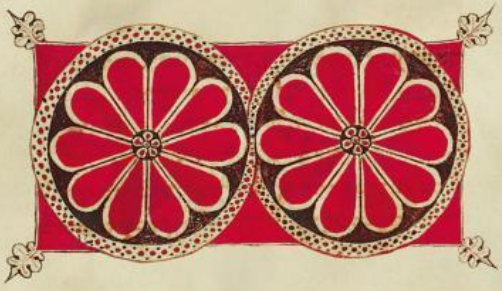
Contested Creations in the Book of Job

THE-WORLD-AS-IT-OUGHT-AND-OUGHT-NOT-TO-BE



ABIGAIL PELHAM

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By
Abigail Pelham

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For Peter

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PROLOGUE

THE AUTHOR, THE READER, AND THE PROFESSIONAL NOT-KNOWER

Writing and Un-Writing

I once wrote a book about the Book of Job, and then I un-wrote it. I made arguments, and then, raising objections, I dismantled them. I ended up with a blank page, with nothing to show. This was true to my experience with the book, and yet, at the same time, so untrue. The blank page bristled with the residue of an encounter which its blankness did not reveal. Something had happened between us, not nothing. To speak to this experience, it became necessary to inquire into the nature of the relationship between texts and their readers and to think anew about the kind of meaning a book about the Book of Job might construct and convey. In this prologue, then, I think about the dominant modes of reading in biblical studies, and attempt to puzzle out where my experience of reading the Book of Job fits in this paradigm, looking for points of consonance and of dissonance. My aim is to explain how and why the book that follows both is and is not a blank page.

The Author in Biblical Studies

Much of the work done in biblical studies has, as its goal, the location of the authors of biblical texts, as if what we biblical scholars have been hired to do is to form search-parties that will scour the caves and hills of ancient Israel to bring back the missing authors, dead or alive.[1] Or, if we cannot locate the exact author of a particular text, our task is to at least garner enough information about him[2] to be able to construct an 'Identikit

[1] In fact, a biblical author, when we find him, will most certainly be dead. But we, possessing the text he left behind, will be able to boil it in water and so concoct an elixir which, being decanted down his throat, will have power to revive him.

[2] In this prologue I will refer to writers using masculine pronouns, and to readers using female pronouns. I realize that this is somewhat problematic, but, as I am female and the author of the Book of Job was most likely male, it is also accurate within the limits of this situation. My main motivation, though, is, to avoid having to spell out "his or her" every time I want to use a pronoun.

drawing' which can then guide our reading of the text, as if without such a guide we cannot read what we have in hand. Explaining the dominant mode in which biblical studies is done, John J. Collins writes,

> What these [historical critical] methods have in common is a general agreement that texts should be interpreted in their historical contexts, in light of the literary and cultural conventions of their time. . . . [This] sets limits to the conversation, by saying what a given text could or could not mean in the ancient context. A text may have more than one possible meaning, but it cannot mean just anything at all.[3]

So it is that James Barr, using an 'Identikit drawing' of the author of Genesis 3, argues that Adam could not have been created immortal. He writes,

> The natural cultural assumption is the opposite: to grow old and die with dignity . . . was a good and proper thing, to which Adam no doubt looked forward.[4]

Similarly, Kathryn Schifferdecker writes of the Book of Job,

> [T]he ancient Israelite reader must have understood the divine speeches to be the answer to Job's situation. . . . The book does indeed have an 'end,' whether contemporary readers appreciate it or not.[5]

Granted, in both these examples, it is the ancient reader and not the author who is reconstructed. Yet, at the same time, the author is understood to be so similar to his readers that if his readers' expectations can be recovered, the author's intentions can be reconstituted from them. This is in marked contrast to our own, 'contemporary' relationship with the text, as noted by Schifferdecker. Whereas the expectations of 'contemporary readers' can only skew the meaning of the text by misunderstanding the author's intentions, ancient readers' expectations accurately reflect these. Biblical scholars, therefore, by discovering ancient reading communities, in effect discover their texts' authors—(this is what I mean by the construction of an 'Identikit drawing')—and reveal to 'contemporary readers' the way in which the text must be read if it is to be understood correctly.

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[3] John J. Collins, *The Bible After Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005), 4, 10.

[4] James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 5.

[5] Kathryn Schifferdecker, *Out of the Whirlwind: Creation Theology in the Book of Job* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 11.

Even many so-called 'literary'[6]—as opposed to mainstream historical critical—readings of the Bible have the discovery of the author's identity as their central agenda. David J.A. Clines, in his book *Interested Parties*, while lamenting that "the tendency of biblical criticism has been to attend only—or at least primarily—to the writing . . . of the texts" and insisting that, by contrast, "Writers and readers of the Hebrew Bible are equally the focus of this book," goes on to describe his own project as

> asking about authors as producers of texts, about their social, class and gender locations . . . not . . . about 'real' authors, but about 'implied' authors—the authors whom the extant texts presuppose.[7]

Clines differentiates this from the project of historical criticism by pointing out that, whereas historical criticism starts from outside the text, constructing the author in order to be able to read the text, he will start from inside the text, constructing a picture of the author based on the text he has created. Yet, Clines goes on to support his argument that the Song of Songs could only have been written by a man for a male audience with the fact that "[t]here is no evidence for female literacy in ancient Israel," a historical detail if ever there was one. Collins points out that the results arrived at by historical scholarship "are always provisional . . . [for] new evidence is constantly coming to light," and it seems possible that, in the same way, Clines' argument might be called into question by new findings about female literacy in ancient Israel. Clines constructs his 'implied' author by looking at the text, but this 'implied' author looks suspiciously like the historical author constructed by the historical critics; he is not a 'real' individual, but, then, neither are most of the authors constructed by historical critics; Clines' author, like theirs, is an 'Identikit drawing,' a composite reflection of his community.

Stephen Moore and Yvonne Sherwood argue that literary theory, which was imported into biblical studies from English literature, has taken a particularly historical turn there, in line with the discipline's established priorities. "[R]eader-oriented theory," for example,

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[6] I have placed literary in quotes, because, in practice, these approaches are defined over against the dominant historical critical mode: a literary approach is anything that is not historical critical (though Collins also insists that historical criticism is not "the totalitarian monolith that some of its critics make it out to be," *After Babel*, 3).

[7] David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSup 205 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 16–17.

> has tended to assimilate automatically with the discipline's inbred obsession with the historical author and the historical reader, who, even when ceremoniously renamed the Implied Author and the Implied Reader, are still implicitly shackled to their hypothetical historical contexts, causing reader-response criticism in biblical studies to become an exercise in historical criticism performed in a wig and dark sunglasses.[8]

This, in fact, seems to be what is going on in Clines' *Interested Parties*. Clines admits, "The *disadvantage* of my scheme is that it . . . assumes that the text is somehow typical," but counters, "I do believe that most texts are typical, and that therefore this text is likely to be a typical text."[9]

Robert Alter, whose book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, is described by Moore and Sherwood as "the best-received foray to date by a 'secular' literary critic into biblical studies"[10] approaches the biblical text somewhat differently, but with the author and his intentions still in view. Alter insists that literary analysis of the Bible

> cannot be based merely on an imaginative impression of the story but must be undertaken through minute critical attention to the biblical writer's articulations of narrative form . . . [as demonstrated in] the artful use of language, . . . the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, compositional unity, and much else.[11]

Alter is not in search of the author's identity, 'implied' or otherwise, but he does want to lay hold of this author's intentions. Inquiring into *how* he wrote, Alter intends to discover *what* he meant, just as the historical critic hopes to arrive at the author's meaning by inquiring into the *when* and *where* of his situation. These approaches—both literary and historical critical—are sensible and, taken together, can give us a more complete picture of the text's meaning.

On the historical critical side, it makes sense to say that the more one knows about the culture in which a piece of writing was produced, the better chance one has of understanding the author's meaning. On the literary critical side, it makes sense to say that close attention paid to the techniques and mechanisms by which a text has been produced can yield a better understanding of what the author wanted to convey. If a literary critic were to point out a shortcoming in the historical critical approach,

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[8] Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 101–02.

[9] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 95.

[10] Moore and Sherwood, *Invention*, 93.

[11] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 12.

it might be that because no individual is ever entirely the product of his or her circumstances, those circumstances cannot be supposed to fully explain or interpret any given text. Moreover, such an approach assumes that a writer will never say anything culturally new or different; he can only ever toe the line and maintain the status quo. Or rather, although he may perhaps speak *against* the conventions of his culture, he can never say anything *tangential* to that culture; his utterance must match his cultural context. So it is that, in Barr's estimation, the author of Genesis 3 could not have written an immortal Adam, and, in Schifferdecker's estimation, the author of the Book of Job could not have written a God at all lacking in the ability to speak definitively. This, though, underestimates the force of the personal, subsuming the individual under the collective of his culture, which need not be the case. The unusual is not, after all, the impossible, and writers, the argument might be made, are often unusual. 'Anachronistic' ideas, unlike objects, can legitimately be held by individuals, if not by entire communities. At the same time, however, the historical critic might point out that literary critics are overly confident about their ability to understand the narrative and syntactic methods used by the authors of ancient texts. It is all very well to speak of close attention to such details, but if one cannot pay *correct* attention because of a lack of cultural knowledge, one's attempt to read, however focused, will not yield true insight into the text or true understanding of the author's message. Therefore, as both types of criticism have something to add in the search for the author and his intentions, and both have flaws which the other approach can check, it seems that both are necessary as we attempt to understand what the biblical authors were trying to convey.[12]

The Reader in Biblical Studies

Yet, concomitant with the central importance of the search for biblical authors and their intentions in biblical studies is a certain reticence on

[12] Clines' approach in *Interested Parties*, though technically a literary approach, might be seen as fitting somewhere in between the traditional historical-critical approach and the literary approach of Alter, starting as it does with the text, but using historical details to help explain what the text contains. Yet, although I have written above that literary and historical critical approaches can check each other's methodological shortcomings, Clines' approach does not seem without flaws, as noted above. Is it possible that the combined use of these approaches results in a compounding of their flaws rather than a canceling out?

the part of the reader. Moore and Sherwood comment on the "epistemological decorum" of biblical studies in which

> [T]he model of the good reader is the commentator. This self-effacing reader does not write but, as his name implies, merely comments. He is a civil servant of the biblical text. He is a patient laborer in the textual field . . . so deep into the text as to be all but invisible ordinarily. For hundreds of pages at a time, there's little or nothing in his own text to indicate that it was written by a living, breathing human being. . . . He lives vicariously through the text and willingly under its thrall.[13]

As the tone of this passage indicates, Moore and Sherwood find it problematic that biblical studies relegates readers to such a peripheral position, and I agree with them. Indeed, their description of biblical studies' appropriation of reader-response criticism, quoted above, also demonstrates their sense that biblical studies' privileging of author's intentions has negative consequences for would-be readers: even ways of reading that have as their goal the privileging of the reader end up privileging the author, as real flesh-and-blood readers are exchanged, by swift sleight-of-hand, with ideal readers who only serve to reflect the hypothetical author. Only those readers who are identical to biblical texts' authors need apply, and 'Contemporary readers' simply do not have the necessary qualifications.

Why, though, should this preference for authors over readers be problematic? After all, aren't authors in control of the meanings inherent in their own texts? Moreover, as Robert Morgan points out, "[W]e usually want to understand a text because we think the author is worth hearing, not because we think we can do something creative with it."[14] For Clines, in *Interested Parties*, however, the discipline's focus on the author's meaning over the reader's response is problematic because it prevents readers from being critical of those biblical texts that propound values different from their own. Subservient to the author's intentions, the reader cannot critique those intentions. Clines, rejecting the 'epistemological decorum' of biblical studies, whereby readers must efface themselves from the reading process, insists that readers must assert themselves to critique objectionable claims asserted by the text. He writes,

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[13] Moore and Sherwood, *Invention*, 113.

[14] Robert Morgan, with John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 6.

> To be truly academic . . . biblical studies has to be truly critical . . . about the Bible's contents, its theology, its ideology. And that is what biblical studies has notoriously not been critical about at all. To be critical, you have to take up a standard of reference outside the material you are critiquing.[15]

I don't disagree. I want, though, to think about the reader and her involvement with the text in a different way. In Clines' formulation, the meaning of the text is fixed—it means what it means, and what it means has to do with its historical situation, which is what the text, after all, implies—and the reader's role is to respond from her own position. What I want to think about is the reader's role in the *creation* of the text's meaning.

Here, though, I am back at the question raised above. Aren't writers the ones who have the right to say what their writings mean? And isn't it common sense to assume that the way to understand a text is to get at the author's intentions for the text, what the author intended to communicate? It is surely common sense, and yet, Morgan, while pointing out that, in general, "[W]e take this grasping of the author's . . . intentions as the norm for understanding," goes on to concede that "[t]here are important cases where this is not what matters most, and biblical interpretation may be among them."[16] Continuing, Morgan makes the claim that when a text is ancient and its author is dead,

> The balance of power and moral rights then shifts to the interpreters. They are the masters or judges of meaning now, for better or worse. The interpreters are never mindless servants of the text, or midwives at the birth or communication of meaning. They are human agents with their own aims, interests, and rights. Texts, like dead men and women, have no rights, no aims, no interests. They can be used in whatever way readers or interpreters choose.[17]

This, I think, is intended (!) to shock us with its brutality, and it does. Morgan follows this heartless assessment of the defenselessness of the dead by detailing how and why some readers might choose to treat these deceased individuals with respect, writing,

> If interpreters choose to respect an author's intentions, that is because it is in their interest to do so. . . . They are reading a particular text on the assumption that the author is worth hearing and therefore respect authorial intention. There are other reasons for interpreters making authorial

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[15] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 109–110.
[16] Morgan, *Interpretation*, 5.
[17] Ibid., 6–7.

> intention, or (better) the grammatical meaning which is assumed to represent the author's intention, into the norm for the text's meaning. . . . [I]t is important for a community to reach agreement about the meaning of such shared texts as its laws. Authorial intention or grammatical meaning provides a norm which makes possible both a determinate meaning and a rational argument between conflicting interpretations.[18]

In other words, just as one can do whatever one wants with a dead body—it is helpless, after all—so one can do whatever one wants with a text once its author is dead, but, just as there are good reasons for treating a dead body with respect, so there are good reasons for respecting the intentions of the dead author. So, although Morgan allows that is it is *possible* to do whatever one wants with a text, such behavior, he asserts, is hardly commendable, not least because if we cannot agree on where a text's meaning resides, it becomes difficult to talk about the text. "In the privacy of their minds or studies individual interpreters can do what they like with a text and make it mean what they like,"[19] Morgan says. The text and the interpreter are, after all, consenting adults, and, what's more, the text's parent isn't around to lay down the law, so text and interpreter may do what they like behind closed doors, but what gets brought out in public ought to conform to certain societal norms. The general public deserves some consideration.

I take Morgan's point. Collins makes a similar assertion, albeit less brutally, about the value of agreeing on a common way of assessing the meaning of texts, writing,

> Scholarship is a conversation, in which the participants try to persuade each other by appeal to evidence and criteria that are in principle acceptable to the other participants. This model of conversation has served the academy well and is not something that should be lightly abandoned.[20]

If the author's intention, or the intention implied by the way in which the text has been put together, is not the baseline for meaning, how are we to judge between different interpretations? On what basis can we make claims for the superiority of one interpretation over another? Collins worries that, when authorial intention is taken out of the picture, the conversation which is the model for scholarship, "disintegrates . . . into a cacophony of voices, each asserting that their convictions are by definition preferred,

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[18] Ibid., 7.
[19] Idem.
[20] Collins, *After Babel*, 11.

because they are *their* convictions."[21] In such a situation, how is scholarship to advance? How are we to know *more* about the texts to which we have devoted ourselves? How will we be able to speak more conclusively about what they mean?

