does not change in the tale and if his self-perception does not change and if our perception of him is only secondary—brought to bear by the author telling the tale<sup>91</sup>—then it seems fair to say that the story is static. Nothing happens, and the whole point of the story is that nothing happens. The apparent change in Job's status is only superficial. His real status—as the righteous man who fears God for nothing—remains unchanged and intact. The tale is able, however, to retain its categorization as a story in its presentation of *potential* change. The conflict that appears in the story exists only as a kind of ghost, a wispy intimation of what might possibly happen, but does not actually happen. Job *might* fail the test, *hassatan* suggests and we, the readers, take *hassatan's* suggestion to heart, viewing it as a real possibility, even though Job himself knows that it will never happen the way *hassatan* thinks it might. The *suggestion* of change is enough to qualify the prose tale as a story (as least in embryonic form), but change itself is shown—by Job, who does not change and reaps the attendant rewards—to be undesirable.

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<sup>91</sup> The tale exists at two levels. On one level, as I have argued, it is a daydream in the mind of Job. On another level, however, it is a story written by an author for us (whoever we may be) to read. The tale is both inside Job's mind and outside of it. If it remained in his head, we would have no access to it. Obviously, though, we *do* have access to it! Because of the two levels at which the tale exists, it can be read as presenting two different points of view. It presents both Job's point of view and the point of view of the author. It may be that, while from Job's point of view, he undergoes no change as the tale progresses, from the author's point of view (and from ours inasmuch as we have access to the tale through the author) Job does change, in that the guarantee of his righteousness is established through the tests he undergoes. It is important not to conflate these two points of view, but to treat them as separate despite the fact that they overlay each other in the prose tale.

The fundamental stasis of Job's character in the tale (viewed as Job's daydream) allows us to perceive that Job views order as similarly static. For Job, change, if it is to be regarded as order and not as chaos, must happen in the service of stasis, in the same way that multiplicity, if it exists within the ordered world, must exist to support singularity. The superficial changes that are forced upon Job by God and *hassatan* do not represent an incursion of chaos into Job's ordered world, because they serve to bolster his status as a static being. Change happens, but it happens so that it need not happen ever again. The world which comes into being after Job's trials is more static and therefore more orderly than the world which existed previously.

I have said above that the prose tale manages to qualify as a story by presenting at least the potential of conflict and change, even though these are never realized. Thinking again, though, I am not so sure that story is the best designation for this piece of writing. The conflict and changes that occur (as potentialities) do so only in the mind of the reader. It seems to me that "snapshot" might be the better term to describe the prose tale's genre. It is, primarily, a picture of a world and not a story about something that happens in that particular world. What is this world like? It is a world in which Job is, always and unchangingly, the central, real character. It is a world in which Job is, without fail, blameless and upright, and in which he, at all times, serves God for nothing. It is a Disneyesque world; you can almost see the Technicolor stream running alongside Job's thatched-roof cottage, inside of which he is engaged in some virtuous activity such as mending shoes or stacking wood by the fireplace. Even though trouble—in the form of some rude ruffian like *hassatan* or some haughty and villainous prince like God—may be about to intrude on the scene, the scene itself is essentially stable. The end will find the humble hero exactly where he began, so much so that it is as if the villain never poked his head into the scene at all. The villain flits through like a passing breeze, perhaps ruffling a few leaves, but making no lasting impression. He need not have bothered, so irrelevant are his efforts. The world is as it ought to be, and as it is it will stay.

Newsom, noticing the absence of any real conflict in the prose tale, also asks the question of whether it can be said to qualify as a story. She suggests that the tale be understood as a "pre-emptive narrative" as defined by Wolfgang Iser. She explains Iser's term, writing, "'pre-emptive' narratives...take an established social or moral norm (like piety) and, rather than rendering it problematical, involve the hero in some sort of activity that tests and reconfirms the value....A story of this sort is a socially stabilizing rather than a socially transforming story" (Newsom 1993, 123). In this way, it is possible to view the prose tale as a story, despite its lack of conflict. It is, though, a very special kind of story, one which promotes stasis rather than change. Job, as the central real character of the

prose tale is able to guarantee the stability of the world in which he lives. What matters is not what others do—even if they are powers on the level of God or *hassatan*—but what Job does. He is confident of his ability to stand firm, and his static pose supports the unchanging order of the world.

*Job's Static View of Order in the Poetic Section: Life is not a Journey*

It is not only in the prose tale that Job preferences stasis over change. Throughout his speeches of the poetic section he makes clear that, in his view, the world as it ought to be is static. In her essay, “Wounded Hero on a Shaman’s Quest,” Carole Fontaine reads the Book of Job, in its entirety, as a folktale which follows the traditional sequence of action of folk literature as described by Vladimir Propp<sup>92</sup> and also as a “shaman’s tale” (Fontaine 1992, 70-85). Both of these readings stress the idea that everything Job experiences throughout the course of the book has, as its goal, his transformation. As Fontaine sees it, the other characters who appear in the book act as “donors” or “helpers” whose purpose is to speed Job toward his goal. At the end of the book, after his encounter with God, Job reaches the end of his “quest” and is healed. The successful completion of Job’s journey is indicated by his reinstatement in society. Fontaine explains,

The tale concludes with functions which center upon the reinstatement of the Hero. The action of a tale does not simply return the Hero to his initial situation, but, as a result of the values gained by successful completion of all the tale tests, leaves the Hero at a higher level than that at which he began. (Fontaine 1987, 222)

For Fontaine, reading the book as a folktale, where Job is at the end of the book, though it may appear similar, is not the same place as that from which he set out. Instead, his ordeal has been a transformative journey, which has had as its goal his arrival at a new understanding of his place in the world.

Reading the book as a shamanic tale, Fontaine reaches similar conclusions. She identifies Job as undergoing a shamanic ordeal based on the fact that illness often serves as the entry point into the shamanic world. She writes, “Often the dread illness functions...as a sort of...initiation...as the afflicted soul is sent wandering away from its body to return

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<sup>92</sup> In an earlier essay Fontaine explains Propp’s theory of folk literature, writing, “Propp’s approach to the folktale starts with the consideration of those features of the tale which are invariant, rather than focusing on individual motifs or themes.” For Propp, though there may be any number of actors or “subjects” in the folktale, “the actions of these characters, the ‘predicates’ of the tale are actually fairly limited.” These actions, or “functions,” as Propp calls them, “are understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action.” They constitute the recurring, stable elements which make a given folk narrative into a folktale.” Fontaine goes on to list the thirty-one functions identified by Propp, and, in the rest of her essay, ties a number of these functions to the various characters in Job, showing how the book follows the structure of a folktale. (Fontaine 1987, 207).

eventually in possession of the secrets of life and healing” (Fontaine 1992, 80). So, Job, in his illness, can be seen as departing from normal human society, communing with the divine, and returning with a new understanding of the position of humanity in the world and the capacity to intercede for his friends who have not been through the same experience. As Fontaine understands it, Job’s return to health is triggered by his newfound knowledge of his place in the world. Yahweh, in his speeches, reveals the interconnectedness of all creation, and, in doing so, heals Job. Job repents, not because he has been overpowered by Yahweh, but because he has been “firmly reintegrated into the web of creation” (*Ibid.*, 83).

Fontaine may well be correct in her assertion that the author of the book intends Job’s suffering to be viewed as a transformative journey which, in turn, has the power to transform its readers.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, she is not alone in interpreting the book in this way. Perdue writes, “in the book of Job...sages struggle to articulate a language that engages faith, revitalizes tradition, and recreates the world....Reality is redescribed, and in its redescription is transformed into a new creation” (Perdue 1991, 38). I do not disagree with reading the book *as a whole* as potentially performing this function. It seems to me, though, that Job *himself* does not view his suffering in this light. Transformation, far from being his goal, is not even in his vocabulary.

When Job speaks his oath of innocence, he does so not to effect his transformation but to effect his restoration. What Job envisages as the outcome of his meeting with God is not the completion of a journey to some place new, but his return to where and how he used to be. Job does not imagine himself as coming out on the other side of his suffering having learned something that he could not have learned otherwise, but as returned to where he was before he started to suffer, so that it is as if his suffering never happened. That this is how Job views his situation is evidenced by his cry in chapter 29, “O that I were as in the months of old” (29:2a). The world as it was is how the world ought to be, as far as Job is concerned. Job does not even expect to learn anything new from an encounter with God. Rather, he expects that if God consents to meet him it will be to go over the accounts of his behavior which will give him the opportunity to show that, despite the changes in his circumstances, he has remained the same as he always was and that, therefore, his circumstances, too, ought to have remained unchanged. Job views his ordeal not as a journey but as a mistake, a chaotic disruption of the static order of the world.

### *God as Agent of Chaotic Change*

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<sup>93</sup> I will discuss the author’s attitudes toward change and stasis in more detail at the end of this chapter.

One of the major accusations Job brings against God is that he acts as an agent of change in the world, in fact as the *solitary* agent of change. In chapter 9 Job describes the changes—both creative and destructive—wrought upon the earth by God. He says,

If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him in a thousand. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength—who has resisted him, and succeeded?—he who removes mountains, and they do not know it, when he overturns them in his anger; who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble; who commands the sun, and it does not rise; who seals up the stars; who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the Sea... How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him?... If it is a contest of strength, he is the strong one! (9:3-8, 14, 19a)

On its surface, this passage would seem to be about the discrepancy in strength between God and Job. Because God is strong enough to build and tear down on the grand scale, Job has no way of levying a claim against him. Job cannot prove his innocence because God has declared him guilty, and what God says goes, as is evidenced by his powerful control of the elements of earth, sea, and sky. If God decides that what was once a mountain shall be a flat plain, then the mountain becomes a flat plain. It is no good for the mountain to argue against God, saying, “But I am a mountain and not a plain.” God’s activity has made the mountain’s point moot. Though the mountain may claim that it is a mountain and not a plain, in fact, because God has willed it, the mountain is not a mountain but a plain. Job sees that the same goes for him. Although he is a righteous man, Job has been declared guilty by God and the power of God’s declaration has made him guilty, just as the mountain, subject to God’s shaping force, has been made into a plain. Job describes his situation, saying, “Though I am innocent, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse” (9:20).

Although Job is speaking about God’s power, it should be evident that his emphasis is on God’s use of his power to effect change. In the speech to which Job is directly responding, Bildad has admonished Job to “make supplication to the Almighty” (8:5b), who, if Job is indeed blameless as he claims, will “restore you to your rightful place” (8:6b). Bildad’s advice rests on his belief that God uses his power to support the static stability of the world. God will not bring about a change in Job’s circumstances if Job prays but will “restore [him] to [his] rightful place.” God will rewind the tape, so to speak, so that the present upheaval, which should never have occurred, ceases to exist. Job, after his restoration, will dwell perpetually “in the beginning,” in one single moment of being that is eternally renewed, untouched by change. In chapter 29, Job, too, wishes for such a return to the way things were, a restoration of his rightful place. In chapter 9, though, Job

dismisses the possibility of such a return. He asserts that God is not interested in the maintenance of stasis, but only in propagating upheaval.

Later in the same chapter Job accuses, “It is all one; therefore I say, he destroys both the blameless and the wicked” (9:22). What concerns God, according to Job, is not justice—that is, building up those who deserve to be built up and destroying those who deserve to be destroyed—but creation and destruction engaged in for their own sake. God is not a just judge, but a force like a rolling glacier that changes whatever it touches, making mountains into plains, plains into ravines, and the innocent into the guilty. It is not, then, simply God’s strength that makes him inaccessible to Job—a strong, just judge would be able to restore Job to his rightful circumstances—but the nature of that strength. It is because God is a force of change that Job cannot contend with him. Job cannot ask the rolling glacier to unmake the lake that it has gouged out of what used to be a flat plane, so he has no means of asking God to unmake the guilty man into which he has made Job.

In a later passage, Job is even more explicit about God’s role as the world’s solitary agent of change. He says, “In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being” (12:10) before going on to describe what God does with these lives over which he has control:

With God are wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding. If he tears down, no one can rebuild; if he shuts someone in, no one can open up. If he withholds the waters, they dry up; if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land...He leads counselors away stripped, and makes fools of judges. He looses the sash of kings, and binds a waistcloth on their loins. He leads priests away stripped, and overthrows the mighty. He deprives of speech those who are trusted, and takes away the discernment of the elders. He pours contempt on princes, and looses the belt of the strong. He uncovers the deeps out of darkness, and brings deep darkness to light. He makes nations great, then destroys them; he enlarges nations, then leads them away. He strips understanding from the leaders of the earth, and makes them wander in a pathless waste. (12:13-15, 17-24)

Just as God stretches out the heavens and establishes the earth and then seals up the stars and overturns the mountains, so God makes people and nations mighty and important and then strips them of their power and status. The word translated “mighty” in 12:19 is the plural of **יָמִיִן**, which literally means “continuous (one)...perennial (one), eternal (one)...reliable (one)” (*The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 237). Those who are overthrown by God are not just strong, they are established, fixed, seemingly immovable. Yet, defying their apparent stability, God brings them low. As God behaves in the natural world, so he acts with regard to human affairs. In neither one is there any stability. God exercises his agency willy-nilly and with great frequency, so that the only constant is the constancy of change.

### *God's "Wisdom" as God's Whim*

A word should be said about Job's attribution of wisdom to God in both passages. One would expect that if Job views God as possessing wisdom and acting according to its precepts, he would necessarily view God as acting rightly. Wisdom in the Old Testament does not describe mere knowledge but the ability to discern the right way to act and the undertaking of that right behavior.<sup>94</sup> If Job views God as "wise in heart" (9:4a), it would seem that Job views God's random creative and destructive behavior as the appropriate behavior for the situation. This, however, does not jibe with the descriptions that follow, especially in the second passage (chapter 12). Although God's creative activity is often described as informed by wisdom (see Job 28 and Proverbs 8, for example), what Job is describing is primarily destruction. God may stretch out the heavens, but he then goes on to shake the earth out of its place (9:6). God may create a great nation, but he goes on to bring that nation low (12:23) for no apparent reason, or, at least, no reason for which the nation itself is responsible.<sup>95</sup> In addition, it is hard to imagine Job praising God's wisdom with regard to his own circumstances, which mirror those of the important men and nations detailed in chapter 12 and the high mountains described in chapter 9. Indeed, throughout his speeches Job accuses God of treating him wrongly—of having brought about an unwarranted change in his circumstances—so surely he would not simultaneously ascribe wisdom to the God who has behaved in this way. Rather, though he speaks of God's wisdom in these passages, he seems to do so in order to undermine the idea that God's actions are governed by wisdom.

Job takes the pious stance that God is wise in heart,<sup>96</sup> while at the same time striking a blow at the idea of God's goodness, which, traditionally, would go hand-in-hand with wisdom, but here is severed from it.<sup>97</sup> In his speech which precedes Job's chapter 12 response, Zophar has spoken of God's possession of "the secrets of wisdom" (11:6a),

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<sup>94</sup> See my discussion of the "hymn to wisdom" in the previous chapter.

<sup>95</sup> About this passage Gordis writes, "Job's description [of the social upheaval caused by God] has nothing in common with such pictures of social change [Ps. 113:7-8, in which the high are brought low and the low raised up]. The salient difference lies in the fact that the psalmists who praise God's greatness depict both aspects of the change—the fall of the mighty and the rise of the lowly....Job, however, describes only half of the picture—the decline of the powerful—because he is arraigning his Maker as a destructive force. Nor is Job's attitude similar to that of the prophets. They saw in the collapse of these elements of society the deserved punishment of a sinful people...and the necessary prelude to a reconstructed social order....But for the author of Job, as for the Wisdom writers in general, a transformation of the social and political status quo meant catastrophe" (Gordis 1965, 52).

<sup>96</sup> Brown calls this "a perfunctory nod of deference" to God's traditional attributes, after which Job goes on to depict God in quite other terms (Brown 1999, 328-29).

<sup>97</sup> Perdue points out that, although Job speaks of God's wisdom and might, "what is not only glaringly absent, but resoundingly repudiated, is the justice of God" (Perdue 1991, 154).

which, if God would only divulge them to Job, would convince him of the justness of his suffering. Job's use of the term wisdom in his description of God plays with Zophar's insistence on God's superior knowledge and the just action which ensues. Job's apparent praise would seem to be euphemistic, partaking of that flipside of meaning which allows bless to mean curse.<sup>98</sup> Perdue identifies this passage as a parody of a hymn of praise, noting that, although Job attributes wisdom and strength to God, his presentation of what God does with his wisdom and strength is wholly negative. Perdue writes,

God uses wisdom and might, not to create and sustain life and nations, but to destroy them....God does not tear down the structures of life and society in order to rebuild them, but to prohibit their being restored. And instead of allowing humans to participate in divine wisdom and power to create social spheres in which justice and life flourish, God limits, constrains, and even denies them to human leaders. (Perdue 1991, 155)

In chapters 9 and 12 it is significant that wisdom is paired with strength in Job's description of God. In chapter 9, Job says, "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength—who has resisted him and succeeded?" (9:4) and in chapter 12 he says first "With God are wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding" (12:13), and then echoes, "With him are strength and wisdom; the deceived and the deceiver are his" (12:16). In chapter 9, it is as a result of God's combined wisdom and strength that the havoc wrought by God cannot be resisted. In chapter 12, it is as a result of God's combined strength and wisdom that he acts with impunity against both deceived and deceiver, rewarding and punishing, founding and destroying as his fancy takes him. In both chapters, strength would seem to be all God needs in order to effect his purposes. Supremely powerful, God can both raise mountains and flatten them with no recourse to wisdom, if wisdom is understood as the discernment of right behavior and the implementation of that behavior in its appropriate situation.

Job is explicit that God's activities are not based on any appraisal of the correct behavior for the situation but happen according to God's whim. Why, then, does Job bother speaking of wisdom at all? He does so because wisdom is already part of the discussion. The friends who assert that God is behaving rightly assume that God's behavior is grounded in wisdom and that Job's suffering is, therefore, a sign of the wisdom of God. Job responds, in effect, "God may be wise, but if he is, wisdom doesn't mean what you think it means." In 12:16's repetition of verse 13's praise of God's wisdom and strength, a subtle reversal takes place. Where in 12:13 Job says, "With God are wisdom and strength," in verse 16 he says, "with him are strength and wisdom," exchanging the placement of the two terms. If we read the two verses as parallels of each other, the effect

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<sup>98</sup> See the discussion of כִּבְיָ in chapter two, footnote 6.

is that wisdom and strength are seen to be being used as interchangeable terms. What is the nature of God's wisdom? Its nature is God's strength. If what Job means by God's wisdom can be at all differentiated from what he means by God's strength, then wisdom must be defined as the ability to choose to do something, while strength must be seen as the ability to carry out that decision. In fact, the word used for wisdom in 12:16 is not חכמה, as it is in 12:13, but תועלת, a word which can also be translated as "success" or "(good) results" (*A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 388). In Job 5:12 it is used this way by Eliphaz who says, "He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success (תועלת)." This alternate meaning of the word reinforces the idea that when Job attributes wisdom to God, he is really only acknowledging his strength.

Job's "praise," then, can be read as merely a statement of his belief that God has both the power to decide what to do and the power to carry out what he has decided to do. What Zophar means by God's wisdom in chapter 11 is a thoroughly just apprehension of and interaction with the world. Job's description of God's wisdom has no room for justice. God simply does things, does *everything*, in fact, and this doing seems to be motivated only by God's desire to do whatever it is he wants to do. This is hardly praise, given that Job perceives himself as the victim of God's decision and ability to inflict suffering randomly and without cause. In chapters 9 and 12, then, Job describes God's wisdom as the desire to cause random and continuous change and God's strength as the effects of this desire as they are felt in the world.

### *The Friends on the Static Life of the Righteous Man*

For the friends, as for Job, the world as it ought to be is stable and unchanging with everyone occupying his or her appointed place from which he or she does not move. The only change condoned by the friends is a change that restores a disturbed stasis. When, in chapter 8, Bildad urges Job to pray to God, it is not so that God will change his circumstances but so that God will restore him to that situation from which he never should have been moved in the first place. It is a movement back to a time before the change-that-should-not-have-happened happened and not a movement forward to a new place on the other side of change. Against this interpretation, Newsom argues that the friends privilege future time in their speeches. She writes,

The friends offer Job the narrative schema of the good person who endures suffering, is delivered by God, and enjoys a peaceful and prosperous life after deliverance. They offer several variations of the schema (5:19-26; 8:8-20;

11:13-19), but in each the crucial element of time is to be found in the happy ending. The outcome of the narrative does not so much serve to integrate and give meaning to all that has come before as to enable it to be voided of significance—to be forgotten. (Newsom 2003, 212)

Newsom's observation that the friends focus on the happy ending and view it as obliterating, or at least obscuring, the prior suffering is correct, yet it seems to me that the conclusion drawn from this observation, namely, that the friends privilege the future as the time of real significance, is not quite right. In Newsom's analysis, Job, too, although he begins by privileging the present moment of his suffering, comes to privilege the future, as he develops the idea of meeting with God in a court of law, as the time at which his innocence will be proved and his fortunes restored. Newsom asserts that "For both the friends and Job the end of the story is what truly matters" (*Ibid.*).

I would argue, however, that the time that matters most to Job and his friends is not the future but the past. For both, the end of the story is marked by a return to the beginning, and this return occasions not another telling of the story, in cyclical fashion, but an erasing of the story itself. Newsom is right that the outcome of the friends' narrative is that the story is voided of meaning and is forgotten, and, of course, she is also right that this is something that happens in the future. Both the friends and Job know that there is no such thing as a real return to the past; what has happened cannot be undone. *But* what has happened can be forgotten to such a degree that it is as if it never happened. Yes, this forgetting happens in the future, but when it happens it makes the future so like the past that it might as well be the past. What the friends envision for Job is a future that is exactly like the past, but even more so, so much more so, in fact, that the prospect of any future is eradicated.

When, in chapter 29 Job begins his final defense, leading up to his oath of innocence in chapter 31, he prefaces his remarks by crying, "Oh, that I were as in the months of old" (29:2a). He does not say, "Oh, that it were sometime in the future when I had made it through this time of suffering and had come to a new place of rest and refreshment." Although any restoration must necessarily occur in the future, Job wants that future to be so much like the past that it is as if he is living in the past and not in the future. The same can be said for the friends' vision of the future; it is not really the future to which they urge Job to look forward, but to a time when the past will, once again, be made present. For all the friends, this past-in-the-future, once achieved, will be guaranteed never to change; it will be a futureless present.

Eliphaz, in his first speech, describes this futureless present, saying,

He will deliver you from six troubles; in seven no harm shall touch you. In famine he will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the

sword. You shall be hidden from the scourge of the tongue, and shall not fear destruction when it comes. At destruction and famine you shall laugh, and shall not fear the wild animals of the earth. For you shall be in league with the stones of the field, and the wild animals shall be at peace with you. You shall know that your tent is safe, you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing. You shall know that your descendants will be many, and your offspring like the grass of the earth. You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, as a shock of grain comes up to the threshing floor in its season. (5:19-26)

Although it will be necessary for Job's circumstances to undergo a change before he can find himself living the life described by Eliphaz, the change serves the prospect of stasis. It is a small thing compared with the vista of sameness that stretches before Job in Eliphaz's description. What Eliphaz promises Job if he repents (5:8), is a life unthreatened by change. Though wars may rage around him, his protection will be guaranteed. Wild animals may stalk the earth, but they will not touch him. He will be preserved no matter what dangers threaten. Even death, which must eventually come to Job as a condition of his mortality, is robbed of its sting. It comes not suddenly and without warning, but when Job is ready for it. Nor does death cause the kind of change in Job's circumstances that it causes for the wicked, who, dying, are wiped from the face of the earth and lost to memory. Rather, when Job comes to die, he will know that his tent is safe (5:24) and that his descendants will be many (5:25). What he has established will continue to exist as he established it, even though he is no longer present. For Job, the final change of death will not signal change so much as the continuation *ad infinitum* of his well-ordered life.

In this passage Eliphaz makes clear that, in his view, the world as it ought to be is a static world. Any change which occurs within this order must serve to bring about increased stability. Earlier in this speech, Eliphaz has spoken about changes wrought by God who "does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number" (5:9), such as, "he sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety" (5:11) and "he wounds, but he binds up; he strikes, but his hands heal" (5:18). Verse 18 may sound similar to Job's claim of chapter 12 that God "makes nations great, then destroys them" (12:23a), but it has one important difference. In Eliphaz's depiction, the wounding comes first, followed by the binding up of the wound, while for Job it is the binding up that comes first, followed by the wounding. The sequence of God's actions in Job's speech gives a sense of continuous upheaval. In Eliphaz's speech, by contrast, an elevated end follows a lowly beginning, and once a person is lifted up, he stays where he is. Eliphaz's description of the static life Job will lead after he has sought and been recognized by God follows his claim that God "wounds, but he binds up," indicating that he is not talking about a vicious cycle of wounding and healing energized by a God who is a force of constant change, but about change that leads to stasis. In Eliphaz's view, God's

goal for the world is stability. Those who are righteous are enabled to move into God's ordered world and settle there, where nothing causes change, not even death.

Zophar, in his first speech, presents a view of stasis and change that is consonant with that held by Eliphaz. Zophar says to Job,

If you direct your heart rightly, you will stretch out your hands toward him....Surely then...you will be secure, and will not fear. You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters that have passed away. And your life will be brighter than the noonday; its darkness will be like morning. And you will have confidence, because there is hope; you will be protected and take your rest in safety. You will lie down, and no one will make you afraid.  
(11:13, 15-19a)

For Zophar, as for Eliphaz, change can happen within the ordered world, but only if it serves the institution of stasis. Job will undergo change as he leaves behind his time of trouble, but he will emerge to occupy a space of absolute stasis, and, with his troubles behind him it will be as if both they and the change required to deliver him from them never happened. Just as Eliphaz envisions a life in which Job has nothing to fear from the wars and wild animals that threaten others, so Zophar claims that Job will be protected from danger. In addition, Job will be continuously surrounded by the light of noonday, even when he is sleeping. Even a natural change, like the change from the light of day to the darkness of night to the light of day again will be eternally suspended. Job, the once-again righteous man, will have nothing to fear when he lies down, because there is no prospect of change. The world as he leaves it when he goes to sleep will be the world as he finds it when he awakes.

Zophar's emphasis on the sleep of the righteous man inhabiting a stable cosmos recalls Job's complaint of a few chapters earlier that even sleep fails to grant him respite from his suffering. There, Job says, "When I say, 'My bed will comfort me, my couch will ease my complaint,' then you scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions, so that I would choose strangling and death rather than this body" (7:13-15). In his current state, when Job lies down to sleep he does not know what the night will bring; he hopes for comfort but often enough finds himself assailed by nightmares. After his repentance, Zophar promises that the nights will be predictable. They, like the days, will bring nothing that Job does not expect and welcome. His righteousness will assure the stability of the cosmos, or at least of his corner of it. Change may afflict others, but he will experience the world as static and secure.

Bildad, though he does not flesh out a vision of what the world will be like after Job repents to the degree that Eliphaz and Zophar do, would seem to agree with them that the world as it ought to be is a static world. As already noted above, he tells Job to "seek

God and make supplication to the Almighty” (8:5), just as Eliphaz and Zophar advise, an action that will result in his restoration to his rightful place (8:6b), a reversal of what has happened to him, not a change but an undoing of change. Bildad’s agreement with Eliphaz and Zophar about the stasis of the ordered world is most fully evidenced by his description of the world of the wicked as fundamentally changeable, as will be seen below.

### *The Changeability of the World of the Wicked*

All three friends present the lives of the wicked as marked by instability and change. Eliphaz initiates this theme, saying, “I have seen fools taking root, but suddenly I cursed their dwelling. Their children are far from safety, they are crushed in the gate, and there is no one to deliver them” (5:3-4). Here, Eliphaz describes himself as ensuring that the undeserving do not benefit from stability. He is quick to curse a fool who seems to be “taking root,” that is, building for himself a stable life; because it is the lot of fools and the wicked to lack stability, Eliphaz’s curse is immediately effective. The change that affects the lives of fools and the wicked is in marked contrast to the stability available to the righteous. Whereas the righteous man, even after death, can be certain of the security of his tent and his family, the fool has no control over what happens to his children even during his lifetime. The protective bubble which surrounds the righteous man and his tent, deflecting whatever troubles might threaten, does not surround the fool or the wicked man, and he and his family feel the force of the world’s troubles and are overwhelmed by them.

In his first speech, Bildad confirms Eliphaz’s assessment of the instability of the world as experienced by the wicked. He says,

Their confidence is gossamer, a spider’s house their trust. If one leans against its house, it will not stand; if one lays hold of it, it will not endure. The wicked thrive before the sun, and their shoots spread over the garden....If they are destroyed from their place, then it will deny them, saying, “I have never seen you.” (8:15-16, 18)

Just as Eliphaz’s curse is effective against the “taking root” of the fool, so Bildad claims that any gentle pressure is enough to topple the seeming security of the wicked. The wicked are blown away, and the change in their circumstances is so extreme that it is as if they never existed. Zophar, too, in his first speech, after detailing the protection from change that is available to the righteous man, offers the contrast of the changeable fate of the wicked man, saying, “But the eyes of the wicked will fail; all way of escape will be lost to them, and their last hope is to breathe their last” (11:20). Unlike the righteous, the wicked have no way of planning or knowing what to expect from a life which assaults them with random change.

*Death as the Mark of the Supreme Changeability of the Lives of the Wicked*

Here, Zophar asserts that for the wicked death is the only potential escape from the instability of life as they experience it. If the wicked cannot count on life to provide a stable environment, they must turn to death as the only realm of stability to which they have access. Yet, although Zophar here presents death as a potentially stabilizing occurrence, for the most part the friends view death, as it comes to the wicked, as evidence of the fundamental changeability of their lives. We have already seen, in Eliphaz's first speech, the depiction of the death of the righteous man as a continuation of the stasis in which he has lived his life; death does not disrupt the stability of his tent, for his line is guaranteed to continue exactly as he left it on into eternity. For the wicked, however, death is a disruption, a final mark of change and changeability upon a life lived in continuous flux.

Eliphaz, in his second speech, describes the ultimate change of death that stalks the lives of the wicked, saying,

In prosperity the destroyer will come upon them. They despair of returning from darkness, and they are destined for the sword....They know that a day of darkness is ready at hand; distress and anguish terrify them; they prevail against them, like a king prepared for battle....They will not be rich, and their wealth will not endure, nor will they strike root in the earth; they will not escape from darkness; the flame will dry up their shoots, and their blossom will be swept away by the wind. (15:21b-22, 24, 29-30)

Eliphaz does not deny that the wicked may seem to prosper, just as they may seem to be taking root and enjoying stable lives on earth, but he insists that this prosperity is fleeting. For the wicked man, death stands at the end of life and, like the vortex of a whirlpool, sucks him toward its center so that he cannot get his footing but can only grab at the rocky shore and hold on for dear life until the pull overwhelms him and he is forced to let go. Bildad's second speech echoes Eliphaz's words, but he describes the changeability of the lives of the wicked as marked with the ultimate change of death with even more fervor. His speech is a narration of continual change: their "light...is put out" (18:5), "their strong steps are shortened" (18:7), "they are thrust into a net" (18:8), "their strength is consumed by hunger" (18:12), "they are torn from the tent in which they trusted" (18:14), "they are thrust from light into darkness, and driven out of the world" (18:18). As Bildad explains it, it is not that the wicked live continuously in a state of darkness or weakness, but that they are caught in a downward spiral, moving from light to darkness, from strength to weakness, from health to disease, from freedom to captivity, and, finally, from life to

death. In this way, their lives are characterized by unending upheaval. When it is again his turn to speak, Zophar concurs with his two friends, describing at once the heights to which the wicked may climb and the depths to which they are destined to fall. He says,

Even though they mount up high as the heavens, and their head reaches the clouds, they will perish forever like their own dung....Their bodies, once full of youth, will lie down in the dust with them....They swallow down riches and vomit them up again....Utter darkness is laid up for their treasures....The possessions of their house will be carried away, dragged off in the day of God's wrath. (20:6-7a, 11, 15a, 26a, 28)

The lives of the wicked as described by the friends are supremely changeable, leading toward the final change of death, but there is, at the same time, a constancy to this change that might be seen to lend it some stability. Can it be said that because the wicked can count on their lives to change and can count on death to meet them in the end, their lives may be conceptualized as static and not as fundamentally changeable? It would be possible to make this argument. It would also be possible to say that because in the end the wicked achieve stasis in death (which Zophar hints at in his first speech), all the changes that beset them in life can be seen as change in the service of stasis. I do not, however, think that this is how the friends see it. Their intention is to contrast, in the most striking terms possible, the changeability of the lives of the wicked with the stability which characterizes the life of the righteous man. They do not want us to ask, "But doesn't all that continuous change and the inexorable pull of death add up to a kind of stability?" And if we were to ask that question, they would be sure to answer, "No. You're missing the point."

The point is that the world as it should be is static. The righteous man, who is "man-as-he-ought-to-be" both supports and benefits from the stability of the world as it ought to be. The wicked man, who is "man-as-he-ought-not-to-be" must necessarily live in the world-as-it-ought-not-to-be, which is a world beset by instability and continuous change. The wicked man, as the friends depict him, is like a man falling off a high cliff. There is nowhere for him to go but down, and it is certain that he will eventually hit the bottom. Yet, while he is falling, each moment brings a change from what came before. His fall is inexorable and his death is inevitable, but, at the same time, he is in a state of profound change, especially when compared with the man who is standing, not only on solid ground, but far from the edge of any cliff and the potential for change that it represents.

Of course, it is not only the wicked who die. Righteous men, too, must meet death. The inevitability of death for righteous men might be seen to give the lie to the friends' claims that the righteous live in a world that is static. In a sense, the righteous, no less than

the wicked, are falling inexorably from a cliff toward the inevitability of hitting bottom. Eliphaz, as we have seen, does his best to distinguish the death of the righteous from the death of the wicked. He claims that death comes to the righteous man only when he is fully ready for it, and does not strike him down before his time, as happens to the wicked man. He also claims that death does not annihilate the righteous man, who lives on in the continuation of his household, as it does the wicked man, who, having died, is forgotten. At the same time, however, Eliphaz recognizes that the fact of human mortality prevents even the most righteous men from participating fully in the world as it ought to be. The ability of human beings to live stable lives is compromised by their inability to escape the change wrought by death. Any human being, therefore, whether righteous or wicked, is subject to the force of chaos as well as being a bearer of chaos and a threat to the order of the world.

### *The Spirit's Message: Mortality as Unrighteousness*

In his first speech, Eliphaz expresses this recognition by recounting it as a message he has received in a nocturnal visitation from a spirit. According to the spirit messenger, the fact that all human beings die is proof of their collective and unavoidable guilt. The spirit begins by asking, “Can mortals be righteous before God?” (4:17). The word translated “mortals” is **אנוש**, which, though its plainest meaning is simply “human being,” does denote humans in their frailty and mortality. The spirit pairs **אנוש**, “mortals” with **גבר**, translated “human beings” in the next line. **גבר**, in its relation to the verb **גבר**, meaning “to be mighty,” connotes a mighty man. Yet, by beginning with the term “mortals,” the spirit places the emphasis on the mortality of human beings, robbing the **גבר** of any power he might want to claim. The fact of their mortality is what marks human beings as incapable of true righteousness. The spirit continues, telling Eliphaz that if even the angels are capable of erring (4:18), “how much more so those who live in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed like a moth. Between the morning and evening they are destroyed; they perish forever without any regarding it” (4:19-20). The spirit presents a scenario in which the changeability of the human being, evidenced primarily by mortality, is reason enough for God’s disapproval. Human beings are not stable, but by nature are destined to disappear from the face of the earth, and God can place no trust in such a being. Humans may be righteous one moment, but they are dead and gone the next.

Not all scholars recognize that mortality is the issue here. John Hartley, for example, claims that the disparity between God and humans is based on God's absolute justice and purity, compared with which humans must always be found lacking. He writes, "God being just and pure by nature, wins every dispute, and each person, no matter how upright on earth, is found guilty by comparison" (Hartley 1988, 113). Other scholars, however, agree with the assessment that it is mortality which distinguishes humans from God. Terrien writes, Eliphaz "implies, consciously or not, that finiteness is contiguous with moral corruption (vs. 19)" (Terrien 1957, 75). Samuel Driver and George Gray, too, see that the emphasis of the passage is on humanity's "frailty and, hyperbolically, the brevity of human life: man is the creature of a day, dying more quickly and easily than such a fragile insect as the moth" (Driver and Gray 1921, 47).

Eliphaz's inclusion of the spirit's message in his own speech is curious. The spirit's claim that humans have no access to righteousness because of their mortality plainly contradicts the views Eliphaz expresses in the rest of his first speech. Both before and after his recounting of the spirit's message, Eliphaz insists that human beings, by being righteous, can access a degree of stability that deprives even death of its ability to act as a force of change. ("Think now, who that was innocent ever perished?" [4:7a] he asks Job.) As Eliphaz sees it, humans can be righteous, and, by being righteous, can participate in and inhabit a world that is static. According to the spirit quoted by Eliphaz, however, human beings cannot be righteous in the first place, precisely because they are not so constituted as to be able to participate in stability. Instead of righteousness leading to stability, as Eliphaz contends, the spirit insists that humans' lack of stability leads to their inability to be righteous.

Strangely, although the spirit's words contradict Eliphaz's own, Eliphaz does not argue against them, but, instead, *pretends* that they support his position. There are a number of reasons why he may have chosen to do this. Perhaps Eliphaz's contradictory words mean nothing more than that he does not know his own position. Janzen suggests this possibility, writing, "The fact is that persons often do entertain logically incompatible views, which arise from the multifarious character of human experience" (Janzen 1985, 75). It is possible, however, to view Eliphaz's contradictory words as spoken more deliberately. That Eliphaz has received such a visitation serves to bolster his position as one competent to speak on God's behalf. If Eliphaz were to acknowledge that the spirit's message challenges his own claims, the benefit he is able to derive from having been visited by the spirit would be annulled. Eliphaz cannot say, "I received a message from the divine realm, which confers on me the status of one who has access to divine wisdom" and follow it up with, "but I disagree with what the spirit messenger told me."

Another reason for including the spirit's message and pretending that it does not contradict his own speech is that it provides a kind of safety net for Eliphaz's argument against Job. Vawter describes Eliphaz's repetition of the spirit's words as providing him with an "escape clause." He writes, "If there is a contradiction here [between what Eliphaz says in 4:12-21 and what he says elsewhere about the possibility of being righteous], it is intentional...the built-in safeguard to the logic of Eliphaz is its inconsistency" (Vawter 1983, 53). Eliphaz believes that Job has sinned and that by repenting he will be restored to the position rightfully enjoyed by the righteous. If, however, it turns out that Job has not actually sinned, Eliphaz can fall back on the argument presented by the spirit that humans are inherently unrighteous because they are mortal. The one who is protected by this safety net is God. In Eliphaz's view, God is justified in punishing a Job who has sinned, but if by chance Job has not sinned, God's actions must still be justified, and the spirit's message allows for this eventuality. Indeed, as the book continues, and Job continues to insist upon his innocence, Eliphaz will make the spirit's message his own, relaying it not as reported speech but as his own belief about human life, even as he simultaneously continues to claim that stability is accessible to the righteous.

In his second speech, Eliphaz incorporates the spirit's message into his own, saying, "What are mortals [אֲנוּשִׁים] that they can be clean? Or those born of woman, that they can be righteous?" (15:14) At this point, though, Eliphaz modifies the spirit's message, continuing, "God puts no trust even in his holy ones, and the heavens are not clean in his sight; how much less one who is abominable and corrupt, one who drinks iniquity like water!" (15:15-16). In this formulation, it is not mortality that brands humans as unclean, but their penchant for iniquity. The remainder of the speech is taken up with Eliphaz's description of the fate of the wicked, which is, as already discussed, to be subject to change and bound toward the ultimate change of death. Still, that Eliphaz echoes the spirit's language shows that he has not dismissed the spirit's position. He continues to use human mortality as the safety net for his accusations against Job. In his third speech, Eliphaz again references the spirit's message, asking, "Can a mortal<sup>99</sup> be of use to God? Can even the wisest be of service to him? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are righteous, or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless?" (22:2-3). Once again, the gulf of mortality is what separates human beings from God and prevents them from being truly righteous; humans' best efforts at righteousness mean nothing to God because they can only ever be approximations.

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<sup>99</sup> The word here is גִּבּוֹר, not אֲנוּשִׁים, but the emphasis on mortality has already been established in the spirit's pairing of the two words and his focus on mortality as the preeminent human failing.

Having said this, however, Eliphaz goes on to deny the implications of these claims. He follows these questions, almost in the same breath, with questions that presuppose an entirely different view of the human capacity for righteousness. He asks, “Is it for your piety that he reproves you, and enters into judgment with you? Is not your wickedness great? There is no end to your iniquities.” (22:4-5). Job is punished, Eliphaz contends, not for the general sin of being mortal, something over which he has no control, but for the commission of specific sins, which Eliphaz details in verses 6-9. Although Eliphaz makes use of the spirit’s message, he never sits completely easy with it. He acknowledges that death is the mark of chaos upon every human being, but is quick to temper and obscure his acknowledgment. Although the mark of chaotic change may be on everyone, it is more evident on the brow of the wicked, whereas, on the brow of the righteous man it is so faint as to be almost invisible. In his third speech as in his first, Eliphaz urges Job to repent and promises that if he does so he will find himself living in a world unthreatened by change: “You will decide on a matter, and it will be established for you, and light will shine on your ways” (22:28).

It is, in fact, Bildad, in his final speech, who most fully embraces the idea that mortality is the sign that humans are hopelessly embroiled in chaotic change. Bildad’s third speech is short and Zophar’s third speech, which ought to follow it to complete the cycle, is absent.<sup>100</sup> It is almost as if Bildad, finding that Job has continued to reject the friends’ admonitions to repent, preferring to insist on his innocence, has pulled the safety brake. He cuts the discussion short by calling in the spirit’s message without qualification, in the light of which Job’s argument that he has not sinned is made irrelevant. Bildad says,

How then can a mortal [אָנִישׁ] be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure? If even the moon is not bright and the stars are not pure in his sight, how much less a mortal [אָנִישׁ] who is a maggot, and a human being<sup>101</sup> who is a worm! (25:4-6)

Although the dichotomy drawn between humans and God here seems to be based on size and not on life-expectancy, Bildad’s initial identification of human beings as “mortal” and his repetition of this designation shows that human mortality is as much at stake as human smallness. For Bildad, God is as justified in crushing a human being as a human being is in crushing a worm. Humans have the right to crush worms not just because they are

<sup>100</sup> Many scholars rearrange the third cycle of speeches in such a way that Zophar is assigned a final speech, insisting that the text must have been corrupted. Clines, for example, writes, “24:18-24 belongs to Zophar, not Job...26:2-14 belongs to Bildad, not Job...and...27:7-3 belongs to Zophar, not Job” (Clines 2006, 548). On page 629 of his commentary he provides a list of the ways other scholars have redistributed some of the speeches of the third cycle. I, however, see no reason for rearranging the speeches. If sense can be made of them as they are, redistribution seems unwarranted.

<sup>101</sup> Here the Hebrew is בֶּן־אָדָם, “son of a man,” perhaps intended to parallel יְלֹדֶת אִשָּׁה, “born of woman” which appears in 25:5. These phrases highlight human mortality, in that one who is born must also die.

relatively small in size, but because their natural lives are so short as to be hardly worth considering. The same goes for God who crushes a human being. In the scheme of time as it appears from God's perspective, the human's life has hardly been cut short at all. Of course, Bildad's description of how humans appear to God is concerned not only with human smallness and mortality, but also with human impurity. The human is described not as some kind of noble insect, like the industrious ant, for example, but as the most ignoble, a maggot and a worm. This impurity, though, can be seen to stem from human mortality, because this is how the spirit presents it in his nocturnal visitation and Bildad is clearly picking up on what the spirit has been reported to say. Bildad chooses to liken human beings to maggots and worms, because these are creatures associated with the grave and, therefore, with mortality. The human, like the maggot, is a creature of the grave. Both humans and worms have life for only the briefest moment, and it is on this basis that humans share the worms' impurity.

For Eliphaz, as he reports the spirit's message and tempers it to incorporate it into his own, and for Bildad, as he accepts the spirit's message wholeheartedly and speaks it as his own word, it is their mortality which prevents humans from participating in or contributing to the world as it ought to be, which is a stable, static world. As such, humans can only be forces of chaos, giving God full justification when he chooses to punish them, regardless of how they have behaved. If Bildad, in fully embracing the spirit's claims has pulled the emergency cord hoping to put an end to Job's arguments against God, he has failed. Job is not silenced by Bildad's last-ditch argument, but launches into his longest speech yet. The ones who are silenced by Bildad's emergency speech are, in fact, the friends. Zophar does not give a third speech, nor does Eliphaz begin a new cycle. Although Eliphaz has toyed with the view of the relationship between humans and God presented by the spirit, the spirit's claims are really at odds with what the friends believe about the human possibility for righteousness. When Bildad claims those views as his own and, by extension, those of his friends, all three are reduced to silence. Not only are Job's claims of innocence invalidated by the spirit, but the friends' own beliefs about the importance of righteousness are negated. Job can go on speaking because he has ceased to put any stock in what the friends say. The friends themselves, however, are struck dumb by their espousal of the spirit's pronouncements; they may not really believe the spirit's claims, but they cannot argue against them if they hope to use them to convince Job of the justice of his suffering.

Indeed, if we are reading the book as a unified whole, we might construe God's condemnation of the friends' words in 42:7 as a response to their appropriation of the spirit's views. Read this way, God's judgment against the friends is a censure of their

dishonesty. They are chastised for having professed beliefs that they do not actually hold, simply in order to silence Job. God's chastisement, then, is not a judgment against the friends for having believed the wrong thing—after all, in his speeches God has told Job that his view of the relationship between God and world is flawed, but in the epilogue claims that Job has spoken rightly (42:7)—but for having lied about their beliefs in order to triumph over Job and bring the discussion to an end in their favor, a plan that has backfired.

### *Job and the Problem(s) of Human Mortality*

Job, although he never agrees with the spirit that mortality justifies God's punishment of any person regardless of whether he or she is otherwise innocent or guilty, is deeply distressed by his own mortality and the constraints it puts on his ability to interact with God.<sup>102</sup> Job, as discussed above, is in agreement with the friends that the world as it ought to be is a static world and that change is evidence of chaos. Although in his speeches he sometimes wishes for death as an escape from his suffering, most of the time he sees death as problematic for one who desires to prove his righteousness. In chapter 9, he laments,

My days are swifter than a runner; they flee away, they see no good. They go by like skiffs of reed, like an eagle swooping on the prey. If I say, "I will forget my complaint; I will put off my sad countenance and be of good cheer," I become afraid of all my suffering, for I know you will not hold me innocent....For he is not a mortal, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together....If he would take his rod away from me, and not let dread of him terrify me, then I would speak without fear of him. (9:25-28, 32, 34-35a)

Here, although it is ostensibly God's overwhelming power which prevents Job from addressing him as an equal, that power is linked to God's immortality which is compared with Job's mortality. Job makes clear that his inability to find a suitable solution to his

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<sup>102</sup> Lloyd Bailey argues that in the Old Testament, "Protests against 'death' are aimed primarily at those qualities and situations which detract from life lived to the full (illness, alienation, persecution, doubt, and so on) or at a 'bad' biological death. They are seldom if ever directed against the appropriateness of death itself. The question 'Why should I (or we) die?' is not asked, except in particular circumstances where that immediate fate might be avoided through the proper course of action (e.g. Gen. 47:15). Death at old age does not raise the question of theodicy, in contrast to the misfortunes which may befall one within the bounds of the life span (e.g., in Job's case). The ultimate fate of all humankind is accepted as part of the definition of creaturehood, as part of God's good creation....There is no suggestion that the meaning of life is thereby called into question, in strong contrast to much modern Western thought" (Bailey 1979, 52). Indeed, as has been seen, in his first speech Eliphaz presents Job with the "good death" that will come to him if he repents and becomes, once again, a righteous man. Yet, as I will argue below, throughout the book Job does view death itself as problematic. If he were experiencing the world as stable, he might agree with Eliphaz's assessment of death as the welcome end of a well-lived life. Experiencing life as fundamentally unstable, however, Job views death as part and parcel of that instability. For Job, death contributes to and is a factor of the world as it ought not to be.

predicament is due to his mortality.<sup>103</sup> Job does not agree with the spirit that mortality equals guilt, but he does agree that his mortality prevents God from seeing his innocence, not because there is anything inherently wrong with being mortal, but because of the gap that exists between God's experience of temporal existence (or lack thereof) and how humans, as mortals, experience time.

In chapter 7, Job has already spoken of his mortality with regard to God's immortality, saying, "Remember that my life is a breath....while your eyes are upon me, I shall be gone" (7:7a, 8b), and "What are human beings that you make so much of them...?...For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be. (7:17a, 21b). In this chapter, Job cites his mortality as the reason for his unwillingness to restrain his complaint against God. Having reminded God that his life is a breath, Job goes on to say, "Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul" (7:11). Job has no patience because, as a mortal being, he is subject to the ultimate change brought on by death. In making this assertion, Job inadvertently confirms what the spirit has said about human beings as mortals. Job's mortality makes him unreliable; he changes before the eyes of those who behold him, and it is his knowledge of his inherent instability that loosens his tongue. After all, what does he have to lose by speaking out against God when in the end he will lose everything no matter what he does? Although in this way, Job confirms the spirit's assertion about the link between mortality and unrighteousness, he also uses the fact of his mortality as the grounds by which to bring his accusation against God. The spirit messenger has claimed that no human being, as a condition of mortality, can be righteous before God, giving God the right to bring calamity upon any human being he chooses, whether that person be righteous or wicked by human standards. Job, though, asks why God should concern himself with such lowly creatures as human beings. God may have the right to afflict any mortal he chooses, but this does not mean that God's *own* righteousness is not compromised by such behavior. A God who takes it upon himself to bring calamity upon mortals regardless of deserts cannot be anything but a bully. Human beings live a short while and then they die. Because of this, Job contends, God ought to let them be. Mortality, far from singling human beings out for punishment, ought to absolve them, in Job's view. That his life is short and that he will soon be no more is given by Job as the reason why God ought to pay him no mind. What does it matter to the eternal God what a creature who is here today and gone tomorrow does? Whatever that creature is doing will swiftly be cut short, without any need for God to intervene. As Job sees it, then, human

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<sup>103</sup> The word translated "mortal" in 9:32 is מָוֶת, but that mortality is the issue is made clear by verses 25-26.

mortality does not give God *carte blanche* in his dealings with human beings, as the spirit asserts, but, rather ought to block God from any mistreatment of them.

In chapters 7 and 9 Job approaches the problem of his mortality in different ways. In chapter 7 he presents his mortality to God as a kind of “pass,” which ought to excuse him from God’s scrutiny. God has no right to torment one whose days are so brief and fleeting. Here, Job also uses his mortality as his justification for speaking out against God; his impending and unavoidable death gives him the power to condemn God, for the worst that God can do to him is already his certain end. In chapter 9, by contrast, it is his mortality that Job cites as preventing him from attracting God’s attention in the way he would like to attract it. He does not contradict what he has said in chapter 7, but reflects on his situation from another angle. If, in chapter 7, he claimed that his mortality empowered him to speak out against God, in chapter 9 he recognizes that his mortality prevents him from being heard by God. He may speak out all he wants, but God will not hear because he does not view Job as an equal. In neither chapter does Job view mortality as a boon, or even as a neutral human characteristic. Even when he is being empowered by the thought of the unavoidability of death, Job views his mortality negatively. If he were not mortal, it would not be necessary for him to make accusations against God, for he would be able to bear God’s punishment in the knowledge that he will live to see better days. It is his mortality that makes it necessary for him to turn against the God who has turned against him; it is his mortality that necessitates a change in his attitude toward God and prevents him from remaining the same as he ever was.

In chapter 10, Job again brings up the issue of human mortality, but this time instead of wishing that he and God were on an equal footing, which would be possible if they had mortality in common, as he has done in chapter 9, here Job accuses God of behaving toward him as a mortal would behave. Job asks, “Are your days like the days of mortals, or your years like human years, that you seek out my iniquity and search for my sin, although you know that I am not guilty...?” (10:5-7a). Here, Job seems to return to the idea he introduced in chapter 7, although with a somewhat different focus. There, he had stated that, due to the brevity of human life, God ought to leave humans alone instead of watching them so as to be able to catch them sinning. Now, Job accuses God of engaging in a kind of game of macabre make-believe, in which he pretends that he is mortal and subject to the limits that characterize the lives of mortals. Mortals must watch their fellows to see if they sin. God, though, Job seems to imply, knows by virtue of his position who has sinned and who has not sinned. The perspective accessible to mortals is limited; their interpretation of what they see is largely up to conjecture. They must watch and weigh the evidence of their observations and draw conclusions as best they can, never

certain that they have got it right. God, though, sees differently. “Do you have eyes of flesh?” Job asks. “Do you see as humans see?” (10:4). God has access to full knowledge in ways that humans, because of their mortality, do not. For him to seek out Job’s iniquity and declare him guilty is a piece of play acting. God made Job, as Job goes on to detail, and so knows him through and through, and has no business making the kind of mistaken judgment a mortal human might make; to pretend that he knows no better is a lie.

Although previously Job has affirmed certain aspects of the spirit’s message that it is the gap between God’s immortality and human mortality that makes all humans sinners, here he contradicts that claim. If God views him as sinful, it is because God isn’t acting like God, like the immortal one who created Job with his own hands, but is behaving like a mortal. Here, as elsewhere in Job’s speeches, to be mortal is to be compromised, unable to participate in the stability that marks true order. By abandoning his rightful stability for the changeable position of the mortal, God undermines the order of the world and unleashes chaos.

In chapter 14 Job returns to the problem of human mortality, repeating his claim of chapters 7 and 10 that God should not bother watching one whose life is as brief as Job’s own. Here, though, Job’s tone seems mournful, where previously it had been sharply accusatory. Job says,

A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble, comes up like a flower and withers, flees like a shadow and does not last. Do you fix your eyes on such a one? Do you bring me into judgment with you?...Since their days are determined, and the number of their months is known to you, and you have appointed the bounds that they cannot pass, look away from them and desist. (14:1-3, 5-6a)

Because of their mortality, Job insists, humans must live by different terms than God does and must be subject to a different judgment. In the middle of this speech, Job asks, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” and answers, “No one can” (14:4). Here he is agreeing with the spirit that humans, because of their mortality, are inherently unclean. Mortality is a deep flaw in the human makeup, and renders humans incapable of true righteousness. Yet, where the spirit accords God the right to punish humans because of this inherent flaw, Job once again cites this unavoidable imperfection as the reason why God should “look away...and desist,” going so far as to point out that it is God who is responsible for creating humans as they are in the first place. How can God blame his creatures for an inherent uncleanness that he instilled in them? Job reminds God that if he has appointed the bounds beyond which humans cannot pass, he has no right to blame them for their inability to transcend those boundaries.

Continuing his speech, although Job has previously compared the brevity of human life to that of a plant, which grows and withers in quick succession (14:2), Job now contrasts human mortality with the relative immortality of a tree which, “though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump dies in the ground...at the scent of water...will bud and put forth branches like a young plant” (14:8-9). If Job regards order as static, we might be surprised to find that he favors the life-cycle of a tree, which dies and is reborn, over that of a human being, who lives and then dies and is no more. The tree would seem to have the more changeable existence, as it moves back and forth between life and death, flitting from this world to the next and back again. Yet, the tree which dies does not experience death as a complete change in its circumstances; its death possesses the promise of possible future life, making death into a phase of life. The tree continues to exist and is not eradicated by death, and, therefore, *does* participate in the stasis of the ordered world. Humans, by contrast, experience death as the ultimate change; their death is fully death, fully different from life because there is no spark of future life in it.

Craving a more stable existence, Job wishes that human life were like plant life, saying to God,

O that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath is past, and that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If mortals die, will they live again? All the days of my service I would wait until my release should come. You would call, and I would answer you; you would long for the work of your hands. (14:13-15)

The desire Job expresses here kills two birds with one stone. First, Job envisions a time when God will have changed his mind about how to treat him, when “my transgressions would be sealed up in a bag, and you would cover over my iniquity” (14:17). From Job’s perspective, it is not he who needs to repent, but God. Hidden in Sheol, Job will be able to wait out the time of God’s wrath, and will reemerge after God has realized that his affliction of Job was misguided. Secondly, the ability to move between the world of the dead and the world of the living, like a plant does, would remove from Job the stigma of mortality. Job would no longer be guilty simply because he is a human being whose life is bounded by death. Emerging from Sheol, Job would find God waiting to befriend him, not only because his misguided anger has been appeased, but because the one thing that could possibly mark Job as guilty has been removed. Immortal, Job is cleared of whatever guilt inheres in mortality.

As the chapter continues, however, Job rejects the possibility of an incubation period in Sheol. For him, death remains the mark of the fundamental changeability of human life. Job compares human changeability to that of a mountain, saying, “But the mountain falls and crumbles away, and the rock is removed from its place; the waters wear

away the stones; the torrents wash away the soil of the earth, so you destroy the hope of mortals. You prevail forever against them, and they pass away” (14:18-20a). The comparison is somewhat odd. Previously, Job has compared human life to that of a plant, pointing out the fleeting existence of both (14:1-2 and elsewhere). A mountain does not share this ephemerality. In fact, compared with the life spans of humans and flowers, mountains would seem to be immortal; any given mountain “lives” far longer than any human or any plant. Yet, as we have seen, Job has changed his mind about the lives of plants. They may seem brief and fleeting, but because of the plant’s potential for regeneration, are not. The plant only *seems* to die, but really goes on living. It is a fixture, unaffected by the real change that is death. The mountain, whose “life” cannot be considered fleeting is, nevertheless, similar to human beings in that both experience real change. The plant does not actually cease to exist, but both mountains and human beings experience irreversible change, leading up to the final change that wipes them off the face of the earth, either through death or erosion. Neither mountains nor human beings have any claim to stability and stasis; both are thoroughly changeable. Although this marks humans and mountains as chaotic, Job continues to lay the blame for this with God—“You prevail forever against them, and they pass away” (14:20a). It is through no fault of their own that humans and mountains are changeable entities. If there is a fault—and Job believes there is—then it is God who is responsible, God who, in creating humans and mountains and the forces that act upon them in the way that he has, has introduced change into what ought to be a stable cosmos.

### *The World According to God: The Stable Foundation of the Earth*

It is difficult to say whether the world described by God when he answers Job from the whirlwind is changeable or static. Chapter 38 begins with what seems to be a picture of stasis, when God asks Job,

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?...Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors...and set bars and doors, and said, “Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped”? Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place...? (38:4a, 5-8a, 10b-12)

These questions are surely meant to be answered, “you alone did.”<sup>104</sup> Interestingly, though, God’s seemingly mocking, “Surely you know!” would certainly be met by Job’s affirmation, “Yes, I do know who is responsible.” Job has never questioned God’s power or his role as creator; rather, Job has questioned the uses to which God has put his power. If God is trying to show Job’s ignorance, “Who did this?” is not the right question to be asking, and, for this reason “who” cannot be what is most at stake in this passage. Rather, what is most important is not “who”—which is already known—but “what.” God’s goal is not to convince Job that he is the creator, but to show Job *what* his creative activity entails.

Contrary to Job’s accusations that God has acted as an agent of change in the world, God here presents himself as the establisher of stability. Where Job has brought the charge against God that he “shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble; [he] commands the sun, and it does not rise; [he] seals up the stars” (9:6-7), God answers by insisting that, contrary to the charges advanced by Job, he is responsible for setting the earth in its place and for commanding the sun to rise on a daily basis. In the world God has created, the earth is firmly fixed in place and the alternating cycle of day and night is set. *What* God is responsible for is stability, not the upheaval of random change, as Job has argued. God does mention change in this first section of his speech, but it is change that occurs as part of a regularly recurring cycle. With each dawn, the earth “is changed like clay under the seal, and it is dyed like a garment” (38:14), but, presumably, every evening the earth changes back to its old color, only to change again with the dawn to the color it was the previous dawn. This is not the kind of change that Job has accused God of instigating; instead, this is change which happens within stasis, and which, indeed, is a mark that stability prevails.

The rest of God’s words do not primarily address the question of whether the world is or ought to be static or changeable, but instead focus on presenting the world as a complex place, filled with a multiplicity of creatures and a variety of paths, as discussed in the previous chapters. Yet, when God shows Job that each creature has its appointed place in the world, he does seem to be describing a stable, static world.<sup>105</sup> The wild ass, for example, has been “given the steppe for its home” (39:6a), and the eagle “lives on the rock and makes its home in the fastness of the rocky crag” (39:28). God cautions against trying to make any creature live where it does not belong. The wild ass cannot be made to live in the city or to pull a cart for a driver (39:7), neither can the wild ox be made to live on a

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<sup>104</sup> See pages 77-79, 110-111.

<sup>105</sup> I realize that here I am writing about space instead of about time. Yet, as I will show below, the spatial arrangement of the world described from the whirlwind affects how it exists in time.

farm and pull the plow (39:9-12); efforts to force a creature to occupy a place other than that ordained for it by God will be futile.

The world is, therefore, like a kind of zoo<sup>106</sup> (created, perhaps, for God's viewing pleasure), in which a great variety of creatures live in pens or cages (albeit invisible ones), separate from each other and never crossing boundaries in such a way as to affect any change. The wild ass's cage is the steppe, and the boundary which it will not cross is marked by the borders of the town. Likewise, the sea is contained by the shore, which acts as the boundary which it cannot cross. Things happen in this world, of course, but they happen within set boundaries which their happening does not disrupt. Deer give birth (39:1-4), the wild ass "ranges the mountains...and searches after every green thing" (39:8), "the hawk soars, and spreads its wings towards the south" (39:26). To this list, we might add, from Job's own vision of the static world-as-it-ought-to-be, Job "sits as chief and...lives like a king among his troops" (29:25). Yet, the fact is that Job does not currently occupy this position. Instead, "Terrors are turned upon me; my honor is pursued as by the wind, and my prosperity has passed away like a cloud" (30:15). If God is presenting the world as it ought to be as static, then Job is in agreement with him. If, however, God is presenting the world as it *is* as static, then Job must beg to differ. Job has undergone profound changes in his circumstances, even though he himself has not changed and has sworn that whatever befalls him in life he will not change. Job, as we have seen, can only vouch for his changelessness during his life, for he knows that death, when it comes, will change him utterly.

We must ask, then, whether God is really presenting the world as it is, or just as it ought to be. And if God is describing the world as it both ought to be and actually is, is he describing a static world or a changeable one? Is he saying to Job, "You're wrong in supposing that you're beset by change, because the world I created is static"?—as he seems to be saying in the opening of his speech when he recalls the founding of the earth—or, if we go deeper into his speeches, do we find him to say, "The world as it ought to be is not static but changeable"? It seems to me that this latter alternative is what we find.

### *God's Changeable World*

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<sup>106</sup> Terence Fretheim writes that, answering Job, "God does not take Job into the temple or into the depths of his own soul, or insist on some ancient equivalent of C.P.E. God takes him to the zoo, or better, out to 'where the wild things are'" (Fretheim 1999, 89). Yet, there is a great difference between animals in a zoo and animals in their natural habitat; "zoo" and "where the wild things are" do not describe the same thing, even different degrees of the same thing. As I will show below, "zoo" is the wrong term altogether for what God shows Job.

We have a hint that God is describing the world as changeable, at least to a degree, when he asks Job, “Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no one lives, on the desert, which is empty of human life, to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass?” (38:25-27). Although here, again, the question God begins with is “who?”, what is primarily at stake is “what.” It is not *who* has done this that God wants Job to recognize, but rather, the fact that such a thing is done in the ordered world. Though stated in terms of fructifying—of making barren land productive—and not its reverse, what God is describing is essentially the same kind of change that Job accuses him of causing when he claims that God “removes mountains, and...shakes the earth out of its place” (9:5a, 6a) and “makes nations great, then destroys them” (12:23a). Job accuses God of both building up and tearing down, though his emphasis is certainly on the tearing down. It is the changes wrought by destruction, not creation, of which Job accuses God. Still, in the topsy-turvy world that Job describes as reality, albeit one that should not be, God is the agent of change who both raises up and casts down, and for God to admit to one side of the equation is certainly significant. Due to God’s action, the land that was a desert is changed into fertile grassland. The use of the term “waste” further links this passage to Job’s chapter 12 accusation, and serves as an answer of sorts.<sup>107</sup> Those who were once great have been made to wander in a pathless waste, Job charges. God does not deny that this is so, but does show that in the world as he has created it the wasteland can put forth grass; it need not necessarily remain a wasteland, but can change into fertile ground. That is to say, something else might happen. Job, despite accusing God of being an agent of change, has viewed that change as cyclical to the degree that it becomes static, though Job does not seem to recognize that this is the case. He says, essentially, “God builds up, then God tears down, then God builds up, then tears down, and on and on *ad infinitum*.” In these verses, read as a response to Job’s accusation, God does not deny that change happens or that he is responsible for its happening, but he does reject Job’s pronouncement that all change is cyclical and, therefore, predictable. These verses present a world that is, actually, *more changeable*, than the world presented by Job in chapter 12. What happens

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<sup>107</sup> Admittedly, the Hebrew words translated “waste” are not the same in both passages. In 12:24, the word is תִּהְיֶה, while in 38:27 it is שָׁמָּה. Whereas תִּהְיֶה has overtones which link it to the pre-creation void, שָׁמָּה connotes land upon which disaster has come and which, consequently, has been laid waste. It is used in Isaiah 47:11, for example, and translated “ruin” in the NRSV: “ruin shall come on you suddenly.” It might be argued that the שָׁמָּה of 38:27 is a more thoroughly wasted land than is the תִּהְיֶה of 12:24, but it is hard to say. What can be stated more definitively is that שָׁמָּה is a more concrete term. It relates to actual, physical land. תִּהְיֶה, on the other hand, has a more metaphorical ring. God is speaking about actual land, whereas Job is speaking metaphorically.

is what is not foreseen. Those who have entered the wasteland may not find their way out of it, but the wasteland may change in such a way that they are able to survive there.

Of course, it is easy to read these verses (38:25-27) as a positive assessment of the changeability of creation as that which allows for hope. We might react quite differently if this passage were slanted the same way as Job's accusations of chapters 9 and 12. If God had said, instead, "Who has withheld the rain from the fertile ground where all the people live so the land becomes a desert which can no longer support them?" we might find ourselves exclaiming, along with Job, that God ruins everything that seems established for good. Yet, even though the passage describes a positive change and not a negative one, its view of the world is not that of the Disneyland happy ending. The new fertility of the desolate land does not preclude once fertile land from becoming desolate; that is, it does not prevent other changes from happening, even negative ones. More significant to the import of the passage, though, is that it talks about God bestowing the gift of fertilizing rain "on a land where no one lives, on the desert, which is empty of human life" (38:26). From the immediate human perspective, the change that occurs in the desert, though it may be positive, is of no benefit to anyone. God does not depict himself fertilizing the land where humans live, but the place from which they are absent. This is certainly jarring. It is a Disney movie gone askew, in which it is neither Cinderella nor one of her stepsisters who catches the prince's eye and wins his affection, but some third person who didn't figure in the story at all. It is not Cinderella who weds the prince, indicating that all is right with the world, nor one of her sisters, indicating that all is wrong, but another person altogether, someone we have never even seen, indicating that all is neither right nor wrong, but *weird*. In the same way, God does not tell Job that he improves the lot of the righteous, nor that he improves the lot of the wicked, but that he improves the lot of the land where no one lives, some land Job has never even seen.