It's Complicated

I am sympathetic toward this concern. It seems a legitimate worry. Of course we want to know *more*, and we want to be true to the texts we are reading. Writing this book about the Book of Job, I have really been trying to write a book about the Book of Job. I have not been trying to do something illicit behind closed doors. The 'writing and un-writing,' mentioned in the opening paragraph of this prologue has to do, I think, with trying to do the right thing by the Book of Job.[22] And yet, I do think that readers have a bigger role to play than that acknowledged by traditional scholarship. The relationship between readers and texts is complicated. Morgan acknowledges that "however powerful the author's act of creation, the text lies impotent until it also comes into contact with a human reader,"[23] and readers have different commitments and concerns which they bring, wittingly or unwittingly, to act of reading.

David Clines and J. Gerald Janzen both point out that readers' identities have a valid role to play in how texts are interpreted. Clines writes,

> All readers of biblical texts . . . bring their own interests, prejudices, and presuppositions with them. While they would be wrong to insist that the Bible should say what they want it to say, they would be equally wrong to think that it does not matter, in reading the Bible, what they themselves already believe. . . . [For] interpretation . . . is . . . the mutual activity that goes on between text and reader.[24]

Similarly, Janzen writes,

> Interpreters . . . must divine the meaning of. . . . the book . . . in the context of their own reading of existence. The diversity of interpretations matches the diversity which is displayed in our respective interpretations of existence.

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[21] Ibid., 161.

[22] More about this later.

[23] Morgan, *Interpretation*, 269. Morgan, in fact, does get at the complicated relationship between texts and readers, however distasteful he finds some readers' disrespect for the dead.

[24] David J.A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, Word Biblical Commentary 17 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), xlvii.

> All positions, nihilist and absurdist no less than affirming and covenanting, are irreducibly confessional.[25]

I think these observations are correct, and yet, I wonder if Clines and Janzen do not oversimplify the issue somewhat. They make it seem as if the reader is fully in control of the way she reads. She believes certain things, and knows she believes them,[26] and these beliefs overtly influence what she takes the text to mean. So it is that Clines goes on to undertake four readings from different subject positions, none of which is his own,[27] which I find somewhat problematic. Sherwood points out that, in general in biblical studies, those readers who are permitted not to efface themselves from their commentary on the text are those whose "subject positions and sites of difference . . . are . . . widely acknowledged to demand respect." Here, Sherwood is talking specifically about those who have the right to *criticize* the Bible, that is, to engage in a very particular kind of readerly non-effacement. At the same time, her claim that only those "whose judgement demands respect" are allowed to be critical of biblical texts illuminates something potentially problematic in Clines' and Janzen's descriptions of how Bible readers read. She writes,

> Would it be too much, I wonder, to mount such critique in the name of no particular subject group but in the name of something infinitesimally small (and unprotected) such as a single I . . .?[28]

This 'I' to which Sherwood refers is not predefined or predetermined—it is simply 'I'—whereas the reading positions acknowledged by Clines and Janzen are positions in which that 'I' is already defined by its beliefs, commitments, and behaviors. None of the readers Clines impersonates is an 'I.' They are all cardboard cutouts in the shape of an 'I.' What is dangerous here, what threatens to keep the real reader from really reading, is the idea that the only way to resist the 'epistemological decorum' whereby

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[25] J. Gerald Janzen, *Job*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 228.

[26] In *Interested Parties*, by contrast, Clines focuses on the subconscious desires which inform writing and reading, while at the same time claiming that these desires, unknown to the writer and his original readers, can easily be elucidated by the critic.

[27] The subject positions are: Feminist, Vegetarian, Materialist, and Christian. Clines, *Job 1–20*, xlvii–lvi. Some of these may describe positions Clines does occupy—I do not really know—but that none of them is really his own is indicated by the fact that they can be separated out from who he is. In *Interested Parties*, by contrast, he writes, "Perhaps you do not even want to know what unexpressed reasons I have for writing this book, and perhaps I could not tell you most of them even if I wanted to." Clines, *Interested Parties*, 24–25.

[28] Yvonne Sherwood, *Biblical Blaspheming: Trials of the Sacred for a Secular Age* (forthcoming *Cambridge University Press*, 2012), 122.

one must make oneself invisible in relation to the text, is to become such a cardboard cutout, trumpeting one's commitments and affiliations and allowing them to stand in for the 'I' that one actually is.

Edwin Good and Mieke Bal do a better job, I think, of talking about the complexity of the relationship between text and reader. Good writes, "The work stands before us, not as an . . . object to which we apply analysis . . . but as a living voice . . . with which we enter conversation."[29] Similarly, Bal writes, "The text is not an object upon which we can operate; it is another subject that speaks to us."[30] Good and Bal, here, are less focused on the identity of the reader, and more focused on the nature of texts; it is because of what texts are that readers become involved in the act of reading them. These descriptions have the advantage of not defining in advance what the interaction between text and reader will look like. Readers are surely less typical than Clines supposes, or at least I would like to think so. For Good and Bal, both text and reader possess 'a living voice,' and they engage each other in an unpredictable, ongoing conversation. That the text is 'a living voice,' and 'a subject that speaks' is quite a different assessment from that arrived at by Morgan, for whom the living parties are the author (who, if dead, is alive only if the reader will respect him enough to treat him as such) and the reader: "A text has no life of its own,"[31] he writes. But I am inclined to agree with Good and Bal on this, and not with Morgan.

The text lives. It may live, as Morgan points out, only because its author has given it life, but it lives nonetheless. It lives because it exceeds its author's intentions, even his unconscious intentions, at least as these are teased out by Clines in *Interested Parties*, where the author is foolishly blind to prejudices that are easily seen by everyone else. When Gabriel Josipovici speaks of the necessity of "trust[ing] that language will help me to discover what it is I need to say," for "only by speaking can one discover what it is one wants to say,"[32] he is noticing this tendency of utterances (or texts) to exceed their authors' intentions. The author is not necessarily in control of his output from the outset. Rather, his intentions are revealed to him as he creates his text, as he, in fact, *reads* what he has written.

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[29] Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1981), 32.

[30] Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 240.

[31] Morgan, *Interpretation*, 269.

[32] Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 163.

To know what he means, the writer must himself become a reader. He may be the ideal reader, but that he has to read in order to discover his meaning indicates that he is not, in fact, identical to the writer. The text exceeds its writer.

Here, though, am I simply back at the idea that the 'grammatical meaning' of the text discloses the author's implied intentions, even if the actual author would not recognize those intentions as his own, and that those implied intentions should be viewed as the baseline for understanding the meaning of the text? This is not what I mean to imply! What I am trying to get at is the way in which the text might be said to be 'a living voice,' and suggesting that a sign of its liveliness might be the capacity it has for telling its author what he meant. If the text is 'a living voice,' this does not mean that we should not try to 'get to know it' by paying attention to its articulations. Of course we should. But it also means that the text is capable of saying different things, both to different people and to ourselves at different moments. How the text responds depends on how we engage it in conversation, but how we engage it depends on how the text engages us. It is a give-and-take.

Bal tries to puzzle out how this give-and-take works and what its implications for objective scholarship are. She begins by claiming that "Interpretation is necessarily a reader's response brought to a text; it is, at most, an interaction, at least, a purely subjective act," but goes on to write that, in this conversation with the text, "If we shout too loud, so that the other is reduced to silence, we will lack arguments to make our case." It is this, then, that checks interpretation, making it so that a reader cannot claim that the text means just anything. If other interpreters cannot hear the text at all in a given reader's interpretation, then it may be that the reader is "shouting too loud." She continues, "It is not a matter of empirical proof; it is a matter of plausible interaction."[33] Bal's formulation shows some loose ends. She acknowledges that she makes claims for the text's meaning, over against other reader's claims, while at the same time recognizing that reading is a subjective act, while at the same time trying to show how one might adjudicate between different readings on the basis of their relative merit. Collins finds her argument incoherent,[34] but I like what she does. She shows her thinking on the page,[35] and, although it doesn't quite

[33] Bal, *Death and Dissymetry*, 238, 240.

[34] Collins, *After Babel*, 14–15.

[35] I have to confess that this is very like how I write, so it is no wonder that it 'speaks' to me.

add up, its very failure to add up is a fitting testimony to the complexity of the subject, and, in that respect, it is true.

'Quod Scripsi, Scripsi': *The Reader as Writer*

Collins, as noted above, is concerned that if the author's intentions are no longer viewed as normative for the assessment of an interpretation's merit, the orderly, scholarly conversation by which biblical studies has been characterized will descend into a cacophonous chaos of competing voices. I wonder, though, whether his fears are justified.[36] Is it really true that scholars will have no grounds by which to converse with each other if the biblical authors are not given the final word on the meanings of their texts? I just don't think so. Biblical studies is not, after all, rocket science. By this, I don't mean that it isn't difficult, but that it, literally, is not rocket science. It has different aims, different possibilities. In rocket science—or any science, for that matter—progress is desirable. Making a better rocket is the goal, or at least knowing more about how rockets work.[37] In biblical studies, though, this kind of progress need not be the goal. Collins assumes, it seems, that the scholarly enterprise has, as its goal, knowing more about the biblical texts; he is concerned to find the best way to go about knowing more about these texts, and historical criticism seems the best way of doing this. Fair enough. But what if another goal were possible? It seems to me that a valuable way of thinking about scholarship might be to view the goal not as knowing more about the texts, but of doing more with them, *using* them to know more. In this formulation, we begin with the text, using it for its capacity to spark ideas and engender thought, but elucidating the meaning of the text itself is not the final goal of the endeavor.

Although in *Interested Parties*, Clines is able to construct the implied author and his intentions from the text, elsewhere Clines insists that the intentions of the author of the Book of Job are unknowable, writing, "*Quod scripsi, scripsi* ('What I have written, I have written') is the only answer

[36] Perhaps they are. Perhaps this cacophonous chaos has already taken control of the discipline, and Collins is trying his best to contain it. Yet, at the same time, Collins does acknowledge that "It is not the case that the postmodernists have captured the field. Far from it," Collins, *After Babel*, 3, a concession that Moore and Sherwood point to as evidence that fear of 'Theory' outweighs its actual influence in biblical studies, Moore and Sherwood, *Invention*, 9.

[37] Of course, I know nothing about rocket science, so I could be totally off on this.

we can glean from the author when we inquire after his intentions,"[38] An author's ability to make this claim—"*Quod scripsi, scripsi*"—is what distinguishes his position most obviously from that of the reader. The author is free to write how and what he wants. Readers, by contrast—or at least readers who are abiding by the prevailing 'epistemological decorum' of biblical studies—are not free. I am bound to the text before me—in this case the Book of Job—in a way that its author was not. Whereas he needed no reason for writing what he wrote, I must have a reason for writing what I do about his book. He was free, but I am bound. He is a gentleman, and I am his servant. I want, however, to challenge this model. I want to be free as the author of the Book of Job is free. If he can say "*Quod scripsi, scripsi*," I want to able to say it too. But what right do I have to do this?

Moore and Sherwood point out that literary critics, as contrasted wih biblical scholars,

> can regularly be found engaging the performative and risky power of words, almost as if they are willfully confusing the job description of the critic with that of the writer.[39]

Although part of Moore and Sherwood's point is that this is what biblical scholars, in general, do *not* do, they make the comparison precisely for the sake of showing that this is what biblical scholars *might* do, and, indeed, Moore and Sherwood's description of the literary critic who confuses her role with the role of the writer provides a useful approach to how I understand my role as a biblical scholar. If critics can be found "confusing the job description of the critic with that of the writer" this must be precisely because there is the potential for a significant amount of overlap between the two jobs, in biblical studies as well as in English literature.

It is not enough to speak of the necessity for readers not to efface themselves from their interactions with biblical texts, although this already goes against the grain of biblical studies' 'epistemological decorum.' That is, it is not enough to speak of 'readers.' Critics and scholars[40] are readers,

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[38] David J. A. Clines, "Quarter Days Gone: Job 24 and the Absence of God," in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 253.

[39] Moore and Sherwood, *Invention*, 111.

[40] Moore and Sherwood point out that, according to the self-naming conventions of each discipline, their academics are literary *critics* and biblical *scholars*; a biblical scholar is not a biblical *critic*, and a literary critic is not a literary *scholar*. According to Moore and Sherwood, this is because, "Whereas literary critics after the New Criticism could think unrestrainedly in terms of unmediated, immanentist, intimate reading, biblical scholars had to continue, self-consciously and emphatically, to separate what they did

but they are also *writers*. This is important and makes a difference to how we understand the possibilities inherent in our work. It means that the author of the text under consideration is not the only author in the house. If there is a privilege that comes from being an author, it belongs not only to the biblical author but to the scholar whose writing is inspired by that author. Who has author-ity?[41] We both do. We meet as equals, and not as gentleman (or king) and servant (or slave). This means that the writing performed by the scholar has value in and of itself and does not derive its value solely from its transmission of the text that it is studying. That is, ideas or insights which are generated in the interaction between the scholar and the text cannot be judged only on whether they accurately represent the biblical author's intentions, but must be judged for themselves: Are they interesting? Do they get at something new? Do they seem plausible—not just as interpretations of the text—but as ideas which might be 'let loose' to play in the larger world of ideas? This *is* biblical scholarship, in that it takes the biblical text as its starting point, but it differs from 'mainstream' biblical scholarship in that it does not take that text as its ending point. The scholar writes her own text.

Morgan, as noted above, argues that

> we usually want to understand a text because we think the author is worth hearing, not because we think we can do something creative with it.[42]

It seems to me, though, that these options are not mutually exclusive. Doing 'something creative' with the text hardly means that we have ignored the text. Instead, we have paid attention to it and then made use of it, acknowledging that the text is not an end in itself. Indeed, Christopher Rowland argues that artists' responses to the Bible ought to be regarded as genuine exegesis writing,

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from a Protestant-Romantic, pious communion with the text. Their work had to be clearly marked *as* work—as other than the subjective, self-indulgent, personal, private, pietistic, devotional, pastoral, homiletical, or confessional." Moore and Sherwood, *Invention*, 77.

[41] I get this way of identifying the 'author' in 'authority' from Moore and Sherwood, who write of the "Enlightenment Bible's" project: "Identifying which (human) hands had produced the different strands of text became the focus of scholarly industry, but the relationship of this question to that of the text's author-ity over the reader was left largely unexamined." Ibid., 102.

[42] Morgan, *Interpretation*, 6.

> I have become convinced that what we have in many works of art is an attempt to present in another medium the *total* meaning of the text. . . . It is thus a different kind of exegesis.[43]

If this is, in fact, the case, it seems that scholars, too, might legitimately engage with the text in this imaginative way. The boundary between the artist and the scholar need not be fixed or insurmountable, because, as argued above, there is already a great deal of overlap between what they do. Morgan goes on to claim that "[a] Bible that can mean anything means nothing."[44] This is a catchy phrase, but I do not know that it is true. It seems based on the presupposition that it is actually impossible to learn anything *new* from the Bible: if we don't want to end up with *no* meaning, we need to agree *in advance* about the meanings we will accept, because agreement is what is most important. But, if we expect our interactions with biblical texts to yield *new* ideas, then it cannot be true that the proliferation of these new ideas automatically reduces the book's meaning to nothing. The ideas are there. We can point to them. They exist, and are not nothing. Instead of meaning nothing, I would argue that a Bible that can mean anything has the potential to mean *everything*. It is in the generation and exploration of new ideas that progress is made, not merely in the explanation of the text.