Is this passage, then, only about multiplicity and not about change? Is its only message that, like the wild ox, who is valued by God despite his unwillingness to serve humans, so the wasteland is valued, despite the fact that no one lives there. I do not think so. A change is clearly described: the land is first desolate and then it becomes fertile. What needs to be asked is what happens to the desolate wasteland after it has been rained on and has put forth grass. Does it change once, and afterwards stay the same? Is this a case of change which occurs in the service of stasis, the sort of change of which Job and his friends approve? Having been rained upon, does the land remain as it was with the exception that, where once it was barren, now it is covered with vegetation? Does it remain a place empty of human—and other—life, or do creatures which did not live there before start finding their way in? Do humans find their way there, so that the place can no

longer be described as “a land where no one lives”? It seems possible and, given the fact that human civilization tends to go where the water is, likely. Is this what God intends? Does God foresee this occurrence? It should not, of course, be said that God sends the rain on the desolate ground *so that* humans can move in and inhabit it. To make this claim would change the whole import of the passage, making the rain on the desolate ground not a sign of God’s valuation of what is other than human but of God’s valuation of what is only human. That the passage should not be read this way is shown by the worth God accords to the other-than-human in the rest of his speeches.

At the same time, I do not think it should be claimed that God, having bestowed fertility on the desert, would view the incursion of humans and other animals as a chaotic invasion of beings who should have stayed in their own places. For God to view the movement of humans and others in this way is for him to take a static view of the created world, to view it as a kind of zoo. If the world is a zoo, then I have been wrong to identify this passage as evidence of the changeability of the world. The rain in the desert must be viewed, instead, as something that happens within established boundaries which are not transgressed, just like the deer giving birth in the wild or the wild ass roaming the steppe. It is change, but so limited that it does not reveal the world as changeable and God as open to change. I do think, though, that the passage *is* about the changeability of the world and God’s approval of such a world. The desolate ground bringing forth grass is not the same kind of happening as a mountain goat giving birth or a hawk soaring towards the south. Such things are happenings, but they are not changes. The desert becoming fertile ground *is* a change, and that this change is approved by God is indicated by his claim of responsibility for it. If God has created a world where change is possible it cannot be that God is open to one change but would view others as marring his creation.<sup>108</sup> Rather, if it is

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<sup>108</sup> This logic is somewhat flawed. Of course it is possible to be open to one change and not to another. I may welcome the change involved in winning the lottery while ruing the change that comes from breaking my leg. Yet, in the case discussed above, it does seem to me that God’s openness to changing the desert to fertile ground indicates his openness to other changes, such as empty land becoming populated. But what support is there for this claim? Is it anything more than a hunch? I base my claim on the nature of the change and the context in which it is described. If God were speaking of change in the service of stasis, his words would not surprise Job. Making the desert into fertile, habitable land, which will remain fertile and habitable ever after, is what is expected of God. Robert Leal points out that “Several of the prophetic books, notably Isaiah and Ezekiel, contain extended visions of an ideal situation to follow the judgment, reconciliation and salvation of God’s people....[These visions] tend to exclude the natural aspects of wilderness and transform them into features that are more conducive to human (and divine) comfort” (Leal 2005, 372). In Isaiah 40:3-4, for example, the prophet presents a vision of the future making-right of the world which involves the transformation of the wilderness into land easily traversed by humans. Indeed, it is possible to read God’s question in Job 38:25-27 as making the same kind of claim. God is telling Job that he is the one who makes the chaotic wasteland into ordered land that can be used by humans. Leal reads the verse this way, writing, “This view of wilderness as essentially chaotic is pursued further in Job through the depiction of God as being victorious in his battle against chaos. God alone is able ‘to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass’ (Job 38.27). In this sense God’s victory over chaos is associated in Job, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, with the coming of rain and fertility” (*Ibid.*, 374). Yet,

good for desolate land to become fertile, it must also be good for human beings and other creatures to move into land that was once unoccupied. The first change begets the second, and so on. Here, the possibility of further change is dependent upon the multiplicity of created beings.

It is because creation is inhabited by a great variety of creatures that the created world is not static. Creatures move from one place to another. They encroach on each other's territory. Their interaction causes change. Indeed, the accusation *hassatan* brings against God in the prologue is based on his assumption that the world is not structured like a zoo. He says to God regarding Job, "Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side?" (1:10a). If the world were structured like a zoo, with each creature occupying its own place and never coming up against the threat of encounter with another creature, then God would have been able to answer *hassatan*, "Of course I have put a fence around him. I have put a fence around everything. That's the way the world works. Now go do something useful for a change." Instead, God is cowed by *hassatan*'s claim, precisely because it suggests that he has been tampering with the way the world ought to work. God has been maintaining Job in a static situation, preventing anything that might induce change from touching him. Job and his friends, as has been seen, assume that stasis is the goal of creation. God's revelation in his speeches that the world was not created to be a changeless place shatters Job's illusions, but these are illusions for which God, in his fencing in of Job, is to blame.

### *The Purpose of Death in God's Speeches*

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the fact is that God does not present the wilderness in a negative light in his Joban speeches. Rather, the wilderness and the "wild things" which live there are depicted as the recipients of his special care. God's sending rain on the desolate land is described not as a battle against chaos, but as God's care for the land itself. The land is not conquered by God's activity, but satisfied. That this is God's attitude is what surprises Job. But how does this lead to the idea that God is open to change in the world? If God quenches the thirst of the desolate ground and does not do so for the sake of humans, so that they may find the desert a more hospitable environment, wouldn't it follow that God would want to keep the wilderness free from human life? Having achieved his goal of satisfying the desolate ground, wouldn't he want to keep the now-fertile ground in its current state, stable and eternally undisturbed? Perhaps. Perhaps I am thrust back upon my hunch, insisting, "No, that just doesn't seem right," but unable to explain why. But let me continue to try. If God has a static goal in mind for the desolate ground, the stasis he envisions is utterly different from the stasis envisioned as orderly by Job: the wilderness becomes fertile ground, but humans are barred from entering it, instead of the wilderness becoming fertile ground so that humans can enter it and make their dwelling there. "I agree with you that the world shouldn't change," God might be understood to say, "But what it shouldn't change *from* is something different from what you imagine." But this cannot be right. Somehow, although it seems paradoxical, it is the fact that the ground does not become fertile so that it may be taken over by human civilization (as in Isaiah and Ezekiel) which, simultaneously, opens it up to the migration of humans and keeps it open to further change. Humans who move into the now-fertile land cannot insist that it remain fertile, because it was not made fertile for their benefit in the first place. This is not land which has been transformed, once and for all, by an apocalyptic occurrence. Rain may come for a time, and then it may go, meaning that the land may be fertile for a time and then may turn, once again, to desert.

As his speeches continue, God touches on the difficulties inherent in a world that contains a great variety of creatures. One of these difficulties is the reality of death. It is particularly important to look at how God addresses the issue of death, given the problems human mortality poses for the stability of the cosmos, as identified by Job, his friends, and the spirit messenger. Actually, though, God never addresses the issue of human mortality head on. His first reference to the existence of death in the world comes in relation to the necessity of being fed. He asks Job, “Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert? Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?” (38:39-41). These verses seem to answer the question of why death exists in the animal kingdom, “Because it is necessary for animals to eat in order to live.” Death exists to support the multiplicity of life. Indeed, God follows these references to death with questions about birth, asking, “Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you observe the calving of the deer?” (30:1). The animals God names here are animals that might fall prey to lions, but he is not saying that some animals exist solely to support the lives of other animals through dying and being eaten. The attention he gives to the calving of the deer rules out this claim.

It is not only the need to eat that necessitates death. Death also happens when creatures “bump into each other,” so to speak. God describes the ostrich which “leaves its eggs on the earth...forgetting that a foot may crush them, and that a wild animal may trample them” (39:14a, 15a). The ostrich’s embryonic young perish simply because of where the ostrich leaves its eggs. Of course, God admits that this is foolish behavior. A wiser ostrich might leave its eggs elsewhere. Yet, God says, “though its labor should be in vain...it has no fear...When it spreads its plumes aloft, it laughs at the horse and its rider” (39:16b, 18). Despite the danger into which it puts its young, the ostrich is unconcerned. After, all, the species does survive in spite of its danger-incurring foolishness. Although the ostrich acts unwisely in leaving its eggs on the ground where they might be trampled and might expose them to less danger by storing them somewhere else, there is, in reality, nowhere that is entirely safe. A safe place would be a place wholly apart from other creatures, and there is no such place. God’s description of the ostrich, whose eggs are inadvertently crushed by other animals who are doing nothing more than going about their daily business, serves as a larger statement about the danger that is inherently present in a varied creation. Death happens because one happens to be where one happens to be, like eggs lying in a path which are accidentally crushed underfoot. Change happens because creatures interact. There is nothing sinister about it; it is simply a function of sharing space.

God's description of the ostrich which "laughs at the horse and its rider" transitions into a description of the horse whose nature makes it eager for battle. Of the horse God says, "With fierceness and rage it swallows the ground; it cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet" (39:24). Although the ostrich is pictured laughing at horse and rider, God describes only the horse. Although we would normally assume that horses go into battle at the bidding of humans, here it is the horse which seems in control. It is not because humans control it that the horse charges into the fray; instead, it is because of the horse's love of a fight that humans are carried into battle. The horse gallops toward its potential death because it has an adventurous nature. Like the ostrich, the horse also laughs: "It laughs at fear, and is not dismayed; it does not turn back from the sword" (39:22). The horse laughs because it is not afraid of death; its love of adventure cancels out any fear it might otherwise feel. Why, though, does the ostrich laugh at horse and rider? Is it because its foolishness causes it to giggle at most everything? No. The ostrich laughs because it sees that the horse and rider are no less foolish than it is itself and, indeed, are perhaps more so. The ostrich laughs at the rider because he thinks he is in control and that the battle serves his aims, when really the battle is instigated by the horse and his love of a good fight. The ostrich laughs at the horse because the horse's noble attributes—its "majestic snorting" (v. 20b) and its fearlessness—will land it in the same boat as the ostrich's eggs. The ostrich may be less than conscientious when it comes to protecting its eggs and rearing its young, but such foolhardy behavior pales in comparison with the horse's rushing into battle where it will no doubt get itself killed. The horse laughs at battle and exposes its breast to the thrust of the sword, but the ostrich laughs at the horse and leaves its young to fend for themselves, reasoning perhaps that surely they will do a better job of it than the horse does, and if not...well...somehow the species still manages to go on, and horses, too, continue to exist. The ostrich, though undoubtedly something of a fool, is also a philosopher.

In his speech so far, God has said that death exists in the animal kingdom for several reasons. First, animals have to eat, and what they eat, at least in some cases, is other animals. Secondly, death exists because the world is a crowded place and animals cannot help but bump into each other, sometimes causing harm. Thirdly, death exists because some animals—like the ostrich—cannot be bothered to try to avoid it (at least where their young are concerned) and others—like the horse—are blinded to its threat by the thrill of adventure. These animals risk death because something in their nature compels them to live in a particular way. In each of these examples, death is a consequence of life in an inhabited world. If lions did not exist, deer might not die. If other animals did not exist, the ostrich could be as lazy as it liked about its eggs and do so

with impunity. If humans did not exist, horses might not find themselves pierced with arrows, but might gallop to their hearts' content in empty fields. If horses did not exist, humans might not be carried into battle, but might sit at home tending their fires and grilling vegetables on the coals. In the world as God describes it, stasis can only be maintained at the cost of the multifarious creation; if complexity is to exist, then change must be a feature of the world.

Although God does not address human mortality outright, humans are present on the periphery of God's discourse about death. The ostrich, as we have already seen, laughs not only at the horse but at its rider, and it is human beings who brandish the spears toward which the horse, in its impetuous lust for adventure, rushes. It is humans whom the horse hears shouting and blowing the war trumpets (39:24-25). Humans are present in the battle, and perhaps it can only facetiously be said that they are there because of the horse's desire for a fight. Perhaps they have their own reasons for being there, possibly as foolish and unavoidable as the horse's own. However, where humans are most notably and jarringly present is as the slain, lying on the battlefield after the conflict is over. This depiction occurs after God has ostensibly left the subject of battle behind, moving on to a description of the birds of prey which live "on the rock and make [their] home[s] in the fastness of the rocky crag" (39:28), seemingly making the same point he has already made about the wild ass and the wild ox, namely, that these animals are part of God's good creation and have sanctioned places within it, set apart from human control. Once again, though, God is not describing the creation as a kind of zoo, with enforced and uncrossable boundaries between each creature.

This point is brought home, when at the end of his passage about the great birds, God returns to the battlefield, this time through the eagle's eyes, saying, "From there [the high, rocky crag] it spies the prey; its eyes see it from far away. Its young ones suck up blood; and where the slain are, there it is. (39:29-30). We are reminded of God's initial foray into the subject of mortality, where he asked, "Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?" (38:41), and we can now see that the question was a kind of trick and has a double answer. Previously we might have answered, "God provides food for the raven and its young," acknowledging that God has created the world in such a way that his creatures can be nourished, even if the nourishment of one depends on the death of another. Now, though, we see that the question "Who provides for the raven its prey" can be answered "human beings do," in that human beings, dead on the field of battle, become prey for scavenging birds. The question, "Why are human beings mortal?" is answered here, "Because ravens and eagles have to eat." This is God's answer to the claims Job and the friends have made about the

problem of human mortality. Both Job and the friends have seen human mortality as something that should not be, as a blot on human perfectibility. God's response is at once flippant and serious. Death is not something that humans ought to be able to avoid, nor does it mark them as unable to participate in the world as it ought to be. Rather, death is the *means by which* humans participate in the world as it ought to be. The world as it ought to be is inhabited by a multiplicity of creatures, and from this multiplicity stems change and also change at its most extreme, which is death.

Job's response to God's claim that humans are mortal so that scavengers can have something to eat is, understandably, bitter: "See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but will proceed no further" (40:4-5). It is one thing to accept that one's mortality designates one as a chaotic being, unable to fully participate in the order of the world, and quite another to swallow the idea that the world is ordered in such a way that one dies in order to feed dirty, scavenging birds. Both Job and Eliphaz have envisioned a way in which the problem of human mortality can be overcome, even if not through the literal avoidance of death (5:20-26; 29:18). For both, in the world as it ought to be, humans can get the better of death by ensuring, through their own righteousness, that their family line will continue after they are dead. God, though, presents no such option. In God's order, death feeds life, for humans and animals alike.

### *God Challenges Job to Afflict the Wicked with Change*

God begins his second speech by challenging Job to "look on all who are proud, and abase them. Look on all who are proud, and bring them low; tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below" (40:11b-13). If Job can successfully do this, God promises, "Then I will also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can give you victory" (40:14). Although these verses are often read as proclaiming that only if he can crush the wicked as God does is Job justified in finding fault with God, I do not think we are meant to understand them in this way, as discussed in chapter two. As already argued, God challenges Job not to beat him at his own game, but to make the world as *he believes* it ought to be, which is not the world God ever intended to make. In his speeches, Job has accused God of acting as the primary agent of change in the world, who brings humans to power and then topples them (12:13-25), and who founds the earth and then shakes it from its foundations (9:5-8). The changes wrought by God, Job has accused, are chaotic undoings of the order of the world. At the same time, both he and the friends have insisted that the wicked, who are allied with chaos,

ought to experience changeable lives, culminating in the ultimate change of death. God's words in 40:10-14 can be seen to address both Job's accusations and the assumptions which he and the friends share. The changeability that Job and the friends see as inherent—or ideally inherent—in the lives of the wicked is denied by God. Job is offered a go at making a world in which this is the case, but God seems to know that he will not succeed. The world may be a changeable place—and a place where change has God's approval—as is suggested by 38:25-27, but it is not a place in which change applies only to one group, while other groups experience stability. In addition, the passage can be seen to address Job's accusation that God manipulates people, situations, and even the earth itself to suit his whim. If God does not act directly upon the wicked in order to bring about changes in their circumstances, it seems unlikely that he acts as the source of change in the lives of others. The world is changeable, yes, and God has created it to be so—its changeability is a function of its complexity—but it is not changeable because God intervenes to bring one person high and cast another low. God may have established a world in which change is possible, but he does not control its changes in the way that Job supposes.

### *Job and "The Beasts": Survival in a Changeable World*

After challenging Job to remake the world as a place where change happens only to the wicked, while the righteous experience stasis, God progresses to a description of the great beast, Behemoth. Directing Job to "Look at Behemoth, which I made just as I made you" (40:15), God once again binds the human condition to the animal condition. Where previously God has spoken (albeit indirectly) of human death, explaining human mortality as that which allows the scavenging birds to be fed, now God speaks of human life, likening it to the life of an animal. There is, of course, debate over just what kind of animal Behemoth is<sup>109</sup> and over whether Behemoth is even an animal at all, or whether it is, instead, a mythic beast, a composite of known creatures which, together, make up the

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<sup>109</sup> Most contemporary scholars agree that if Behemoth is a natural animal, it is the hippopotamus, though other identities have been proposed. B. Couroyer, for example, argues that Behemoth is the wild buffalo, showing that of the nine traits which Behemoth is described as possessing, only four match the hippopotamus, while all match the buffalo (Couroyer 1975, 443). For instance, Behemoth's tail, which is said to be "stiff like a cedar" does not accurately describe a hippopotamus's tail, which is short and stubby, and not at all tree-like. Scholars frequently make up for this discrepancy by understanding "tail" to be a euphemism for "penis," but this, too, is problematic. Watson points out that "hippopotami have internal testes and a recurved penis. This translation would therefore only work if the knowledge of ancient Israelites about hippopotamus genitalia was as scant as that of most modern biblical scholars, which of course may be so" (Watson 2005, 340).

unknown.<sup>110</sup> The actual identity of Behemoth is not, however, important to my reading of the text. For my purposes, it makes sense to understand Behemoth—which literally means “beasts” (beast plural), and is by extension, understood to mean “great beast,” given that the singular pronoun is used to refer to it<sup>111</sup>—as representative of the animal kingdom as a whole. Read this way, the purport of God’s reference to Behemoth is not the comparison of Job to one specific animal, but the comparison of Job to all animals. The animals that inhabit the world were created by God to the same degree that human beings were created by God. Animals and humans are, collectively and to an equal degree, God’s creatures. In this section, God does not question Job or urge him to try his strength to see if it can equal God’s own. The passage, until its final verse where God asks, “Can one take it with hooks or pierce its nose with a snare?” (40:24), is entirely descriptive. Even this verse does not question Job directly—God asks, “Can *one* take it?” (יִקַּח) not “Can *you*”—making the verse less about what Job can do and more a continuation of the description of Behemoth.

What is the significance of the descriptive nature of this passage? I am in agreement with John Gammie who suggests that Job is meant to see himself in Behemoth, particularly the potential which he shares with the beast (or with beasts in general) to face whatever dangers may threaten. God depicts Behemoth as a powerful, yet peace-loving creature, which has been created and given a place to live within the created world. God says, “Its bones are tubes of bronze, its limbs like bars of iron....Under the lotus plants it lies, in the covert of the reeds and in the marsh” (40:18, 21). The river in which Behemoth lives is not always calm, but, “Even if the river is turbulent, it is not frightened; it is confident though Jordan rushes against its mouth” (40:23). Gammie writes that the import of this passage is that like Behemoth, Job too has “the defenses with which he may vigorously resist all attack,” as well as “the sexual strength to start again” (Gammie 1978, 226). I would add to this interpretation the idea that Job has been given what he needs to survive in a changeable world. Or, that is, at least to survive for a time. It cannot really be said that Job has the strength to “resist all attack.” He is not immortal, and neither is Behemoth.

God’s message, though, would seem to be that Job is stronger than he thinks he is. Previously, while complaining of his situation Job had asked, “What is my strength, that I

<sup>110</sup> See the discussion in chapter 1.

<sup>111</sup> Dhorme writes, “The form is nothing more than the plural of בְּהֵמָה (12:7), and it makes of בְּהֵמֹת a designation of majesty, the brute beast par excellence” (Dhorme 1967, 619). Pope, too, explains that the name is “an apparent plural of the common noun *behemah*, ‘beast, cattle.’ The verbs used with the noun in this passage are third masculine singular thus indicating that a single beast is intended and that the plural form here must be the so-called intensive plural or plural of majesty, The Beast, par excellence” (Pope 1965, 268). At the same time, Pope argues that the name has mythic overtones, and that Behemoth may be related to “the monstrous bullock of the Ugaritic myths and...the Sumero-Akkadian ‘bull of heaven’ slain by Gilgamesh” (*Ibid.*, 270).

should wait....Is my strength the strength of stones, or is my flesh bronze? In truth I have no help in me, and any resource is driven from me” (6:11a, 12-13). God’s answer is that Job’s strength *is* the strength of stones and his flesh *is* bronze, just as Behemoth’s bones are tubes of bronze and its limbs bars of iron. Job is not without resources. The resources that are available to the natural world are also available to him. Clearly, Job is not literally made of stone and bronze, just as Behemoth is not actually made of bronze and iron, but, as creatures of the God who also created stone and bronze and iron the link between their bodies and these materials is a close one; there is strength in flesh and bone. God has endowed Job, like Behemoth, with the resources to weather the changeability of the world in which he lives.

### *Leviathan as the Embodiment of Unpredictable and Uncontrollable Change*

Then God turns to speak of Leviathan. Ah, Leviathan. What a splash the monster makes and how easy it is to call that splash chaos—what should not be—instead of order. What are we to make of Leviathan and of God’s speech about it, which is so clearly a hymn of praise? In the first part of this section, God returns to the question format but soon abandons it again in favor of pure description. The questions in the first part of the chapter are addressed to Job and have to do with whether he is capable of capturing the mighty beast. “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fish-hook, or press down its tongue with a cord? Can you put a rope in its nose, or pierce its jaw with a hook? Will it make many supplications to you? Will it speak soft words to you? Will it make a covenant with you to be taken as your servant for ever?” (41:1-4). The questions continue along the same lines for another three verses, and then God answers the questions he has been putting to Job, saying, “Lay hands on it; think of the battle; you will not do it again! Any hope of capturing it will be disappointed; were not even the gods overwhelmed at the sight of it? No one is so fierce as to dare to stir it up. Who can stand before it? Who can confront it and be safe?—under the whole heaven, who?” (41:8-11). Those who read the chapter as a reenactment of the combat myth see it as God’s challenge to Job to try to be the one who creates the world by conquering the chaos monster. If Job cannot perform this most basic of God’s tasks, how can he presume to know how the world should function and how God should behave?<sup>112</sup> As already discussed, I do not think the Leviathan questions should be

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<sup>112</sup> Among those who read the passage in this way, Hartley writes, “Yahweh challenges Job to demonstrate his prowess by defeating in mortal combat the ominous creatures Behemoth and Leviathan. If he cannot master these symbols of cosmic powers, he will have to abandon his complaint” (Hartley 1988, 518). Similarly, Batto remarks, “the author of Job 40:15-41:34 has Yahweh challenge Job to play the role of creator, if he can, by subduing Behemoth and Leviathan, the traditional twin chaos monsters representing the

interpreted in this way. Rather, it seems to me that God includes himself among those “under the whole heaven” who cannot confront Leviathan and be safe.<sup>113</sup> Good supports this view, writing, “is Job 41.17 an admission that Yahweh, like the other gods, has his moments of terror before his astounding monster? The text does not say ‘the gods’...or ‘other gods’...but just, in the abstract generality, ‘gods’....Surely no claim is implied that Yahweh is not a ‘god’” (Good 1990, 363-64).<sup>114</sup>

If, in chapter 40, God has presented Job with Behemoth as a mirror to show him that, contrary to what he believes, he does have the resources to survive in a changeable and unsafe world, here, with his description of Leviathan, God acknowledges that, in the world as he has created it, there are forces and beings that pose the kind of threat that cannot be resisted. Leviathan is the supreme embodiment of that which is uncontrollable in the world, over which even God has no control. If the changeability of the world stems from its multiplicity, then Leviathan, whose inclusion in the ordered world marks the extremes to which its multiplicity is taken, is also the mark of its extreme changeability. In his description of Behemoth God has said that Job is equipped to survive some of the changes life throws at him, but in his description of Leviathan he concedes that Job is not equipped to survive all of them. And it is no use asking God to take control by subduing or binding Leviathan, because God cannot control Leviathan. Or perhaps Leviathan is not, necessarily, the representative of change that Job cannot survive, but only of change that he is powerless to resist. He cannot stop Leviathan’s onslaught, nor can he be safe in its presence, but who is to say what he might be capable of surviving? Behemoth survives the turbulent waters, so it is possible that Job, too, might survive the turbulent waters stirred up by Leviathan who “makes the deep boil like a pot” (41:31a). But then again, maybe not. Who can say? Job has resources, but his resources have a limit to them, as do, it seems, God’s. But if God can watch Leviathan recede, seeing the “shining wake” that it leaves behind it (41:32) as it swims away, then perhaps Job can, too, at least some of the time.

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dry wasteland and the unformed ocean, respectively. Since Job obviously cannot subdue the chaos monsters, Job has no right to challenge the Creator about the way he runs this world” (Batto 1992, 47-48). John Day, too, suggests that “the implication seems to be that, just as Job cannot overcome the chaos monsters Behemoth and Leviathan, which Yahweh defeated at creation, how much less can he...overcome the God who vanquished them. His only appropriate response is therefore humble submission to God” (Day 2002, 103). Rowold concurs with these interpreters, writing, “Leviathan is the fierce one who stands/stood against Yahweh...Yahweh’s challenge is that Job begin his moral governance with this primal beast. Of course, Job can no more master this task than he can perform any of those tasks detailed in the first speech of Yahweh” (Rowold 1986, 88).

<sup>113</sup> See my remarks in on pages 84-85, likening God’s description of Leviathan to his description of the wild ox, and drawing from this similarity the idea that God is not presenting himself as the champion who has defeated Leviathan but as the one who has created Leviathan to be free.

<sup>114</sup> In contrast to the great multitude of scholars who read the Leviathan chapter as depicting God’s control of Leviathan, Good seems to be unique in holding the view that God himself may be overwhelmed by Leviathan’s power, a view with which I agree.

After asking his final question, “Who can confront it and be safe?—under the whole heaven, who?” to which the answer is, presumably, “no one,” and, I would argue, “not even God,” God leaves off questioning Job and focuses his attention fully on Leviathan, singing a hymn of praise to this “king over all that are proud.” God’s description of Leviathan continues the theme originated in the questions of the first part of the chapter, namely the impossibility of conquering the beast. God enthuses,

I will not keep silence concerning its limbs, or its mighty strength, or its splendid frame. Who can strip off its outer garment? Who can penetrate its double coat of mail? Who can open the doors of its face? There is terror all around its teeth....The folds of its flesh cling together; it is firmly cast and immovable. Its heart is as hard as stone, as hard as the lower millstone. When it raises itself up the gods are afraid; at the crashing they are beside themselves. Though the sword reaches it, it does not avail, nor does the spear, the dart, or the javelin. It counts iron as straw and bronze as rotten wood. (41:12-14, 23-27)

God has described Behemoth as having bones that are tubes of bronze and limbs that are like bars of iron (40:18). Supporting the idea that, in Leviathan, God is describing an agent of change that Behemoth, and by extension Job, cannot resist, is the fact that the strong materials of which Behemoth is made are as nothing to Leviathan. To Leviathan, iron is like straw and bronze like rotten wood. Behemoth has no chance against this beast, but Behemoth does have a chance against plenty of other threats. Such is the nature of life in the world as God has created it.

It is significant that what God praises in Leviathan is its unconquerability, its inability to be subdued or bound, let alone killed. The crowning achievement of God’s creation is this uncontrollable beast. If Behemoth has held a mirror to Job, how does Leviathan function with regard to Job? Clearly, God’s claim that Leviathan is “king over all that are proud” serves to answer Job’s reminiscence about the world as it was and ought to be, where, he says, “I lived like a king among his troops” (29:25b). Job, who has seen himself as the crowning achievement of creation, is unseated by Leviathan. The static world favored and upheld by Job is toppled by the turbulent, changeable world ruled by Leviathan. Job, though, would never have counted himself as king of the proud. His subjects are meek and mild; they keep silence and draw back. The proud, at least in God’s words of 40:11b-13, are synonymous with the wicked. Are Leviathan and Job, then, kings of different realms, with Job ruling the righteous and Leviathan the wicked? Is God’s claim that Leviathan is “king over all that are proud” the equivalent of saying, “Leviathan is the proudest of the proud, and also, therefore, the wickedest of the wicked”?<sup>115</sup> I do not think so. The chapter’s ebullient praise of Leviathan’s characteristics prohibits this

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<sup>115</sup> See chapter 3, footnote 5.

interpretation. Leviathan's kingship is described by God as legitimate, which means that Job cannot call for Leviathan to be overthrown and the crown ceded to Job himself. In a sense, while Behemoth holds a mirror to Job, Leviathan holds an anti-mirror. Leviathan stands for everything that Job is not, and the world over which he is king is, in Job's view, a chaotic world. God, though, insists that the world ruled by Leviathan is the world ordered as it ought to be.

There is a sense, however, in which Leviathan, too, can be seen to hold a mirror to Job. Job, too, is a powerful creature. He does not have the power to completely remake the world according to his own vision, but he does have the capability to act unpredictably and uncontrollably. Although Job has assumed that God has complete control over human destiny and has accused him of acting as the agent of random change in human life and society, perhaps, in the Leviathan pericope, God is arguing otherwise. If Leviathan is not subject to God's control and, for this reason, earns not God's enmity but God's praise, then perhaps Job, too, has independence. Perhaps it is not true that "In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being" (12:10), as Job has claimed. If the life of the living thing called Leviathan is not in his hand, perhaps the life of every human being is not under God's thumb, for him to do with as he pleases. God is not the agent of change in the world. Rather, it is his uncontrollable creatures who shape and change the world, Job included. The ordered world, as God sees it, is a world over which he has relinquished control, over which he is not king, in which creatures are free to act as real characters and who, in consequence, act as agents of change. God has equipped creatures to survive in such a world, and yet death is also a reality, itself based on the great multiplicity of creatures which possess full reality.

### *The Laughter of the Animals in God's Speeches and Bakhtin's Carnavalesque*

Before leaving God's speeches behind, it seems worth touching, again, on the laughter that springs from the mouths of many of the creatures that God describes from the whirlwind. In her reading of God's speeches, Keller invokes Bakhtin's ideas about the role of laughter, quoting his claim that "Laughter is a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically" (Bakhtin 1981, 23). I have already written about the laughter of the ostrich and the horse, both of which are described as fearlessly laughing in the face of danger. The word translated "laugh" with both ostrich and horse as subject is לָחַץ. It is also used in God's description of the wild ass: "It scorns (לָחַץ) the tumult of the city" (39:7). The

ass laughs at a way of life in which it does not wish to participate, but it is also possible to see fear as the ultimate object of this laughter. Perhaps the ass laughs at the tumult of the city against the fear of being captured and taken there. Behemoth, though he is not pictured as laughing, is described as fearless. God says of this beast, “Even if the river is turbulent, it is not frightened” (40:23). Indeed, laughter might strike us as out of character for Behemoth, who is portrayed as placid by comparison with the frenzied horse and the foolish ostrich. Still, if Behemoth were the type to let loose with a laugh, we would, no doubt, find him laughing at the turbulent waters as an expression of his lack of fear. When we come to the final chapter of God’s second speech, we find that Leviathan, too, laughs to display its fearlessness when faced with potential death. We read, “Clubs are counted as chaff; it laughs (רָחַץ) at the rattle of the javelins” (41:29). Of course, Leviathan, with its impenetrable skin, may as well laugh at whatever weapons are thrust against it; if it is truly as invincible as God seems to say, even the direst threat is rendered laughable. If this is the case, Leviathan’s laughter is quite different from that of the ostrich, the horse, the ass, and Behemoth, all of which face the real possibility of harm and laugh in spite of it. Leviathan has cause to laugh; the others have no cause, but laugh anyway, mocking the unlaughability of their situations.

Is it a correct assessment to say that Leviathan’s laughter is qualitatively different from that of the other animals? Leviathan’s laughter *does* seem different, because its situation seems different. At the same time, however, the fact that Leviathan is not the only animal depicted as laughing, but is instead the final animal in a series of laughing—or at least fearless—animals seems to link Leviathan’s laughter to theirs and to indicate that all this laughter is of a piece. The series seems to move from the one who has the least reason to laugh through to the one who has the most reason to laugh, with each animal’s fearlessness being progressively more justifiable. The horse has more reason to be fearless than the ostrich—it is a mightier beast, described as majestic and terrible, while the ostrich is depicted only as foolish and lazy; the horse laughs at death, knowing that it gallops into danger, while the ostrich seems to be fearless only because it doesn’t know any better, because it doesn’t realize the danger into which it is putting its eggs and offspring. Behemoth, whose “bones are tubes of bronze, its limbs like bars of iron” is again more justified in being fearless than either the horse or the ostrich; it does not expose itself to death accidentally like the ostrich or purposefully like the horse, but faces the threats that arise naturally in the course of its life. And then there is Leviathan, which seems to have the right to laugh in the face of danger, because nothing can touch it.

Yet, though Leviathan might be the only creature for which laughter is really wise, God does not criticize the other animals for laughing in the face of danger. Even his designation of the ostrich as lacking in wisdom does not indicate his belief that the ostrich would be better off if it did not laugh. Although by laughing an animal may court death, taking risks that a wiser being might avoid, in a sense the only way to live is by being fearless in the face of danger and laughing at the threat of death. To do otherwise is to risk being paralyzed by fear. This is the substance of Bakhtin's claim, quoted by Keller in relation to the laughter of the animals in God's speeches. But, again it must be asked what this has to do with Leviathan, which laughs because it has nothing to fear. Perhaps the answer is that Leviathan does not know it has nothing to fear, but laughs, like any other creature, to overcome the fear it feels. Perhaps all these beasts are in the same boat, laughing to overcome their fears, because they do not know what the future holds.

Or perhaps the answer lies in the fact that there are times when all the animals' laughter seems justified. There are times when the ostrich's young survive, despite being uncared for by their parent, as is evidenced by the fact that there are ostriches. There are times when the horse is not killed in the fray of battle. There are times when Behemoth is not overwhelmed by the waters. Leviathan, God tells Job, always survives attack, but, when they *do* survive the dangers that assail them, the ostrich, the horse, and Behemoth are as invincible as Leviathan. They are not as reliably invincible, but their sometime survival justifies their laughter.

In his exploration of the medieval carnival as the interaction between "official culture" and "folk culture," Bakhtin links laughter to change. Official culture, in his view, is characterized by a denial of time; it locates itself in a timeless realm, insisting that its authority will be valid in every time and for all time. Official culture believes that it is endowed with eternity, where eternity is not merely a *surplus* of time, but, rather, time's *superfluity*; to invoke eternity is to abolish time. By contrast, folk culture, in its carnival mode, is able to uncrown official culture precisely through an invocation of time in its full potency. Time, which passes and which guarantees and ushers in change, is a carnivalesque force. It is precisely because time passes that it is possible to laugh at what seems to be fixed and immutable. Discussing the beatings and abuses heaped upon representatives of official culture in Rabelais' novels, Bakhtin observes,

They are all subject to mockery and punishment as individual incarnations of the dying truth and authority of prevailing thought, law, and virtues. This old authority and truth pretend to be absolute, to have an extratemporal importance. Therefore, their representatives...are gloomily serious....They do not see themselves in the mirror of time, do not perceive their own origin, limitations and end; they do not recognize their own ridiculous faces or the comic nature of their pretensions to eternity and immutability....They continue

to talk with the majestic tone of kings and heralds announcing eternal truths, unaware that time has turned their speeches into ridicule. Time has transformed old truth and authority into a Mardi Gras dummy, a comic monster that the laughing crowd rends to pieces in the marketplace. (Bakhtin 1984b, 212-13)

Claiming eternal authority, the representatives of official culture cannot perceive that time has invaded their supposedly extratemporal space and has burst it open, exposing it as a sham.

In Rabelais' portrayal of the uncrowning of official authority figures, as described by Bakhtin, laughter figures prominently. The ravages of time are hilarious. It is funny that those who claimed eternal authority have been proven fools and liars by the passage of time. Nor, Bakhtin claims, is the funniness of the situation due only to the fact that it is "them" and not "us" to whom this has happened, as if their hypocrisy has been exposed, allowing us to mock them while patting ourselves on the back for avoiding similar hypocrisy. The laughter of the "folk" or of the people in the marketplace cannot be attributed to their perception of themselves as immune to the power that has unseated the agelasts.<sup>116</sup> They know that time has the upper hand where they, too, are concerned. Bakhtin insists that carnival mocks not only agelast members of the official culture, but also the carnival's participants. He writes, "The people do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world. They, too, are incomplete, they also die and are revived and renewed" (*Ibid.* 12). This knowledge, however, provokes laughter, instead of grief or silent pensiveness, because, if Bakhtin is right, change is valued over immovability. Everything is understood to be in a state of becoming, and this becoming is affirmed over the preservation of a stasis that is equated with death. If there is an us/them situation in Rabelais as understood by Bakhtin, it is between those who affirm change and those who affirm changelessness. Those who recognize the unstoppable power of time and rejoice in the changes that time brings can mock those who claim extratemporal authority, but their laughter acknowledges that they themselves are also caught in time's current and will be swept away.

What, then, of the laughing animals in God's speeches? Can their laughter be linked to the laughter of the "folk" during carnival? Does it serve a similar purpose? And, if so, who is the representative of official culture at whose pretensions their debunking laughter is directed? Of course, I do not mean to contend that there is a direct correlation between the laughter of the "folk," as described by Bakhtin and the laughter of the animals in the whirlwind speeches, but only to suggest that Bakhtin's observations about carnival laughter may provide a lens through which to view the animals' laughter. Indeed, Bakhtin

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<sup>116</sup> Rabelais' term for the time-denying members of official culture

himself, with his coining of the term “carnavalesque” intended his insights to be applicable to areas of study beyond that of the medieval carnival alone. Terrien describes God’s speeches as presenting a “carnival of the animals” (Terrien 1971, 501), and although he does not mean that the animals literally participate in the kind of carnival staged by medieval Europeans, the phrase may at least gesture toward a reading of the animals’ laughter that looks toward the carnivalesque. For Bakhtin, when the people laugh their carnival laughter, they laugh not only in response to time’s unseating of the eternal dictates of official culture, but in order to bring about the overturning of what seems eternally established. To laugh at what is deemed unsusceptible to ridicule is to render that thing susceptible to ridicule, to cause it to crumble and force it to change, which is also the work of time. Laughter and time, then, work together to topple what has been declared wholly stable.

What, though, do the animals want to topple? At whom is their laughter directed? Is it directed at God? Is God the representative of official culture to the animals’ “folk” culture? I do not think so, although some scholars read the relationship in this way. Robert Fyall, for instance, writes, “Laughter is a sign of control; God laughs because he is in control: ‘The One enthroned in the heavens laughs’ (Ps. 2:4). The evocation of the grotesque here is amusing, but it is the amusement of the Creator who laughs with total knowledge and power” (Fyall 2002, 76). For Fyall, laughter means the opposite of what it means for Bakhtin. Whereas for Bakhtin, it is the powerless who laugh, for Fyall, laughter is the prerogative of those whose sovereignty is unchallenged. Here, it is not only that God is the representative of official culture, but that God has taken their only weapon out of the hands of the “folk.” God confiscates the animals’ laughter, and, in so doing, stops time. Fyall makes sense of the animals’ laughter by explaining it in terms of their participation in the world ordered by God’s power. He writes, “The ostrich, too, secure in her place in creation, can afford to laugh” (*Ibid.*). Yet, although it is true that God does not chastise the ostrich for her lack of wisdom, it can hardly be said that her life is presented as secure. Rather, the ostrich laughs despite her insecurity. Habel, too, transfers to God the laughter which is said in the speeches to belong to the animals. He claims that, although Leviathan may laugh “at the rattle of javelins” (41:29b) “In the hands of Yahweh...the defiant laugh of this sea monster can be transformed into a giggle or a game (as in Ps. 104:26)” (Habel 1985, 573). Leviathan still laughs here, but its laughter is robbed of power. It does not laugh so much as *simper*, batting its eyelashes at the God who has subdued it.

In both of these interpretations, God is represented as the official, while, at the same time, the animals are robbed of the laughter which might allow them to expose this official as subject to the vicissitudes of time and chance. Of course, the point Fyall and

Habel are making is precisely that God is not subject to these vicissitudes; God is not like one of Rabelais' overturnable agelasts, and so can laugh heartily in self-satisfaction. I do not, however, think that God is the official in this picture. If God laughs, it is not because he is in complete control, but because he has relinquished at least some of that control to the world he has made. His laugh is not the self-confident guffaw of the unchallengeable official, but a peal of delight in what he has made. Perhaps, also, God's laughter is like that of the animals who laugh in spite of fear and whose laughter generates change. If, in creating the world and its inhabitants, God has let go of his ability to control everything that exists, perhaps he, too, has need of laughter to fortify himself against the unknown future and to stave off fear.

Although God may be the obvious choice for the representative of official culture, I do not think the whirlwind God fits this bill. But if God is not the official, then who is? Having ruled out the first obvious answer, let me propose another: the representative of official culture is Job. Job is the one for whom the world as it ought to be is static, eternal, untouched by time. Job is the one who insists that the change in his circumstances is unjust and who calls for a return to the way things used to be. In fact, Eliphaz, in his first depiction of the stable life of the righteous man, has told Job that once he has repented and is restored, "At destruction and famine you shall laugh (לִשְׂמֹחַ), and shall not fear the wild animals of the earth" (5:22). Here, Eliphaz promises Job the laughter of the powerful, of those who have no reason to fear change. Yet, this is not the laughter of the animals as God describes it, nor is it the kind of laughter in which God's speeches would encourage Job to engage.<sup>117</sup> Job may claim his authority by an appeal to God's authority—as Newsom points out "In Job's construction, God functions...as the social and moral order writ large" (Newsom 2003, 196)—but this is not the God of the whirlwind.

The animals, to be sure, are not laughing *directly* at Job. They do not even see him. That they laugh, though, calls into question what he holds to be true about the world as it ought to be. Although Job has already been toppled from his position of power, he has clung to his belief that time and the changes it brings are precluded from the world as it ought to be. In God's speeches, however, the animals' laughter both acknowledges and affirms the changeability of the world, and God reveals himself as disinclined to prohibit their laughter. In Bakhtin's thought, laughter functions in two related ways. First, it is a

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<sup>117</sup> There is one other occurrence of לִשְׂמֹחַ in the Book of Job. In 30:1 Job says, "But now they make sport of me (לִשְׂמֹחַ), those who are younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock." Their laughing at Job does seem like the laughing of the folk at the agelasts. These are people whom Job describes negatively, in terms that are thoroughly animalistic, so that God's positive description of the animals, including their laughter, must be a response to what Job has claimed. The animals' laughter must be related to the laughter of what Job calls the "senseless, disreputable brood" (30:8a). I will discuss the relation between God's speeches and Job's speech of chapter 30 in more detail in the next chapter.

kind of “whistling in the dark,” without which it would be impossible to live in the unpredictable and uncontrollable world. This is the sense Keller picks up on in her Bakhtinian interpretation of the animals’ laughter. Secondly, it is a force for change, a way of harnessing the unpredictability and uncontrollability of the world by recognizing that whatever one’s situation, it will not last forever. The world is changeable and one laughs to get up one’s nerve to face that changeability, but one also laughs to create change, to debunk official culture, recognizing that it, like one’s own life, is ephemeral. Why does laughter function in this way? Perhaps because it is a delight to laugh, and, laughing, the world becomes delightful, whatever else it may be.

### *The Epilogue as Evidence of the Changeability of the World*

After God finishes his description of the ordered world as characterized by wild multiplicity and, in consequence, change, a strange thing happens. We return to the world of the prose tale, a world which God has shown does not exist. Although previously I have argued that both prologue and epilogue present Job’s vision of the static world-as-it-ought-to-be, in its present location the epilogue is experienced as an abrupt change. Just as Job has accepted—(or has seemed to accept, depending on how his response in 42:6 is interpreted<sup>118</sup>)—that the world is a certain way, it changes and takes on quite different characteristics. In fact, it becomes the kind of world that Job has been insisting ought to exist throughout his speeches. His efforts at remaining static despite changes to his circumstances, finally pay off. His circumstances are reconciled with his behavior, becoming similarly stable. The outcome of the story is as predictable as Job had argued it ought to be. He has argued that reward ought to follow righteousness, and, in the epilogue, it does. Forget about the ostrich taking its chances with its eggs and laughing all the while. It is not necessary to laugh against fear when the end so clearly follows expectation.

Yet, at the same time, there is a kind of laughter than runs through the epilogue. Some interpreters, in fact, have identified the Book of Job as a comedy, based on the happy ending of the epilogue, which reverses the downward trend of the rest of the book.<sup>119</sup> But if there is laughter in the epilogue, whose laughter is it and what does it signify? Newsom argues that, in its current placement, the epilogue functions as a kind of Bakhtinian “loophole” through which Job slips. Morson explains Bakhtin’s concept of the loophole, writing,

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<sup>118</sup> See the discussion of Job’s response in the conclusion.

<sup>119</sup> William Whedbee points out that a central component of comedy is “a basic plot line that leads ultimately to the happiness of the hero and his restoration to a serene and harmonious society,” a plot line which Job clearly follows (Whedbee 1977, 5).

Life in an artwork...possesses what Bakhtin calls "rhythm."...In understanding and planning a story, the author discovers the rhythm of the whole from its beginning to its end, the patterning that ensures closure and dictates the significance of everything along the way. In Bakhtin's terminology, rhythm therefore becomes the opposite of "loophole," the capacity for genuine surprise. (Morson 1994, 90)

For Newsom, the epilogue as loophole is evidence that even God cannot fully comprehend the world which he has created. Although God claims that righteousness is not the precondition for prosperity, Job discovers, in the end, that he is rewarded for his righteousness. God does not know everything after all and his question, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (38:2), which served to show Job that his own vision of the world was limited and insufficient, now reflects back on God himself. Job's vision is partial, but, it turns out, so is God's. Things can happen that God has not envisaged.

If Job laughs in the epilogue, it is not as a means of overcoming fear, but because he has been right about the world after all. If the epilogue is Job's loophole, however, having slipped through it he does not return to the static world he once envisaged as the embodiment of order. The events of the epilogue come as a shocking change, not a maintenance of the status quo. Experiencing his restoration as change, Job can no longer insist that the world is not changeable, nor can he disparage change as he once did, for it is change which has permitted him to occupy his new position.

Or does the epilogue ring with God's laughter? Some, like Pyper, see the epilogue as evidence of God's sadism; in it, God destabilizes Job by telling him one thing and then doing another. If this is the case, then the laughter of the epilogue is the crazed glee of the torturer who has sprung the trap on his victim. Pyper writes,

Job has to live on in the epilogue after the experience of his utter humiliation before God. Before the divine speech, Job is secure in his right to challenge God and demand justice....Afterwards, he has to live knowing how utterly dependent he is on God's grace. His restored prosperity can be no comfort to him as its precariousness has been made so abundantly clear to him....The comfort of his friends and family must ring rather hollow given their earlier desertion of him....His new children are a different matter. There is almost a fairy-tale unreality about them in their perfection and the whimsy of his daughters' names. The fact that he makes the unique provision for his daughters to inherit...along with their brothers may reflect the way in which his material possessions have...become...unreal to him. To top it all, he has to survive under these ambivalent circumstances for a hundred and forty years, twice a normal life-span. (Pyper 2005, 59-60)

In this assessment, the prose ending does not represent the loophole by which both Job and God are surprised, but, rather, God's final silencing of Job. How can Job complain now that he has been restored to his former position? He has been utterly silenced, and a

capricious but calculating God has the last word and the last laugh. Read this way, the epilogue is a dark ending to a dark book. The book has put God on trial and has pronounced the verdict “Guilty,” but it is a verdict that cannot be enforced. God is guilty of crimes against humanity, but humanity is powerless in relation to God, and so *in practice* humanity loses, even though *in theory* humanity has won the trial.

The interpretation advanced by Pyper is plausible. The bet between God and *hassatan* that sets in motion the murder of Job’s children and servants, the theft of his livestock, and the affliction of his body, followed first by God’s refusal to answer Job’s pleas, and then by God’s speech from the whirlwind in which God harps on Job’s insignificance and insists that there is no such thing as retributive justice, finally followed by God’s rehabilitation of Job’s fortunes, in seeming contrast to the claims about the workings of the world that he has just made, can all be seen as serving to highlight the cruelty of God. This God toys with Job, despite Job’s efforts to enter into honest dialogue with him. When Job uses legal language to refer to the complaint he wants to bring against God, indicating that he wants to put God on trial, he does so because wants God to be acquitted. Although Job wants it proven that God has wrongly afflicted him, what Job *does not want proven* is that God is, by nature, the afflicter of the innocent. Job firmly believes that God is not fundamentally *Guilty* in his relations with human beings. In Pyper’s reading of the book, however, God’s fundamental Guilt is precisely what *is* proven. It is not that a mistake has been made with regard to Job, rendering God guilty on a small scale but innocent on the large scale. Instead, God is shown to be fundamentally Guilty—capital G—in his relations with human beings.

Where, though, does this kind of reading leave us? Job, Pyper argues, is silenced by the rehabilitation of his fortunes; he has been paid off, and, even if the payment indicates his innocence, it prevents him from speaking what he knows about the Guilt of God. Does the reader of the book find herself similarly silenced by this reading of its meaning? I would argue that she does. She can see that God is Guilty in a large sense, but Job has seen this, too—he has experienced it first hand. Although, in this interpretation, part of what prevents Job from crying “Guilty!” from the rooftops is the hush money he has been paid by God, in the form of the rehabilitation of his fortunes, this is not the whole reason for his silence. At the end of the book, having discovered that God is Guilty, to whom is Job to address his accusation? Previously, when he called for God to meet him in court, Job counted on *God* to be the judge. God, whom Job envisioned as righteous by nature, was the one who would declare the verdict of guilty against himself in his affliction of Job. Now, though, who is to be the judge against God? Revealed as essentially Guilty, God cannot be appealed to as the upholder of justice. This does not, however, mean that

God ceases to matter; his Guilt does not make him any less God, at least as far as power is concerned. Job is faced with a God who is both utterly Guilty and absolutely powerful. Job cannot speak because he has no power in relation to God. Earlier, Job thought he had power, because he could appeal to God's true, righteous nature as his defense. In relation to the Guilty God, Job is rendered absolutely powerless. He cannot speak, because there is no one to speak to except other powerless beings like himself. And we, reading the book in this way, are rendered as powerless as Job. We regard each other mutely and shrug our shoulders.

Yet, the book's readers have not been rendered silent. Quite the opposite is the case. If the author meant to reduce the book's readers to silence, he has not succeeded, but I am not convinced that this was, in fact, his intention. It is even a matter of debate as to whether Job himself is actually reduced to silence by God's speeches of chapters 38-41. Newsom, as we have seen, views the prose ending as evidence of a loophole through which Job slips and which allows Job to *keep speaking* after God's speeches, which *might have*, but *do not* reduce him to silence. Elsewhere, Newsom wonders about how Job lived the 140 years between his restoration and his death, the details of which are not discussed in the book itself. Newsom answers the questions she poses by suggesting that

In many respects he probably behaved much as he always had: in uprightness and integrity. I suspect, though, that he understood the motivation of his deeds quite differently. I doubt that he cared much any more for gestures of deference. It probably did not matter to him as it once had whether the distressed blessed him for his help or not. Above all, I suspect that he looked on society's outcasts with rather different eyes....The horizon of his vision and the patterns he discerned were different. (Newsom 1994, 27)

Far from seeing Job as an anguished survivor, isolated by his suffering and unable to speak to anyone who will comprehend him, least of all God, in Newsom's view the result of Job's suffering and his encounter with God is his integration into his community in a new and deeper way. He no longer sees himself as above the fray of common mortals, but as joined with others in the joy and pain of what it means to be a human being.

Interestingly, Newsom points to Job's bestowing an inheritance on his three daughters as one of the details that supports this reading (*Ibid.*), a detail which Pyper uses to support his own, opposite interpretation. He claims that it is not because Job is so integrated into his community that he gives an inheritance to his daughters, but because he is supremely disillusioned, having learned the hard way that whatever seems to belong to him can be taken by force at a moment's notice. In Pyper's reading, Job is pictured as saying, in effect, "If I can't have the certainty that my wealth will continue to belong to me I might as well throw it away by giving it to the girls." To interpret Job's giving of an

inheritance to his daughters in this way seems, to me, to underestimate the significance of the action. It strips it of meaning, making it into a kind of shrug-of-the-shoulders, I-couldn't-care-less gesture, instead of a demonstration of purposeful intent. Pyper sees the Job who makes heirs of his daughters as a man completely resigned to his lot, a whipped dog who has lost the ability to care about what becomes of his earthly possessions.<sup>120</sup> It seems to me, though, that a Job as resigned to his lot as Pyper makes him out to be would not *bother* naming his daughters as co-inheritors with his sons. It is not the sort of action that would be undertaken lightly, without effort. It is not the action of one who has become so listless that he can only float where the current takes him; it is an action that requires exertion *against* the current of societal norms. Even if it is listlessness that first causes Job to disregard the norms, his disregarding of the norms allows him to *move*, to take an active part in carving out a new situation for himself, to be an agent of change in his own life and the lives of others.

One of the striking things about Pyper's reading of the epilogue is how it deals with issues of stasis and change. The world Pyper sees Job inhabiting in the epilogue is a world which is strangely subject to both stasis and change. It is, first, a world in which Job's "restored prosperity can be no comfort to him as its precariousness has been made so abundantly clear to him" (Pyper 2005, 59). That is, it is a world over which the threat of change hangs at all times and, in the face of which, Job can do nothing to establish stability or guarantee security. Yet, despite being a world in which the threat of change looms large, it is, at the same time, an utterly static world. What does Job do in the epilogue? He lives out a dreary, disillusioned double-lifetime, never forgetting his suffering, never moving on. Job's first moment in "epilogue-time" is exactly like his last. In this way, Pyper presents Job as inhabiting a world that is simultaneously utterly changeable and utterly static. This inherent contradiction casts doubt on the validity of Pyper's interpretation. He is, it seems, concerned to present Job's situation in the most negative light possible. He claims that negative change is possible, but not positive change; Job's situation could get worse at any moment with no warning, but there is no way for his situation to get better. If only negative change is possible, we might be led to suppose that Job would prefer a static situation, one in which his restored wealth, family, and friends are

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<sup>120</sup> Indeed, Pyper likens Job-after-the-whirlwind to one of Pavlov's dogs. Like the dogs, Job, after being "bombarded with contradictory stimuli" is "reduced to an abject and listless silence" (Pyper 2005, 51). James Reynierse, undertaking a "behavioristic analysis of the Book of Job," makes a similar comparison, writing, "The present analysis compares the behavior of Job with the phenomenon of 'learned helplessness' from behavioristic learning psychology. Such a comparison indicates that there is almost perfect correspondence between Job's circumstances and the necessary experimental conditions which produce 'learned helplessness' in the laboratory" (Reynierse 1975, 81). That is, Job's passivity corresponds to the passivity of lab animals which have received random shocks instead of shocks which can be correlated to specific behaviors. I am not convinced, however, that Job is as listless as Pyper and Reynierse presume.

not threatened by the possibility of being removed from him. Stability, too, however turns out to be a bad deal, as Job is forced to drag himself through 140 years of a life forever soured by suffering, with no possibility of reprieve. Job lives a life of absolute stasis threatened at every moment by absolute change, and both are rotten.

In Pyper's analysis, God is in complete control of Job's life, able to dictate when he will experience stability and when he will experience change. In this way, Pyper affirms Job's previous claim that "In his [God's] hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being" (12:10) and Job's insistence that "I have no help in me, and any resource is driven from me" (6:13). God howls with laughter through the epilogue because, although he has given Job everything he asked for (full restoration of his wealth and position, and then some) Job remains unsatisfied, haunted by the sneaking suspicion that he has been the victim of a cruel joke, which, indeed, he has. Job will live out his static life, loathing his situation, but at the same time fearing change, and powerless to do anything about either.

Yet, as I have already noted, it does not strike me that the Job of the epilogue is dissatisfied with his lot and powerless to do anything to change it. If he has learned anything from God's depiction of the animals, he need not fear change in the same way that he once did. "All this could be taken away" must ring in his ears not as a threat that he knows to be real because he has already experienced its enactment, but as a fact of what it means to be alive. Like the ostrich, the horse, Behemoth, and Leviathan, he is empowered to laugh at fear and not to be paralyzed by it, as Pyper contends he is. In addition, as I have already said, naming his daughters as inheritors does not strike me as the gesture of one who is so exasperated with his powerlessness that he can think of nothing else to do but to throw the false indicator of his power (that is, his wealth) in the garbage can. It is, rather, a definitive action, an action that displays a sense of power and purpose. (That it is an action which gives power away does not lessen the empowerment of the one performing the action.) In performing this action, Job shows himself to be an agent of change in the world, against his prior claim that God has complete control over the life of every living being. He changes his daughters' lives, by giving them an unexpected inheritance, but he also changes his own life. He is no longer simply one who is "like a king among his troops." He is now one who has acted against societal norms and given his daughters an inheritance. Who he is has shifted, and he himself can claim at least partial responsibility for the change.

I do not, therefore, think that the laughter of the epilogue belongs to God in the sense that Pyper claims. God does not cackle over his cauldron, stirring up an epilogue that identifies him as victorious villain and Job as his victim. If God laughs over the

epilogue it must be laughter of quite a different sort, laughter, I would argue, that is linked to Job's own laughter at the discovery of a loophole. In Newsom's reading, the loophole belongs to Job, who escapes being pinned down or fully defined by God's explanation of the world. Although it is true that Job finds that things turn out differently for him than God has predicted, his escape is not a "narrow" one. That is, he does not escape his suffering and reap reward *despite* the way in which God has created the world, but *because* of it. In his hymn to Leviathan, God reveals that he has created a world filled with real characters who are capable of surprising him, and to be thrilled that this is the case. If, in Leviathan, God rejoices over a creature that exceeds his control, in the epilogue God must rejoice over a world that exceeds his control. The surprise of the epilogue's events must strike God as happy evidence that the world is actually real, that it is not just his personal fantasy. God has told Job that the righteous are not rewarded as a matter of course; the workings of the world are far more complicated. However, the workings of the world turn out to be so complicated that Job, the righteous man, does end up reaping reward for his righteousness: what was originally expected to happen happens, but only after it has been shown to be unexpected!

Read this way, the epilogue contains the laughter of both Job and God—Job, because he has survived his suffering and has ended up reaping reward, God, because he has told Job, in his depiction of the animals, that it is possible to survive life's trials and dangers, and because the epilogue ending comes as a complete surprise, but one that happens in a world that he has described as changeable and capable of generating surprise. If anyone else laughs in the epilogue, it must surely be Job's daughters, who themselves reap unexpected reward when their father gives them an inheritance. Far from clinging to his restored wealth, as he might do were he afraid of what it would mean to let it go, Job is profligate with it, bestowing it where it is not deserved or expected. In this, Job mirrors, in a certain way, God's creative activity. Just as God has let the wild ass go free and given it the resources to live free from human (and also divine) control, so Job gives his daughters the financial wherewithal to be free from male control. This freedom from his and others' control creates them as separate, real characters. If Job's bestowal of an inheritance is a surprise to them, they themselves are now free to work their own changes, their own surprises. The epilogue, which, in its current position, appears as a change in both Job's circumstances and in the world as God has described it, is a place in which change generates change and surprise gives rise to surprise. If there is laughter in this, there must also be a degree of fearlessness, which, God has claimed, is signaled by laughter. God laughs and fearlessly creates in such a way as to relinquish control. Job laughs and fearlessly gives an inheritance to his daughters. The daughters laugh, and who can say

what they will do? If such fearless laughter signals a degree of foolishness—which in the case of the daughters, their names might suggest<sup>121</sup>—well, there are worse things to be than a fool, and, indeed, sometimes it is necessary to be a fool in order to face the changeable and unpredictable world.

### *The Author's Vision of the Changeable World*

It is clear that the author of Job has written the world of his book to be changeable, rather than static. The book is shot through with change, both in its shifting genres and in the turns of its plot. It moves from prose, unexpectedly to poetry, and then, doubly-unexpectedly, back again. The friends claim that Job will not be restored unless he repents, but then he is restored, without repenting. Job claims that his integrity will win him reward, and though his life does turn sweet, it does so not as reward in the sense that Job had expected, and its amelioration seems to have little to do with his integrity. The dialogue between Job and the friends progresses, and, just when it seems to be winding down, another character appears, seemingly out of the blue, and lends his voice to the discussion. Elihu, the unexpected and late-arriving character, claims that God will not appear to Job (“The Almighty—we cannot find him” [37:23a]), and immediately God appears and begins to speak. Elihu also makes claims about what God will have to say—“he is great in power and justice, and abundant righteousness he will not violate (37:23b)—but when God speaks he does not seem at all concerned with the issues Elihu has put at the top of his agenda. Job, too, has expectations about what God would say were he to appear, and these, at least in part, are thwarted. Even God makes claims that are shown to be erroneous. God claims that, in the world he has created, the righteous do not reap reward, but immediately afterward Job does reap reward, or, at least, finds his fortunes restored. The world created by the author is a topsy-turvy world, a world where the unexpected happens and where surprise is the order of the day.

There is, in fact, much in common between the world created by the author and the world described in God’s speeches, not least the fact that, just as God is able to be surprised by the world he has created, so, too, the author is able to be surprised by the

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<sup>121</sup> According to Anthony and Miriam Hanson, the daughters’ names can be translated “Dove,” “Cassia,” and “Box of Antimony,” which they paraphrase as “Swansdown’, ‘Lavender’, and ‘Mascara’” (Hanson and Hanson 1953, 118). That the girls are named after beauty products is, perhaps, a sign of foolishness on at least someone’s part, if not their own. Of course, other interpretations of the significance of the names are possible. Stephen Mitchell suggests that the beauty-product names “symbolize peace, abundance, and a specifically female kind of grace,” indicating that “the story’s center of gravity has shifted from righteousness to beauty, the effortless manifestation of inner peace” (Mitchell 1989, xxvi). For John Wilcox, the daughter’s names emphasize their sexuality and draw attention to what has been revealed in God’s speeches, “the amoral goodness of the natural order” (Wilcox 1989, 218).

world within the book that he has made. Having orchestrated the surprise ending to Job's story by attaching the prose ending, he must himself be surprised to find that the ending is actually fitting. The epilogue resonates with the poetry in unsuspected ways. For example, the surprise of the events of the prose ending mirrors the surprise which Leviathan is capable of creating as a supremely free and real character, and Job's bestowal of an inheritance on his daughters, making them into free, real characters, mirrors God's creative activity. Attaching the poetry to the prose tale, the author transforms the meaning of the story of Job. But, having forced together two totally different narratives, the poet discovers that they are, somehow, apposite, and the fact that they don't fit together is, in large measure, what *makes* them fit. Discovering this, the poet must gasp, and, if he has taken his own lessons to heart, must also laugh. The world of God's making eludes God's grasp in the author's telling, and, it turns out, the world of the author's making eludes his own grasp, as well.

Earlier in this chapter, interacting with Fontaine's reading of Job as a folktale/shamanic tale in which the goal of the book is Job's transformation, I said that although it may be the case that the *author* is telling a story about Job's transformation, Job himself does not conceive of his situation in this way. Unlike the hero of a folk story and unlike a shaman, Job does not think that he is on a Quest, walking a path fraught with danger and difficulty that will lead to his transformation, from frog to prince, from ordinary mortal to one who communes with the divine, or whatever. Job has no goal except to go back where he came from. It is time now to ask whether the author has a goal, if Job does not. If Job does not view his experiences as telling the story of his transformation, does the author view them in this way? I have to confess that I don't know. It must first be asked whether any transformation takes place. Does Job change in the course of the book? If not, then it can hardly be said that the author is telling the story of Job's transformation. Although, above, I have made the case that the epilogue functions as evidence of the changeability of the world and have argued that, in the epilogue, Job shows himself to have embraced change, it is possible to read it as meaning something else. Perhaps the appearance of the epilogue is not, after all, evidence of the changeability of the world as it ought to be, but is only an instance of change in the service of stability, the kind of change that Job and his friends sanction throughout the book, but which does not qualify as real change. When I read the epilogue as part of Job's daydream, I saw it as a picture of a fully static ordered world. In the next chapter I will read the epilogue again and come to yet another set of conclusions. Much hinges on the meaning of the epilogue, a meaning which needs further investigation before it can be fully pronounced (*if* it can be fully pronounced).

In addition, if the Book of Job functions like Bakhtin's polyphonic novel, in which the author's position is not superior to that of the characters, then it cannot be said that an authorial proclamation of "Transformation!"—(like a magician whisking aside a curtain to reveal that what was previously a dove has become his lovely assistant, Rita)—holds sway over the characters' own insistence that no change has taken place. At the same time, in chapter two I argued that, even in polyphonic novels, the author still retains some power over the characters, because it is the author who dictates what the fictional world will be like. The world is, at least initially, his world, even if he subsequently dives into it and relinquishes his importance. If a character wanted to create the world in a different way, he would find that he could not, no matter how much independence he has been granted. In the Book of Job, the author has created a changeable world and so, even if he is surprised by some of the changes that happen, he cannot be *fundamentally* surprised. What would surprise him fundamentally would be the shutting down of change in the world he has created. If the world of the book became unchangeable, the author's expectations would be shattered. Can it be said, then, that even though the Book of Job may function like Bakhtin's polyphonic novel, the author really can claim that he is telling a story about transformation and have that claim borne out by the book? Can he wave his wand and shout, "Transformation!" and show us that this is what has really happened to Job? After all, if the ground is moving under Job's feet, Job cannot stand still, no matter how much freedom over his own limbs he may possess. Yet, I am reluctant to say that the author does use his magical powers to effect Job's transformation. The ambiguity of Job's response to God and of the epilogue lingers (like the grey feathers stuck to Rita's skin and the beak-like hook of her nose), suggesting that, despite the changeability of the world he has created, one of his characters, Job, might have somehow managed to choose another world in which to live—a stable world, in which no change happens. I will return to this question in my conclusion.

## CHAPTER 5

## THE SPATIAL LOCATIONS OF ORDER AND CHAOS: INSIDE AND OUTSIDE

*Inside as Order and Outside as Chaos*

In my introductory chapter I argued that chaos and order are not fixed concepts but function as “umbrella terms,” each capable of covering a variety of definitions, some of which are contradictory. It is for this reason that I have adopted general definitions for chaos and order—“how the world ought not to be” and “how the world ought to be,” respectively—and have used these definitions to explore what the characters in the Book of Job think chaos and order are like. I have asked whether they perceive order as primarily simple or complex, whether they think of chaos as primarily static or as a state of change. The oppositional pair “inside/outside” functions somewhat differently with relation to chaos and order than the pairs already examined. This pair is tied in a far more fixed way to the terms it defines. Whereas either chaos or order may be defined as simple or multiple or static or changeable, when it comes to the inside/outside pair, inside can be seen to define order, while outside defines chaos. The world “inside” is the world as it ought to be, while the world “outside” is the world as it ought not to be. The inner world has boundaries which must be protected against the incursion of the chaos which exists outside those boundaries. The inner order may be simple or complex, it may be static or changeable, and the outer chaos may, likewise, possess any of these characteristics, so long as the attributes of each space are opposites, but the fact remains that what is inside is order, while what is outside is chaos.