Carol Newsom, in her article "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," suggests that an enterprise which she terms "playing Dostoevsky to the Bible"—by which she means bringing the various worldviews contained within the Bible into contact to allow them to quarrel and dialogue with each other—might be a useful way for scholars to engage the Bible. This enterprise, Newsom explains,

> 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.[45]

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[43] Christopher Rowland, "Re-imagining Biblical Exegesis" in *Religion, Literature and the Imagination*, ed. M. Knight and L. Lee (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 141.

[44] Morgan, *Interpretation*, 13. Morgan is actually talking about the need for groups to agree on how they will use texts, which, in and of themselves, do not mean anything. Collins quotes this sentence in *After Babel* (p. 16), but presents it in a less nuanced way.

[45] Carol A. Newsom, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," *Journal of Religion* 76 (1996), 305.

What Newsom has in mind is an intra-biblical dialogue, which may be why, in her own book on *Job*,[46] despite her use of a Bakhtinian approach, she does not 'play Dostoevsky' to the text in quite this way. Instead, there she insists that any new interpretation must be "rigorously answerable to the text in a nonarbitrary fashion,"[47] instead of going "beyond what the text explicitly says." But I want to grab Newsom's idea and make use of it for my own purposes.[48] I want to insist that if biblical texts can be forced into dialogue with each other, and, in this, can be made to say things that, on their own, they would not say, scholars as readers and writers can engage in the same kind of dialogue with the texts they study, pushing them beyond their 'natural' limits, drawing out their implications, and seeing what kinds of ideas get generated in the encounter.

Bal and Good both use the metaphor of the 'conversation' to describe what goes on between texts and their readers. I think this metaphor is helpful, but I want to propose another metaphor, not to supplant theirs, but to accompany it. I want to say that the text is available for *use*, not as an "object to which we apply analysis," but as a *space for thinking in*. As readers, we enter into the Book of Job. We find the walls papered with its characters' utterances; we find themes— about suffering, righteousness, creation, and so on—dangling like mobiles from the ceiling; we find wild animals swooping and prowling; we feel the air, here thick with moisture, bristling with the crack of thunder, and there dry and calm. Walking around this space, we interact with what it offers for inspiration. We enter the space as readers, and, living there, we become writers. We converse with the text, and, out of this conversation, comes a new text which, in turn, presents itself as a new space for thinking in.

Job's *Ambiguity*

I want to push this idea—of the text's availability for *use*—still further, and suggest that misuse is impossible. It seems to me that when we read a text we are entitled to take what we can get. If what we get is an insight into the conclusive meaning of the text, about which everyone agrees,

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[46] In this book I will sometimes use italicized *Job* as shorthand for the Book of Job, whereas Job, without italics, will always refer to the character.

[47] Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16.

[48] I am a writer. I can do this.

well and good. But if what we get is something else, an idea, an insight, perhaps about the text, but nothing particularly conclusive, or perhaps about ourselves or the world, why shouldn't we take that, too? If we get something the author intended, fine, but if we get something the author didn't intend, let's take it anyway. I do not think texts are like natural resources that can be over-exploited to the point of exhaustion. However much we mine the Book of Job, we are not going to run out of the Book of Job. It will not turn limp on us, its marrow sucked out, leaving only a floppy, papery shell, with no meaning left in it. Or, rather, if this were to happen, it would be because its meaning had been fixed, proclaimed once and for all, and the mining operation shut down in the name of preservation, or the '*Job* space' roped off with velvet cords, so that it became impossible to actually enter it to see what might happen there. This, it seems to me, is where misuse comes in; it has more to do with *no use* than with *overuse*.

Moreover, *Job's* renowned complexity and ambiguity make it particularly suited to this kind of *use*. Clines points out that in his 1989 commentary he has "listed more than a thousand books and articles that profess to state the unequivocal answers of the book of Job to such questions [the knottiest questions about the meaning of life]." He continues, querying, "Can they all be right? If they cannot, is it because their authors were incompetent, or might it be that there is something about the book that lends itself to many divergent interpretations?"[49] The answer to the last question is presumably, "yes." Similarly, 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."[50] For these reasons, Newsom ends her Bakhtinian reading of *Job* by advising readers "to go and reread the book in the company of others who will contest your reading,"[51] for only by engaging with other readers who read the book from different perspectives and arrive at different interpretations can one hope to get at the truth of the thing.

I think this is correct. And yet, these scholars (perhaps with the exception of Day), seem to imply that the book's multivalence is revealed primarily when individuals compare their interpretations and not to indi-

[49] David J.A. Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job," in *What Does Eve do to Help? and Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 106.

[50] Peggy L. Day, *An Adversary in Heaven* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 70.

[51] Newsom, *Book of Job*, 264.

viduals interacting with the book on their own, for each reader's identity will determine how she understands the book. I am who I am, which means that I can only read the book in one particular way, but you are not me, and so you read the book differently, and when we get together and compare notes we should be aware that the book's complexity allows for differing interpretations and should listen politely to each other's point of view instead of coming to blows over the meaning of the book. It seems to me, though, that the book's multivalence—the un-pin-down-ability of its meaning—exists not just when readers get together, but for the individual reader as she reads the book. I may approach the book in a particular way because of who I am, but the fact that I have a point of view does not guarantee me a fixed or unambiguous interpretation of this complex book.

The book may offer itself to one interpretation, only to duck out of the noose at the last moment, leaving its befuddled interpreter—mouth agape in mid-sentence, slack rope in hand—watching it caper across the field emitting peals of laughter at its escape. This, at least, has been my experience with the book. I have, at various times, 'figured the book out,' only to follow my argument through and discover that I am now making the opposite argument from the one I started with. Sherwood tells of similar difficulties experienced with the Book of Jonah, referring to her production of "Several crumpled and binned readings," leading to a recognition of her inability to make sense of the text without leaving "loose threads hanging."[52] At times, *Job's* capriciousness and its concomitant willingness to participate in philosophical thought-play has seemed delightful; at other times, the fact that the book seems unwilling to ever finally yield its true meaning to me has been depressing. ("I am throwing my youth away on the Book of Job, a book that, let's face it, is never going to commit," I have sometimes thought, melodramatically, casting a wistful glance over the borders to the greener country of Qohelet, where the wine is flowing and everyone's beard is dripping with oil and at least they are having fun.)[53]

The impossibility of being conclusively 'right' about the Book of Job is, in fact, the impetus behind my need to find another way of thinking about

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[52] Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 230.

[53] 'The grass is always greener.' I know. Sherwood writes of her initial attraction to the Book of Jonah, which, although it presented itself as "a crackable code . . . the most simple, GCSE-level and cartoonish of the prophetic texts," turned out to be no such thing. Sherwood, *Jonah*, 230.

how to read it and write about it. So, although I have written above that the book's ambiguity and complexity make it well suited to being used as a 'space for thinking in,' as described above, in fact *Job* is the model for this kind of space. I have read *Job* in this way, because I have found it impossible to read it in any other way, and this kind of reading has seemed to permit a more fruitful interaction than reading for authorial intentions and a hard-and-fast 'correct' interpretation. I acknowledge that this prologue is an exercise in apologetics. But what can one do? Above, I quoted Morgan's assertion that, although "[i]n the privacy of their minds . . . individual interpreters can do what they like with a text and make it mean what they like,"[54] scholarship intended for public consumption must adhere to certain norms. In reading and writing, though, the private and public are inextricably mixed. What one does 'behind closed doors' cannot help but affect one's public interaction with the text. Moreover, I do not know that one can help what goes on in one's private readerly space. One reads; one responds. One cannot, after the fact, retract that response. Bal writes that "[t]exts trigger readings. That is what they are: the occasion of a reaction."[55] Something happens when we read, and if we are not true to that happening—even if, perhaps, it should not have happened—we are not true to the text.

Newsom, having, perhaps, similar difficulties with *Job's* ambiguity, describes her own Bakhtinian approach as better suited to the nature of the text—or to exploring certain aspects of the text—than the historical critical approach.[56] Yet, Newsom, while recognizing that "The Book of Job lends itself . . . to being read in light of shifting philosophical and hermeneutical assumptions" and praising the book's adaptability as "truly not to be regretted, for it is what gives the book its perennial value," also insists that any new reading of the book "should be rigorously answerable to the text in a nonarbitrary fashion,"[57] as noted above.

These are stern words, hammering home the necessity of treating the book responsibly—rigorous, answerable, nonarbitrary—but I wonder about the purpose of such rigorous answerability. What is its goal? Is it to get at the 'real' meaning of the text and the author's 'true' intentions? If so, I want to know how this approach differs from those used

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[54] Morgan, *Interpretation*, 7.

[55] Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 132.

[56] Newsom, *Book of Job*, 22.

[57] Ibid., 3, 16.

in the "thousand books and articles that profess to state the unequivocal answers [to] the book of Job" described by Clines. Surely those scholars, too, sought to be rigorous, answerable, and nonarbitrary, and, by doing so, believed that their interpretations would be nonarbitrary, and yet their sheer volume points to their arbitrariness. Moreover, which text is it to which one is to be so answerable (and not just 'answerable' but 'rigorously answerable,' with no weak, arbitrary link)? Is it the text before one, in its 'final form,' or some other, earlier, more authentic text? Is a reading of *Job* which excises chapter 28 or Elihu's speeches or the prologue and epilogue more answerable to the text in a less arbitrary fashion than one which includes them, or vice versa? Furthermore, who is to arbitrate between the arbitrary and the nonarbitrary? The text itself? Perhaps. And yet, the inherent ambiguity of a text like the Book of Job makes this arbitration difficult. I do not know that *Job* will stand still long enough to be chiseled with these tools.

My own assessment of *Job*, as a space for thinking in, allows for a looser approach, in which the responsibility for being answerable to this capricious text is relaxed. Moreover, it seems to me that to take what we can get from a text—whatever we can get, and as much of it as we can lay our hands on—may, in fact, be a way of taking the text *very* seriously. We may not be able to say what the text means in any kind of nonarbitrary way, but we can point to an array of meanings radiating out from it, meanings which have meaning for us.

The Will to Be Right and the Value of Being Wrong

Frank Kermode gets at something like this in his essay, "The Uses of Error," in which he reflects on the contrast between Georges De La Tour's painting "Job Visited by his Wife" and this event as depicted in the Book of Job. The painting, he observes, seems based on its painter's misunderstanding of the book's euphemistic use of the word 'bless,' for, in it, Job's wife is portrayed as acting with tender pity towards her husband. Kermode writes, "So far as I can make out her gesture could mean either 'depart' or 'bless' . . . but either of these seems more likely than 'curse.' "[58] Yet, Kermode muses, although it is probably true that *Job's* author really meant

[58] Frank Kermode, "The Uses of Error," in *The Uses of Error* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 428. Incidentally, Kermode calls this essay a sermon, which is how it was originally delivered.

'curse,' and not 'bless,' his use of one word and not the other has opened up an ambiguity, even if the author did not mean to be ambiguous, and this ambiguity is useful; it allows us to think about things we might not think about without it. Kermode writes,

> The history of interpretation . . . is to an incalculable extent a history of error . . . .It arises because we want to have more of the story than was originally offered, or we want to see into the depths of that story . . . and when we try to go beyond it we may err, but sometimes splendidly.[59]

De La Tour's painting is an example of precisely this kind of 'splendid error.' We would not wish it to be other than it is; we would not wish it to be "rigorously answerable to the text in a nonarbitrary fashion." It might, of course, be argued that art is one thing and scholarship is another. The artist is free to do as he pleases, but the scholar has to follow certain rules. Here, though, we are back at the distinction between the writer and the scholar as discussed earlier in this prologue—he is free, but I am bound—a distinction already rejected on the grounds that scholars are writers too.

Making a similar point about the usefulness of error and the value of being wrong, 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.[60]

That is, the book's complexity and ambiguity are such that one can do a great number of things with it, and it is the *doing* that matters, or, as I have put it above, the fact that one is putting the text to *use*, and not whether the outcome of this use is right or wrong, for the standards by which to judge whether one is right or wrong are simply not available, as noted above. Moreover, what comes out of this encounter, however right or wrong, may be similarly *useful*.

There is, however, one aspect of Cooper's claim that troubles me somewhat. At the risk of appearing to contradict the argument I have just been making, I have to confess that I balk at his claim that "no combination

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[59] Ibid., 431.

[60] Alan Cooper, "Reading and Misreading the Prologue to Job," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 15 (1990): 74.

can be said to be 'right' or 'wrong.' " Or, perhaps, what I balk at is my own claim, related to his, that it does not *matter* whether one is right or wrong. This gives the impression that one may simply read the book any which way, and, after a casual glance at its pages, settle on its meaning and be done with it. This is not what I mean. Perhaps, after all, I have gone too far, overstating my position for the sake of argument, and, in the process, making a fool of myself.[61] This is, after all, a book about the Book of Job and, in it, I do pay attention to the pages I have before me. I want to take the text seriously. I want to say things about it that are true. I want, in short, to be right. And in this book I argue for my own readings of *Job*, demonstrating how they are answerable to the text, pitting them against others' interpretations. I emerge triumphant from the encounter, and then, acknowledging the text's ambiguity, point out the weakness in my argument and allow an alternate reading to take shape amidst its ruins. It is, in fact, because I want, so desperately, to be right, that I am willing to acknowledge that I am wrong, again and again. Instead, however, of binning those wrong readings, as Sherwood says she did while writing her *Jonah* book, I have let them lie, uncrumpled, but showing the seeds of their undoing, juxtaposed with alternate readings.

This kind of being wrong *is* valuable, because it is true to the ambiguity of the text. Perhaps, then, I am back, with Newsom, claiming that any reading must be "rigorously answerable" to the text. Still, I kick against this language, which does not seem to convey what I am trying to say. The difference, perhaps, is that I am trying to be answerable to what the text *does*, recognizing the impossibility of being 'rigorously answerable' to what the text says, this saying being so fraught with ambiguity as to defy any attempt at certainty. I try to be right, but I must be wrong, and so I try again. As a biblical scholar, I am not a professional 'knower,' having, as a result of my studies, more and more reliable information, an accumulation of facts about the object of my studies. Rather, at least where the Book of Job is concerned, I am a professional 'not-knower.' This 'not-knowing' bespeaks a rigorous engagement with the text, a willingness to occupy the 'Job space' and to keep working in the 'Job mines.' I do not have facts to offer, but questions and possibilities. And, in the end, "*Quod scripsi, scripsi*."

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[61] See, for comparison, my assessment of Elihu in Abigail Pelham, "*Job* as Comedy, Revisited," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 no1 (2010): 89–110.

CHAPTER ONE

CREATION IN THE BOOK OF JOB: READING BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS FOR QUESTIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

Questions and Answers about Creation

The Book of Job is an exploration of creation. It inquires into the nature of the created world and the identity of its creator. It asks how the creator originally went about the task of creating and how the creation is maintained into the present. Finally, it wonders about the relationship between the creator and what he or she has made.