Why, though, should this be? Why should what is inside be synonymous with order, while what is outside corresponds to chaos? And, equally importantly, what is it that designates a space as “inside” and another as “outside”? From whose perspective are such classifications made? In a way, both questions can be answered by the recognition that where “I” am is inside, and where “I” am is also the location of order. Eliade explains,

One of the outstanding characteristics of traditional societies is the opposition that they assume between their inhabited territory and the unknown and indeterminate space that surrounds it. The former is the world (more precisely, our world), the cosmos; everything outside it is no longer a cosmos but a sort of “other world,” a foreign, chaotic space, peopled by ghosts, demons, “foreigners.” (Eliade 1961, 29)

It is easy to see why this would be so, and not just for “traditional” cultures. Where I am—or, by extension, where we are—must be the world. Inasmuch as whatever is beyond

the boundaries of our world threatens our world, it cannot be called a world, because our world is the world; it follows that the world beyond the boundary of our world is chaos, the world as it ought not to be. The inside/outside distinction arises naturally.<sup>122</sup>

There is a second aspect of the inside/outside distinction which Eliade elucidates: not only is the inside world characterized as order because it is where we are, but the inside world is primarily designated as order because it is where God is. Eliade writes,

We shall see that if every inhabited territory is a cosmos, this is precisely because it was first consecrated, because, in one way or another, it is the work of the gods or is in communication with the world of the gods. The world (that is, our world) is a universe within which the sacred has already manifested itself....The sacred reveals absolute reality and at the same time makes orientation possible; hence, it *founds the world* in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world. (*Ibid.*, 30)

That is, it is the contact of the divinity with the space in which we dwell that makes it cosmos and that designates us as insiders. Where we are is where God has been and has instituted order. The world beyond is where God has not been, and has not instituted order, and is therefore chaos.

Mary Douglas, in her book *Purity and Danger* writes of the importance of boundaries and boundary-making to the creation and maintenance of order. She says, “It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created” (Douglas 1966, 15). Here, although Douglas suggests a connection between boundary-making and order-making, she does not yet claim that inside the boundaries is where order resides. She does this later when she writes, “The idea of society is a powerful image. It is potent in its own right to control or to stir men to action. This image has form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure. Its outlines contain power to reward conformity and repulse attack” (*Ibid.*, 137).

Douglas’s ideas are similar to those propounded by Eliade, though stated differently. She does not use the term order to describe what is contained within the boundaries of human society, nor does she call what is beyond those boundaries chaos. Nevertheless, she notes that what is inside attempts to remain inside. Conformity to the behaviors associated with being on the inside are rewarded at the same time as attempts by

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<sup>122</sup> It is, of course, possible for “me” to inhabit chaos, instead of order. If, for example, I conceive of the temporal location of order as sometime in the future, as compared with present chaos, then where I am is chaos and not order. However, it is also the case that when the time comes for order to exist, I will locate it as the place where I am. Even if, temporally speaking, I live in a chaotic present, I project myself into the ordered future, using my imagination. It may also be possible for me to believe that I inhabit chaos spatially as well as temporally-speaking. In this case, though, it seems that I would conceive of myself as inhabiting a place outside the inside space where I actually belong, and I will do what I can to move inside. See more discussion of this issue beginning on p. 166.

whatever is outside to cross the boundaries and get in are repulsed. To conform to certain accepted behaviors is to maintain the boundary around the group—“We are the ones who do this.” Conversely, to engage in deviant behavior would be to open a breach in the boundary, allowing something external to enter in, even if the behavior was instigated by an insider. For Douglas as for Eliade, the world as it ought to be is the world inside the boundaries of a given human community, while the world beyond those boundaries represents what ought not to be and which, therefore, must be kept out. The outer chaos is kept out by specific behaviors on the part of the inside group, including both efforts against those inhabitants of the outside realm who attempt to break through the boundary to get in and efforts to maintain the cohesion of the group that is contained within the boundary.

Turning from anthropological assessments of cultures in general to the Bible, we find the same inside/outside distinction at work. In his discussion of the disposal of impurity in the Bible, Robert Wright points out that

All examples of the riddance of idolatrous impurities from Kings and Chronicles, except for 2 Chr 33:15, explicitly state that the disposal occurred in the Kidron Valley. Also of note are the locative phrases ‘outside’ (2 Chr 29:16), ‘outside Jerusalem’ (2 Kgs 23:4, 6), and ‘outside the city’ (2 Chr 33:15). The mention of the Kidron as the disposal place and the locative phrases show that the concern was to remove the impurity from the city’s boundaries. (Wright 1987, 285-86)

Here, we see that what does not belong as part of the world-as-it-ought-to-be, is put out beyond its boundaries. Here, as elsewhere, order is inside, where we are, and chaos is outside, where we are not. In a way, this point is so obvious that there is not much that can be said about it. *Of course* what does not belong inside is put outside—where else would it be put? And of course inside, *here*, is where order resides.

Whereas Wright speaks of what does not belong inside being put out, Benedikt Otzen writes about what belongs outside trying to get in. Otzen claims that common to ancient Israel and its neighbors,

is the idea that chaos still threatens the world of man, despite the fact that it was originally defeated, or perhaps tamed, at the creation. The desert may force its way into good arable land and make it uninhabitable by man; death may “ease his tentacles” into human existence in the forms of illness and sin, which can wreck man’s existence; and death itself is the final reality to which every man is subject. Moreover, at any moment the primordial sea, which lies beneath the earth and above the firmament of heaven, may break through and annihilate the cosmos, as in fact happens in the story of the flood. (Otzen 1980, 36-37)

Otzen, of course, is referring to the combat myth which, it has been argued, may not actually be present in the Bible's depictions of creation.<sup>123</sup> In addition, I have argued in my introductory chapter that the combat myth is merely one aspect of the discussion about chaos and order, and should not be taken as representative of how chaos and order are conceived across the board. Yet, at the same time it is true that chaos and order are oppositional concepts and, as such, are in conflict with each other regardless of whether combat along the lines of the *Chaoskampf* is envisioned. In the biblical narratives, chaos as an active force *may not* have been "originally defeated...at the creation." Despite this, it is still possible to think of chaos as present beyond the boundaries of the world, and possible to see it as threatening to break through those bounds. Where Eliade and Douglas speak of the inside/outside distinction as a feature of cultures in general, Otzen identifies this feature as present in biblical culture specifically. He sees the flood as a breakthrough of chaos into the ordered world. In the world as it ought to be, dry land ought not to be overwhelmed by water, because, if it is, the human community cannot survive. In the flood, then, the world becomes as it ought not to be—it is subsumed by chaos—regardless of the fact that this breakthrough of chaos, as Otzen points out, is sanctioned—indeed, caused—by God.

According to Otzen, the designation of inner space as order and outer space as chaos was a fundamental aspect of the worldview of the ancient Israelites.<sup>124</sup> Robert Cohn, in his exploration of sacred space in the Bible, notices the same inside/outside distinction at work, but with an important twist. Corroborating the views expressed by the scholars quoted above, he writes, "Salvation is being within Yahweh's land; exile is always catastrophe" (Cohn 1981, 2). To be inside Yahweh's land is to be inside the world as it ought to be, which is the world as it ought to be both because we are there and because Yahweh is there and has put us there. However, Cohn's simple sentence brings up a heretofore unnoted issue. If we are exiled from our land, then are we no longer inside? Or if inside is where we are, then does inside shift when we move, so that wherever we are is inside? As Cohn presents it, the former is the case. He argues that the boundaries of

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<sup>123</sup> About the comparative method which has linked biblical creation accounts to those in other ancient Near Eastern mythologies, Watson writes, "This has resulted in an approach whereby a divine conflict with the sea, characteristically resulting in creation, is often assumed in passages where the pretence of such allusions could hardly be supposed on the basis of the biblical text itself. Thus, a picture is drawn, according to which there are numerous references to Yahweh's battling with the waters of chaos and thereby bringing the cosmos into being, without there being any clear statement or account of such an idea in the Hebrew corpus, and despite the many inconsistencies between such a notion and much of Old Testament theology" (Watson 2005, 2). See the discussion on pages 8-10, 13-17 of this thesis.

<sup>124</sup> Otzen writes, "No matter how these myths were employed in the cult, the Israelite cult was in any event permeated on all levels by what was termed the 'total world-view' of myth, the understanding of existence as determined by the tension between cosmos and chaos. In short, it was the task of the cult to reinforce the cosmos and combat the destructive forces which assail it" (Otzen 1980, 59).

inside are defined primarily by the gods, in this case Yahweh. It is Yahweh who designates a place as inside. It is, therefore, not quite correct to say that where we are is the inside, ordered world and the boundaries around our community mark the boundary between inner order and outer chaos, because it is possible for us to find ourselves in exile, outside those boundaries. In light of this, our claims about what designates a space as inside or outside must be refined. Let us say, then, that inside, if it is not where we are, is where we ought to be. When we find ourselves where we ought to be, then we inhabit order. When we find ourselves where we ought not to be, then we inhabit chaos, and must concern ourselves with finding our way into ordered space.

### *Wilderness as Chaos*

This is precisely how Cohn views the wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan. Even though the Israelites found themselves in the wilderness, this did not transform the wilderness into an ordered realm. Rather, the wilderness journey was a trek through chaotic space, a journey from the non-world outside into the world as it ought to be. Cohn writes,

The Hebrew *midbār*, ‘wilderness,’ and related wilderness terminology are not simply neutral geographical designations but occur with generally negative connotations in the Bible....[*M*] *idbār* is the periphery, the undomesticated, the uncivilized....It is the dwelling place of wild and demonic creatures...and the refuge of outlaws and fugitives. The Pentateuchal narrative views the wilderness in light of these negative connotations....The difficulty of life in the wilderness is repeatedly contrasted with the security of life in the promised land. The wilderness is desolate; the land is fertile (Deut. 8:1-10). The wilderness is chaos; the land is rest. (*Ibid.*, 13-14)

Cohn points out that the wilderness was viewed negatively by the Pentateuchal authors despite the fact that the wilderness journey was a time and location “of divine protection and favor” (*Ibid.*, 14). God’s presence with the traveling Israelites did not serve to transform the wilderness into inner space. Rather, the ordered realm remained the promised land of Canaan.

One might be tempted to think that if a community finds itself in a particular place in the presence of its God, it would consider itself to be already inside, and would set up boundaries around itself, proclaiming the outer world to be chaos. This, though, does not happen in the Pentateuch’s telling of the wilderness journey. Cohn continues, “The Pentateuch’s overall evaluation of...[the wilderness journey] is overwhelmingly negative. The trek is a punishment more than a rite of passage;...The Pentateuchal vision of the wilderness period is not one of nostalgia for a liminal time to be recaptured but one of

hope for its termination” (*Ibid.*, 20). The wilderness in which the Israelite community finds itself does not become the inside world, even though their God accompanies them on their journey, precisely because God, despite his presence, has proclaimed that the true inside world—the one he has created for them—lies elsewhere. Until they reach that land, the Israelites will be outsiders, by God’s decree.

It seems possible that this may have to do with the strength of the wilderness as a symbol for outsidership. The wilderness is constitutionally outside and, as such, cannot be made into an inside world even if a community and its god finds itself there.<sup>125</sup> Of course, here I am contradicting what I have already claimed, namely that chaos and order do not have set characteristics but have their characteristics determined by how any given person or group conceives of the way the world ought and ought not to be. If wilderness is always outside and is, therefore, always chaotic, despite the fact that groups and their gods may find themselves inhabiting the wilderness, then chaos can be said to have certain inalienable traits, namely the traits of wilderness. Yet, I do not think this fully disproves my claims about the unfixability of definitions of chaos and order. It would be possible for a group to dwell in the wilderness and consider itself as inhabiting an inside world around which boundaries that should not be transgressed are fixed. The ancient Israelites, however, were not such a group. For them, it seems, we can say that the wilderness was synonymous with chaos, and that chaos possessed the attributes of wilderness. This was so

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<sup>125</sup> Some scholars contend that a positive portrayal of wilderness does exist in the Bible in the writings of the prophets who recall the wilderness journey as the time when Israel was faithful to Yahweh, before the people’s apostasy in Canaan. In support of this position, Andrew Louth writes, “the period of the wandering in the wilderness, in contrast to the period that followed when...the Israelites began to settle in Palestine, is often regarded by the later prophetic tradition as a kind of golden age. Renewal of the covenant, so often breached by Israel, is frequently seen in terms of a return to the desert” (Louth 2003, 33). In the same way, Roland de Vaux points out that in the Bible “we do encounter what has been called the ‘nomadic ideal’ of the Old Testament. The Prophets look back to the past, the time of Israel’s youth in the desert, when she was betrothed to Yahweh (Jr 2:2; Os 13:5; Am 2:10). They condemn the comfort and luxury of urban life in their own day (Am 3:15; 6:8, etc.), and see salvation in a return, at some future date, to the life of the desert, envisaged as a golden age (Is 2:16-17; 12:10)” (de Vaux 1961, 14). Yet, de Vaux also stresses that “nomadism in itself is not the ideal....If the Prophets speak of a return to the desert, it is not because they recall any glory in the nomadic life of their ancestors, but as a means of escape from the corrupting influence of their own urban civilization” (*Ibid.*). Most scholars seem to concur with this caveat, and many of them take it further than de Vaux does. Shemaryahu Talmon, for example, writes, “the theme of ‘disobedience and punishment’ is of much greater impact on the subsequent formulation of the ‘desert motif’ in Biblical literature than is the concept of the desert as the locale of Divine revelation and of Yahweh’s love for Israel. The idealization of the desert, which scholars perceived in the writings of some of the prophets, derives from an unwarranted isolation of the ‘revelation in the desert’ theme from the preponderant ‘transgression and punishment’ theme, with which it is closely welded in the Pentateuchal account of the desert trek. The widespread opinion that ‘the pre-exilic prophets for the most part [sic!] interpreted the forty years as a period when God was particularly close to Israel, when he loved his chosen people as the bridegroom his bride,’ (Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought*, pp. 15-16)...rests on the slender evidence of two passages, Hosea 2:17 and Jeremiah 2:2....A closer analysis of this theme...indicates that it is of minor importance” (Talmon 1966, 48). Leal, too, contends, “Though several biblical commentators deny the presence in the prophetic books of negative attitudes towards the wilderness, they are there to be found....[W]ilderness and desert are frequently perceived as not only undesirable through lack of comfort; they are also the haunt of wildlife inimical to humans and they contain evil creatures” (Leal 2005, 371).

precisely because their world as it ought to be, namely the promised land of Canaan, was literally surrounded by wilderness. From the perspective of those inside the world as it ought to be, wilderness appeared as what lay beyond the boundaries of their community. Thus, because of its outside location it became synonymous with chaos and remained so, even when the Israelites found themselves inhabiting it. *Theoretically*, wilderness need not be associated with chaos, but in practice it often is, and in ancient Israel, as depicted by the Bible, it certainly was. As Brueggemann writes,

Wilderness is not simply an in-between place which makes the journey longer. It is not simply a sandy place demanding more stamina. It is a space far away from ordered land....Wilderness is the historical form of chaos and is Israel's memory of how it was before it was created a people. Displacement, in that time and our time, is experienced like the empty dread of primordial chaos, and so Israel testifies about itself. (Brueggemann 1978, 29)

Writing about more recent times, Roderick Nash in his *Wilderness and the American Mind* notes that

European discoverers and settlers of the New World were familiar with wilderness even before they crossed the Atlantic. Some of this acquaintance was first-hand....Far more important, however, was the deep resonance of wilderness as a concept in Western thought. It was instinctively understood as something alien to man—an insecure and uncomfortable environment against which civilization waged an unceasing struggle....Anyone with a Bible had available an extended lesson in the meaning of wild land. (Nash 1982, 8)

It was not just for ancient Israel, then, that wilderness was associated with outer chaos, but those culturally much closer to us also shared this view, partially because of the Bible's depiction, but not entirely. Nash is concerned to show how the attitudes about wilderness held by the European settlers have influenced and affected their descendants' dealings with the American wilderness up through the present day. Later in his book Nash makes an observation that is relevant to our discussion of inside and outside as related to order and chaos. He points out that wilderness can only be defined over against civilization, writing, "wilderness is an entirely human concept, an invention of civilized man" (*Ibid.*, 270). Similarly, Ian Holder asserts, "the wild and the natural are not themselves 'natural' categories....[They] are created as categories in order to form the domesticated and the cultural, and vice versa. In the opposition and juxtaposition of the cultural and the wild society is dialectically created out of its own negative image" (Holder 1990, 11). These claims suggest that wilderness, by definition, is that which is outside human community, and human communities are created by its exclusion. If this is the case, then wilderness can be equated with chaos, simply because of its outsideness, and not because of any other trait it possesses. If a space is not outside, then it is not wilderness. Those who inhabit space which one group considers wilderness, do not see themselves as inhabiting

wilderness, because the territory is inside the boundaries of their community and not outside.

*An Overview of the Relationship Between Inside/Outside Locations and Order and Chaos in the Book of Job*

In the section above I have attempted to show that the ideas of inside and outside space are involved differently with chaos and order than are the other attributes I have been examining in this thesis so far. Whereas either chaos or order may be simple or complex or static or changeable, when it comes to being inside or outside, order is always associated with being inside, while chaos is associated with what is outside. I have tried to show that this association existed in ancient Israel, as it existed and exists in other ancient and contemporary cultures. This is not to say that there is no fluctuation of inside/outside designations, but only that they fluctuate quite differently than do simplicity and multiplicity, stasis and change as related to chaos and order. If inside space is that place in which I ought to be, as sanctioned by divine authority, I will necessarily view where you are, unless you are a member of my community, as outside space. You, however, will no doubt view your own location as inside and my location as outside. It is in this sense that inside and outside are not fixed. You and I have different ideas about which space should be designated inside and which outside. We do not, however, have different ideas about how these spaces are designated with regard to chaos and order. We agree that inside is order and outside is chaos, though we may disagree over where inside and outside are and which of us inhabits each kind of space.

I have wanted to show that order is linked to inside space and chaos to outside space because of the way the two locations are dealt with in the Book of Job. Around these concepts there is less discussion and more assumption than there was around the other concepts I have examined. Job and his friends assume that to be inside is to inhabit order, and assume that this view is intuitively held by everybody, and, because of this, the book offers fewer descriptive examples of inside as order than it does of simplicity or multiplicity, stasis or change as constitutive of order or chaos. Nevertheless, that Job and the friends do hold this view can be shown by the way they describe the fate of the wicked. The wicked are punished by being cast out of the human community. In addition, in chapter 29 where Job describes in detail his vision of the world as it ought to be, his focus is on his place as an insider among other insiders. This emphasis is further highlighted by Job's words in chapter 30, which contrast his present situation which ought not to be with his well-ordered past. In chapter 30 Job turns his attention to a group which he describes

as “a senseless, disreputable brood” (30:8). This group inhabits the wilderness, having been driven out beyond the boundaries of the town. In his affliction, Job describes himself as the subject of this group’s mockery, an indication that, whereas he was once the preeminent insider, he is now even more outside than these most outside of outsiders.

Job’s focus on the inside/outside distinction in these two chapters and his clear designation of the inside world as the world of order and the outside world as the realm of chaos make the inside/outside aspects of order and chaos central to the book as a whole, even though the attendant discussion occupies less space in the dialogues of chapters 3-27. In addition, in the prologue *hassatan* introduces issues of inside and outside as central to his accusations against God and Job. He questions God, “Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side?” (1:9). *Hassatan* is claiming, in effect, that God has granted Job special insider status, walling him in so that he is unthreatened by the chaos that exists outside. In this regard, it is significant that, in his affliction, Job leaves the boundaries of the town and takes up residence on the ash heap beyond its boundaries.<sup>126</sup> At the same time, though, it might be asked whether, if order is intuitively allied with inside and chaos with outside, it is worth discussing the appearance of these topics in the book. That is, if everybody already knows that order is inside and chaos is outside and everybody agrees that this is the case, there is not really much to be said on the subject, apart from giving examples of how these universal beliefs are expressed in the book. Such an objection would be fair enough, although the counter argument that it is worth seeing how the beliefs are expressed in the book, even if everybody holds them to be true, also has merit. I will, in fact, spend part of this chapter showing how Job and the friends express the idea that inside is order and outside is chaos. However, what makes this topic especially important is the fact that, in his speeches, God rejects the association of order with inside and chaos with outside. Although, as has been seen, God’s views of chaos and order have differed from those held by Job and the friends as regards simplicity, multiplicity, stasis, and change, this disagreement is far more radical. It is one thing to hold a different view in a situation where difference is to be expected, even if all the other participants in the conversation share the same view, and quite another to offer an alternate understanding of something that is held to be one way across the board. God’s speeches explode the distinction between inside and outside that Job and his

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<sup>126</sup> Here, I am following the majority opinion that this is what Job does. Clines points out that it is not necessary to interpret the text in this way, writing, “It is by no means clear from the text whether Job has performed this ritual [sitting among the ashes] in his own house or has gone out to a public place to display his grief. But,” Clines continues, “it is almost universally assumed by interpreters that the ashes in which Job sits are in the public ash-heap outside the town, the resort of outcasts and persons with infectious diseases, as well as, in cases like the present, those who psychologically identify themselves with the rejected and destitute. The Septuagint in fact explains ‘ashes’ by its translation ‘the dungheap outside the city’” (Clines 1989, 50).

friends assume to be unchallengeable. For this reason, the discussion of the book's dealings with ideas of inside and outside as related to order and chaos is important and must not be overlooked on the basis that everybody already knows how the discussion will end. God's speeches show that we do not know how the discussion will end, as they challenge one of the most basic assumptions held by Job and his friends, and, indeed, perhaps by all of us.

### *The Wicked as Outsiders and the Metaphor of the House as Inner Space*

It is in their descriptions of the punishment that attends the wicked that the friends most clearly show their assumption that being inside designates one as a participant in order, while being outside reveals one's alliance with chaos. When God punishes the wicked, in the friends' depiction, he either uproots them from within the bounds of the community and casts them into the outer chaos, or allows what is outside to come in and claim them. Untimely death, which the friends claim is the fate of the wicked, functions in both ways. The realm of the dead exists outside the human community, and, as such, is a chaotic realm. When the wicked die, death crosses the boundaries into the human community and then, snatching its prey, carries them back to its domain beyond those borders. Both Job and the friends use the image of the house as a symbol for inner space. To have one's house destroyed is to be claimed by what belongs outside the boundaries and to be taken thither.

In his first speech, quoting the spirit messenger who insists that all humans are unrighteous because of their shared mortality, Eliphaz says, "Their tent-cord is plucked up within them, and they die devoid of wisdom" (4:21). Here, the destruction of the house (the uprooting of the tent cord) is paired with untimely death (death devoid of wisdom, that is, before sufficient time has elapsed in which to attain wisdom). The inner space of the house is collapsed, and what ought to have been kept outside by its boundaries comes rushing in to claim its own. Eliphaz, despite the fact that he reports the spirit's message, does not really agree that all humans are unrighteous simply by virtue of their mortality. For him it is the wicked and fools, who are unable to remain inside, but find their homes destroyed and themselves subject to the dangers of the outside realm. He says, "I have seen fools taking root, but suddenly I cursed their dwelling. Their children are far from safety, they are crushed in the gate, and there is no one to deliver them" (5:3-4). It is significant that it is the *dwelling* of such people that Eliphaz curses. In doing so, he removes their ability to stay inside the protective boundaries of the town. The destruction of the dwelling results, for Eliphaz as for the spirit messenger, in death.

The children of those whose homes have been cursed and destroyed are subsequently “crushed,” and that Eliphaz describes this as happening “in the gate” is significant. The gate functions as an opening between the inner world of the town and the outer world that exists beyond its boundaries. It is through the gate that things can come in from outside, and through it that things can go out from inside. As such, it is a particularly vulnerable place in the boundary between the two realms. It is no surprise that the town’s elders chose to meet in the gate. Their presence there would have protected the vulnerable place in the boundary.<sup>127</sup> In addition, it was in the gate that they would have passed judgment against those accused of wrongdoing. Such judgement would have served to separate the righteous from the wicked, that is, insiders from outsiders. This activity would have replicated the function of the gate itself, as the passageway between inside and outside, the place through which what belongs outside is cast out and what belongs inside is gathered in. When Eliphaz describes the children of fools as being crushed in the gate, he is describing them as being judged, found guilty, and punished by those whose job it is to repulse what belongs outside and protect what belongs inside. Crushing, here, is certainly synonymous with killing, and, as the kingdom of death is a place outside the human community, being killed is synonymous with being cast out through the gate into outer chaos.

Although in chapter 3 Job imagines the world of death as an inner space, in general he agrees with the friends that the kingdom of death is a chaotic outer realm. In chapter 3 he longs to be inside the halls of death, to make his home there. In chapter 7, however, Job laments his mortality and the fact that all humans must die. He says, “As the cloud fades and vanishes, so those who go down to Sheol do not come up;<sup>128</sup> they return no more to their houses, nor do their places know them any more” (7:9-10). Like Eliphaz, Job uses the house as a symbol for being inside. Those who are dead cannot return to the inner space of home, but are doomed to “exist” outside the human community. Job complains that the affliction God has leveled against him is robbing him of his only opportunity to

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<sup>127</sup> Frank Frick points out that the gate functioned as the meeting place for the city’s elders for practical reasons. He writes, “due to the lack of extensive city planning there was little if any open space within the typical Palestinian city. Consequently, the place of assembly was around the city gate, to a limited extent inside, but usually outside, where the converging tracks made a well-worn area which was the scene of much of the activity of a public nature” (Frick 1977, 125). However, in addition to the practical reasons for assembling at the gate, Frick also cites a religious reason, quoting Eliade who writes about the importance of thresholds as the place where two worlds (the sacred and profane) are both separated and, paradoxically, joined (*Ibid.*, 126).

<sup>128</sup> Although Eliphaz would certainly agree with Job that those who go down to Sheol do not come up (עלֹהֶם), in his depiction of the righteous man’s death in 5:26, he likens the death of the righteous man to “a shock of grain [which] comes up (עלה) . . . in its season.” For Eliphaz, there is something regenerative in the righteous man’s death. Even though the dead man goes down into the ground and into Sheol, there is a sense in which his death is also a coming up. The movement is not entirely downwards.

live on the inside, in an ordered world. His end will be in the outer realm of death, from which he will not be able to return home.

In the same chapter Job asks God, “Am I the Sea, or the Dragon, that you set a guard over me?” (7:12), perhaps referring to the combat myth of creation in which the Sea and Dragon are the representatives of chaos that must be kept out so that the ordered world can exist (an interpretation which may be supported by the lack of definite articles in the Hebrew). Yet, whatever cosmic implications may or may not inhere in these names, what is certain is that the Sea and the Dragon are menacing figures which the boundaries of the town are in place to repulse. Even if Job’s question is not directly related to a full-scale combat myth of creation, it is clearly meant to demonstrate his belief that he is being kept out when he should be allowed in. His suffering at the hands of God has made him into an outsider. Job, though, insists that he is not a threat to the world inside the boundaries, and, in a peculiar move, uses his mortality as evidence to support his claim; it is because he will ultimately be thrust out by death that God need not trouble himself to keep him out. Yet, as will be seen, Job only makes this argument because he believes himself to be innocent and, therefore, a true insider. He would not question God’s casting out of the wicked, despite the fact that they too are ultimately subject to death. His argument, then, can be seen to respond to the spirit messenger’s claim that all humans are constitutively unrighteous and therefore liable to punishment. If Job is only being punished for being human, then God might as well not bother, because death will do the trick in the end without any help from God. Although, according to the spirit, it is mortality that marks humans as deserving of punishment, Job makes the counter-argument that death is punishment enough and ought to absolve otherwise innocent humans from feeling the effects of God’s wrath. Although in this speech, Job does not speak specifically of inside as the locus of order, he makes clear his belief that this is the case, both through the opposition he describes between the inner world of home and the outer world of death and through his depiction of himself as kept outside by God’s fury, while, by rights, he ought to be inside.

When it is Bildad’s turn to talk, he too uses the house as a symbol of insideness, speaking not of exiling the wicked beyond the walls of the community, but of causing the collapse of their houses so that, though still inside, they are thrust out into the realm of death. He says, “The hope of the godless shall perish. Their confidence is gossamer, a spider’s house their trust. If one leans against its house, it will not stand; if one lays hold of it, it will not endure....If they are destroyed from their place, then it will deny them, saying, ‘I have never seen you.’...and the tent of the wicked will be no more” (8:13b-15, 18, 22b). The walls that are meant to protect the wicked cave in upon them, letting that

which they intended to repulse in to claim them. It is no accident that Bildad describes the wicked as driven out by being walled in. This language is a direct comment on Job's own situation. Bildad has begun his speech by telling Job, "If your children sinned against [God], he delivered them into the power of their transgression" and consoling, "If you will seek God and make supplication to the Almighty...surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore you to your rightful place" (8:4-5, 6b). Job's children, Bildad knows, were killed when the oldest brother's house collapsed and crushed them. The surviving servant reports, "a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead" (1:19). That the tumbling of the house is occasioned by the force of a great wind is also significant. In later depictions of the casting out of the wicked, the friends and Job will describe it as accomplished by a powerful wind sent from God for the purpose of punishing them. Although Job's children were not literally driven out beyond the boundaries of the town in recompense for their transgressions, they were driven out by being crushed to death, their inner sanctuary of home having become the outer domain of death. Job himself, following the deaths of his children and the affliction of his own body has been literally driven out of town. For Job's children, cast out into the realm of death, there is no possibility of return to the inside world of the human community. For Job, however, Bildad insists, there is the possibility of return. If Job contends that he has been wrongfully driven out, he should present himself to God who, if he judges that Job is indeed innocent, and, therefore, an insider and not an outsider, will restore him to his "rightful place" (8:6) inside the community.

In his first speech, Zophar makes a similar point, but focuses on the security of the righteous, instead of on the insecurity of the wicked. Echoing Bildad's words he images Job's position after repentance, promising him, "you will have confidence, because there is hope; you will be protected and take your rest in safety. You will lie down, and no one will make you afraid" (11:18-19a). The righteous, unlike the wicked, are able to have confidence that the walls protecting them will not cave in, that the boundaries of their houses will not be breached. Although Zophar does not use the word "house," that he envisages Job as being inside a house is shown by his description of Job lying down and taking rest, an activity that would take place within the house. That Zophar pictures this house as having strong, even impenetrable walls, as opposed to the "gossamer" walls of the houses of the wicked, is evidenced by his depiction of Job lying down without fear. The walls of the houses of the righteous function as protective boundaries, keeping what belongs outside out and what belongs inside in, while the walls of the houses of the wicked are flimsy defenses, easily breached.

In his second speech, Zophar speaks of the lack of protection afforded the wicked by their houses. He says, “a fire fanned by no one will devour them; what is left in their tent will be consumed....The possessions of their house will be carried away, dragged off in the day of God’s wrath” (20:26b, 28). Here, the focus is not so much on the claim that what ought to be kept out by the walls of the house gets in, as on the claim that what ought to remain inside—the possessions of the wicked, and indeed, they themselves—are dragged out. Indeed, in this speech Zophar has already said that the wicked “will fly away like a dream, and will not be found; they will be chased away like a vision of the night” (20:8). The place to which the wicked will be chased is the outer realm of death: “they will perish forever like their own dung....Their bodies, once full of youth will lie down in the dust with them” (20:7a, 11). For the wicked, borders and boundaries do not do the job for which they are intended: what belongs out—death and destruction—comes crashing in, and what belongs in—the wicked themselves (given their status as human beings), and their possessions—is dragged out.

### *Job as Outsider/Death as Inner Space*

In general, Job sees as evidence of the chaos that has overwhelmed the world the fact that the wicked are not dragged out beyond the boundaries of their homes and of the human community. He contrasts the insider status of the wicked with his own outsider status. He, the righteous man, is the one who has been forced out beyond the boundaries of the town. He is the one whose house provided him with no protection from affliction. He is the one whose possessions were carried away. He is the one whose children were crushed by the collapsing walls of their own home. Job responds to Zophar’s speech by asking, as regards the wicked, “How often are they like straw before the wind, and like chaff that the storm carries away?” (21:18). Job contends that the wicked are not, in fact, forced beyond the boundaries of the community; the wicked are not scattered outside of their tents, but, rather, reside securely within them. Even death, which the friends have presented as that which carries the wicked away to its outer space, is denied “outside-making” power by Job. He says, “When they are carried to the grave, a watch is kept over their tomb. The clods of the valley are sweet to them; everyone will follow after, and those who went before are innumerable” (21:32-33). In death, Job claims here, the wicked are not exiled from the human community, for the community gathers around their graves, keeping watch there. In this way, the dead remain inside. Additionally, the fact that the number of those who have already died is “innumerable” and that “everyone” who now lives will die means that the kingdom of death cannot really be an outside space. It is not

where the human community is not, but is the place where the human community most fundamentally *is*. Far more people are dead than are alive, and the number will go on growing. It is, therefore, no consolation to speak of the wicked as being cast out by death. Death is no ousting, no matter what anyone says.

It seems significant that the word Job uses for tomb—*שֵׁן*—is a word which also means “shock of grain.” It is used with this meaning by Eliphaz when he promises his hypothetically-repentant Job, “You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, as a shock of grain (*שֵׁן*) comes up to the threshing-floor in its season” (5.26). Here, though, it is the wicked man’s tomb that Job likens to *שֵׁן*, denying Eliphaz’s claim that only the righteous partake of a death that has been robbed of its power. At other times in his speeches, of course, Job does view death as a casting out. Here, he is making the effort to respond to his friends’ claims about the lot of the wicked, claims with which he disagrees because of his own situation. The location in which he finds himself is the situation the friends reserve for the wicked. His own outsider status gives the lie to the friends’ insistence that only the wicked are cast out.