I say that the book 'explores, inquires, asks, and wonders,' but, in reality, it is a text filled not with questions but with statements. Its characters do not wonder about the nature of the world; they claim to know what the world is and should be like, and they speak out of this certainty. Even Job, in the throes of a suffering that has unmade the world as he knew it, has claims to make about the essential features of the world as it should be. Job insists that the world-as-it-ought-to-be has been overthrown and replaced with a kind of anti-world, in which the opposite of everything that ought to be is true.[1] Job's friends, by contrast, perceive no disruption of this status quo. Yet, even while vehemently disagreeing with each other about the state of the world as it is, in the course of a debate which occupies the bulk of the book Job and his friends flesh out between them a vision of the world-as-it-ought-to-be that they, for the most part, share. This is not to say that Job and his friends are not profoundly troubled by the fact of Job's suffering; they recognize that it poses problems for their claims about the world-as-it-ought-to-be, but ultimately they refuse to accept these problems as significant enough to change their views. Their combined description of the world-as-it-ought-to-be can be arranged into three basic topics, having to do with the nature of interpersonal relationships, the workings of time, and the configuration of space.

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[1] These two worlds might also be designated by the terms 'order' and 'chaos.' I prefer, however, to try to avoid these latter terms, due to their particularly loaded quality, which will be discussed in chapter 5.

Throughout the book, Job calls on God, whom he identifies as the world's creator and, therefore, the only power qualified to put the upside-down world right again, to arise and remake the world. Granted, throughout the book he also blames God for the disruption of the world-as-it-ought-to-be, but this is because God is the only creative power he knows, and so he lays the blame for the anti-world squarely on God's shoulders, all the while firmly believing that this is not the world as God intended it to be. Job asks, "Who . . . does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this?" for, Job contends, "In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being" (12:9–10).[2]

Then, near the end of the book, God does appear. Instead, however, of doing whatever needs to be done to turn the world of Job's current experience into what Job has asserted is the world-as-it-ought-to-be, God announces that Job has no idea what he is talking about. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding" (38:4), God thunders at Job at the beginning of his first speech, implying that because Job was not present at the founding of the world Job lacks the knowledge necessary to make definitive claims about the way the world ought to be. God goes on to present the world of his creation as fundamentally different in almost every particular from that described by Job and his friends as the world-as-it-ought-to-be, and his discourse, too, can be seen as dealing with relationships, the workings of time, and the configuration of space. In this way, God addresses—and unambiguously rejects—Job's and his friends' suppositions about the world-as-it-ought-to be. Although it is not uncommon to read God's speeches as non-sequiturs which fail to engage with the concerns central to Job and his friends, this is certainly incorrect. As Good points out, far from being unrelated to the concerns of the dialogue, Yahweh's speeches respond directly to those issues but reject the claims on which they are based.[3] It is this rejection which leads some readers to miss the relevance of God's response, a response which is, I would argue, completely attuned to the central theme of the dialogue, the nature of the world-as-it-ought-to-be.

Although I began by saying that *Job* is an exploration of creation, the trajectory of the book, as described above, would seem to indicate that it is, instead, an official statement about creation. The author of the book has engineered it in such a way that erroneous views about creation—views

[2] All English Bible quotations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.
[3] Edwin M. Good, *In Turns of Tempest* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 56.

which he may suppose his readers share—are first aired by Job and the friends and then struck down and set right by God, who is the only one with the knowledge and authority to speak the truth about the world. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" God asks Job, but he may as well be asking us. We, like Job, are in no position to pronounce on the nature of the world-as-it-ought-to-be. God tells us what the world is like, and, because God is in the unique position of being the world's creator, our only response can be to stand corrected. The book ends and we close the cover, wiser than we were when we began to read, but also chastened; we know more than we knew before, but central to this new knowledge is a deep awareness of our inability to *really* know. We are mere creatures, and we must look to the creator as the only one capable of speaking the truth about his creation.

Two Problems: Job's Response and the Epilogue

There is, however, a problem with this reading. The book does not end with God's proclamation, but with something else.[4] First, Job responds to God. He speaks words which may be understood as indicating his acceptance of everything God has said and his submission to God's superior authority. He says,

> I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. . . . I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know . . . therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (42: 2, 3b, 6)

This, of course, is not problematic for the reading undertaken above. God speaks authoritative words, and Job highlights their authority by speaking words of submission, perhaps to make sure that dense readers do not miss the point of the book. The problem, though, is that Job's words possess a certain ambiguity. Newsom goes so far as to say that Job's last words are "irresolvably ambiguous and therefore a puzzling response. No matter how hard we listen, we cannot be sure of exactly what Job has said."[5]

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[4] Newsom presents a similar reading of the trajectory of the book, first describing it as "a kind of *Bildungsroman* for the reader's moral imagination," but then pointing out that "There are . . . problems with this approach. The most obvious is that it has difficulty in accounting for the return of the prose tale." Newsom, *Book of Job*, 20.

[5] Carol A. Newsom, "Cultural Politics and the Reading of Job," *Biblical Interpretation* 1 no. 2 (1993): 136.

There are several difficulties which translators and interpreters face. The first arises from Job's use of the verb מאס, which usually takes a direct object, without a direct object. מאס 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 מאס 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 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.'[6] 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?

Some interpreters do read Job's response as submissive. Moshe Greenberg, for example, writes,

> [Job] confesses his ignorance and his presumptuousness in speaking of matters beyond his knowledge.... [H]e 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.[7]

Others, however, understand that Job's final words are a rejection of all God has said. David Robertson 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 who has attempted to cover up this inability by bombarding Job with new questions which are irrelevant to the discussion at hand.[8] For John Briggs Curtis, Job's words are not submissive at all, even if meant ironically, but,

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[6] See William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon* (Grand Rapids and Leiden: Eerdmans and Brill), 234.

[7] Moshe Greenberg, "Job," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. R. Alter and F. Kermode (London: Collins, 1987), 299.

[8] David Robertson, "The Book of Job: A Literary Study," *Soundings* 56 (1973): 463.

rather, are overtly rejective. According to Curtis, what Job says is, "I feel loathing contempt and revulsion [toward you, O God]; and I am sorry for frail man."[9]

If Job rejects God's claims about creation and denies their authority, the point of the book, which seemed so clear, is suddenly obscured. Is the book saying that God is not, after all, qualified to speak definitively about creation, and are we readers also intended to reject God's words? When God appears it seems as if the book has been leading up to that moment, for we intuitively accept that God alone has the knowledge and authority to speak the truth about the world. Indeed, throughout the book Job has called on God to appear and answer him. God's words are what Job has been waiting for. But is all this build up of expectation simply a ruse? Does the author make us wait for God, then let us hear God's definitive words, but, before letting us close the book secure in our new knowledge, call that knowledge into question? Perhaps. As Newsom points out, though, we cannot be sure what we have heard. Newsom, in fact, goes so far as to identify Job's final words as a Bakhtinian loophole, defined as "[T]he retention for oneself of the possibility of altering the ultimate, final meaning of one's words. . . . This potential other meaning . . . accompanies the word like a shadow."[10] That is to say, it is possible that Job deliberately uses ambiguous language, so as to be able to later reinterpret what he has said. He may later decide that he intended to be submissive or he may decide that he intended to be antagonistic, but, for the moment, both options remain possible.

If we cannot know whether Job has bowed before God's presentation of the world or whether he has rejected it—and if, in fact, Job does not himself know what he has done—it is difficult to know how we are to respond to these words of Job's. We cannot reject God's world outright, claiming that its conclusiveness has been undermined by Job's rejection of it, for we do not know *if* Job has actually rejected it, but neither can we accept God's depiction of the world as definitive, since it *is* possible that Job has rejected it. Furthermore, as if the ambiguity inherent in Job's words is not confusing enough, there is also the question of what authority Job's response possesses. That is, so far I have assumed that how Job

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[9] John Briggs Curtis, "O n Job's Response to Yahweh," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 no. 4 (1979): 505.

[10] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans., C. Emerson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 233. Quoted in Newsom, *Book of Job*, 29.

responds to God makes a difference to the meaning of the book. Most interpreters make this assumption, based on the idea that it matters who has the last word. If Job has the last word, we assume that his word trumps God's, even though God is, by nature, the one with the authority to make conclusive statements. It is not, however, clear that this needs to be the case. If the last word is not definitive simply as a matter of course, but if its definitiveness depends upon the authority of the speaker, whether Job accepts God's presentation of his creation or rejects it does not really matter, at least as far as God's authority is concerned. If Job rejects God after hearing him speak, so what? God has still spoken authoritatively about the world. Job may not like it, but that's his own hard luck. As far as we know, there's nothing he can do about it.

We, who have identified with Job throughout the course of the book[11] may wonder whether we ought also to reject God's words, if this is what Job has done. If so, then the content of Job's response is significant and may affect God's authority, or at least our relation to it. It seems equally possible, however, that, if Job rejects God, we ought to drop Job like a hot potato. We may have been willing to side with him against the friends, taking his claims of innocence in good faith, but now, when Job refuses to accept God's own chastisement, we see that we have been misled and we promptly disassociate ourselves from him. So, although it is possible that Job's potential rejection of God calls God's authority into question, it is also possible that it does not. Moreover, if Job's response is submissive instead of rejective, this entire line of speculation is rendered moot: Job's response does not call the definitiveness of God's presentation of the world into question because Job accepts God's authority without question.

Despite the uncertain answer to the question of whether Job's response to God derails what has seemed to be the program of the book—that of setting right, through the use of the voice of God, erroneous assumptions about the world—the presence of the epilogue poses a more concrete challenge to this kind of reading.[12] After hearing God's description of the

[11] As Robertson points out, "Job so gives voice to our own fears, doubts, and frustrations that we cannot help but sympathize with him. Robertson, *Book of Job*, 450.

[12] In this book I will read the Book of Job as if prose and poetry belong together and are the work of a single author, but I recognize the possibility that they are not. Newsom, taking the same stance, speaks of the need of adopting "heuristic fictions" about the book's composition which are useful for purposes of interpretation, even if it cannot be known whether they have any basis in fact. Newsom, *Book of Job*, 16. My best guess is that the prose prologue and epilogue, though written by the same author as the poetry, are intended to stand out as different and to seem like one story that has been interrupted by

world and answering however he answers or perhaps making no unqualified answer at all but reserving his response for a later date, Job finds himself living in a world that is strangely similar to the world-as-it-ought-to-be of his debate with the friends. He is back in the world he claimed to have at one time inhabited—and which, if the prologue is to be believed, he did at one time inhabit—a world which could hardly be more different from the world God has just finished describing as the world of his creation.

That Job actually finds himself living in a world completely different from the world God claims to have created, a world which is consonant with Job's own vision of the world-as-it-ought-to-be, turns the Book of Job from an 'Answer' book, in which the truth about creation is proclaimed, into a 'Question' one. Whatever can it mean that Job ends the book living in a different world from the one God claims to have made? Suddenly the book is bursting with questions. Has God decided that Job's world-as-it-ought-to-be has merit after all and decided to give that world a place in his creation? Or has the epilogue world come into existence through an agency other than God's? If God is not responsible for creating the epilogue world, is its existence still consonant with the world he describes himself as having created, despite its differences from that world, or does God's world preclude the existence of the epilogue world? If God's world precludes the existence of such a world, how does it happen to exist? If God did not create it, who did? If Job and his friends made it, how did they manage to do so? If the book ends with a world made by humans, does this mean that human beings, and not God, are the real creators? Or is the world inhabited by Job in the epilogue nothing more than a fantasy, with no basis in reality? If it is a fantasy with no basis in reality, does this mean that it is impossible to live there or is it perfectly possible to live in such a place? Is there, after all, nothing more to creating than imagining, or is God's creative activity of a different sort? Is there such a thing as the 'real world' or are all worlds imaginary? If Job can create and live in his own world, what is his relationship to God? Is he a co-creator, endowed by God with creative faculties so that he may share in God's creativity? Or is he an anti-creator who has set himself up as God's rival? Or is he some third thing, neither subordinate co-creator nor antagonistic rival-creator?

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another. I want to say that these stories take place in different worlds, as will be discussed in chapter 5.

Reading Backwards and Forwards

In this book I want to do two things. First, I want to inquire into the details of the worlds described by Job and his friends and by God, and to assess how God's world responds to the world-as-it-ought-to-be of Job and his friends. I will do this in three chapters, each dealing with one of the topics into which I have said the discussion can be divided: the nature of relationships between persons, how time works, and how space is configured. To elucidate the positions of the characters, I will take some liberties. I will, in a sense, 'lean' on the characters, pushing their statements to their logical (and sometimes illogical) conclusions, inquiring into their motivations, and showing how their various claims link up and what kind of combined structures they form. In a way, I treat them like 'real' people, assuming that they have motivations, and that their statements have implications that go beyond those that are spelled out on the page. In another way, I do not treat them like 'real' people at all. Would 'real' people submit to this kind of pushing and prodding, this insistence that they divulge their unstated motivations? Newsom, who also pays close attention to the characters' utterances in her Bakhtinian reading of *Job*, treats the characters with more respect than I do, mindful of the nuances of meaning that differentiate Job from his friends. My own investigation, though, is into the bigger picture which the characters' speeches combine to form, and so my less-nuanced approach is appropriate.[13]

The second thing I want to do is to address some of the questions raised by the epilogue, which I will do in a final chapter. How, though, do I plan to deal with the questions raised by the epilogue? Does the book offer answers to these questions, or does the fact that it *ends* by asking them mean that it blows itself up: 'This book will self-destruct in 5 seconds'? Clines, who argues that that the epilogue renders the book deconstructible by 'pulling the rug out from under' what the book has asserted up to that point, nevertheless insists that its primary assertions remain, despite being problematized by the ending. He writes,

[13] Newsom's *Job* book is full of interesting insights, and I like it very much. I wonder, though, whether the way in which she separates out the different positions of the separate characters results not in a picture of the book's 'dialogic truth,' but in a picture of a series of 'monologic truths.' That is, her focus is not so much on the intersection of the characters' points of view, but on the isolation of their various positions, which actually seems to contradict the Bakhtinian enterprise on which her method is based.

> In deconstructing, we are distinguishing between the surface and the hidden in the text. . . . We are allowing that it is possible to read the text without seeing that it undermines itself, and we are claiming that the deconstructive reading is . . . at the same time more aware of the character of the text.[14]

That the ending deconstructs what has come before may cause the book to "lose all of its authority as a trustworthy testimony to the way things really are in the external world," Clines says, while, at the same time, the multiple philosophies it presents retain "their persuasive force" thanks to the power of the book's rhetoric.[15] That is, we both take note of the undermining effect of the epilogue and, simultaneously, ignore it! We recognize that the book fails to say anything authoritatively, and yet we continue to listen to its arguments and to take them seriously.

Newsom offers a similar, but not identical, interpretation of the purpose of the epilogue. Its purpose is "to reassert the continuing claim on truth by voices that were silenced by the authoritative divine voice."[16] That is, although God's words have seemed authoritative, the epilogue saps them of authoritative force, allowing Job and his friends to go on making their own claims, even if those claims differ from God's. For Newsom, the book does not finally side with any character's point of view, but remains a discussion in which its readers are invited to participate.[17] Although for Newsom, it is specifically God's authority that is undermined by the epilogue, whereas for Clines it is claims that the book as a whole has made about the independence of righteousness and reward and the meaning of suffering, for both the epilogue breaks apart the monolithic structure of the book, either into several different voices which, together, work toward the enunciation of a 'dialogic' truth (Newsom) or into several philosophies, each of which undermines the other, but none of which cancels the other out (Clines).[18]

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[14] Clines, "Deconstructing," 107.

[15] Ibid., 114, 123.

[16] Newsom, *Book of Job*, 29.

[17] Ibid., 30.

[18] David Penchansky offers a somewhat similar perspective, writing, "The epilogue . . . does double duty in a holistic reading of the book. On the one hand, Yahweh's approval of Job reflects Job's pious activities in the prologue; but on the other hand, it affirms the blasphemous statements made in the center. . . . Job therefore disperses into many stories, each occupying the same 42 chapters." David Penchansky, *The Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in Job* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1990), 49. For Penchansky, it is not multiple voices that are reaffirmed by the epilogue or multiple philosophies, but multiple stories. Yet, in contrast to Clines, Penchansky reads the entire Book

I began this account of the effect of the epilogue as perceived by Clines and Newsom by wondering whether the epilogue causes the book to self-destruct so that there is, in fact, no book left. These interpreters claim that, although the epilogue changes the book in some way, it does not obliterate it. I am inclined to agree with them, and, in fact, how could I not? A book that has self-destructed leaves nothing behind to be discussed, save perhaps a few charred remains, which rather hampers any attempt to say anything about its content or meaning. I do want to write about the book's content and meaning, however, and so I, along with everyone else who writes about the book, must insist that the explosion witnessed in the epilogue has served some other purpose than its self-destruction. Supporting this claim is the fact that the book exists and is, after all, a substantial document, far more substantial than a few charred remains would be. Many interpreters, in fact, argue that, far from being a *partial* text, what we have in the Book of Job is an *expanded* text, a text which has grown by a process of accretion, so that it is not a case of having too little left to work with, but, some would argue, of having too much.[19]

My interpretation of the force of the epilogue shares similarities with those of Clines and Newsom. As I have written above, I see the epilogue as raising a multitude of questions about the nature of creation, the identity of the creator, and the way in which the world is made and maintained. This interpretation stems, of course from my reading of the book up to the point where the epilogue begins, as no doubt, everyone's does. The epilogue may be explosively transformative, but what the explosion looks like must reflect, in some way, the book we think we have been reading before it happens. This may go without saying, but it is, nevertheless, important to recognize. It is only because I think I have been reading a book about creation and the world-as-it-ought-to-be that the epilogue raises questions about these topics. Clines thinks he has been reading a book about the relationship between righteousness and reward and the

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of Job as "dissonant" (Ibid., 9–10, 26), rather than viewing it as a smooth narrative that is disturbed by the epilogue.

[19] Some interpreters argue that the wisdom hymn of chapter 28 and Elihu's speeches of chapters 32–37 were not part of the original book but were added by later editors. Others go so far as to say that the prose prologue and epilogue were appended to the book by someone other than its original author. See Andrew E. Steinmann, "The Structure and Message of the Book of Job," *Vetus Testamentum* 46, no. 1 (1996): 85–100, and Douglas Lawrie, "How Critical is it to be Historically Critical? The Case of the Composition of the Book of Job," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 27 no. 1 (2001): 121–146, for overviews of the scholarly discussion on the compilation/corruption of the book.

reasons for suffering, and so he reads the epilogue as deconstructing the book's assertions on these topics. Newsom thinks she has been reading a polyphonic text in which different characters' speech and different genres are intercut in order to proclaim a dialogic truth, based on the author's recognition that

> the truth about piety, human suffering, the nature of God, and the moral order of the cosmos can be adequately addressed only by a plurality of unmerged consciousnesses engaging one another in open-ended dialogue.[20]

So, for Newsom, the epilogue refutes the idea that God is the only one with the authority to speak; it is the author's final 'unfinalizing' move, by which the conversation is extended out beyond the boundaries of the book. The links between our readings of the epilogue and the body of the book do not mean that we are misreading either section. Likewise, the differences between our interpretations do not mean that someone is right and someone is wrong. These interpretations can coexist. In fact, even contradictory interpretations of the Book of Job can coexist; the book's complexity and ambiguity, which are prodigious, permit the legitimate existence of a wide variety of readings.[21]

Still, neither Clines' reading, nor Newsom's, strikes me as taking enough note of the transformation that the epilogue works upon the book. Clines, while arguing that the epilogue undermines the philosophies supported by the rest of the book and while claiming that the deconstructive reading is "more aware of the character of the text"[22] than a non-deconstructive reading, still wants to argue that the greatness of the book lies in its ability to persuade us to overlook its self-deconstruction. He writes,

> We recognize in the unenlightened Job the human condition, embattled against an unjust fate, and we will him to succeed in his struggle even at the moment when we know it is ill-conceived and unnecessary.[23]

How, then, is the deconstructive reading "more aware of the character of the text"? Where Clines' argument ends up makes it seem as if the opposite is the case: the text may deconstruct itself, but it wills us to ignore this fact and read it in a straightforward way. The epilogue is not, then, a shocking revelation of what the book is really about which undermines

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[20] Newsom, *Book of Job*, 24.

[21] See the prologue to this book for a discussion of how one might respond to *Job's* ambiguity.

[22] Clines, "Deconstructing," 107.

[23] Ibid., 122.

everything that has come before; instead, we are meant to read it as if it confirms the agenda of the preceding text. No doubt I am oversimplifying Clines' argument, but these seem to me to be its implications. The argument seems to negate itself.

Newsom's reading of the epilogue does not satisfy me for a different reason. She argues that the epilogue, by denying God absolute authority of speech, reasserts "the continuing claim on truth by voices that were silenced by the authoritative divine voice."[24] I do not disagree with this, but I want to know what the truth-claims of the other characters look like in the wake of the epilogue. As Newsom presents it, the epilogue does not change the nature of the truth available to the other characters, but only gives them the ability to go on speaking as they have been speaking. Job is permitted to keep speaking his personal truth, as he has been speaking it throughout the book, and the same goes for the other characters. But how can this be? The epilogue's relativization of God's authority—or, at least, its potential relativization thereof—cannot mean that the characters just pick up where they left off and continue saying what they have been saying. If God's authority is in fact relativized by the epilogue, this is a cataclysmic event. *Everything changes*, or, at least, is potentially changed. The characters simply cannot go forward from it saying the same old things, for one of their most basic assumptions about the world—that God is the only one with the power to create and the authority to determine what the created world will be like—has been called into question. If Job has a 'claim on truth' after the appearance of the epilogue, both the content of his claim and its nature must be completely different from what they were before.

Perhaps this is implicit in Newsom's assertion that the epilogue 'unfinalizes' the text, extending it out beyond its on-paper ending. The characters may have something new to say, but they must say those things in the space extended beyond the end of the book. How, though, are we to know what they have said? Theoretically they may keep speaking, but how are we to hear them? We can only speculate about what they may be saying. Elsewhere, in fact, Newsom does just this. She begins her article "The Moral Sense of Nature: Ethics in the Light of God's Speech to Job," by wondering how Job lived the remaining 140 years of his life, and concludes by suggesting that Job probably lived the rest of his life much as he had lived before the events of the book, in uprightness and

[24] Newsom, *Book of Job*, 29.

integrity, but with a different understanding of his place in the world.[25] In this article, Newsom's focus is on God's speeches and their power to effect a transformed vision—"it was Job's seeing, as he himself observes, that was most radically altered (42:5). The horizon of his vision and the patterns he discerned were different"[26]—and not on the power of the epilogue to transform our understanding of God's authority. Here, Newsom is interpreting Job's response to God's speeches, a response grounded in his acceptance of their authority, rather than Job's response to an epilogue which wrests authority from God. She wants to know what happened in the years which remained of his life after his encounter with God, years which, because the book does not describe them in much detail, must be approached with a certain amount of speculation. Yet, despite this, they are years which are contained within the book. The epilogue begins immediately after Job's encounter with God and ends with Job's death 140 years later, so the information provided in the epilogue, however slight, does provide us with a picture of how Job lived his remaining 140 years. There is much that is not described, but what is described can be taken as emblematic.

Thus, Newsom's presentation of Job's remaining years in her 1994 article is speculative, but it is also grounded in the text. If, however, the epilogue serves a purpose other than showing how Job's acceptance of God's words played out in the remainder of his life, a greater degree of speculation is required. In Newsom's Bakhtinian reading of Job, it is not just the content of the epilogue that matters; rather, the epilogue serves the purpose of undermining God's exclusive authority so that all characters can continue speaking. There is, however, no direct speech in the epilogue. A narrator tells us a few of the things Job does in his remaining years, but not what he says. We may imagine what he may have said based on what he does, but we do not really know. How, though, is this any more speculative than interpreting the events of the epilogue in terms of what they mean for Job's worldview, as Newsom does in the article quoted above? The difference I am trying to get at has to do with the purpose of the epilogue. If the purpose of the epilogue is to show how Job responded to God's speeches, and if it is taken as a given that God speaks the definitive truth (which is what Newsom assumes in her article), then it is possible

[25] Carol A. Newsom, "The Moral Sense of Nature: Ethics in the Light of God's Speech to Job," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 15 no. 1 (1994): 27.
[26] Idem.

to interpret the epilogue's events in a straightforward way, and to view them as showing, albeit in brief, how Job lived his remaining 140 years. If, however, the epilogue appears as a sudden rupture in what has come before, then it is not clear whether it can be read straightforwardly. The meaning of the few details about Job's life with which it provides us are not clear; they could mean any number of things. Moreover, if Newsom is right that the epilogue extends the book's conversation out beyond the end of the book, the epilogue cannot be understood to provide us with all the information we need to understand what Job may have said after its incursion into the book. The epilogue may end with Job's death, but this is, in some ways, immaterial. The epilogue may tell us that, in the end, "Job died, old and full of days" (42:17), but, really, it is impossible for Job to die, if dying means the end of his ability to speak. As a textual character, engaged in an unfinished and 'unfinalizable' conversation, Job must continue speaking. "Job died. The end," proclaims the epilogue, but this is something the epilogue has no authority to proclaim or enforce. Job's 'life' is not bounded by the boundaries of the epilogue, if the epilogue's main purpose is to create an 'unfinalizable' text.

Yet, thinking about how the conversation continues beyond the bounds of the book must be as much about the reader as about the characters. Perhaps this is the point Newsom's Bakhtinian reading makes. The book, with its 'unfinalized' ending, breaks loose from its textual moorings and is free to roam about in the 'real' world. We interpreters become the characters, and, in fact, Newsom understands Elihu to be an early reader who has been so drawn into the conversation that he has written himself into the book.[27] Still, if this is the case, it is not quite right to say that the book's characters are permitted to go on speaking. Rather, it is the book's readers who are permitted to go on speaking *about* the characters, even to the point of putting words in those characters' mouths.

In Clines' deconstructionist reading, the epilogue undermines previously asserted philosophies, but the book simultaneously goes on asserting those philosophies, and, in fact, we are intended to overlook the fact that the book deconstructs itself and accept its coherence on the strength of its rhetoric, meaning that what happens in the epilogue does not really matter. In Newsom's Bakhtinian reading, the only thing about the book that the epilogue changes is the absoluteness of God's authority, an authority which would serve to close the book with a definitive statement; as it is,

[27] Newsom, *Book of Job*, 30.

the epilogue functions not as an ending but as a portal which leads to the world outside the book. My problem with both of these readings is that they do not pay enough attention to what the epilogue does to *the content of the book itself*. I want to argue that we must read *backwards* from the epilogue, back into the middle of the book. If the epilogue changes the circumstances in which Job and his friends find themselves and if it permits them to go on speaking, it seems to me that they must do this 'new' speaking within the book itself, and not in some 'real world' space projected out beyond the end of the book. They do not live in the real world, but only in the book, and it is there that they must respond to the epilogue.

But how can they do this? Is it not as impossible for them to re-speak words they have already spoken, but this time with different meanings, as it is for them to go on speaking (or, to be heard speaking) in the space beyond the end of the book? In both cases, isn't it the reader who must do all the speaking, throwing her voice like a ventriloquist so that the words seem to come from the characters' mouths? To a degree, I suppose the answer is yes, inasmuch as all "interpretation . . . is . . . the mutual activity that goes on between text and reader,"[28] as discussed in the prologue to this book, and yet, because the author of the speeches in the body of the book also wrote (or attached) the epilogue, it seems likely that he would have written them to work in concert. He would have known that the epilogue was coming—(unless the epilogue was attached by a saboteur without his knowledge and against his intentions,[29] a position which I do not accept)—and could, therefore, have engineered the characters' speeches in such a way that they would divulge different meanings based on whether they were read pre-epilogue or post-epilogue.

For example, in his chapter 38 speech, God seems to be accusing Job of having acted as a rival creator. After asserting Job's inability to speak about the nature of creation based on his not having been present at the actual moment of creation, God goes on to question Job about the identity of the creator, asking, "Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?" (38:5), implying that Job's absence at the founding of the earth has disqualified him from knowing not only the nature of the created world but also the identity of its creator, who is presumably God himself. There is, however, something strange here. What

[28] Clines, *Job 1–20*, xlvii.

[29] Curtis, for example, writes, "The . . . purpose of the prose . . . is that of deliberately misleading the reader." Curtis "Job's Response," 510. I will discuss this possibility—and my rejection of it—in chapter 5 of this book.

is strange is not the content of the question as it relates to creation, but the fact that God asks Job, "*Who* has done these things?" God's question oozes sarcasm and implies that Job will not know how to answer. And yet, the sarcastic tone of God's "Surely you know" is confusing, for, in fact, Job *surely does know*, and is prepared to answer correctly. Throughout the book Job has identified God as the creator of the world, and has never contemplated the possibility that there might be another creator besides God, let alone the thought that he himself might be capable of wresting creative power from God and making the world himself.

Yet, in God's mind, knowledge about the world and creator-status go hand in hand, so if Job has claimed to know what the world should be like (which he has), he has also tried to rival God's creative power. However much we might like to side with Job in this situation, we cannot. God speaks authoritatively, and, therefore, we must accept his reading of the situation as correct. We feel the tension here acutely. On the one hand, we feel sure that Job never intended to do the thing God has accused him of doing, and if he did it he did not know he was doing it, but on the other hand we also know that only God has the knowledge and authority to speak definitively. If God says that Job has done this, it means that Job has done it, however unwittingly.

Granted, as already discussed, some interpreters reject God's authority on the basis of what he says to Job, and read Job's response in 42:2–6 as either overtly or covertly rejective. Taking this point of view, we could alleviate the tension by insisting that God is wrong about Job; in his speeches, God shows himself incapable of speaking definitive words about the creation, and this is one of the places in which he undermines his own authority, by making accusations that are blatantly false. Yet, I am not convinced that God's speeches undermine his authority in the way that commentators who take this position assert. There is much of value in what God has to say and the only way to read God's whirlwind speeches as revealing him to be "so remote, so unfeeling, [and] so unjust"[30] that he does not deserve the deference normally attributed to God is to reject everything he has said as a matter of course. The baby must be thrown out with the bath water for this rejection of God to be justified.

The epilogue, though, as I have argued, does raise questions about God's absolute authority, for, in it, a world completely different from the one for which God claims responsibility springs into being. The epilogue,

[30] Idem.

however, is not an authority in the way that God is an authority. It may call God's authority into question, but it does this not by speaking authoritative words of its own, but by portraying a situation which can be interpreted in multiple ways. It is not a case of one authoritative speech being superseded by another more authoritative speech, but of questions being raised. We cannot say that the epilogue proves that God was right about Job, for we are not told that Job has created the world it portrays. At the same time, that Job now inhabits his world-as-it-ought-to-be does bear thinking about. And how are we to think about this information? By going back and rereading the book in its light, without deciding the matter beforehand.