### *Job’s Antithetical Comments on the Outsideness of the Wicked*

There is, however, one place in his speeches where Job, somewhat bewilderingly, given what has come before, seems to agree with the friends’ assessment of the outsider status that is forced upon the wicked as punishment for their wickedness.<sup>129</sup> In chapter 27 he says,

They build their houses like nests,<sup>130</sup> like booths made by sentinels of the vineyard. They go to bed with wealth, but will do so no more; they open their eyes, and it is gone. Terrors overtake them like a flood; in the night a whirlwind carries them off. The east wind lifts them up and they are gone; it sweeps them out of their place. It hurls at them without pity; they flee from its power in headlong flight. (27:18-22)

Zophar has spoken of the righteous man’s certainty that, when he goes to sleep, he and his possessions will be protected by the walls of his house, contrasting this with Bildad’s description of the gossamer walls of the house of the wicked man. Here, Job affirms his

<sup>129</sup> Elsewhere in his speeches Job does envision “outside” as the domain of the wicked. His comments in chapters 29-30 are clearly based on the assumption that the wicked belong outside and the righteous belong inside, as will be discussed in more detail later. In general, however, Job insists that, although the wicked belong outside and the righteous belong inside, this spatial arrangement is not being upheld in the world as Job has experienced it since the beginning of his affliction. Chapter 27 is unique in that, in it, Job seems to claim that in the present the wicked are confined to outer space, instead of presenting this as the way the world ought to be but, currently, is not.

<sup>130</sup> *כַּעֲשׂוֹ*, which might also be translated “like the moth,” which would allow for a similar interpretation to that I am proposing.

friends' claims. The houses of the wicked are built "like nests" or like "booths" in a vineyard. Job surely means to indicate that these structures are flimsy and provide only a false security. Like Bildad's picture of the confidence of the wicked as a "spider's house," here Job describes the dwellings of the wicked as temporary structures. A booth thrown up in a vineyard as a temporary dwelling to be used during the harvest is not a real house with real walls that can keep out what ought to be kept out. A nest, made of twigs and mud and spit, perched precariously among the branches of a tree, is easily blown down and carried away by a gust of wind. Job, like the friends, is not speaking simply of destruction as the fate of the wicked. His emphasis, like theirs, is on the casting *out* of the wicked, whether to the realm of death or to the wilderness beyond the confines of the town.

Of course, it is uncertain how Job means his friends to hear these words of apparent agreement. These claims seem so out of place in his mouth that it can hardly be assumed that he speaks them with a straight face and means what he says. Some scholars suggest that Job's words are the result of a mix-up in the text. Clines attributes the antithetical passages in chapter 27 to Zophar (Clines 1989, 629), while Habel gives them to Bildad (Habel 1985, 37). Offering another possibility, Newsom reads chapter 27 as a nod to the wisdom dialogue genre to which she believes the conversation between Job and the friends belongs. Wisdom dialogues typically end with the participants adopting aspects of each other's views, signifying that they value what their conversation partners have to say. Here, Job, or the Job-author, follows the convention, but with quite different results. Job's adoption of the friends' views does not serve to validate the discussion that has preceded, but to render it incomprehensible. Newsom writes,

I wonder whether the author of Job is paying a parodic homage to a generic convention....Both perspectives from the dialogue remain present, but rather than being represented in some mutual acknowledgment, they are present together within Job's own speech. Most perplexingly, however, Job's speeches not only remain polemical...but he also uses the friends' arguments as though they were a refutation of what the friends had just said. Though in one sense this kind of mad writing brings closure (the friends are literally left with nothing to say), it does not relieve tension but rather exacerbates it. (Newsom 2003, 164)

Other scholars who retain chapter 27 as Job's words include Good, Lo, and Janzen. For Good, the chapter is spoken by Job as a parody of his friends' position,<sup>131</sup> but a parody which functions somewhat differently from Newsom's idea. Good argues that Job's words do not simply mock the friends' position. Rather, finding that God has made him into his enemy, Job identifies himself as one of the godless who are cast out by God. The irony is

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<sup>131</sup> Good rejects the reassignment of the speech, arguing that "The best index to its success as parody is the way we moderns...have been hoodwinked into thinking that the speech belongs to Zophar" (Good 1990, 289).

that, by all standards besides God's, Job is righteous. Job declares himself to be "godless" because he possesses integrity and righteousness, whereas God is wicked. God punishes him, therefore, not because he is wicked, but because he is righteous and, hence, godless (Good 1990, 287-88). Although Good's argument succeeds in making sense of Job's apparently antithetical words, I do not find it entirely convincing. I find it hard to believe that Job would identify himself as one of the godless, even if he identifies God, in his current manifestation, as acting like one of the wicked. Throughout the book, Job counts on God to become, once again, who God ought to be, and, in so doing, to reorder the world as it ought to be. Job prides himself on remaining one of the God-ful, even if God himself is behaving like one of the godless.<sup>132</sup>

In Lo's interpretation, Job's words do not identify God as one of the wicked and himself as, consequently, God-less, but, instead, are aimed at the friends. It is the friends whom Job designates as the wicked who will reap God's punishment. Lo writes, "The crucial thing is that, in the flow of the argument, Job uses his friends' words against them. In so doing, he silences them, though we know that the issues are not yet settled. Such a declaration of punishment has driven them into total silence, a state Job requested of them in 13:5" (Lo 2003, 193). Why, though, should the friends accept that Job's words apply to them? They do not consider themselves wicked, nor are they experiencing the punishment which Job claims attends the wicked. In Lo's reading, it is as if Job has responded to the friends' accusations by saying, "I know you are, but what am I?" Far from silencing them, this ought to propel them into voluble denials, or at least their own repetition of the chant, "I know you are, but what am I?" If Job is indeed trying to turn the tables on his friends, there is no reason to expect his success. There is no reason to expect that the friends will be struck dumb. It does not make sense to reason backward from the fact of their silence to the fact that Job has successfully convinced them of their own wickedness.

Janzen's position is the most convincing. He argues that, in chapter 27, Job angrily interrupts Bildad, finishing his speech for him, and then preempts Zophar's speech by delivering the response Job already knows he would give. The friends are silenced because they have exhausted their arguments, as is demonstrated by Bildad who "adopts the structure of the argument which Eliphaz had used in 4:17-19 and 15:14-16 (cf. 25:4-26)" (Janzen 1985, 173). Job already knows what Zophar will say and shows him that he does, thus taking away Zophar's ability to respond. Janzen writes, "More clearly than any other indication could give, the rhetorical device of having Job finish his friends'

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<sup>132</sup> See, for example, 23:10-11, where Job says, "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold. My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside." The steps to which Job's foot has held fast are still God's, even if God has temporarily abandoned his true way.

arguments for them signals the end of the dialogues....The friends see that they have nothing more to say, or that there is no point in trying to say it” (*Ibid.*, 174).

I want to propose a related, but somewhat different possibility. Perhaps Job’s adoption of the friends’ position on the wicked is related to Bildad’s wholesale adoption of the spirit messenger’s position about the impossibility of human righteousness (as discussed in chapter four). Bildad pulls the safety cord and shuts down the dialogue, and Job responds in kind, taking up the friends’ position, but after it is too late for it to do them any good, for it is a position they have already abandoned in favor of the “safety net” argument by which they are able to condemn Job and defend God once and for all. Job’s speech, therefore, becomes a taunt. The friends cannot answer him because they have already given up the right to speak. Job does not silence them. Rather, they have already silenced themselves, and Job takes advantage of this. Although Job seems to agree with the friends on the fate of the wicked, this agreement does not strike us as sincere, and, therefore, reads as parody.

Yet, despite the problematic nature of Job’s words, I do not think they can be read as *pure* parody. Although in earlier speeches Job has insisted that the wicked are not cast out, as the friends contend, for which he presents the evidence that he, a righteous man, is the one who has been forced beyond the boundaries, in chapter 29 he will present a picture of the world as it ought to be, in which the righteous are inside and the wicked outside. If he sneers at the friends’ claims about the current order of the world, he can only sneer to a certain degree and no further. He may sneer at their insistence that the world, in its current state, is functioning as they describe it. However, he cannot sneer at their idea of the way the world ought to function, for this is a view he shares. At the beginning of chapter 27, Job makes an oath, saying, “As God lives, who has taken away my right...as long as my breath is in me and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit. Far be it from me to say that you are right; until I die I will not put away my integrity from me” (27:2a, 3-5). Immediately following this oath Job launches into his puzzling depiction of the fate of the wicked. However, if Job means this description to be heard as a complete parody spoken with a sarcastic sneer, it is strange that he begins with an oath in which he promises “my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit.” Those hearing him might very well charge him with uttering deceit, speaking that which he does not believe to be true with the intention of mocking and confounding his friends.<sup>133</sup> Of course, the friends themselves cannot charge

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<sup>133</sup> Good avoids this conundrum by viewing Job’s words as having undergone “ironic reversals” (Good 1990, 289) of their true meanings. Job *is* speaking what he believes to be true, but his words do not mean what the friends (and we) think they mean.

Job with speaking falsehood, given that the claims he makes are the very claims of which they have been trying to convince him throughout their own speeches.

Job's oath, though, is not made before his friends, but before God. Job goes so far as to identify this God as the one "who has taken away my right...the Almighty who has made my soul bitter" (27:2). If he is so forthright in describing his perception of God's behavior and links this honesty to his unwillingness to relinquish his integrity, it seems strange that he would equivocate in the rest of his speech, speaking what he does not believe to be true simply for the purpose of "scoring off" his friends. Quite a different preface ought to precede a speech spoken with such an intention. Instead of saying, "I will not put away my integrity," a Job about to speak what he does not believe but which accords with the orthodox view ought to say, "I will now say what you think I ought to say, in the interest of appearing righteous, because there is no other way to convince you—or the God who has done me wrong—of my integrity." This, though, is not what he says. Job's opening oath combined with his depiction of the world as it ought to be in chapter 29 and as it ought not to be in chapter 30 renders his depiction of the fate of the wicked in chapter 27 something more than a parody that silences his friends. His claim that the wicked are cast out by the hand of God represents his affirmation that, though the world is not currently as it ought to be, in the world as it ought to be the wicked are cast out. Job stakes his claim with the fact that even though such a world does not exist *now*, in reality it does exist. In the same way, although a God who does not afflict him does not exist *now*, such a God does exist. Job lays claim to these realities despite the fact that they do not currently exist, in the hope, it seems, that his oath of innocence will bring them into being.

### *The Body as a Microcosm of the Human Community*

Before turning to an investigation of the all-important chapters 29 and 30, in which Job gives his clearest expression of his ideas about the distinctions between inside as order and outside as chaos, I want to approach the depiction of these distinctions in the rest of the book from another angle. Douglas advances the idea that the human body can function as a microcosm of human society. She writes,

The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious...We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva and the rest unless we are prepared to see in a body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited to social structures reproduced in small on the human body. (Douglas 1966, 138)

That is, just as the boundaries of the town serve to separate what belongs inside from what belongs outside, so the boundaries of the body protect what is inside from what is outside. Orifices, which provide potential passageways between inside and outside must, therefore, be carefully guarded, just as the town gate must be guarded. Although Douglas observes this phenomenon as arising particularly among minority groups which would have a special concern to protect their unique identity,<sup>134</sup> it need not apply only to groups of this kind, as Douglas recognizes. Ronald Simkins makes a similar claim about the human body as an entity that partakes of inside/outside distinctions. He writes,

From an external perspective, the body is a highly ordered and symmetrical entity with fixed boundaries that differentiate it from other entities. The body also has a number of orifices in its boundaries that can be penetrated and that discharge internal bodily fluids. These orifices make the body vulnerable to external attack...and so must be protected. (Simkins 1994, 76)

Simkins goes on to liken the body not to the human community, but to the earth. Yet, his statements about the body, though they lead elsewhere, do present the body as an inner space with boundaries which must be protected from what lies outside, a description that allows us to see how the body might function as a microcosm of the human community.

Although she does not write about the body and the town as linked through their shared necessity of keeping inside what belongs there and keeping out what belongs out, Elaine Scarry does identify the body as a microcosm of civilization, arrived at through the house, which is both a projection of the body and civilization in miniature. That is, house is body and civilization is house, meaning that civilization is also body writ large. She writes,

the room, the simplest form of shelter, expresses the most benign potential of human life. It is, on the one hand, an enlargement of the body: it keeps warm and safe the individual within; like the body, its walls put boundaries around the self presenting undifferentiated contact with the world, yet in its windows and doors, crude versions of the senses, it enables the self to move out into the world and allows that world to enter. But while the room is a magnification of the body, it is simultaneously a miniaturization of the world, of civilization. (Scarry 1985, 38)

For Scarry, the house (or room, the simplest form of house) stands for the world because it is an artifact external to the body, and what the world is *is* such external artifacts: “objects which stand apart from and free of the body, objects which realize the human being’s impulse to project himself out into a space beyond the boundaries of the body in acts of making, either physical or verbal, that once multiplied, collected, and shared are called

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<sup>134</sup> She writes, “When rituals express anxiety about the body’s orifices the sociological counterpart of this anxiety is a care to protect the political and cultural unity of a minority group. The Israelites were always in their history a hard-pressed minority. In their beliefs all the bodily issues were polluting....The threatened boundaries of their body politic would be well mirrored in their care for the integrity, unity and purity of the physical body” (Douglas 1966, 148).

civilization” (*Ibid.*, 39). Yet, at the same time, the external artifacts that constitute the world are linked to the body in that they perform functions that, previously, the body performed itself or that the body wishes it were able to perform. Walls, for example, function like the epidermis, they “mimic the body’s attempt to secure for the individual a stable internal space,” but they do a better job of it than the body does itself and permit the body to “suspend its rigid and watchful postures; acting in these and other ways like the body so that the body can act less like a wall” (*Ibid.*). Because of the link she perceives between the world and the body, Scarry argues that the disintegration of the body results in the disintegration of the world. If a body is in enough pain, the world, which is a projection of the body and which, normally, functions to relieve the body of the aversive aspects of sentience—(i.e. the trouble of having to be rigidly attentive at all times)—fails to fulfill its purpose and is, consequently, unmade. Additionally, if pieces of the world cause pain, whether that pain is purposefully inflicted, or inadvertently stumbled across, those pieces of the world cease to be part of the world as it was intended to be. If the world revisits aversive sentience upon the body, then it is no longer the world. Although Scarry does not focus on inside/outside distinctions as regards the body and civilization, they are assumed in her work. When things get into (or out of) the body that should not be there, civilization falls apart.

### *The Breaking of Job’s Body as Indication of his Outsider Status*

Because the body functions as a microcosm of the human community as regards inner and outer space as related to order and chaos, it is no surprise that Job’s bodily affliction coincides with his relocation outside the boundaries of the town. Throughout the book, when Job describes the suffering inflicted upon him by God, he describes it in terms of a breaching of the boundaries of his body. In chapter 10, Job appeals to God for a release from his anguish on the basis that God is the one who created him. He describes God’s work in the womb, saying, “You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews” (10:11). Here, Job presents God as responsible for giving him an inside, and for separating his insides off—by means of skin and flesh—from what is outside. God is the one who has created the boundaries surrounding Job, and Job uses this fact to argue that God should not, then, breach those boundaries. In this chapter, he accuses, “Bold as a lion you hunt me; you repeat your exploits against me. You renew your witnesses against me, and increase your vexation towards me; you bring fresh troops against me” (10:16-17). Although here he does not specifically speak of God’s attack as breaking through the boundaries of his body, that this is implied is indicated by the use he

will make of breaching imagery later in the book. When God hunts Job and brings troops against him, what happens is that Job's bodily integrity is compromised. Although Job may insist that he retains his moral integrity despite the affliction of his body, his friends do not believe him, viewing his loss of bodily integrity as proof of his loss of moral integrity, assuming that the two go hand in hand. Indeed, that Job's bodily affliction incites him to take himself out to the ash heap shows that he, too, knows that a firmly defended body is a sign of insider status, and, with his body's defenses broken down, knows that he has become an outsider, though he continues to argue that because of his righteousness he should not be one.<sup>135</sup>

After accusing God of bringing "fresh troops against me" to break through the boundaries of his body, despite the fact that God erected those boundaries in the first place, Job wishes, as he has wished in chapter 3, to have never been born in the first place. He asks, "Why did you bring me forth from the womb?" (10:18). The implication of this question is, "Why did you create me, if you planned only to destroy your creation?" or "Why did you establish protective boundaries around me, if you planned to breach those boundaries and leave me unprotected?" The womb is an inside space; it exists inside the boundaries of the body, and the child that grows in the womb is protected by those boundaries while its own boundaries are constructed. In order for the child to be born, the boundaries of its mother's body must be crossed, but this crossing is of a particular kind and serves the purpose of expelling what now belongs outside the borders of the mother's body, having become a body in its own right with its own protective boundaries. Job, having discovered that the boundaries of his body cannot protect him from God's attack, wishes to be back in the womb, within the protective sphere of his mother's body. His own boundaries are useless, so he wishes to rely on the boundaries of another, in the hopes that they will serve him better. However, knowing that it would have been impossible to have survived indefinitely in the womb, Job continues, "Would that I had died before any eye had seen me, and were as though I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave" (10:18b-19). Here, Job envisages the grave as another inside space, analogous to the

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<sup>135</sup> It might be argued that the breaching of Job's bodily defenses results in a confusion of the distinction between outside as chaos and inside as order. If Job's body has become chaotic, then that chaos can be seen to occupy an inside space. Yet, even when chaos has penetrated to the inner space of the body, there is never the sense that it belongs there. The body's boundaries ought to be intact, and whatever is capable of breaching them—disease, the infliction of pain, etc.—ought not to breach them, or ought not if the body is that of a righteous man. Job insists that he is innocent, but, at the same time, recognizes that his broken body contradicts his words. Clines writes, "Job is helpless against the criticism of his friends if his own physical appearance is testimony of his wrongdoing. His...suffering and even his own body are witnesses against him" (Clines 1989, 382). Yet, Job never tries to argue that his broken body identifies him as anything but guilty, even as he protests that his body is not speaking the truth. Job does not want to redefine the *meaning* of a broken body, but only to have his body brought into alignment with his status as a righteous insider.

womb, but more accommodating. Whereas he could not remain forever in the womb, he can remain forever in the tomb, surrounded by its protective boundaries.

What those boundaries protect him from is, of course, a good question. If death has already claimed him, what is there that needs to be kept outside? It would seem that, for the dead person, the most formidable enemy has already breached the boundaries; the walls of the body have collapsed and cannot be resurrected. It seems that Job imagines the womb and the tomb as protecting him from life, and, what he most needs to be protected from in the world of the living is God. Womb and tomb, then, are location in which boundaries exist between Job and God—womb because it is the location of creation (and, therefore, not of the destruction which Job is experiencing in his life outside the womb) and tomb because it is beyond God’s grasp. Later in the book, Job cries out to God, “O that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath is past” (14:13a), indicating that he does conceive of the realm of the dead as, in some way, protected space, surrounded by boundaries that God cannot cross. Yet, although at one moment Job wishes for enclosure in the tomb, in the next he laments the inevitability of his death, saying, “Are not the days of my life few? Let me alone, that I may find a little comfort before I go, never to return, to the land of gloom and deep darkness, the land of gloom and chaos,<sup>136</sup> where darkness is like light” (10:20-22). In these verses, Job ceases to envision the grave as inner space, seeing it instead as that from which his life must be protected. Because God did not allow Job to stay inside the womb and to go from there straight into the tomb, Job asserts that God ought to leave him alone for the time being. God should not pierce Job’s body, but should allow its boundaries to continue intact, for, before long, Job will be claimed by the realm of outer darkness, a realm that is physically outside the boundaries of the human community and in which the boundaries of his body will be overrun once and for all. Worms and the earth will do the job without any help from God.

In chapter 16 Job embarks on his most vivid description of the ways in which God has violated the boundaries of his body. He cries,

[God] has shriveled me up, which is a witness against me; my leanness has risen up against me, and it testifies to my face. He has torn me in his wrath, and hated me; he has gnashed his teeth at me....I was at ease, and he broke me in two; he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces; he set me up as his target; his archers surround me. He slashes open my kidneys, and shows no

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<sup>136</sup> The phrase translated “chaos” here is לֹא סִדְרָם. According to *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, לֹא סִדְרָם means “order, formation, arrangement, esp. of battle formations” (*The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 122). Here, then, Job envisions the grave as the domain of formlessness, a place in which the boundaries of his body will cease to exist.

mercy; he pours out my gall on the ground. He bursts upon me again and again; he rushes at me like a warrior. (16:8-9a, 12-14)

Job's body is utterly broken by God, and what ought to remain inside—his kidneys, and his gall within them—is pulled out into the open, deprived of the protection of skin and flesh. Job identifies the brokenness of his body as “a witness against me.” The state of his body identifies him as one who is undeserving of the protection afforded by inclusion within the human community. The link between the breaching of the body and the breaching of the city's defenses is shown by the fact that “the image [of God's attack on Job's body] shades off into the breaching of a strong city wall. Once sufficient openings appear, the enemy rushes in for the kill” (Crenshaw 1984, 68). Job, though, insists again as he has insisted all along, “there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is pure” (16:17). He claims that he is righteous and therefore deserving of insider status, despite the testimony his afflicted body bears against him.

In chapter 19, Job again takes up this theme, this time accusing the friends of contributing to the breaking of his body. He asks, “How long will you torment me, and break me in pieces with words?” (19:2). Job is responding directly to Bildad's second speech, the subject of which has been God's punishment of the wicked. Bildad has said, “In their tents nothing remains; sulfur is scattered upon their habitations....Their memory perishes from the earth, and they have no name in the street. They are thrust from light into darkness, and driven out of the world” (18:15-18). His depiction of the punishment of the wicked focuses on the breakdown of that which ought to provide them with protective boundaries—that is, the tent—and on their expulsion from the human community. After describing the casting out of the wicked, Bildad concludes, “Surely such are the dwellings of the ungodly, such is the place of those who do not know God” (18:21). That is, their dwellings are flimsy and do not serve to protect them from the threats that lie beyond the walls, and their rightful place is in the outer space beyond the boundaries of the town and its righteous inhabitants.

It is no wonder that Job responds with incredulous accusations of wrongdoing. Bildad has described the situation in which Job finds himself. Identifying Job as an outsider is commensurate with breaking Job's body in pieces. In this, though, Bildad breaks one who is already broken. Bildad identifies Job as an outsider, but Job is already outside. With his words, Bildad afflicts Job's body, but Job's body is already afflicted. Bildad is simply calling it as he sees it. Later in the chapter, Job again names God—and not the friends—as the one responsible for the breaking of his body and its conferral of outsider status. He says, “He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone, he has uprooted my hope like a tree. He has kindled his wrath against me, and counts me as his

adversary. His troops come together; they have thrown up siege-works<sup>137</sup> against me, and encamp around my tent” (19:10-12). This description of God’s enmity and his breaking down the boundaries of Job’s body is not as vivid as that given in chapter 16, but its sentiment is the same. Here, the image of the tent functions as a symbol of insider status both at the level of the town and the body. Job’s tent is both his body and his position within the boundaries of the town. He finds the tent of his insider status threatened, as he is surrounded by God’s troops, who, having laid siege to it, are attempting to break through its defenses so that they can drag Job out or, who, perhaps, plan to cause the tent to collapse so that Job is crushed inside and exiled to the realm of death. As the tent of his insider status is threatened, so the tent of his body is assaulted by those who would pierce and break it, spilling its insides out on the ground. These actions are one and the same: to breach the boundaries of his body is to identify Job as an outsider and to drag him beyond the boundaries of the community.

As chapter 19 continues, Job speaks of the way in which he has been deemed an outsider by the members of his household, those for whom the tent still provides a protective boundary. He is ignored by relatives, guests, and servants alike because, due to the affliction of his body, he has become an outsider. In relation to this passage (19:13-19), Philippe Nemo makes the link between outsider status and the breakdown of the body explicit, writing that the members of Job’s household, “might have tried to overcome their moral repulsion...had Job’s physical existence remained intact and healthy. However, confronted with his ‘putrid’ body odor and ‘unbearable’ bad breath, even his wife recoils....The dissolution of the body automatically dissolves the convention of communication” (Nemo 1998, 32). That is, the affliction of the body can only ever signal moral failure requiring expulsion from the community, because the community cannot bear the presence of the one whose body is in a state of disintegration. The breakdown of the body cannot stand simply for itself, with no larger meaning, for if it did it would not require the expulsion of the afflicted one, but the expulsion of the afflicted one is necessary, at least in Nemo’s view. He continues, “In their eyes, or rather in the eyes of their unconscious, Job is guiltier of an illness for which, obviously, he can bear no real responsibility, than of a transgression which, presumably, he committed freely. They are ready to discuss the latter; from the former they recoil in fear” (*Ibid.*, 33). According to Nemo, Job’s household can hardly be blamed for their treatment of Job, for “This is not a defect in their personalities; it is a shortcoming in our nature” (*Ibid.*). His community’s

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<sup>137</sup> Literally, another occurrence of a path word, פָּתָח. Gordis translates, “they have paved their road against me” (Gordis 1978, 196). This is where God’s deviation from the one right path has led—to his violent affliction of Job.

physical repulsion and fear of death make the afflicted one an outsider, even if he has done nothing else to merit outsider status. Whether or not Nemo is correct that such behavior is human nature, his observations highlight the essential tie between the wholeness of the body and the integrity of the community. The community abhors a broken body and casts it out, even if it is necessary to trump up alternative reasons (i.e. the sufferer's unrighteousness) for doing so.

In chapter 20 Zophar responds to Job first by describing the casting out of the wicked ("They will fly away like a dream, and not be found; they will be chased away like a vision of the night" [20:8]), and then by linking this to the affliction of the body. He ends his speech by returning to his report of the destruction of the tent of the wicked and the dispersal of their possessions, symbolizing their banishment from the inside world of the town and human community. For Zophar, as for Job, the destruction of the body is synonymous with the destruction of the tent, both of which indicate that the afflicted person is an outsider. As Zophar presents it, it is precisely through the affliction of their bodies that the wicked are cast out of the community. He says, "God will send his fierce anger into them, and rain it upon them as their food. They will flee from an iron weapon; a bronze arrow will strike them through. It is drawn forth and comes out of their body, and the glittering point comes out of their gall" (20:23b-25a). The similarity between Zophar's claims about the piercing of the bodies of the wicked and Job's description of his body's destruction by God should not be overlooked. In chapter 16, Job has said that God's archers surround him and that God slashes open his kidneys and spills his gall on the ground. Here, Zophar describes God's arrow piercing the bodies of the wicked, specifically their kidneys, spilling their gall.<sup>138</sup> What happens to the wicked, according to Zophar, has happened to Job, by his own admission. The boundaries of their bodies are

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<sup>138</sup> I'm wondering what it is about the piercing of the kidneys and the spilling of the gall that leads both Job and Zophar to describe these as the actions taken by God against his enemies. Perhaps it is as simple as Zophar picking up on the imagery already used by Job, in order to include Job in his indictment of the wicked. I have not found any scholarly speculation about the meaning of Job's and Zophar's shared use of this picture, but some scholars do offer interpretations of Job's choice of the kidneys as the specific locus of God's attack. Balentine suggests that the attack on the kidneys signifies an attack that is emotionally overwhelming, writing, "At one level the expression signifies the overwhelming emotional fatigue that drains Job's passion for carrying on with the struggle, for the kidneys, like the heart, are the symbolic center of intense affections and desires. At a more basic level the kidneys are a vital and extremely sensitive part of the human anatomy....Job of course does not speak with the expertise of a medical internist....He does know, however, what it is like when the kidneys are under attack....It is out of that experience...that Job speaks about the dangerous imbalance between God's hostile presence in his life and his emotional and physical capacities to withstand it" (Balentine 1999, 276). Offering an alternate (but not contradictory) interpretation, Newsom writes, "In the symbolic anatomy of Israelite thought, divine scrutiny is often represented as the searching of the kidneys and the heart (e.g. Pss 7:10; 26:2; cf. 73:21). Though such scrutiny is represented by the psalmist as legitimate and even welcome, Job insists on the close connection between looking and harming" (Newsom 1999, 247). If Job experiences himself as wrongfully scrutinized and harmed by God, Zophar's use of the same language might indicate his belief that, for the wicked, scrutiny which results in punishment is legitimate: God examines the kidneys (as we would say the heart) of righteous and wicked alike, and, depending on what he finds, allocates reward or punishment as appropriate.

violated, their insides spilled out on the ground, identifying them as outsiders who ought to be repulsed beyond the boundaries of the town and denied its protection. Zophar asserts that the spilling out of the insides of the wicked is based on their having tried to assimilate, to take in, that which should have remained external to them. He declares, “They knew no quiet in their bellies; in their greed they let nothing escape. There was nothing left after they had eaten; therefore their prosperity will not endure” (20:20-21). Because they have attempted to hoard within the boundaries of their bodies that which ought rightfully to have belonged to others, their bodies must be invaded, and the wrongfully appropriated wealth reclaimed. The wicked man is like a city which, having stolen a treasure, is sacked when that treasure is reclaimed by its rightful owners. By taking in more than his share, the wicked man has, ironically, declared himself an outsider, and, Zophar contends, his casting out is soon to follow. As can be seen, for both Job and Zophar, the body functions as a microcosm of the town and its human community. A broken body is synonymous with a town whose walls have been breached and no longer serve their protective function. A broken body is a body claimed by what is outside and, as such, declares its possessor an outsider. If chaos is to remain outside, the outsider must be cast out, so that order can reign inviolate within.

### *Job's Self-Identification as an Insider through his Preservation of the Inside/Outside Distinction*

Despite his location outside the boundaries of the community, Job continues to insist that he is actually an insider. In fact, the narrator's early designation of Job as אִישׁ צַדִּיק (1.1), may be an indication of an insider status that goes beyond that secured by righteous behavior. Ellen Davis points out that

There is one other place in the patriarchal narratives that this theme of integrity appears....I refer to the designation of Jacob as *'ish tam* (Gen 25:27). As with Job, the first thing we learn of the grown Jacob is that he is “a person of integrity”; but the phrase poses a conundrum, for if indeed *tam* denotes ethical integrity, then Jacob is not an obvious candidate for that accolade. Here the word characterizes a disposition and lifestyle sharply distinct from that of Esau, who is “a man experienced at hunting, a man of the open country”....The best clue to the meaning of *tam* in this passage is the continuation of the verse: *tam* marks the character of the tent-dweller, one who lives with others and recognizes the demands of the social order. (Davis 1992, 211)

As an *'ish tam*, Job is a civilized man. He belongs within the borders which surround the town. For this reason, throughout his speeches, he alternately begs and demands that God return him to his rightful place, and, in chapter 29 presents a picture of what his rightful

place looks like. I have already discussed this chapter in detail in chapter two. The observations that I made there about Job's central position and his status as the only real character, whose importance all the other characters serve to bolster, are applicable here as well. Job, at the center of the town's attention, is the insider *par excellence*. It is important to notice that, in chapter 29, he bases his insider status on his righteousness, and it is to this claim of righteousness that he clings throughout his speeches, despite the affliction that has branded him an outsider. He relies on his righteousness as the key that will open the gates of city and community to him again. It is his righteousness that Job lays before God in his oaths of chapters 13, 27, and 31, certain that if God will only deign to look he will recognize Job as an insider and effect his restoration.<sup>139</sup>

This righteousness, as Job describes it in chapter 29, is of a specific sort. Job is not simply "a good person" in general. Rather, Job's righteousness, which he presents as the sign of his insider status, is based on his ability to judge the righteousness and wickedness of others and to enforce insider/outsider distinctions. Job ensures that those who belong inside, because of their righteousness, remain inside, and casts out those who, because of their wickedness, do not belong. He speaks of his saving work on behalf of the poor, the orphan, the widow, the wretched, the blind, the lame, the needy, and the stranger, all of whom bless him for what he has done, turning their eyes heavenward and fixing them on Job who shines above, surrounded by God's holy light.<sup>140</sup> He saves these righteous poor by breaking "the fangs of the unrighteous" and making "them drop their prey from their teeth" (29:17). It is this very act that occasions Job's reflection, "Then I thought, 'I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days like the phoenix'" (29:18). Although Job uses the term "nest" to describe his dwelling, a term that he has used in chapter 27 to describe the insecurity of the homes of the wicked and the lack of protection they afford, it is clear that here he is not describing his own home as similarly insecure, or if he is, it is only in the light of the affliction that has befallen him and does not reflect how he perceived his

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<sup>139</sup> Newsom reads Job's chapter 31 oath of innocence as spoken to a community which shares his values and which, after hearing what he has said, must recognize him as an insider. She writes, "As Job swears to different kinds of conduct, it allows Job to rehearse with his audience the virtues and values they mutually endorse and so to present himself persuasively as 'one of us'" (Newsom 2003, 195). As Newsom sees it, it is the community that Job must convince of his insider status, and not primarily God, for God as "the social and moral order writ large" (*Ibid.*, 196) will necessarily agree with the community's evaluation. It is, therefore, the community's decision to allow Job to reenter its boundaries that comes first, even though the community assumes that God has made the first move to rehabilitate Job. The maintenance of boundaries between inside and outside is here recognized as a function of society.

<sup>140</sup> Of Job's work on behalf of the righteous poor, Mark Hamilton writes, "the author pictures Job as mender of the very bodies of those who did not receive deference, the lowest tier of society....Indeed, his body merges with theirs, so that, in a brilliant literary maneuver, the text identifies the body of the ruler with the body politic itself...[T]he emphasis on the ruler's protection of the ruled...reinforces the elite's status but does so by seeming to distribute power and wealth more widely than before" (Hamilton 2007, 78). Here, it is not just that any body is a microcosm of the human community, but that the leader's body is representative of the community.

security in the days when he was the consummate insider.<sup>141</sup> In those days, Job believed that his work on behalf of the righteous poor and against the wicked guaranteed his own position as an insider. He expected to remain within the protective walls of his house and community throughout all the years of his life. Indeed, it is interesting that, although Job speaks of dying “in my nest,” in the second half of the verse he speaks of multiplying “my days like the phoenix.” On the basis of his differentiation between righteous and wicked, Job has confidence that his life will be prolonged, allowing him to remain within the bosom of the community for a long, long time. Even death, which would normally be seen as an outside force that drags its victims outside the boundaries of the community, did not seem to function in this way for Job, at least in his imagination, in the days before his suffering. He planned to die in his “nest,” in the security of his home, if he planned to die at all; his use of the image of the phoenix, which is perpetually reborn from its ashes, seems to suggest that, at least at some level, Job believed that he would continue to live indefinitely,<sup>142</sup> for, given his position at the center of the community, without him the distinctions between inside and outside would break down and the community would be overwhelmed by chaos.