On our first reading, we will interpret the book one way, but, reaching the surprise ending of the epilogue, we are forced to go back and reread, recognizing that the identical words on the page may now mean something different. I do not think, though, that I am talking about the same process we undertake when we read, for example, a whodunit mystery novel, where, having reached the end and discovered the identity of the murderer, we are now able to recognize his guilt in his previous gestures and statements, which at one time seemed innocent. The difference is that *Job* does not provide us with any definitive statements. It does not tell us who the 'murderer' is, but, rather, ends by asking whether it is possible that there may have been a 'murder.' The epilogue does not give us information that makes everything clear. It confuses things, rather, and causes questions to arise which we would not otherwise have been asking. Moreover, it is not that, rereading the Book of Job, we go back and recognize the clues that were there all along, but that the book itself has been changed, despite retaining the same words. It is for this reason that, in this book, I will focus first on the speeches of the characters as they appear in a first *reading* of the book,[31] and, then, in chapter 5, I will *reread* the book, in the light of the questions raised by the epilogue. At the same time, my *reading* of the book—or, rather, *readings*, as, in each chapter, I will approach the text from a different angle and focus on a different aspect of its content—will have implications for how I understand what happens in the epilogue, as I have already noted above. Even if I *read*

[31] Of course, I cannot claim that what I will say about the worlds described by Job and his friends and by God are ideas that came to me the first time I read the book, so perhaps it is disingenuous to speak of an initial reading contrasted with a rereading. My intention, however, is to contrast a straightforward reading, which does not know the epilogue is coming, with a rereading which takes account of the epilogue from the outset.

without anticipating the epilogue, how I *read* will determine, at least to a degree, what the epilogue means to me when it suddenly, surprisingly appears at the end of the book. Then, with these meanings in mind, I must *reread* what has come before, perhaps discovering different meanings, even if the original *reading* has helped determine what questions I understand the epilogue to be asking. This is what I mean by reading backwards and forwards. The epilogue, once read, forces us back into the center of the text, while this center simultaneously drives us forward toward the epilogue, which we now know is coming, creating a kind of continuous feedback loop.

CHAPTER TWO

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PERSONS IN THE WORLD-AS-IT-OUGHT-AND-OUGHT-NOT-TO-BE: CENTRALITY AND DISPERSION, CONNECTEDNESS AND LONELINESS

The Righteous and the Wicked

This book must begin with a discussion of how righteousness and wickedness function for Job and his three friends. These categories are fundamental not only to these characters' ideas about relationships between persons, with which this chapter will deal, but to all aspects of their beliefs about the world-as-it-ought-to-be. Central to this world is a strict division between righteousness and wickedness, as is evidenced by the way Job and his friends refer to the righteous and the wicked as two distinct blocks of people, with set attributes and destinies, and never mention individuals whose behavior happens to fall somewhere in between. Righteousness and wickedness do not exist as points at either end of a spectrum, so that a person may be thought of as relatively more righteous or relatively more wicked. Rather, there is a fundamental divide between the two kinds of people. If any comparison of relative righteousness or wickedness is possible, it can only be between the members of each group, and not between both groups at once. Job may be the most righteous man on earth (1:8), but this does not mean that other righteous people who are not quite up to Job's standard are more wicked than Job, nor can a wicked man who is less wicked than other wicked men claim to be more righteous than his fellows, any more than an apple that is less shiny or crunchy than other apples can be claimed to be an orange. For Job and his friends, wickedness and righteousness do not touch each other; there is no such thing as an 'orpple.'

Moreover, that Job and his friends speak of 'the righteous' and 'the wicked' as blocks of people demonstrates not only that they think of righteousness and wickedness as mutually exclusive states of being, but that they view these groups as collectives. Wicked men are all alike and share an identical fate. If Job or his friends speak of 'the wicked man,' this man is intended to be emblematic of the group, rather than being singled out for any unique characteristics he may possess as an individual. The same

goes for 'the righteous man,' though, admittedly, to a lesser degree. Job and his friends, being righteous men themselves, are more attuned to the differences that may exist between righteous individuals, whereas it is possible—or, rather, certain—that they do not know any wicked men personally. The righteous do not mingle with the wicked. Yet, even though Job and his friends are able to speak about—and as—individual righteous men, they still view righteousness collectively. The righteous behave one way and have a single fate, whereas the wicked behave another way and have their own shared fate.

For the purposes of this book, it is necessary to recognize the link between righteousness and the world-as-it-ought-to-be as Job and his friends perceive it. The righteous are those who live in the world-as-it-ought-to-be and who benefit from the blessings intrinsic to it. The wicked, by contrast, are unable to lay claim to these blessings. What this means is that, although wicked people may technically be present in the world-as-it-ought-to-be, they do not really live there. Instead, the wicked live in a kind of anti-world—the world-as-it-ought-not-to-be—which, nevertheless, is where they belong. This world exists as the flip-side of the world-as-it-ought-to-be, and the lives of its inhabitants are marked by their direct opposition to the lives of those who inhabit the world-as-it-ought-to-be.

These distinctions mean that, when Job and his friends speak about the righteous and the blessings that attend them, they are also speaking about the world-as-it-ought-to-be, and the blessings by which it is characterized. In the same way, when they speak about the wicked, they are describing the world-as-it-ought-not-to-be, which exists in opposition to the world-as-it-ought-to-be. For this reason, it is possible to read Job's and his friends' descriptions of the situations in which the wicked find themselves as simultaneously clarifying some aspect of their depiction of the world-as-it-ought-to-be. What is said about the wicked and the anti-world they inhabit can be reversed and applied to the righteous and the world-as-it-ought-to-be they inhabit. So, for example, if Bildad describes the lives of the wicked as lacking in stability, this detail can be understood as confirming Eliphaz's description of the lives of the righteous as stable and the world-as-it-ought-to-be as a place where stability reigns.

How Job and his friends present their picture of the world-as-it-ought-to-be is bound up in their talk about the righteous and the wicked. This talk is, therefore, cosmically significant. When Eliphaz says something about the wicked, he is not saying, "I don't like so-and-so's behavior, so I consider it wicked" or "What so-and-so is doing is harming me, so

I consider him wicked." Instead, he is saying that such behavior or such a person cannot exist in the world-as-it-ought-to-be. The world-as-it-ought-to-be will not tolerate such behavior or such a person, and so the wicked man is thrust out of this world and into the anti-world. Moreover, his suffering is the result not of punishment meted out in the world-as-it-ought-to-be, but of the fact that he inhabits the world-as-it-ought-not-to-be, where one cannot help but suffer, just as, in the world-as-it-ought-to-be, one does not suffer.

This strict division between the righteous and the wicked is what makes Job's situation so problematic. It is not simply that tragedy has befallen him and that, as a result, he 'feels really bad.' However 'bad' he feels as a result of his personal tragedies, this is not the half of it. Job's problem, rather, is that in the world-as-it-ought-to-be, the situation in which he finds himself ought to be impossible. If Job is one of the righteous—and he thinks of himself as *supremely* righteous—there is simply no way for him to suffer to the kind of anguish he feels in the world-as-it-ought-to-be. Since he finds himself suffering, he perceives that the only possible explanation is a breakdown of the world-as-it-ought-to-be. For the friends, however, it is perfectly possible to explain Job's suffering and the continued existence the world-as-it-ought-to-be. If he suffers, he is one of the wicked. It is true that, in his wickedness, he inhabits a kind of anti-world, but this does not mean that the world-as-it-ought-to-be has ceased to exist or has malfunctioned in some way. Rather, that Job has been thrust into the anti-world in which the wicked live is proof of the correct working of the world-as-it-ought-to-be, which casts out those who do not belong.

Even so, the friends are troubled by Job's prolonged suffering, and not only because they pity their friend and are sorry for his distress. They are troubled because they do not know how to reconcile the fact that they do not know the wicked with the fact that they do know Job. He is so thoroughly one of them that even though, on one level, they can make sense of his suffering, on a deeper level they are confounded by it. Job, for them, appears as the kind of liminal figure which they have assumed does not exist: a wicked righteous man. At the same time, their perception of Job's liminal position arises from their belief in the strict division which exists between the righteous and the wicked. Job *is* one of the righteous, and, as such, he cannot be one of the wicked, and so he occupies a problematic, impossible, liminal space.

Because of his position as one of the righteous, the friends, even as they grow more vehement in their accusations of wickedness, keep throwing Job life rafts, hoping that he will grab hold and be hauled back into

the world-as-it-ought-to-be where he belongs. In chapter 22, for example, Eliphaz accuses Job of wickedness outright, saying, "Is not your wickedness great? There is no end to your iniquities" (22:5). Yet, immediately afterwards Eliphaz urges, "Agree with God, and be at peace; in this way good will come to you. . . . If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored" (22:21, 23). This offer is not available to the wicked, who are fated to die in their wickedness, death snatching them up when they do not see it coming, and their remains purged from the earth by a consuming fire (22:16, 20). The friends may come to accuse Job of wickedness, but, in their minds, he remains one of the righteous. He is so essentially one of them that, whatever he may have done, they cannot give him up completely.

The impossibility of Job's position forces the friends to perform strange contortions of logic, whereby contradictory claims are made and their implications ignored. Nowhere is this more evident than in Eliphaz's report of the message he received from a nocturnal spirit visitor (4:12–21), a message which is picked up in Eliphaz's subsequent speeches and which Bildad uses to close down the conversation in his final speech of chapter 25. I will discuss the import of this message and the friends' use of it in the next chapter. Here, I simply want to point out the quandary into which Job's suffering casts Eliphaz and, by extension, the other friends whose speeches contain similar contradictions in logic. Eliphaz thinks he knows how to interpret Job's suffering, but, as soon as he starts talking, he finds that he cannot make sense of it. Is Job a wicked righteous man or a righteous wicked man? In truth, he cannot be either, for there are no such things, and Eliphaz is forced to come up with another explanation for Job's suffering, which he nonchalantly presents as a possibility, ignoring the way in which it undermines his claims about the divide between righteous and wicked and the disparate worlds they inhabit, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

I am trying to make two points in the discussion above. First, and most importantly, I have endeavored to show how the characters use the categories of 'the righteous' and 'the wicked' to talk about the nature of the world-as-it-ought-to-be. In this book, I will mine their comments about these groups of people to draw out the ideas about the world-as-it-ought-to-be which are implicit in them. Second, I have wanted to show how Job's suffering poses problems for his friends' vision of the world-as-it-ought-to-be. The friends deny that anything has gone wrong with the world, but, at the same time, they find that they cannot speak about it as straightforwardly as they could before Job began to suffer. Their language takes strange twists and turns; they contradict themselves even as they

try to make plain, forceful, unambiguous statements about the world and Job's predicament. It is important to notice this, as even these contradictions can tell us something about the friends' vision of the world-as-it-ought-to-be. As for Job, his difficulties lie in a different direction. When he begins to suffer—or, more specifically, when the poetry interrupts the prose tale—Job is immediately convinced that the world-as-it-ought-to-be has been overwhelmed by the world-as-it-ought-not-to-be. Job sees himself not as an anomaly—impossibly straddling righteousness and wickedness—but as Everyman. From his suffering, he draws the conclusion that all righteous men are being forced to suffer against their deserts—(closing his eyes, it would seem, to the fact that his friends, who are presumably righteous, are not suffering)—and all wicked men are given rewards they have not earned. His problem is not to reconcile his righteousness with his suffering, but to reconcile God's goodness with the fact that God has permitted the anti-world to overwhelm the world-as-it-ought-to-be. Even though Job's challenge is different from that faced by his friends, the way he faces this challenge is similarly revealing of his beliefs about the world-as-it-ought-to-be, which he contrasts with the world of his current experience.

Chapter 29: Relations between Persons in Job's World-as-It-Ought-to-be

In chapters 29–31, however, Job has no reservations about presenting a clear picture of the world as he believes it ought to be, contrasting this with the world-as-it-ought-not-to-be of his present experience, and calling for God to reinstate the world Job believes both of them agree is the world-as-it-ought-to-be. Job begins chapter 29 by wishing, "O that I were as in the months of old" (29:2a), a wish which gestures back to the prologue and the world it describes Job as inhabiting before his suffering began. For this reason, even though Job does not speak the prologue, it can also be seen as presenting a picture of his world-as-it-ought-to-be, and, in fact, as far as relationships between persons are concerned, the worlds described in chapter 29 and in the prologue are essentially the same. The link between chapter 29 and the prologue is highlighted by the word קדם, which is used both in the description of Job's former status—he was the greatest of all the people of קדם ('the east;' 1.1)—and to describe the time to which he wants to return—"O that I were as in the months of קדם ('old,' 'earlier times;' 29:2).

In chapter 29, Job speaks of human relationships in the world-as-it-ought-to-be in two related ways. First, a proper relationship is one in

which the individuals involved are correctly placed in space, vis-à-vis one another. This placement may be symbolic of some aspect of the relationship, but it is also actual. That is to say, a person's distance from another may symbolize his deference to that other's superior status, but the distance is physical and is a real feature of the relationship. It is the spatial configuration which demonstrates what the relationship *is*, and, if the configuration is changed, the relationship is also changed. If the space of deference is not maintained, the once-superior person ceases to be superior. This, in fact, is what Job describes in chapter 30 as having happened to him, as will be discussed below. Second, central to Job's understanding of relationships in the world-as-it-ought-to-be is the issue of where attention is focused. Although this might seem unrelated to Job's concern with the correct placement of individuals in space, in reality it is a feature of the same concern. Even if one stands at the proper distance from one's superior, if, at the same time, one is looking off to the side at one's equal, one fails to maintain proper relations with one's superior. The space, then, is as much mental as it is physical. Where one stands and where one looks and how one looks are all bound up together.

In chapter 29, Job describes a world in which he is the sole central figure, around whom all other individuals are arranged and on whom their attention is focused. Indeed, it is not only his fellow humans who regard Job in this way, but God as well. Job begins the chapter by remembering the special attention 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; . . . the friendship of God was upon my tent." (29:2b-3, 4b). God's eye is focused on Job, and the result of this focus is blessing: "[M]y 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"[1] [v. 20a] and implores, "Will you not look away from me for a while, let me alone until I swallow my spittle?" [v. 19].) In chapter 29, though, God's gaze is benevolent, and this seems related to God's maintenance of the proper, respectful distance from Job. God watches over Job and shines his light upon him, but he does not get too close. In the world as it is now, however, Job complains that God's hands are on him, and this touch is agony:

[1] The verbal root used here is נצר, whereas that used in 29:2 is שׁמר. Neither word, though, has connotations which are more overtly positive or negative than the other.

> 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 mercy; he pours out my gall on the ground. (16:12–13)

Indeed, in the prologue, permission to *touch*[2] Job is what *hassatan* is given (1:11–12, 2:5–6); the fence which, *hassatan* insists, has unfairly surrounded and protected Job, is removed and the distance which formerly separated him from others is made to disappear. What Job asks for in chapter 29 is the return of this distance, a distance which, based on his righteousness, he believes he fully deserves.

After describing himself as the center of God's benevolent attention, which is bestowed from a respectful distance, 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 the town's leaders, saying,

> 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,

> [H]is entry . . . causes a reconfiguration of those present: Job sits, the young men withdraw, the elders rise and stand. Space is made for Job. . . . When he enters, all others fall silent, their hands covering their mouths (29:7–10).[3]

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 נחבאו). 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.

After describing the source of his supreme righteousness—his status as the defender of the poor and weak against the machinations of the unrighteous (29:12–17)—Job continues with his presentation of the space

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[2] In 1:11 and 2:5, *hassatan* challenges God to touch or strike Job, using the verb נגע; in 1:12 and 2:6, the prepositional phrase בידך, "in your hand" is used to designate the power *hassatan* has been given over Job.

[3] Newsom, "Moral Sense," 11.

made for him in the days when the world was as it should be, a picture which seems to include his entire community. He says,

> 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. I smiled on them when they had no confidence; and the light of my countenance they did not extinguish. I chose their way, and sat as chief, and I lived like a king among his troops. (29:21–25a).

As can be seen, Job's focus is not on relations between persons in general, but, rather on how people relate to him specifically. Neither is he arguing that this degree of physical and mental space should be made for all people, but only for him specifically. Is Job self-centered? Yes, without question. He is so self-centered that he insists that for the world to be as it should all other persons must make space for him, both physically, with their bodies and their voices, and mentally, by giving him their full attention. Anything less than this and the world has turned into an anti-world, the world he describes in chapter 30. Yet, if to be righteous is to be in tune with the world-as-it-ought-to-be, and to live in that world and benefit from its many blessings, perhaps Job is asking nothing more than his due. If Job is not only righteous but supremely righteous, as the God of the prologue claims he is (1:8), then Job does have certain rights. If, in the world-as-it-ought-to-be, the righteous (who are the only ones capable of living in this world) are entitled to a certain amount of deferential space and a certain amount of mental attention from their fellows, then Job must be entitled to the greatest amount of deferential space and the greatest amount of mental attention. Unless Job is deluded about his righteousness, his insistence that he belongs at the center of his community is justified.

Job's Centrality in the World of the Prose Tale

As stated above, chapter 29 and the prose prologue are both representative of Job's vision of the world-as-it-ought-to-be. Job begins chapter 29 by wishing, "Oh, that I were as in the months of old," a wish that gestures back to the prologue which, at least when it begins, before its depiction of the onset of Job's suffering, takes place in those "months of old." In fact, I want to argue that even the start of Job's suffering does not bring an immediate end to those months or to the-world-as-it-ought-to-be, as will be discussed below. In the prologue, as in chapter 29, Job is the central figure in his world and is surrounded by a multitude of others who are

focused on him. Here, the spatial aspect is not stressed as overtly it is in chapter 29, though it is present in the prologue's depiction of the arrival of the friends and their subsequent behavior, as will be investigated below. After beginning by describing Job as a righteous man—"blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (1:1b)—the prologue goes on to describe Job's relationship with a certain large group of individuals, which includes both humans and animals. The relationship is that of possession. Belonging to Job are "seven sons and three daughters . . . seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants" (1:2–3a).

If, in chapter 29, Job's righteousness resulted in deferential space being made for him by his community, here his righteousness seems to result in his possession of this multitude of people and animals. If we think of this relationship spatially, this multitude, far from standing at a deferential distance from Job, seems to crowd up against him. This sense of crowding is created by the progression of the story's opening introduction of Job, which is the same in the Hebrew as in the NRSV's translation. Beginning with a description of Job's righteousness, the introduction then names the possessions which his righteousness has earned him, and concludes with the statement, "this man was the greatest of all the people of the east" (1:3b), so that Job's possessions are sandwiched between the proclamations of his righteousness and his greatness. His righteousness makes them *his*, but *they* are what make him great. This greatness, in turn, born of his righteousness and the possessions ensuing from it, is what leads Job's community to arrange themselves at a respectful distance from him and to give him their full mental attention. He merits the deference of elders and princes not only because he is supremely righteous, but because he is the greatest man, with his greatness functioning as the outward sign of his righteousness.

If Job's family, servants, and livestock seem to crowd up against him, this does not mean that the space he deserves is not being made for him. This is because these individuals are not, in fact, members of Job's community; instead, they are members of Job himself. The word translated as 'greatest' in 1:3b is גדל, (*gadol*), which also means big. Job is not just an important man, he is, physically, the biggest man in the east, the man made up of the most material; his possessions attach themselves to his body, swelling it in size. It is, in fact, Job's sons, daughters, servants, and livestock who create and maintain the space that surrounds Job. At the center of the world is Job, and pressed up against him and radiating out from him are those who belong to him, and beyond these are the members of his community.

When the first round of Job's affliction begins, it is his sons, daughters, servants, and livestock who 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.[4] When Job's possessions are attacked, he suffers because he is physically diminished and, because of this, the configuration of persons in the world-as-it-ought-to-be has been upset. The ones who ought to be pressed up against him have been removed, and the space between him and his community, that manifestation of his greatness, has been shrunk.

This is what happens, but it does not happen immediately. Instead, even when Job's possessions have been stripped from him and he has lost his health, his greatness and the deferential space and mental attention it inspires remain with him for a time, like a kind of phantom limb, as is evidenced by the way the friends approach him when they arrive to comfort him. This 'phantom greatness' lingers as a kind of placeholder for Job's actual greatness, which Job fully believes will be returned to him—which is, in fact, what happens in the epilogue. If we accept that the epilogue is the second half of the story which the prologue begins, which has been dislocated from its original place by the incursion of the poetic material, and if we reunite these two severed halves, we find that Job's greatness is not long in returning to fill the spot saved for it.[5] Despite Job's apparent suffering in the prologue, this suffering does not actually indicate a change in the world-as-it-ought-to-be. Job retains his proper place in the configuration of persons on the strength of his and his community's belief in his righteousness and the status it confers.

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[4] See Janzen, *Job*, 45–46 for a description of the way in which one's "embodied self" extends to one's family and possessions. For a related discussion of the extension of the rich man's body in particular see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 264.

[5] Here, I may be trying to have it both ways, reading the prose and the poetry as if they are both parts of the same document and different documents from each other. This is, though, I think, fair. Prose and poetry are both part of the same Book of Job, and neither one enjoys privileged status as more 'authentic' to the book than the other. Yet, at the same time, differences exist between them which make them stand apart from each other. We are intended to notice their disjunction. We are meant, I believe, to perceive the poetry as severing the prose tale into two halves, and to perceive the prologue and epilogue as the beginning and end of a single story, even if it is the case that prose and poetry never existed except in their present configuration.

Job's Relationship to God and Hassatan *in the Prologue*

The prologue begins by describing Job's relationship to his family, servants, and livestock, individuals whom he owns and who contribute to his personal greatness, making him "the greatest of all the people of the east" (1:3b), a designation which means that the other inhabitants of 'the east' will relate to him in a particular way, placing him at the center of their physical and mental worlds. Then the story gets underway, and God and *hassatan* make their entrances. How are we to understand the relationship between these two new individuals and Job? Surely they cannot be counted among Job's possessions, such that their separate identities can be rolled into his, the way his children, servants, and livestock are. Nor do they seem to make space for him, thereby showing him deference, the way he community does in chapter 29. *Hassatan*, after all, is given permission by God to "touch all that [Job] has" (1:11a), including his "bone and flesh" (2:5a), with the one reservation that he leave Job alive. There is no respectful distance here. Yet, despite this, when it comes to mental space and attention, God and *hassatan* are as focused on Job as the nobles and princes who move aside to make space for Job and silence themselves to attend to Job's words in chapter 29.

In the heavenly council they talk of nothing but Job. The point of the scene in 1:6–12 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 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.[6]

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[6] Clifford W. Edwards writes that the prologue "invites us to satisfy one of the persistent wishes of humanity, the wish for a glimpse into the secret recesses of heaven. . . . What more could a mortal ask than to be privy to heaven's plan, the 'big picture' as it reflects on our personal well-being? . . . What does God talk about in heaven? Each of us wants to believe that God obsesses about us, about me, about his favorite human being, about myself as Job. . . . Amazingly, God and I have the same high opinion of me." Clifford W. Edwards, "Greatest of All the People in the East: Venturing East of Uz," *Review & Expositor* 99 no. 4 (2002): 533. For Edwards, it is not that Job, as a character in the story, is able to eavesdrop on heaven, but that we, human beings like Job, are permitted to eavesdrop. To me, though, it seems that, in order for Edwards interpretation to work, Job himself must have access to the heavenly conversation, a possibility which I will discuss in chapter 5.

Still, we return to the fact that even though Job may be big even in heaven—no big fish in a small pond he—so that God and *hassatan* cannot help but pay attention to him, this does not force them to stay at a deferential distance. Job 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.[7] Indeed, Hugh Pyper, taking as his cue the detail that 'bless' is often used in *Job* to mean its opposite, 'curse,'[8] 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.[9] 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.

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*

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[7] I agree with those who point out that the transaction between God and *hassatan* is not really a bet, but, because my focus is on the effect of this transaction on Job and not on the exact nature of the transaction itself, I will use the traditional term, even as I recognize that the transaction is actually something different.

[8] There are four places in the book where the pi'el of ברך, which usually means 'bless,' seems to mean its opposite, 'curse.' 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. (See Bruce Vawter, *Job & Jonah: Questioning the Hidden God* [New York: Paulist Press, 1983], 29). Yet, although this is the dominant explanation of this usage of ברך, some scholars argue that the real explanation is not quite so simple. Tod Linafelt makes a convincing case for "the undecidability of ברך," proposing that the author, rather than intending his readers to immediately recognize that ברך is being used to mean its opposite, has instead created in ברך "the site of conflicted meaning." That is, in the author's use of ברך, both meanings are presented as real possibilities, which calls into question what it means to be blessed and what it means to be cursed. Tod Linafelt, "The Undecidability of ברך in the Prologue to Job and Beyond," *Biblical Interpretation* 4 no. 2 (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.

[9] Hugh S. Pyper, *An Unsuitable Book: The Bible as Scandalous Text* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005): 58–60.

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 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).[10] 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 greatness-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.

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—חנם—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.

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,

[10] The italics are mine, but the Hebrew text also emphasizes the "you": הלא־את שׂכת.

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 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. As James Harding explains,

> 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.[11]

What move can God make? How can God extricate himself from this checkmate? He can't, really. All he can do is restore Job to his former position of wealth and power, giving him even double what he had before. The restoration of Job's wealth is not God's rewarding Job for passing the test; rather, it is tribute paid by the loser to the winner.[12] 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. Thus, even though God and *hassatan* seem to violate the deferential space which ought to surround Job in order

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[11] James E. Harding, "A Spirit of Deception in Job 4:15? Interpretive Indeterminacy and Eliphaz's Vision," *Biblical Interpretation* 13 no 2 (2005): 164.

[12] 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." Charles Melchert, "The Book of Job: Education Through and By Diversity," *Religious Education* 92 no. 1 (1997): 19.

for the world to be as it ought, this violation has as its result an increase in Job's righteousness, which also means an increase in his bigness and an increase in the physical and mental space that must be made for him by his community. Moreover, it is not only his community which must relate to Job in this 'intensified' way, but also God and *hassatan*. Having lost in this engagement, they dare not touch him again.[13] If, at the beginning of the story, they made mental space for Job, giving him their full attention, at the end of the story they must make physical space for him as well. It is even possible that they have become his possessions. Does the one who has shown himself to be more righteous than God *own* God? It is not inconceivable that he does. What's more, when one reaches the end of the story, one begins to wonder if this has been the case all along, for, when the workings of the bet are examined, it begins to seem as if Job has masterminded the whole thing, a question to which I will return in chapter 5.

Job's 'Phantom Greatness' as Demonstrated by His Three Friends

Although, in the prologue, Job is stripped of his possessions and his health, thereby losing his designation as "the greatest of all the people of the east," his friends, when they arrive, do not treat him as if he has lost his former status. Instead, they behave as if his greatness remains, which means that, in a sense, it does remain. For as long as the prologue lasts, this 'phantom greatness' lingers, protecting Job from the full impact of his loss as he waits for the restoration of actual greatness, an event which he is certain will soon come to pass.

As for everyone else in the prologue, Job is the absolute center of the friends' focus,[14] so much so that their presence serves only to make him even more present. We read,

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[13] Pyper observes that Job's "restored prosperity can be no comfort to him as its precariousness has been made so abundantly clear" (Pyper, *Unsuitable Book*, 59), but, within the context of the prose tale alone, this does not hold true. In the prose tale, Job is not in danger of losing his position a second time. Those who took it from him the first time—God and *hassatan*—have emerged from the experience chastened. To paraphrase a comment God makes about another formidable creature in chapter 41, they have laid their hands on him once, but, from now on, they will remember that battle and will not do it again (41:8).

[14] I have not dealt with Job's wife or his surviving servants in this chapter, but they, too, are wholly focused on Job and can be counted among his possessions. It is fair to say that none of them would have survived had it not been necessary for them to interact

> 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" (וישׂאו את־עיניהם), indicating that they are actively looking for him. Lifting their eyes from a distance, the friends do not recognize (לא הכירהו) the one for whom they are looking, and yet, immediately upon *not recognizing* him, the friends lift their voices (וישׂאו קולם) to weep aloud for their friend, showing that, although they have not recognized him, they know 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 figure of their world, 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 demonstrate their focus on Job. Moreover, the spatial configuration of the friends in relation to Job is described in a way that is consonant with the spatial configuration of Job's community in chapter 29. As the friends approach, their eyes and voices are lifted *up* (נשׂא) to Job who occupies a higher plane than that on which the friends move. Reaching Job, the friends promptly sit *down* (ישׁב) to allow themselves to continue to look *up* at him. Then, they throw dust (עפר) *up* toward heaven (השׁמימה) upon their heads (על־ראשׁיהם), which also serves to lower the friends in

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with Job in some way. The servants survive to report the details of the disasters that have struck, and the device of having a servant report each disaster to Job allows "the spotlight [to] remain fixed upon Job," instead of having the reader's attention shift to the scene of each catastrophe. David J.A. Clines, "False Naivety in the Prologue to Job," in *On the Way to the Postmodern*, vol. 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 736. 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 him. Similarly, Job's wife survives to provide Job with the cue that will allow him to prove his righteousness. She delivers it—"Curse God and die" (2:9b)—and promptly disappears from the book, not even regaining the foreground when ten new children are born to Job in the epilogue.

Job's presence: those who have dust upon their heads are lower than the dust. Job may be sitting among the ashes (בתוך־אפר), 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. 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.[15]

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. Norman Habel comments effusively on the bond between the friends and Job, as it is revealed in their initial response. He writes,

> 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.[16]

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.[17]

The friends' response may be appropriate in a generic sort of way. That is, we may want to argue that all true friends, faced with the extreme suffering of one who is dear to them, ought to respond as Job's friends do. Nevertheless, when we read this passage in the light of the relationships between Job and others in the prologue up to this point and between Job and his community in chapter 29, we must see that something more than

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[15] Page H. Kelley, "Speeches of the Three Friends," *Review & Expositor* 68 no 4 (1971): 480.

[16] Norman C. Habel, " 'Only the Jackal is My Friend' On Friends and Redeemers in Job," *Interpretation* 31 no. 3 (1977): 228.

[17] Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job, A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1985), 97.

this kind of generic statement is being made about Job's relationship with his three friends. Like everyone else in the prologue, Job's friends, too, are rolled into the conglomerate of his identity. Adopting the signs of his suffering and grief, they make clear that it is *his* experience that is of central importance. Silencing themselves like the members of his community in chapter 29, they make clear that his words are valued above their own. Lowering themselves to the ground in his presence, they demonstrate their deference to him. They do not behave this way *because* he is suffering and they want to show how sorry they feel for what has befallen him. Rather, they behave this way because it is indicative of the relationship that exists between them—Job is the central figure in their world, because he is the most righteous and, by extension, the biggest—*in spite* of Job's suffering, which has stripped his greatness from him.