That Job understood his work on behalf of the righteous poor and against the wicked as serving to maintain the boundaries between inside and outside is supported by his description of the treatment of the poor by the wicked in chapter 24. There, Job says,

The wicked remove landmarks; they seize flocks and pasture them. They drive away the donkey of the orphan; they take the widow's ox for a pledge. They thrust the needy off the road; the poor of the earth all hide themselves. Like wild asses in the desert they go out to their toil, scavenging in the waste-land food for their young....They lie all night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the rain of the mountains, and cling to the rock for want of shelter. (24:2-5, 7-8)

It is significant that the wicked are described as “removing landmarks.” The word translated “landmarks” is גְּבֻלָּה, meaning “borders” or “boundaries.” The wicked are guilty of removing the markers of separation and differentiation, so that the boundaries between one person's land and another's are made unclear, rendering the distinction between inside and outside uncertain. They do this, presumably, with the intention of claiming for themselves what rightfully belongs to another. The landmark, which should have served to keep them out and to protect what was inside, fails to do its job, and what is outside comes in and claims for its own what was formerly inside. By stealing from the

<sup>141</sup> The word translated “nest” here is קֵן. In 27:18 “nests” is the translation of a different word, עֵשׂ.

<sup>142</sup> Because the Hebrew חוּל has both meanings, it is also possible to translate this verse as saying that Job expected to multiply his days “like sand,” instead of “like the phoenix,” which, though it does not connote endless life through continual rebirth, does indicate the extreme prolongation of Job's life.

poor any means they may have had to support themselves within the human community, the wicked thrust them “off the road” and out into the wilderness where they are forced to live like animals. These needy people have done nothing wrong. They belong within the boundaries of the town. They deserve to benefit from its protection, as all righteous people do. The wicked, however, make them into outsiders, and, by doing so, illicitly appropriate their insider status.<sup>143</sup> It is the wicked who now live in town and own fields and flocks, donkeys and oxen, slaves and olive groves and vineyards, when they ought to be outside the boundaries of the human community. From this passage it is clear that when Job helps the righteous poor and defends them against the wicked by “breaking the fangs of the unrighteous” he is performing that most important function of maintaining the correct boundaries between inside and outside, preserving order against the onslaught of chaos.

*The “Senseless, Disreputable Brood”: Humans as Animals in the Outer Space of the Wilderness*

In chapter 24, Job has described what happens when correct boundaries between inside and outside are not maintained. In the world as it currently is, those boundaries are in turmoil. Whereas previously Job took responsibility for ensuring that those who belonged inside remained inside and that those who belonged outside were repulsed, he no longer has the power to do so. An outsider himself, he can no longer protect the community’s boundaries through his righteous judgment, but can only sit outside and demand that God let him back in so that he can get back to work. Not only are the righteous poor in the situation he describes in chapter 24, but he himself is among them. In chapter 30, he describes himself as “a brother of jackals, and a companion of ostriches” (v. 29), that is, as a wild beast inhabiting the wilderness beyond the boundaries of the town. He and the righteous poor alike must scavenge in the waste-land (24:5b) and “cling to the rock for want of shelter” (24:8b).<sup>144</sup> Here, again, the image of “home” is used as a

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<sup>143</sup> Clines identifies the wicked described in chapter 24 as being “not professional thieves or brigands,” but “the chieftains and ruling class” of the same community as the poor (Clines 1998b, 247), basing his identification on the fact that these wicked people do not make off with what they have stolen, but, instead enjoy their ill-gotten gains under the very noses of those who have been robbed. They are insiders, not outsiders. According to Clines, what Job is describing is a problem in the structure of his society itself—the rich and powerful exploit the poor and no one does anything to stop them. Whereas, in chapter 29 Job describes himself as the one who, in his former glory, protected the poor from the wicked, in chapter 24 Job blames God for allowing the wicked to prevail. This is because Job now finds himself in the situation of the exploited poor, unable to carry out his former duties, a circumstance for which he believes God is responsible.

<sup>144</sup> This language may be metaphorical. Clines argues that the poor do not literally inhabit the wilderness. Instead, “What we have here...is...a metaphorical depiction of the hard work required to earn an inadequate living as a farm laborer: it is no better...than scavenging for roots in the steppe” (Clines 2006, 605-06). Yet, even if the language is metaphorical, the link between the poor and the animals of the wilderness is not

symbol for insider status. Like animals, Job and the righteous poor have no home; having been thrust beyond the walls of the community, they must make do with the meager shelter of rocks and bushes, which can provide no real protection.

In chapter 30, instead of describing how his position as an insider has been usurped by the wicked, Job speaks of another group of animal-like outsiders whose mockery shows how much of an outsider he has become. He is mocked by

those who are younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock. What could I gain from the strength of their hands? All their vigor is gone. Through want and hard hunger they gnaw the dry and desolate ground, they pick mallow and the leaves of bushes, and to warm themselves the roots of broom. They are driven out from society; people shout after them as after a thief. In the gullies of wadis they must live, in holes in the ground, and in the rocks. Among the bushes they bray; under the nettles they huddle together. A senseless, disreputable brood, they have been whipped out of the land. (30:1b-8)

Job has gone from being the consummate insider, the one who secured the boundary between inside and outside, to being considered an outsider even by those who are themselves the most outside. Like the righteous poor of chapter 24, this group's members are described as living like animals, scratching out an existence in the wilderness outside the boundaries of the town, trying to find dwellings for themselves by squeezing into gullies and holes in the ground and gaps between rocks, but unable to create the true inner space of a home.

Unlike the righteous poor, however, this group is described as deserving its wilderness habitation. These people have been “driven out from society” and “whipped out of the land,” not by the wicked who would wrongfully appropriate their place as insiders, but by the righteous who are defending the integrity of their inner space. This group is described by the epithet, בני-נבל גם-בני בלי-שם, “foolish ones and ones with no name,” which is translated by the NRSV as, “a senseless, disreputable brood.” Janzen explains the force of this appellation, writing,

In human society, where social relations are rooted in sensibilities of primal sympathy having moral and religious overtones and where individual identity arises partly through embodiment of recognizable common values and partly through the individually distinctive way in which those values and sensibilities are embodied and enacted, how can one discover or make contact with anything personal or individual in a *nabal*, a fool, much less give a personal name? The very namelessness of such a brood is already their alienation from the community. (Janzen 1985, 205)

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lessened. Brown writes, “In his description of the needy, Job freely moves from the domain of harsh and unforgiving nature to the brutal arena of human culture to describe the plight of the vulnerable. Abused by nature and society, the onager and the orphan share in common their status as victims. The poor have been...exiled...to the margins to become kin with the exploited class of asses” (Brown 1999, 334). Even if they remain literally within the human enclosure, these people have been made into animal-like outsiders.

The epithet conveys, in the strongest possible terms—(Janzen writes, “It is difficult to find a translation adequate to the extreme lengths to which the Hebrew terms here take the reader’s moral imagination” [*Ibid.*])—the outsideness of this group,<sup>145</sup> seeming to imply that they do not possess the characteristics necessary for participation in human community. They would seem to be those who are “so far gone” (for whatever reason), that their rehabilitation to insider status is unimaginable, if not entirely impossible.

The animal descriptors applied to the “senseless, disreputable brood” indicate Job’s belief that a boundary exists between humans and animals which marks humans as insiders and animals as outsiders. Although the righteous poor in chapter 24 are described as having been forced to live like animals because of the oppression of the wicked, the “disreputable brood” of chapter 30 is described in terms that are even more animalistic. This group must not only scavenge for food like animals do, eating whatever vegetation happens to be growing instead of cultivating grain for themselves, nor must they only try to shelter themselves under bushes and outcroppings of rock instead of building homes for themselves, but when they open their mouths animal sounds come out. Job says, “Among the bushes they bray” (30:7a). The verb here is נִרְרַן, the same as is used by Job in 6:5, “Does the wild ass bray over its grass...?”, a noise which is thoroughly animal. A person may live like an animal and still remain human so long she retains the power of language, but this group has crossed the line. That animal sounds come out when they open their mouths is proof of how far outside the boundaries of the human community this group lives.<sup>146</sup>

That the members of the “senseless, disreputable brood” are consummate outsiders, outside to the point that they could not be more outside if they were actually animals, is clearly established in Job’s description of them. What is not so clearly established is what

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<sup>145</sup> In 18:17, describing the destruction of the wicked, Bildad has claimed, “Their memory perishes from the earth, and they have no name in the street.” For Bildad, having no name means that one has completely ceased to exist. A man whose name survives him still has some claim on the world, but one whose name has been wiped out is an absolute nonentity. Job’s “senseless, disreputable brood,” then, is made up of people who do not exist. And yet, in his suffering, undergoing their scorn, Job discovers that their existence is reasserted against him. In his suffering, he has become the nonentity.

<sup>146</sup> Although it does seem to me that the members of the “senseless, disreputable brood” are described in terms that are more animalistic than those applied to the poor of chapter 24, as is shown by the animal sounds which Job attributes to them, I should perhaps be more careful not to underestimate the extent of the animal descriptors used in chapter 24. When Job says that these people are forced to scavenge for food, he uses the term טָרַף, the same word translated “prey” in 29:17: “I broke the fangs of the unrighteous and made them drop their prey from their teeth.” The same word is used by God in 38:39: “Can you hunt the prey for the lion...?” Clearly, this term describes the hunt for food of a carnivorous animal, and not the human search for food. In addition, Job dwells on the nakedness of the poor who have been forced to inhabit the wilderness—“They lie all night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold” (24:7)—a detail which links them to animals. These animal descriptors are tempered, however, by the assertion which runs through the passage that this situation is at odds with how things ought to be. The members of the “senseless, disreputable brood” are rightfully animalistic, whereas the righteous poor of chapter 24 are not.

they have done to mark themselves as such. Are they the wicked?—those whose fangs Job has broken in defense of the vulnerable (29:17), and who are, therefore, his enemies? It does not seem so. If they were, Job would surely call them by that name, which he does not. Unlike the wicked of chapters 24 and 29, they are not described as attempting to cast out the righteous poor. Rather, it is they themselves who are cast out. Whereas those who force out the righteous poor are wicked, those who have forced out the “senseless, disreputable brood” are righteous. But why? What have the members of the second group done to warrant their status as outsiders? If they are as destitute as those whom Job makes it his business to defend, why does Job not fight on their behalf? Why are his words insulting instead of compassionate? The answers to these questions have to do with the economic nature of insider status.

### *The Economics of Insider Status*

In chapter 29, Job has described his vision of the world as it ought to be, the salient feature of which is his position at the center of his community’s deferential attention. Essential to this depiction is Job’s insistence that he has earned this deference. Why do the elders make way for Job and the poor regard him with shy gratitude? They do so because he is their defender. “I broke the fangs of the unrighteous, and made them drop their prey from their teeth” (29:17), Job recalls. This arrangement is an economic one, even if no money changes hands. Job engages in behaviors valued by his community and, in exchange, they repay him with behavior which he values, namely the homage befitting a king.

When this behavior is contrasted with that of the “disreputable brood,” what the members of this group have done to deserve their outsider status becomes clear. They have refused to enter into economic agreements with the members of their community, most specifically with Job. They have rejected what Job has to sell and have refused to pay for his services. Job does not ask much—only gratitude displayed in silent deference and acknowledgment of his superior status, a fee well within their range. Others as poor as they have paid it before and found the trade in their favor. But, in fact, in Job’s view, the members of this group are not as vulnerable as their destitution might imply. His opening reference to their fathers is not accidental. These people are not in the same position as the widows and orphans Job helps in chapter 29. There is nothing stopping them from earning adequate food and shelter besides their refusal to enter into the necessary economic agreements and do the requisite work.

Job begins his description of them by claiming that their fathers were worse than dogs. This is an insult, to be sure, but Job does not employ it generically. He speaks specifically of “the dogs of my flock,” dogs with which he has an arrangement. These dogs herd Job’s flocks, and in return, he gives them food and shelter. For Job to be unwilling to set this group with his sheepdogs is an indication of their refusal to uphold their end of any give-and-take arrangement he might make with them. It is in this specific sense that they are worth less than “the dogs of my flock.” That this is the correct interpretation of this particular insult is confirmed by the next line of Job’s description, “What could I gain from the strength of their hands?” a question he answers with the claim, “All their vigor is gone” (30:2).<sup>147</sup> These are people from whom Job has nothing to gain, not because they are truly incapable of giving him any return on his investment—Job only requires what they can afford—but because they refuse to do so. Furthermore, Job’s remarks should not be taken as entirely hypothetical. Chances are he has first-hand experience of their lack of vigor. He knows they are not powerless widows and orphans but lazy, good-for nothings who would rather sit around all day picking their teeth than make any kind of honest effort. If they took the job Job offered to help get them on their feet, they would show up late for work, take a long lunch, and knock off early to play darts with their friends at the local bar. Then, when Job was forced to fire them for their lack of initiative, they would shrug and say, “Didn’t want it anyway,” before shuffling off to join the rest of their gang on the corner.

In chapter 29, Job has described a world in which economic agreements are entered into and kept, a situation which results in the correct functioning of the human community. To be an insider is, by definition, to participate in such arrangements. Such arrangements are what differentiate humans from animals. Although the righteous poor of chapter 24 may adopt some animal behavior because it is necessary to their survival, the members of the “senseless, disreputable brood” are animals through-and-through. The division between them and the human community is firm and final. This is what makes their mockery so hard for Job to bear. It is one thing to be mocked by those who are jealous of one’s position and who, seeing one fall, are eager to climb into one’s place. The wicked might mock Job in this way, but such mockery, though galling, would not be like the mockery of the “disreputable brood.” The “disreputable brood” has no stock in Job’s former position. They do not recognize it as desirable, nor do they aspire to hold a similar

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<sup>147</sup> The word translated “vigor” is the same as that used by Eliphaz in his description of the righteous man’s death in 5:26, כִּלְיָהּ. Eliphaz claims that the righteous man “shall come to [his] grave in ripe old age (כִּלְיָהּ).” As Eliphaz sees it, the righteous man never loses his vigor. That the members of this group lack vigor, despite presumably being young men (given that Job can remember their fathers), is not just a sign of their weakness but of their moral turpitude.

position. Like wild animals, they do not care about the boundaries between inside and outside—those upheld by Job and the human community through a variety of economic agreements—but, even so, they know that Job is even farther outside than they themselves are. Their world becomes an inside space and they become insiders when they compare themselves with Job.

### *Job's Inability to Draw the Boundary Line*

What is it that makes Job, who was the insider *par excellence*, into the outsider of all outsiders? It is, Job says, “Because God has loosed my bowstring and humbled me” (30:11a). In this, Job identifies himself as the enemy of God. The disreputable brood may have been whipped out of town by its rightful inhabitants, but Job has been whipped out by God himself. A more definite expulsion would not be possible. The word translated “bowstring” is *יהר*, the same word translated “tent-cord” in 4:21 where Eliphaz claimed of the wicked “Their tent-cord is plucked up within them, and they die devoid of wisdom.” Here, the word does double-duty: Job’s bowstring has been loosed, symbolizing his defeat by God, and his tent-cord has been “plucked up,” casting him beyond the boundaries of the community.

God’s enmity, though, is not the whole reason for the brood’s mockery. In chapter 29, Job has claimed, “my glory was fresh with me, and my bow ever new in my hand” (29:20). It was with this bow, presumably, that Job “broke the fangs of the unrighteous, and made them drop their prey from their teeth” (29:17). The bow was the means by which Job maintained the boundaries of the ordered world—the world inside—protecting it against the ever-threatening incursion of chaos from outside. If Job’s bowstring has been loosed, Job no longer has the means by which to guarantee these boundaries. What he has lost is, in effect, the privilege of defining the borders of order. Are the members of the “disreputable brood” outsiders? Job insists that they are, and yet he has no power to prove that they are by separating himself from them. They can come close to him and poke at him, and he can do nothing about it. The boundaries have been erased, and because he has been stripped of boundary-making power, Job cannot reestablish them. He, like the members of the disreputable brood, is a powerless outsider, but unlike that group he wants in whereas they could care less, a distinction which gives them power over him.

### *God's Denial of the Distinction Between Inner Space as Order and Outer Space as Chaos*

God's answer to Job from the whirlwind is based on a different set of assumptions about how order and chaos are related to inner and outer space than those held by Job and his friends. Whereas for Job and the friends inside is unquestionably the domain of order and outside the realm of chaos, God takes a different view. This is made most clear in God's depictions of the wild animals, a discourse which picks up on Job's claims about the "senseless, disreputable brood" and the economic agreements necessary to insider status. What God has to say about the animals utterly undermines the distinction between inside and outside, and it is in this respect that God's speeches are most radical. Although God may disagree with Job and the friends about the nature of order and chaos as regards simplicity and multiplicity or stasis and change, here God disagrees with *everybody* (except, perhaps, the "disreputable brood" and, perhaps also, the animals they resemble). Refusing to recognize the value of inside over against outside which is basic to understanding the difference between order and chaos, God, in effect, derails the whole chaos/order discussion.

Although I have claimed that it is possible to disagree over the characteristics of chaos and order while still maintaining the idea that there is such a thing as order and such a thing as its opposite, chaos, I now want to assert that this is only possible so long as the distinction between inside as order and outside as chaos is maintained. That is to say, if I have designated one locale as order and another locale as chaos, then it is possible for me to describe the first locale as simple or complex or static or changeable, and the same goes for the second locale. If, however, I remove the dividing lines between the two locales, then all bets are off.

God's depiction of the world as it ought to be as a place characterized by complexity and change lays the foundation for his undermining of the inside/outside distinction. The world as a whole is complex and multiple. With no dividing line, it is impossible to know which piece of that complex multiplicity is order and which corner is chaos. Additionally, if the world as it ought to be is subject to change, it may be that it goes through periods which are less complex than others, or more complex for that matter. How is one to pinpoint order amidst the flux if one does not already know where it is? The point is, one cannot. One can only point to order if one already knows *where* it is, and, in the same way, one can only locate chaos if its location is already known. If the boundary is removed, one loses one's bearings, and is left not with order and chaos as distinct regions, each with specific characteristics, but only with the world, with the creation in its entirety, which is neither as it ought to be nor as it ought not to be but only as it is. It is in his description of the animals that God gleefully erases the line between inside and outside

and, with it, the distinction between order and chaos. Before he gets to that, though, he drops certain hints which suggest where he is going.

### *The Meaning of the Whirlwind*

It is significant, first of all, that God answers Job from the whirlwind. In his speeches, Job has used the wind as an image of that which blows outsiders beyond the boundary of the community and which has, now, blown him out into the wilderness. In chapter 27, describing the fate of the wicked, he has said, “Terrors overtake them like a flood; in the night a whirlwind lifts them up and they are gone; it sweeps them out of their place” (27:20-21). In chapter 30, describing the way in which God has made an outsider of him, Job accuses, “You lift me up on the wind, you make me ride on it, and you toss me about in the roar of the storm” (30:22). In these depictions, the wind is the instrument used by God to cast out those who do not belong inside, thereby protecting what is inside from the threat of what needs to be kept out.<sup>148</sup>

God’s appearance in the whirlwind might, in fact, be read as performing the same function that Job has attributed to the wind throughout. Perdue writes, “The storm with mighty winds most often occurs in the context of theophanic judgment and the destruction of chaos in its various incarnations....Yahweh has come to engage chaos in battle, reassert divine sovereignty, and issue judgment leading to the ordering of the world” (Perdue 1991, 202). According to Perdue, Job is an outsider who must be repulsed, and God appears in the whirlwind to effect that warding off. David Robertson offers an alternate interpretation of God’s whirlwind appearance, writing, “God comes in a storm in order to appear to Job...as awesome; but because Job has already prophesied that he would come in a storm, he seems not awesome but blustery” (Robertson 1973, 463). In Robertson’s reading, it is not Job who is shown to be a force of chaos that must be blown away by God, but, rather, God who reveals himself as chaotic. Continuing to treat Job, who is by rights an insider, as an outsider and a force of chaos, God puts himself in the wrong; the maintenance of order depends not on the repulsion of Job, but on the warding off of a God who fails to maintain the correct boundaries. There is, in fact, something in Robertson’s construal, as opposed to Perdue’s, that is consonant with the meaning I want to propose for God’s whirlwind appearance, although I do not agree with Robertson’s interpretation in its entirety.

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<sup>148</sup> Job, of course, insists that he is an insider not an outsider, and that he has not deserved to be blown away by the wind from God. This, though, does not change his understanding of the wind as a tool God uses to maintain the boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

Terence Fretheim and Ronald Simkins offer an explanation of God's appearance in the whirlwind that seems to me to be closer to the mark. They view the whirlwind appearance as evidence of a link between God and the natural world. According to Simkins, "There is a definite correspondence between God and the natural world. The biblical theophanies function primarily to reveal God, and nature often serves as the means by which God is revealed" (Simkins 1994, 130). In addition, God does not wear the storm as a kind of mask behind which he conceals his true appearance, but, as Fretheim explains, "natural metaphors for God are in some way descriptive of God...they reflect...the reality which is God" (Fretheim 1987, 22). That is, there is something about the storm that is consistent with who God is. Simkins points out that God's appearance in a natural form is apt, given the speeches that follow, in which God parades the creation before Job, in all its wild splendor.

Yet—and here is where I think Robertson's interpretation is relevant—the natural world depicted in God's speeches is an outside space; from Job's perspective it is the domain of chaos. Shockingly, God appears to Job wearing the garments of an outsider, and, if Fretheim is right, those garments are actually accurately indicative of who God is. For Robertson this confirms Job's accusations that God is behaving like a force of chaos. I, however, want to argue that God's appearance in the whirlwind undermines the distinction between inside and outside and, therefore, between chaos and order. If inside is where God is, and outside is where God is not, what must it mean for God to reveal himself as present in that world which Job has designated as outside, the world that exists beyond the boundaries of the human community? God's appearance in the whirlwind is a different thing entirely from God's use of the wind as a weapon against outsiders. In that figuration, God is inside, hurling the wind out to repel those who must not enter. When God appears to Job in the whirlwind, the wind is where God is. God's presence in the whirlwind reveals God's presence in the non-human world, a presence which must consecrate that world and annul its outsider status.

*God's Boundary-Making (or lack thereof) in the Founding of the Earth and the Birth of the Sea*

Having appeared in the whirlwind, and thus, already made a statement to Job about what constitutes inside and outside, God begins to speak, asking Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (38:4). As discussed above, the world that a given human community understands as having been founded by God is the world of its own community, its own inner space. What lies beyond the boundaries of the community

is not considered to have been founded; it is space into which God's creative activity has not extended. Yet, here, God does not distinguish between inner space and outer space; he simply speaks about the earth in its entirety having been established and rejoiced over by the morning stars and the heavenly beings (38:7). If God has created the whole earth and the heavenly beings have rejoiced over all of it, then the idea that one space is desirable because blessed by God's founding presence and another undesirable because it is untouched by God is shown to be misguided. The second kind of space simply does not exist.

God now directs Job's attention to the sea, asking, "who shut in the sea with doors when it burst from the womb—when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped?'" (38:8-11). These questions play with ideas of inner and outer space. The sea comes from one inner space—the womb<sup>149</sup>—and is then enclosed in another inner space—the place apportioned for it by God. But is the place of the sea inside or outside? In combat mythology, the place of the sea would be designated outside space, in that the sea is linked with chaos as the medium in which the chaos monster is embodied. The sea would be out, not in. Here, though, the sea does seem to inhabit an inner space consecrated for it by God and surrounded by protective boundaries. Interpreters have noticed that, if the sea is bursting forth from the womb, the boundaries set for the sea must be the boundaries set by a parent for a child, boundaries that are meant to protect the child and not merely to constrain. Brown writes, "Yahweh as a caring mother or midwife wraps chaos with a cumulus swaddling band (38:9b)...Caring sustenance and firm restraint are woven together" (Brown 1996, 93-94). Similarly, Janzen comments, "the Sea...is described in its birth with Yahweh as midwife. The images of swaddling bands, bars and doors, and bounds or delimiting decrees...connote parental care and discipline" (Janzen 1994, 468).<sup>150</sup> The

<sup>149</sup> "Whose womb?" we might ask. Keller answers that the womb must be God's. She writes, "But then whose womb is this, that precedes all creatures? From the perspective of the whirlwind circling like the very *ruach* that pulsed over the deep, how can we avoid the inference that the *rehem* is God's, from whose unfathomable Deep the waters issue? Since goddesses had been *a priori* ruled out...the waters stir rather queerly. We would have to say that 'His' womb belongs to 'His' fecund body" (Keller 2003, 131).

<sup>150</sup> Despite the birth imagery and the parental care for the sea that it seems to connote, some scholars still see this description of the sea as primarily evincing God's power. Habel writes that God depicts a world in which, due to his power, "The forces of chaos are harnessed and the threatening sea confined like a baby to its playpen (38:8-11)" (Habel 1985, 66). Brueggemann ignores the birth story altogether, writing, "it is evident that the ground of Yahweh's response is in power, the power of the Creator God who is genuinely originary, who can found the earth, bound the sea, summon rain and snow, order the cosmic lights, and keep the food chain functioning...These doxological verses strain for words to articulate the massiveness and awesomeness of this God" (Brueggemann 1997, 390). That is to say, that the sea is described as a baby is not meant to demonstrate that God cares for the sea as if it were his own child, but, instead, reveals God's power as so awesome that the raging sea is no more threatening than a newborn infant. I do not, however, think that this reading is correct, as should be evident in my discussion above.

parent, in restricting the child, has the child's interests at heart. The child is not restricted primarily so that he or she will not encroach on the space of the someone else who really matters. Rather, it is the child who is at the center of the parent's attention. So it is with God and the sea. God wraps the sea in swaddling bands, so that it will be comfortable and warm. God sets boundaries for the sea so that the sea will have a place in which it can be at home. Hearing God begin to speak of the binding of the sea, Job might expect to hear an account of how the sea has been kept out, away from the boundaries that surround the human community. Instead, what Job hears is an account of how protective boundaries have been placed around the sea. The boundaries that surround the sea are the same kinds of boundaries that Job imagines encircle the human community. God presents the place of the sea not as outer space but as inner space.<sup>151</sup>

### *Questions about Place*

God moves on to a series of questions about place. He asks, "Have you...caused the dawn to know its place?" (38:12); "Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home?" (38:19-20); "What is the way to the place<sup>152</sup> where the light is distributed, or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?" (38:24). God presents a series of inner spaces which Job might have classed as outer spaces. He uses the terms "dwelling," "territory," and "home," to refer to the places where light and darkness reside. As we have seen, the idea of "home" has been used by Job and his friends to refer to the inner space of the human community. Here, though, God claims that light and darkness also have homes, as do snow, hail, and the east wind (38:22-24). If these things have homes, those homes must be inside and not outside, even though these homes may be located in the farthest reaches of the earth or sky, in places nowhere near the boundary walls of the human community. In chapter three I suggested that Job might answer these

<sup>151</sup> The verb translated "shut," in "who shut in the sea with doors," is the same word used 3:23 , סָרַח, and a similar word to that used in 1:10. In 1:10 *hassatan* questions God, "Have you not put a fence (שָׁבַח), which seems like a variant form of סָרַח, using שָׁב instead of ס) around him and his house and all that he has...?" In 3:23 Job laments, "Why is light given to one who cannot see the way, whom God has fenced in (סָרַח)?" There is an interesting play of inside/outside here. *Hassatan* assumes that to be fenced in is a boon, albeit an illegal one; it is preferential treatment given to Job. In 3:23, Job experiences being fenced in as a curse; the boundaries around him contain his suffering and make it impossible to escape. Then, in 38:8, God describes himself putting a fence around the sea, an action which, based on the previous two uses of the term, could be either a blessing or a curse. Additionally, because *hassatan* assumes that the hedge makes Job an insider, which contrasts with Job's assumption that the hedge makes him an outsider, it is impossible to say whether the hedge around the sea is intended to keep it in or to keep it out. In this way, the boundary, even though it is there, becomes confused. It ceases hold a definite meaning.

<sup>152</sup> Technically, the word "place" is absent from the Hebrew. However, it can be reasonably assumed to be implied.

questions, “Of course not. I haven’t deviated from the path of right belief and behavior in order to seek out the way to these distant and irrelevant places.” If we are thinking of these questions in terms of the inside/outside discussion, we might imagine Job making a similar answer. If Job has seen the gates of darkness, it is only because he has been forced to do so by being blown out of the inner world of the human community.

God, though, in asking these questions, indicates that it is desirable to have been to these places, to inhabit these locales, erasing the distinction between inside and outside by presenting all places as part of his good creation. God makes this explicit when he asks, “Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no one lives...to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass? (38:25-26a, 27). God’s blessing of rain is purposefully given to land outside the human community, to the wilderness, inhabited only by outsider animals (and perhaps those humans who live like them). God’s blessing on this land can only mean that God does not regard this space as chaotic space. It may be space “outside” the inside world of human habitation and community, but outside does not mean what Job thinks it means. To be outside is not to be condemned as wicked, nor is it to be banished from the presence of God. God, it seems, does not recognize inside/outside distinctions, or, he recognizes them only in that he has prepared places for his many creatures to live. The sea lives in the sea bed, the hail lives in the storehouses of the hail, the light and the darkness have their place. None of these places can be classed as inherently outside or inherently inside. They are inside to those who live in them, but the world beyond is inside to those who live there. The world is made up of a great variety of inside places, and though these may be outside relative to each other, no space is inherently outside. No space is, by nature, chaotic.

### *Animals and the Economics of Insider/Outsider Status*

Having begun his speech by giving glimpses of where he is going with his discussion of inside and outside as related to order and chaos, God now begins his discourse on animals which will carry his speeches to their conclusion. To those who insist that God’s speeches fail to answer Job’s questions and greet him only with incomprehensible non-sequiturs, it must be pointed out that God’s consideration of the animals, which makes up the bulk of his speeches, is a direct response to Job’s claims of chapters 29 and 30. In those chapters, Job has presented his most complete picture of the world as it ought to be and ought not to be, and so it is fitting that God should choose to respond to the ideas set out there. Indeed, chapters 29 and 30 stand as the summation of

Job's claims against God about the chaotic structure of the world in which he has, because of his suffering, found himself. In them, he shows God order and then chaos, and then, with his oath of innocence in chapter 31, orders God to choose between the two, confident that God's idea of what the world ought to be like matches his own. In their direct response to Job's concluding arguments, God's speeches address Job's claims in their entirety. If they are perceived as non-sequiturs, it is only because they reject Job's most basic assumptions about how the world ought and ought not to work. God answers, but he does not give the answer Job anticipates. Whereas, in chapter 30, Job has described the members of what he calls the "senseless, disreputable brood" as the consummate outsiders, so far outside that they have become animals, who are, by reason of not being human, inherently possessed of outsider status, God's discourse, with its focus on animals, indicates that, from his perspective, neither animals nor the "senseless, disreputable brood" can be considered as outsiders. The wilderness is not a place where God is not present. In fact, God dwells on his presence in the wilderness and fails to describe himself as present at all within the bounds of the town and the human community.

It is significant that when Job speaks of the members of the "senseless, disreputable brood," he speaks of them not only as animals, but as animals that are of no use to human beings, those which refuse to enter into economic agreements with human beings. That God disagrees with the worldview that brands those who refuse to participate in economics as outsiders is indicated by his focus on animals who are similarly noncooperative, presenting them as recipients of care and devotion, for which he expects nothing in return. Beginning his talk about animals with lions and ravens, God asks, "Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert? Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander<sup>153</sup> about for lack of food? (38:39-41). It is easy to answer these questions "God can" and "God does" and to view them as assertions of God's power.<sup>154</sup> God is powerful enough to feed lions and ravens, tasks that Job, with his limited abilities, cannot successfully undertake. But we ought to pause to ask why it should be anyone's

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<sup>153</sup> The word translated "wander"—*הִנָּח*—is the same as that used by Job to describe the toppled leaders who "wander in a pathless waste" (12:24). For God, such wandering does not seem negative, at least where ravens are concerned.

<sup>154</sup> Prey here is Hebrew *טֶרֶף*. It is the word used by Eliphaz in 4:11 to make his claim that "The strong lion perishes for lack of prey," a description which allies lions with the wicked. God's words in 38:39 clearly refute what Eliphaz believes to be true about the way God relates to lions. More disturbingly, in 16:9, Job uses a verbal form of the same word to describe his abuse at the hands of God: "He has torn (*טֶרֶף*) me in his wrath." Similarly, in 10:16 he accuses, "Bold as a lion you hunt me," where the word "hunt" is the same as that used in 38:39, *צֹדֵד*. Whereas Eliphaz imagines God to be the hunter of the lion, Job envisions God as the hunter of the lion's prey, an assertion which God confirms, although he does not confirm its corollary, that Job is that prey.

responsibility to feed lions and ravens. Shouldn't lions and ravens take responsibility for their own sustenance? Don't they know that God helps those who help themselves? Of course, I know that these questions can be read as affirmations of God's creative power instead of intimations that God is literally out on the prowl for prey which he carries back to the lions and ravens, as if they have ordered take-away and God is the delivery man. At the same time, though, even if all God means to claim is that he is the one who created those animals that serve as prey, the focus is still on God as the active party. God is the one doing all the work. The lions and ravens are passive. Nor is any sign given that the lions and ravens, if they are passive in their acceptance of God's care, are active in returning thanks and praise. Feeding the lions and ravens, God has not arranged a situation which will benefit him as well as them. Rather, these lazy creatures take what God gives without returning anything to God. Like chapter 30's outcasts they are ingrates. But God doesn't seem to expect gratitude.

When God moves on to his description of wild asses and oxen, his response to Job's assumptions about the economic nature of insider status becomes more explicit. Like Job's outcasts who "gnaw the dry and desolate ground...picking mallow and the leaves of bushes" (29:3-4a), the wild ass is described as "ranging the mountains...searching after every green thing" (39:8). And like Job's outcasts, the reason for the wild ass's difficult search for food is its rejection of the economic agreements that would guarantee it food in exchange for labor: "It scorns the tumult of the city; it does not hear the shouts of the driver" (39:7). The wild ass will not enter into mutually-beneficial agreements with the human community. It will not render its services for payment. It would rather live as it wants to live, whatever hardships such a life may entail, than bind itself to a life of servitude in exchange for more reliable food and shelter. Yet, despite this, the wild ass is not an outsider. Rather, it enjoys its freedom on the steppe which God has given it for its home (39:6).

This point is made with even more force with regard to the wild ox which will not "harrow the valleys after you" (39:10b) or "bring your grain to the threshing floor" (39:12b). "Is the wild ox willing to serve you? Will it spend the night at your crib?" (39:9), God asks. Here, God makes the explicit claim that wild ox will not enter into an agreement with Job, exchanging its labor for the security which Job might offer, symbolized by the crib. Like the outcasts of chapter 30, the wild ox and ass refuse to be civically engaged, refuse to work hard to earn their keep, refuse to participate in the economic systems of the human community. Job's condemnation of that group's unwillingness to participate in the economics of the town is undermined by God's praise of the wild ass and ox, both of which are described as shunning human society and disdain

the economic agreements that Job sees as necessary to the maintenance of the world as it ought to be.

### *The Economics of Leviathan*

When God turns to his description of Leviathan which culminates his speeches, he shows the limits of human power and perhaps even of divine power. Neither humans nor gods can control Leviathan, the beast that cannot be conquered or captured. In its supreme capacity to resist domestication, Leviathan is the wild ox writ large; whereas humans may try to domesticate the wild ox, Leviathan is completely beyond their reach. Keller points out that

Much has been made of the ludicrousness of the trope of Leviathan as a pet for giggling girls. Little, however, has been said of its *economics*....Leviathan makes a mockery of the whaling industry....[T]he windy vortex mocks the powers of global commercialization; it puts in question the assumption of the exploitability of the wild life of the world—the “subdue and have dominion” project. (Keller 2003, 138)<sup>155</sup>

Keller’s focus is on humans’ inability to buy and sell what they cannot control, but there is an additional dimension to God’s depiction of Leviathan as it relates to economics. As the wild ox writ large, Leviathan shares with that animal the refusal to participate in human industry. It is not just that these animals cannot be domesticated because their characteristics make them unsuitable for the purpose. Rather, it is that these animals refuse to enter into any kind of mutually beneficial agreement with humans.

Humans may have no power to capture Leviathan and press it into service, but neither does Leviathan offer its services in exchange for security. Leviathan will not “make a covenant with you and be taken as your servant” (41:4).<sup>156</sup> Leviathan will not trade on its abilities, in the way that a sheepdog or a domestic ox is willing to trade, as in, “I’ll watch the sheep or pull the plow and in exchange you’ll feed me and give me somewhere to sleep.” Leviathan will not be a status-symbol pet, taken to the park on a leash as a way of meeting women—“What a darling animal! What is that—a Leviathan? What’s its name? Flopsy? How adorable!”—in exchange for room and board. Keller is

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<sup>155</sup> Habel, too, argues that God’s speeches challenge the human mandate to dominate of Genesis 1:26-28. He writes, “Reading these texts...side by side...enables us to hear God asking repeated questions that progressively narrow down the interpretive options; gradually all sense of domination evaporates and the dogmatic mandate is subverted” (Habel 2001, 184).

<sup>156</sup> As part of the ideal life Job will live after he has repented Eliphaz promises, “[You] shall not fear the wild animals of the earth. For you shall be in league with the stones of the field, and the wild animals shall be at peace with you” (5:22b-23). The word translated “in league” is *ברית*, more frequently translated “covenant,” which is how it is translated in 41:4 with regard to Leviathan. Eliphaz believes that the wild will make a covenant with the righteous man, but here God denies that such a thing is possible.

right that the “‘subdue and have dominion’ project” is called into question by the Leviathan pericope, but I think it is undermined more deeply than even she asserts.

To “subdue and have dominion” requires a lot of hard work. It means clearing land, plowing fields, planting, harvesting, processing, storing. It means inventing machinery, building barns, domesticating animals. It means earning your keep, not taking a hand-out from anybody. The food that you eat is the food that you’ve labored to produce. What Leviathan, as the culminating beast of the array described by God, represents is not only the failure of the “‘subdue and dominion’ project” with respect to the fact that it is impossible to subdue or have dominion over Leviathan, but the negation of the idea that one must earn one’s keep, that one must, in fact, participate in economics. It is not just that humans *cannot* subdue Leviathan by force, but that Leviathan *will not agree to being subdued*. It rejects whatever benefits such an agreement might bring. It will not trade its freedom for insider status, and, for this, God praises it.

### *The End of the Inside/Outside Designation of Order and Chaos*

The group Job describes as a “senseless, disreputable brood” in chapter 30 shares characteristics with the animals God describes in his speeches. Job describes these people as animals, scratching out a meager existence from the wilderness, eating roots instead of cultivated grains and huddling under bushes instead of sleeping in houses they have built. These are the people whom Job classes as true outsiders; they are as outside as it is possible to be. Their outsideness is based on their refusal to enter into mutually-beneficial agreements with members of the community, whether economic or moral. They will not do an honest day’s work for an honest wage, but loaf around, shiftless. Neither will they gratefully accept Job’s charity, acknowledging him as morally superior in return for whatever help he offers. What they steal—what makes the townspeople shout after them “as after a thief” (30:5b)—as long as they remain in town, is the town’s ability to function as a community of insiders. The town holds together because of the agreements its members make with each other (and also with their God). Their covenants define the space they inhabit as inner space and the space they do not inhabit as outer space. Without such agreements, the community fragments. It is not an “us” inhabiting a “here” over against the “them, that, and there” of outside space, but simply a mixed group of people who happen to be in the same place but cannot define that place as in any way inside because there are no links between its people. The community is created and maintained by its economic agreements. Those who refuse to participate in these agreements are, by

definition, outsiders, and must be expelled if the community is to be a community of insiders.

God, though, praises animals who refuse to enter into economic agreements with humans and who fail to earn their keep by cultivating the food they will eat. He also praises animals who either abandon their parents, in the case of the deer (39:4), or who abandon their children, in the case of the ostrich (39:16). In doing so, he also praises the group that Job has labeled “a senseless, disreputable brood.” He does not invite these outsiders back into the town, but, rather, validates the outside space as valuable in its own right and the “lifestyle” of the outsiders as a viable way of living, perhaps more viable than that of the so-called insiders. God’s praise of outsider animals and of wilderness breaks down the distinction between inside and outside, preventing inside from being considered the realm of order and outside being viewed as the realm of chaos. Inside and outside become hopelessly confused—Is the wild ox inside or outside? And what about the sea?—and, with their boundaries so confused, inside and outside cease to exist as reliable designators of locations in which we can expect to find order or chaos.

God’s speeches end with Leviathan, described as the supremely unsubduable beast. Leviathan is depicted as the supreme outsider. It will not enter into economic agreements with humans, and there is no way for humans to capture it and force it to work for them. Keller argues that God’s depiction of Leviathan’s unconquerability marks the end of the human “‘subdue and have dominion’ project.” The end of this project is concurrent with the dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside space. If to be inside is to be within the human community, on land and among animals that have been subdued and over which humans now have dominion, then where Leviathan is there can be no inside space. Faced with Leviathan, humans lose their ability to be insiders.

In his speeches, God has dismantled the distinction between inside space and outside space. He has negated the claim that inside is the domain of order and outside the domain of chaos. He has denied the validity of the “‘subdue and have dominion’ project,” both in terms of its possibility and, in his praise of the “lazy” animals, its desirability.<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, God’s removal of the distinction between inside and outside as fixed locations of order and chaos serves as a refutation of the idea that there are such things in

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<sup>157</sup> I realize that animals are not humans. It would be possible for God to describe the animals as not seeking to “subdue and have dominion” and for Job to still hold to his belief that humans ought to engage in that activity, given that the command was given specifically to humans and not to animals. Yet, the fact that Job has described the members of the “senseless, disreputable brood” as animals, means that what God has to say about animals also applies to humans. God praises animals in his speeches, and, by extension, praises those humans who are most like animals, namely the “senseless disreputable brood,” whose designation as animals has come about by way of their refusal to “subdue and have dominion.” In this way, it can be seen that what God says about animals applies to humans, too.

the world as order and chaos. The world as it ought to be and the world as it ought not to be do not exist over against each other in identifiable spheres. Rather, there is only the world as it is, which is something quite different from either order or chaos. Although it might be argued that if the world God presents as the world that exists is also the world as it ought to be, he is presenting a picture of order, without chaos there can be no order. The one gives rise to the other. If chaos is taken out of the picture, as it is when God denies that inside and outside are the locations of order and chaos respectively, then order also disappears. Order is essentially a defensive designation, defined by its need to defend itself against the incursion of chaos. In God's speeches, there is no chaos that threatens to break through the defenses of the ordered world, causing order itself to dissolve. God's world is the world as it is: complex, changeable, and unbounded.

### *Job Goes Back Inside*

In chapter four, I suggested that the resumption of the prose tale at the end of the book served as a fitting ending, as proof-in-action of the changeable and unpredictable world created by God. God has ended his speech with a hymn to the supremely uncontrollable, and therefore unpredictable, Leviathan, and what subsequently happens to Job is something that God has not engineered and which he could not have predicted. Job gets what God has told him the nature of the world will not allow him to get—the restoration of his fortunes—which seemingly serves to validate his good behavior and his having earned the wealth than now comes his way. Yet, it is the nature of the world as described by God that makes Job's restoration possible. He seems to have earned what he gets, but in reality he has not earned it. His fortunes change unpredictably because it is the nature of the world to change unpredictably. The prose tale ending appears as a surprise, and, precisely because it is a surprise, it is apposite.

Having read God's speeches as I have read them in this chapter, however, the prose ending seems less appropriate. Instead of validating what God has said, even though and precisely because it comes as a surprise to him, here the prose ending seems to invalidate the world as God has presented it. God has erased the distinctions between inside and outside and denied the claim that inside is the realm of order and outside the realm of chaos, but, in the prose ending, Job goes back inside. God has demonstrated that inside does not exist, that there is no such place. Still, inside is undeniably where Job goes.

The epilogue tells us,

And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends;  
and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then there came to

him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than the beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters....After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. (42:10-13, 16)

This ending is absolutely at odds with everything God has been at pains to show Job throughout his discourse on the animals. Job's restoration comes in exchange for his having prayed for his friends, as God has asked him to do. That is to say, Job is shown to be righteous when he does God's bidding, and the evidence of his righteousness results in his being immediately ushered inside. Job goes back into his house, that symbol of insiderness, and is met there by his community, which gathers around him and affirms that he is one of them by sharing a meal with him. As a way of comforting him for the wrongs God has done him, they give him money and jewelry, as if in payment for his suffering, a kind of fine imposed for their having colluded with God to treat him as an outsider when he should have remained an insider. God, too, pays up, and the contents of the settlement are detailed in verses 12-13. Scholars often notice that no servants are included in the list of what Job gets as part of his restoration, an interesting detail given the fact that in the prologue his wealth includes "very many servants" (1:3). Few, however, comment on the much more interesting fact that God, who has just dazzled Job with his cavalcade of undomesticated wildlife, praising the wild animals for their refusal to be anything but wild, now gives Job a bevy of domesticated animals.<sup>158</sup> God repays Job for his righteousness with the currency of dominion. The thousand yoke of oxen and the thousand donkeys stand out particularly, in that God has just finished describing the unwillingness of the wild ox and wild ass to serve humans. The term "yoke of oxen" (צמד) employed here itself designates oxen who are bound to human service, and contrasts with God's claim that the wild ox cannot be tied "in the furrow with ropes" and will not "harrow the valleys after you" (39:10).

The contrast between the world of the wild animals described by God and the world of the epilogue is furthered by its description of Job's family life. The community that surrounds Job, joining him in his house and eating with him there, is referred to as

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<sup>158</sup> Brown is the only scholar I have read who makes note of this detail, writing, "Job's status as patriarch seems only heightened with his property doubled, including his draft animals (42:12; cf. 1:3). His beasts of burden are the counterparts to the animals of the wild; but their appropriate domain is Job's domicile, not the rugged mountains or bare heights. Their place remains with Job, servile and at home within Job's reestablished familial kingdom" (Brown 1996, 378).

Job's "brothers and sisters" (42:11). They are his relations, bound to him by the covenant of blood. The epilogue goes on to describe Job's children, "seven sons and three daughters" who are given to him by God as part of his restoration. The enigmatic detail that he gave his daughters an inheritance along with their brothers can be variously interpreted. On the one hand, the inheritance may be seen as serving to give the daughters independence from Job and from male control, providing them with the resources to be real characters in and of themselves. Giving his daughters an inheritance, Job may be emulating God's behavior as depicted in the whirlwind speeches; there, God is the one who sets his creatures free and provides them with the resources with which to cope with their freedom. On the other hand, however, the giving of the inheritance may be seen as cementing Job's familial bonds through mutual obligation. Job pays his sons and daughters, and, in turn, they stay close to home, so that he can see "his children, and his children's children, four generations" (42:16) until he finally dies "old and full of days" (42:17). The information given in the epilogue about the cohesion of Job's family (with the exception of his wife who is, for whatever reason, not mentioned, and whose absence may sound a dissonant note), can be contrasted with God's description of the deer and the ostrich which shirk their parent-child obligations and which, nevertheless, are shown as recipients of God's life-giving rewards.

Just as God's whirlwind speeches can be seen as a direct answer to Job's claims about inside and outside and their relation to order and chaos, an answer that refutes what Job assumes to be true, so the epilogue can be read as a direct refutation of what God has claimed about inside and outside and their lack of real existence. God says that there is no such place as inside to be contrasted with outside, but, in the epilogue, Job definitely goes inside. He surrounds himself with family who are bound to him and to whom he is bound by treaties of economic exchange. He inhabits the space of righteousness and reaps its rewards. Additionally, the space in which he finds himself is the subdued space of the "'subdue and have dominion' project," as is evidenced by Job's possession of domesticated animals over which he has dominion. The epilogue reconstructs the boundaries between the inside space of human community and the outer space of wilderness, while at the same time affirming the "'subdue and have dominion' project."

What is to be made of this? Is the epilogue intended to make us forget everything we have heard God say? Is it, because it appears last, the last word on the subject of inside and outside as related to order and chaos? Does the discussion conclude with the claim that inside is most definitely the location of order, while outside is incontrovertibly the location of chaos, a claim that we, as readers, are meant to take as decisive? In addition, is God's revelation that, in truth, chaos and order are empty, nonexistent concepts when

faced with the actuality of what the world is, shown to be false by the events of the epilogue? I don't know. So much depends upon the epilogue, but what the epilogue means is not obvious.

CONCLUSION:  
HOW DOES IT END?

*The Last Word Matters*

The Book of Job ends with the prose epilogue, meaning that the prose tale, literally, has the last word in the book. Does it, then, represent the last word on the subjects discussed in the book? Is what the epilogue says somehow definitive? In some ways, it must be. Endings are always definitive, even open-ended endings, which project their open-endedness back on what has come before. In claiming that the epilogue matters, I am disagreeing with those who view the epilogue as an inconsequential addition to the book. Actually, “inconsequential” is the wrong word in this context. Those who view the epilogue as an addition may see it as irrelevant or misleading, but they cannot view it as inconsequential, even if they claim to. Coming last, the epilogue is profoundly consequential. Demonstrating this, Curtis, who believes that the epilogue is an editorial addition, writes,

The most important purpose of the prose...is that of deliberately misleading the reader as to the actual content of Job’s final and decisive rejection of God. Once the prose ending had been appended with its explicit statement of divine approval for Job...a reader would always tend to read the difficult closing speech of Job in light of God’s acceptance of Job’s words. (Curtis 1979, 510)

These are strong words. For Curtis, the epilogue is subterfuge, an effective rewriting of the meaning of the entire book. Curtis insists that Job, and not the epilogue, speaks the last true word of the book, and what Job says (Curtis says) is, “Therefore I feel loathing contempt and revulsion [toward you, O God]; and I am sorry for frail man” (*Ibid.*, 505).

There is almost a note of panic in Curtis’s assessment of the epilogue. He is reacting towards it as if it is a kind of Iago, maliciously deceiving everyone with its lies—lies which will be believed if they are not condemned with enough force. Others react less stridently to the epilogue, while still disparaging its claims. Crenshaw states quite matter-of-factly, “The epilogue...can be dispensed with altogether, since the poem ends appropriately with Job’s acquisition of first hand knowledge about God by means of the divine self-manifestation for which Job risked everything” (Crenshaw 1982, 100). For Crenshaw, the epilogue adds nothing, so it may as well be “dispensed with altogether,” lopped off so that the book ends where it ought to end. Even here, though, “inconsequential” is the wrong designation for the epilogue, even though Crenshaw’s interpretation might seem imply that the word is appropriate. If the epilogue is inconsequential, why bother getting rid of it? It is not because the epilogue doesn’t matter

that it should be “dispensed with altogether,” but because it distracts from the true meaning of the book, which, for Crenshaw is given in God’s speeches and Job’s acceptance of the world God has presented. Despite their difference in tone, both Curtis and Crenshaw want to knock off the epilogue, and, in so doing, restore the true meaning of the book.

Moshe Greenberg points out that the epilogue has been variously received. He writes, “Critics have deemed this conclusion, yielding as it does to the instinct of natural justice, anticlimactic and a vulgar capitulation to convention; the common reader, on the other hand, has found this righting of a terribly disturbed balance wholly appropriate” (Greenberg 1987, 300). This is just to say that it *matters* how the book ends. Curtis and Crenshaw both contend that the book *really* ends elsewhere. The epilogue should not have the last word, because it is not the last word. The last word has already been spoken. Yet, Greenberg’s observation highlights the fact that *where* one believes the book really ends depends on what one expects (or wants or needs) from the book. Greenberg’s claims are shared by Douglas Lawrie, who argues that what critics class as the “real” Book of Job, and what they excise as secondary is “profoundly influenced by individual opinions about the meaning and value of the particular sections” (Lawrie 2001, 136). Those who expect (or want or need) God to have the last word, end the book with God’s speeches. Those who expect Job to speak last, end the book with Job’s last words. Those who expect a happy ending in which things are returned to “normal” (as normalcy is defined by the prologue) accept that the epilogue is the appropriate ending of the book.

### *The Ambiguity of the Potential Alternative Endings*

Because the last word matters, because it is never merely inconsequential, Curtis and Crenshaw (among others) offer alternative endings. Both locate the real end of the book around God’s speeches and Job’s response, Crenshaw focusing on God’s words and Curtis on Job’s. What those words mean, however—and how they, therefore, end the book—is less than clear. Job’s final words are notoriously ambiguous, and Curtis’s interpretation is far from universally shared. Job’s last words, Newsom claims, are “irresolvably ambiguous and therefore a puzzling response. No matter how hard we listen, we cannot be sure of exactly what Job has said” (Newsom 1993, 136).<sup>159</sup> Robertson

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<sup>159</sup> There are several difficulties which translators and interpreters face. The first arises from Job’s use of the verb **סָרַף**, which usually takes a direct object, without a direct object. **סָרַף** can be translated “refuse” or “reject,” which is fairly straightforward, but the question arises as to the quality of Job’s refusal or rejection and as to its object. What does Job refuse or reject and why? The NRSV’s translation “I despise myself,” assumes that the object of **סָרַף** is Job himself, an assumption which draws some support from the second half of the verse, but which is, nevertheless, not conclusive. The second difficulty in translating the verse has

contends that Job's repentance is wholly ironic, given to pacify a blustery and overbearing God who has been unable to answer Job's pressing questions about life and suffering, and has instead attempted to cover up this inability by asking a series of questions of his own, questions which are irrelevant to the discussion at hand (Robertson 1973, 463). Other interpreters, by contrast, read Job's repentance as wholly sincere, arguing that he views his inability to answer God's questions as proof that his own questions were grounded in a view of the world which was limited. Having seen God and heard him speak, and having been presented with a world that is bigger than he had previously imagined, Job's questions about his suffering fade from his concern; they are no longer relevant. In support of this position, Greenberg writes,

[Job] confesses his ignorance and his presumptuousness in speaking of matters beyond his knowledge. Now that he has not merely 'heard of' God—that is, known of him by tradition—but also 'seen' him—that is, gained direct cognition of his nature—he rejects what he formerly maintained...Lowly creature that he is, he has yet been granted understanding of the inscrutability of God; this has liberated him from the false expectations raised by the old covenant concept, so misleading to him and his interlocutors. (Greenberg 1987, 299)

Newsom, taking up yet another position, argues that Job's response is deliberately ambiguous. Its lack of clarity provides him with a Bakhtinian "loophole," which allows him to reinterpret the encounter with God again and again and allows the reader to do the same (Newsom 2003, 29). What do God's speeches mean? They do not mean anything finally, once-and-for-all, but mean different things depending on when they are read or recalled.

Disparity also exists in the interpretation of God's speeches. Brenner points out that "God's answer to Job...is, at best, enigmatic. It seems to raise problems instead of solving them" (Brenner 1989, 129), and Edward Greenstein comments that "The whirlwind speeches, more than any other section of the book, appear in the diverse literature written about them like a readerly Rorschach test" (Greenstein 1999, 302). That is to say, how the speeches are interpreted depends as much on the reader as on what the text says. Janzen advances a similar opinion, spelling it out in more detail, as he writes,

Interpreters not only will but must divine the meaning of the speeches, the response, and the book as a whole in the context of their own reading of

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to do with the meaning of נחמתי, which can mean "I regret," "I am sorry," or even "I am comforted," as well as "I repent." (See *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 234.) The third difficulty is the meaning of עפר ואפר, "dust and ashes." What does Job mean when he says he repents (or regrets or is sorry or is comforted) in (or on or over; the Hebrew is על) dust and ashes? Does he mean that he is literally sitting in dust and ashes? Or is he making some reference to his mortality? And if he is, is he saying that he regrets the limitations of being mortal, for they will not allow him to challenge God as God deserves to be challenged? Or is he saying that he accepts that, because he is a human being, he has no right to challenge God? Or does he mean something else entirely?

existence. The diversity of interpretations matches the diversity which is displayed in our respective interpretations of existence. All positions, nihilist and absurdist no less than affirming and covenanting, are irreducibly confessional. (Janzen 1985, 228)

Lopping off the epilogue, therefore, does not result in a clarification of the meaning of the book. To end with God's speeches or Job's response is perhaps more climactic, but it is not clearer. It might be argued, of course, that, if ambiguity is the name of the game, the epilogue spoils the effect by tying up all loose ends and slapping a definitive ending on what would, otherwise, have been open-ended. As I have shown, however, the epilogue, despite its "happily-ever-after" style, which seems to neatly wrap up the story, is itself capable of being variously interpreted.

### *(Re) Reading the Epilogue*

In this thesis, I have read the epilogue in several different ways. I began by reading it, as part of Job's daydream, as detailing the outcome of a situation in which God's hand is forced by Job. I argued that, having been trapped into the bet with *hassatan*, a bet from which Job stood to benefit and of which Job is the true winner, God rewards Job because Job has proved himself better than God. Job has remained loyal to God, while God has been disloyal to Job, and must, therefore, pay for his disloyalty. It is not so much that Job is rewarded in the epilogue, as that God is punished. Then, in my fourth chapter I suggested that the epilogue might be alternatively understood as a situation in which both Job and God come out winners—Job, because he is restored, and God, because the world of his creation is shown to be a real world, full of the uncontrollable unpredictability of the real. In his speeches, God has described a world that is characterized by change and surprise, and the epilogue shows that the world is functioning as it ought to function, even as it takes on characteristics that God has said it does not possess. Finally, in my last chapter, I proposed yet another reading of the epilogue, arguing that the epilogue reconstructs the boundaries between the inside space of the human community and the outer space of wilderness which have just been deconstructed by God in his speeches. Something different is happening here than what I suggested in chapter four. It is not just that God is pleasantly surprised by a world which exhibits changeability, having intended to create such a world. Instead, in its reassertion of the existence of inside space and outside space and, by extension, of chaos and order, this third version of the epilogue denies God—at least the God who has spoken from the whirlwind—the power to create the world.

In this reading, the events of the epilogue show that God cannot reliably say what the world is like. God has sided with the wild animals and has invited Job, too, to be wild, but, in the epilogue, Job says, “No thanks, not interested,” and immures himself within the boundaries of his town, the walls of his house, the bosom of his family. As God describes the world in his speeches, there is no inside space specially dedicated to order, but Job, a human being, claims that such a space does exist and proceeds to inhabit it, creating it even as he does so. Ingeniously, he appropriates God’s support for his creation of inside space, claiming that it is God who has put him where he is and given him what he has, the marks of insider status. As has been seen in the whirlwind speeches, however, God’s gifts cannot be understood as marks of insider status or as rewards for righteousness which confer insider status, as they are given to all and sundry. In the epilogue, though, they are interpreted as marks of insider status, and Job identifies himself as an insider among insiders, the consummate insider within the bounds of town and community once again.

### *Who Makes the World?*

What is really at stake in the epilogue is the question of who makes the world. Throughout the book, Job and his friends have argued over what the world is like, even as they have agreed on how the world ought (and ought not) to be. When God appears in the whirlwind, he upsets Job’s and his friends’ conceptions of chaos and order, showing Job a world that both is and ought to be wildly different from what he and his friends have claimed. God brings home to Job the fact that he, God, and not Job is the creator of the world, asking Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (38:4) and “Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?” (40:8). That is, Job is not only not the creator, but was not even present when the world was made to know how it was done. Job’s insistence on his vision of the way the world ought to be requires the condemnation of God’s workmanship in making the world as it is.

Of course, Job has never expressed any doubt that God is the creator, leading some interpreters to claim that God is making the wrong point, failing to tell Job anything he does not already know. This, though, could hardly be further from the truth. Job may have always known that God was the world’s creator, but the world which he believed God to have created was a particular kind of world, a world very different from the world God shows him from the whirlwind. “As you already know, I made the world,” God says to Job. “But what you don’t know is what kind of world I made. It’s not the world you think I made, and if you insist that your idea of the world is the world I ought to have made, then you’re denying me, putting me in the wrong.”

“I am the creator of the world,” says God from the whirlwind, “and this is what the world is like.” The question is whether or not Job accepts this pronouncement and what he does with his newly-given knowledge. Does he say, “Yes, I accept your world and reject my old ideas about order and chaos,” and proceed to live in the world that God has shown him? Or does he say, “I reject the picture of the world that you have shown me. It may be the world that you have created, but it is not the world as it ought to be,” and proceed to live in a world of his own making?

Interestingly, however Job is understood to respond, commentators of all stripes are unhappy with the story’s conclusion. If Job rejects God’s world, the epilogue, in which Job finds himself, once again, on good terms with God, diverts attention from what Job has just said, overtly contradicting it. On the other hand, if Job is seen as accepting God’s world, problems arise when Job does not move into the world God shows him from the whirlwind. Job never joins the animals on an equal footing, having given up all claims to the “‘subdue and have dominion’ project,” and having accepted that the world is changeable beyond his control. Brown explains this discrepancy by asserting that God never intended Job to inhabit the wilderness world of the whirlwind. He writes, “It is crucial that Job does not remain in the wilderness, meditating upon God’s awesome beneficence in creation....Just as he was thrown into the margins of life, where the periphery suddenly replaced the center, Job is now thrown back into the community with a new sense of purpose and moral vision” (Brown 1996, 114). As Brown sees it, Job accepts God’s depiction of the world, but he lives in that world by reentering his community, by being willing to reengage despite the unpredictable changeability of the world as he now knows it to be. For Brown, then, the epilogue represents the fulfillment of what has come before in God’s speeches and Job’s response, and not its undoing. Perhaps this is so, but I am not convinced. The world of the epilogue is too different from the world God has shown Job. It smacks of rejection, not of acceptance. Yet, at the same time, for those who claim that Job rejects God’s version of the world, the epilogue seems too much like acceptance.

Are we, then, hopelessly mired in ambiguity, unable to determine what the epilogue means? Perhaps. But before accepting that this is the case, I want to return to the question of who makes the world as it is answered by the epilogue. If the God of the whirlwind has made the world that appears in the epilogue, he can only have made it, it seems to me, by means of creating a changeable world that is capable of surprising him. The world that appears in the epilogue is not the world God shows Job from the whirlwind. Instead, it is clearly the world Job has insisted ought to exist, the world he has described in chapter 29. Given the close resemblance between the world of the epilogue and Job’s

ordered world of chapter 29, it seems more likely that it is Job who makes the world with which the book ends. Having been shown the world as God has made it, Job realizes that the world he has been calling God to uphold throughout the book is not God's world, but Job's own. If anyone is going to make the world as Job believes it ought to be, Job realizes that he must be the one. Perhaps there is a way in which God's stress on himself as the creator of the world backfires. Although Job has always taken it for granted that God is the creator, God's self-proclamation as creator highlights the fact that the world is a made artifact, and, as a made artifact can be remade by other makers.<sup>160</sup> God's challenge to Job to "Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on all who are proud, and abase them" (40:10-11) signals God's belief that Job is incapable of making the world as he believes it should be. Job is incapable of abasing the proud and of grinding the wicked into the dust, and is, therefore, incapable of making a world in which the wicked receive their just deserts at each and every turn.

Yet, in the epilogue, Job does make a world. Perhaps this world does not quite attain his standard of perfection, but it comes close. Job is central, the future is predictable, and he is located inside the city walls. Although Job may be incapable of punishing the wicked as he believes they ought to be punished, it is significant that the wicked do not figure in the world of the epilogue. The only being designated as wicked in the epilogue is God (42:11). Job's friends and family acknowledge that God has acted wickedly, and they reverse the effect of God's actions by comforting Job and giving him money and jewelry. Additionally, the God who appeared to Job in the whirlwind is left outside the city walls, in the howling wilderness where he belongs. The only God let in is the one who seconds the restorative activities of Job's family and friends, who does, in effect, what Job wants him to do. So, although God may be right that Job is not capable of abasing all the proud, Job does, somehow, construct a world from which the proud and wicked are absent, and, foremost among these, is the God of the whirlwind.

In the end, then, does the Book of Job proclaim that the last word about order and chaos, about how the world ought and ought not to be, belongs to Job? The epilogue does give us Job's world, and the epilogue has the last word in the book. If this is the case, though, what about that mire of ambiguity alluded to earlier? Was it simply a mirage that has now evaporated? No. It's still there. Job's world does have the last word, but it is Job's world that has something of the mirage about it. It disappeared before and could disappear again. Is the whirlwind world, therefore more real? Not entirely, for it, too, is

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<sup>160</sup> This possibility is suggested by Scarry's work on the nature of the world as made artifact in *The Body in Pain*.

capable of disappearing, which is what has happened at the end of the book. In the end, it seems, both God and Job make the world, both determine what order and chaos are like, but neither determines it once and for all.

I have claimed that so much of the interpretation of the book depends upon the epilogue, and I think this is true. The last word matters. But, as has been seen, what that last word says is uncertain or, at least, only temporarily certain. Noting the ambiguity inherent in the epilogue David Penchansky writes, “Job returns to quiet and trustful piety in the epilogue, but by following the center, the epilogue introduces many ironic and disharmonic elements....Job therefore disperses into many stories, each occupying the same 42 chapters” (Penchansky 1990, 49). We do not read *the* Book of Job, but *a* Book of Job. If this is the case, it might be argued that we, the readers, are the ones who make the world of the book. We are the ones who decide which world holds sway, which world has the last word. Yet, I do not think that this is entirely correct. The book is trickier than that. The moment I choose between one of the options it presents, it throws up objections. If I choose Job’s static, simple, inside world as the domain of order, God’s complex, changeable, whirlwind world rises up and undermines my certainty, and the same happens if I choose the whirlwind world over the world of the epilogue. Whether or not Newsom is correct that, in his response to God, Job is intentionally ambiguous so as to create a loophole for himself, she is certainly right that the book ends “by thwarting all attempts to harmonize the various elements of the book....The apparent monologic resolution in an illusion, and the conversation is projected beyond the bounds of the book” (Newsom 1996, 298). The idea that Job creates a loophole for himself makes it seem as if he is choosing the more comfortable option; he would rather not be pinned down, and so keeps his options open. It seems to me, though, that the loophole is an uncomfortable space. If Job’s answer is ambiguous, perhaps it is because he does not know how to answer, and not because he wants to keep his options open. There is a way in which the ambiguity of his answer signals his recognition that he inhabits an uncertain, unpredictable world, which is, in fact, the world as God as described it from the whirlwind. In this way, Job answers God even as he withholds his answer!—but then he goes on to inhabit another sort of world altogether.

Here, though, I am being drawn back into the vortex of the book’s ending, reweighing the options it presents, when I am trying to bring my discussion of Job to an end. This is the problem with the loophole. It sucks you in, and won’t let you out. The reader does not control the book by deciding what it means for herself. Rather, it’s the book that controls the reader by preventing her from knowing, once and for all, what its vision of order is. It engenders a discussion that it is impossible to conclude, no matter

how much we would like to stop talking. Yet, perhaps this emphasis on continuing discussion is misguided. As helpful as Bakhtinian analysis is for understanding the book, perhaps it leaves us in the wrong place—always talking with no possibility of ever arriving at any conclusion. The book, after all, does not end with discussion, but with action. Job chooses a world and inhabits it. Perhaps the best response to the book's presentation of multiple visions of what the world ought to be like is to do the same, not as a way of closing down the possibilities the book has raised but of trying them out.

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