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 retains his greatness in the eyes of his friends. They give him the benefit of the doubt, treating him as if he is still great, despite his reduced circumstances. When the friends come to comfort him, they are silenced because the man who was *gadol* has been overwhelmed by a suffering which is *gadol*. 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; and each gave him 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 lost the multitude that once surrounded him. These characters, like those of the prologue, serve 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. The

friends were right to continue to relate to Job as if he were still great, for, he was, in fact, still great. I have referred to Job's 'phantom greatness' as standing in as a placeholder for Job's actual greatness, allowing him to remain great despite his reduced circumstances, but perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of his reduction as the phantom state. Job's greatness remains real throughout his time of suffering, and it is his apparent reduction that is an illusion. 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.

The Anti-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 world-as-it-ought-to-be is a world in which he is at the center, both physically and mentally. Yet, despite his unique position, it is not a world in which he is alone. Rather, he is surrounded by a multitude of others, and it is the presence of these others that makes Job's position at the center possible. Some of these others belong to Job, thereby contributing to his greatness. Others stand beyond the buffer zone created by these possessions, and acknowledge Job's greatness by making space for him. All persons in this world have Job in their gaze, and the focused quality of this gaze acknowledges his centrality.

In chapter 29, Job does not wish for relief from 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 figure, 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 may keep their distance from Job, but this distance indicates disgust rather than deference. Furthermore, 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, מלה. 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 spoken by men who are lower than dogs.

It is not his physical suffering or his personal losses that are the worst of Job's predicament, but the fact that his suffering and loss have 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 disordering of the world because he remains at the center, retaining a certain 'phantom greatness,' which acts as a placeholder for his actual greatness. 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 figure of their world will do. In chapter 30, however, Job presents a world in disarray, an anti-world. Job's 'phantom greatness' has dissipated, and the full extent of his loss is borne in upon him. Job has ceased to be his world's central figure, made great by the many who attached themselves to him, and now he exists only to bolster others' status, as the object of their mocking disdain.

The Connectedness of the Righteous and the Loneliness of the Wicked: Interpersonal Relationships as Viewed by Job's Three Friends

As discussed in the opening section of this chapter, when Job's friends speak about the lives of the righteous, they are speaking about the world-as-it-ought-to-be. It is because they are righteous that these people are able to inhabit the world-as-it-ought-to-be, and, because they inhabit it, they benefit from its inherent blessings. In the same way, when the friends speak of the lives of the wicked, they are speaking about the world-as-it-ought-not-to-be, which it is the fate of the wicked to inhabit, a place as abundant in curses as the world-as-it-ought-to-be is in blessings. Although they do not each spell out both 'sides of the coin,' their speech about the righteous and wicked can be taken collectively, so that Zophar's description of the aloneness of the wicked can be understood to confirm Eliphaz's words about the connections which exists between the righteous,

and both can be understood to be saying something about the world-as-it-ought-to-be.

It is something of a misnomer to speak of 'interpersonal relationships' in the friends' view of the wicked, for, a point all of them make is that there are no real relations between wicked individuals. (That there are no relations between the wicked and the righteous goes without saying.) For the friends, to be wicked is to be fundamentally alone, a condition that becomes evident at death even if it has not been evident in life. 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. 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" (22:16, 20b). Earlier Eliphaz has claimed of the wicked, "Their tent-cord is plucked up within them, and they die devoid of wisdom" (4:21). The word translated 'tent-cord' is יתר, which can also mean 'remnant' or 'remainder,' which is how Eliphaz uses it in 22:20 to say "what they left (יתרם), 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.

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.[18]

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 wrongdoing 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[19] 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,[20] imply throughout that if Job were to die now, as he seems to wish,[21] he would be met by the fate

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[18] These observations were suggested to me by René Girard's theory of the scapegoating mechanism, a central tenet of which 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, as Girard sees it, is finally a story about failed scapegoating, because Job refuses to agree that he is guilty, despite all indications to the contrary. René Girard, *Job: The Victim of his People*, trans. Y. Freccero (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

[19] The word translated 'miss' is חטא, 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.

[20] 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).

[21] In chapter 3 Job has wished, "Let the day perish in which I was born, and the night that said, 'A man-child is conceived' " (3:3). Granted, in this speech Job seems to be wishing

of the 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.

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 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. For the friends, as well as for Job, to live in the world-as-it-ought-to-be is to be made *gadol* through one's connections with other persons and things. The friends, though, do not speak of Job as the *greatest* of all the people in their world, the one with the most possessions and connections, but only offer him the opportunity to be, once again, *gadol*, as all righteous men are *gadol*. Perhaps it is for this reason that Job bristles under their efforts at comforting him, refusing, from the beginning, to see any value in their words. Or perhaps he rejects their overtures because he sees in their descriptions of the loneliness of the wicked a covert accusation brought against himself. He may fundamentally agree that this is the lot of the wicked, but he feels the sting in his friends' words nonetheless.

The Expectation of a גאל: *Job Rejects the Friends' Assertion that He is Fundamentally Alone*

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

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that he had died before he ever began to live, and not that he would die now, after the onset of his suffering. Still, Job longs for death, painting the land of the dead as a place of respite from the turmoil of life (3:17–19), and he wants to be dead *now*, even if he couches this desire in language referring to the past.

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.[22] Job rejects Bildad's veiled accusation, countering, "[K]now then that God has put me in the wrong" (19:6a). Although he insists he is not one of the wicked, the description of his own situation Job gives is consonant with the picture of the fate of the wicked 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, and, in this, it is as if he is dead and forgotten. Job laments,

> [God] 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 Job's situation, Job insists that Bildad has incorrectly interpreted the meaning and implications of his suffering. His loneliness, Job claims, stems from God's unwarranted enmity (19:6, 7b).

In chapter 19, Job does not go on to make the argument that the upside-down 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.[23] 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,

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[22] 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." Carol A. Newsom "Job and His Friends: A Conflict of Moral Imaginations," *Interpretation* 53 no. 3 (1999): 249. Although I agree that, fundamentally, Job and his friends are arguing over the nature of the world, 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).

[23] See, for example, 21:7–34.

> 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 גאל (*go'el*), 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**."[24] 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 (ריב) for those too helpless or too vulnerable to obtain justice for themselves.[25]

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 three verses (19:25–27) is immense.

There are two main camps of opinion on the identity of the *go'el* into which scholars may be divided. The traditional scholarly position holds that when Job speaks of his *go'el* he is speaking of God. 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. Robert Gordis provides a compelling representative statement of this position, writing,

> In all of Job's speeches two themes have been heard. . . . 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 . . . as Job appeals 'from God to God.'[26]

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[24] Holladay, *Concise Lexicon*, 52.

[25] Samuel E. Balentine "Who Will be Job's Redeemer?," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 26 no. 3 (1999): 274.

[26] Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 88. Others in the 'God-is-the-*go'el*' camp include Westermann, Dhorme, Hartley, Whybray, Rowley, Driver, Gutierrez, Cox, Kinet, and J.G. Williams.

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 . . . 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.[27]

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. Suggestions for the *go'el's* identity range from a member of the divine council who will intercede with God on Job's behalf (Pope; Habel) to Job's own voice and his claim of righteousness (Clines; Vawter).[28]

Although there is disagreement over the identity of the *go'el*, most interpreters agree that Job, when he speaks of his *go'el*, is speaking about someone specific, whose identity is known to him. It seems to me, though, that this need not be the case. Raymond Scheindlin suggests that the *go'el* is

> an unknown kinsman [who] will come forward [sometime in the future], read the record, take up [Job's] case again, and gain the vindication he has been seeking.[29]

Janzen takes the possible unknownness of the *go'el* even further, writing,

> [I]n 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 . . . in . . . blind affirmation of what is unknown, yet which must be there if one's own truth ultimately matters. [30]

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 he is not ready to

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[27] Samuel Terrien, "The Book of Job," in *The Interpreter's Bible* vol. 3 (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954), 1052.

[28] See Marvin Pope, *Job* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 135; Habel, *Job*, 306; Clines, *Job 1–20*, 460; Vawter, *Job and Jonah*, 52. See also Peggy Day, who identifies *hassatan* as Job's *go'el*, a personage who, against Job's expectations, works to harm rather than to deliver him. Day, *Adversary*, 100–01.

[29] Raymond Scheindlin, *The Book of Job* (New York and London: Norton & Co., 1998), 91.

[30] Janzen, *Job*, 125. See also James L. Crenshaw, *A Whirlpool of Torment: Israelite Traditions of God as an Oppressive Presence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 74.

make that admission. Job 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* is to bring the world-as-it-is, which is an anti-world, 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. James Crenshaw supposes that Job's *go'el's* work corresponds to the first definition of the term given in the *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, quoted above. He 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"[31] I am not sure, though, that the issue *is* revenge. If vengeance is to be had, it ought to be had against God, who is identified as the one responsible for Job's situation. Indeed, 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 recognizes that God is 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 all definitions of the *go'el* is the idea that the *go'el*, however he fulfills his role, works 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, as someone who is on his side. The dead man 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. 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 this pair do not belong to the *go'el*. Rather,

[31] Crenshaw, "Job," in *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), 771. See also Good, *Tempest*, 102; James G. Williams, "'You have not Spoken Truth of Me' Mystery and Irony in Job," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 83 no. 2 (1971): 244.

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 showing God that Job is not alone, the *go'el* proves to God that Job is not one of the wicked.

The work of the *go'el*, as Job imagines it, is to bring an end to the anti-world and return the world to the way it ought to be. The way the *go'el* will achieve this goal is by showing solidarity with Job, and thereby proving that Job is not alone. In the world as it existed before his affliction, Job was the central figure. 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 in that world. The *go'el* must stand beside Job in such a way that he becomes an extension of Job, making Job bigger,[32] just as in the prologue Job was made great by his many possessions, servants, and children. The *go'el* must also make Job the center of his attention and behave with deference towards him, as was formerly done by his community's elders and nobles and its righteous poor, as is described in chapter 29. The *go'el's* job is to act as if the world 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 his friends' assessment that aloneness is a mark of wickedness and, therefore, of the world-as-it-ought-not-to-be. His own seeming aloneness he

[32] 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, instead, follows movements choreographed by Job.

identifies as a false indicator. Although he appears to be alone, he is not really 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 in time to save him from his imminent death.

Summary of the Positions Taken by Job and the Friends

As seen, Job and his friends present similar pictures of how relationships between persons are structured in the world-as-it-ought-to-be. In this world, the righteous man (who is the only kind of man capable of living in the world-as-it-ought-to-be) is embedded in his community and made great by the others who are attached to him. He may be the single, central point of a network that spreads out from him, but he is most emphatically not alone. Rather, his position is made possible by the others who surround him and whose existence is given over to him in varying degrees, whether by belonging to him outright or by focusing their attention on him. There is, however, one key difference between this aspect of the world-as-it-ought-to-be as presented by Job and by his friends. Job presents himself as the greatest member of his community, the one central figure in whose orbit all others move. The friends, although they do not deny that this was the case, seem to offer Job the chance to be restored to the position shared by all righteous patriarchs, and not to a position which is unique to himself. Eliphaz says, "How happy is the one whom God reproves; therefore do not despise the discipline of the Almighty" (5:17), before describing how things will be for Job once he has taken God's reproach to heart and repented of whatever wrong he has committed. Although Eliphaz uses the second person here—"*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" (5:24–25, my italics)—that it follows his use of the third person, "happy is the one . . ." (אַשְׁרֵי אֱנוֹשׁ) gives it a generic flavor. Job's is not the only safe tent in the world-as-it-ought-to-be, nor is his the only guaranteed line of descent.

In a way this goes without saying. What kind of a world would it be if only Job occupied this coveted position? Indeed, that Job does not think

of himself as completely unique is demonstrated by his belief that his current suffering is indicative of the suffering of all righteous persons and, by converse, the rejoicing of all wicked ones. What is happening to him is what is happening to others as well.[33] Still, it is true that in chapter 29 and in the prologue Job presents himself (or is presented by the narrator) as the greatest and most central figure in his world, and the friends, although their world-as-it-ought-to-be is not unlike Job's, do not pick up on this particular detail, which may actually mean that the worlds they envision are not the same at all. Perhaps Job is not more open to the friends' admonitions precisely because they fail to offer him reinstatement in the world as he believes it ought to be, but rather in some other world, one which comes a close second to his world-as-it-ought-to-be, but misses the mark nonetheless. Even if this is the case, the similarity between Job's world-as-it-ought-to-be and that of the friends is highlighted when, declaring his certainty that his *go'el* lives, Job counters his friends' accusations that he is alone in the way that the friends have described the wicked as being alone. In the anti-world of the wicked, communal bonds are lacking, and, where it is every man for himself, no one has the opportunity to be *gadol*. This description of the lot of the wicked reinforces, in turn, the description of the world-as-it-ought-to-be as a place where real connections exist between people, and where, through these connections, the most righteous men are made great.

The Wicked and the Righteous in God's Speeches

When God appears and begins to speak it quickly becomes clear that not only are his ideas about the world different from those held by Job and his friends, but the frame of reference by which he expresses those ideas is different as well. Whereas for Job and his friends, to talk about the righteous and the wicked is to describe the world-as-it-ought- and ought-not-to-be, for God this is not the case. The division between these two groups of people is not central to God's discourse, and he is fully able to describe the world of his creation without referring to it, a feat which would be impossible for Job and his friends. Indeed, it is arguable that the idea of

[33] There is, however, another way of reading this detail. It is possible that Job views his personal suffering as indicative of the suffering of all righteous persons precisely because of his unique position at the center: if he is suffering it goes without saying that the world has been turned upside-down, and that everyone who ought not to suffer is suffering.

the existence of righteous and wicked as distinct groups does not even enter God's consciousness. What checks this claim is the fact that God does speak of the wicked in 40:11–13 where he challenges Job to

> Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on all who are proud, and abase them. . . . [T]read down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below.

In addition, in chapter 38 God asks

> Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, 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. (38:12–13, 15)

It is, therefore, obvious that God knows about the existence of a people collectively categorized as 'the wicked.'

Yet, it seems significant that God does not also speak about the group 'the righteous.' Perhaps this is simply because his addressee, Job, is one of the righteous, so that when he says 'you' he is automatically talking about the righteous. This, though, seems somewhat unlikely, as a central point of his speeches is that Job has been completely wrong about the nature of the world-as-it-ought-to-be. God calls Job one who "darkens counsel by words without knowledge" (38:2), accusing him of "put[ting] me in the wrong . . . [and] condemn[ing] me that you may be justified" (40:8), and, although these accusations do not necessarily impugn Job's righteousness, they do cast something of a pall over it, making it seem unlikely that God is using Job as his example of 'the righteous man' simply as a matter of course. Job's righteousness—let alone his *quintessential* righteousness—is not, at this point in the book, the shining beacon it is at other points! For Job and his friends, by contrast, the righteous and the wicked are constantly being referred to as points of opposition. They do not speak about the wicked alone, because to do so would miss the point of the contrast they are setting up. Despite the fact that they consider themselves righteous, and might, therefore, speak of 'us' instead of 'the righteous,' they do speak of 'the righteous,' for the opposition between the two groups is so essential that they must set it forth in the most obvious terms.

God, though, speaks only of 'the wicked.' Whatever can this mean? Its meaning must depend on how God intends the questions he asks to be answered. When he asks Job whether he has done certain things, is he implying that these are things he himself has done and which Job, by contrast, does not have the power to do? Or is the implied answer

something different? It seems possible that God's mention of the wicked has more to do with the fact that he is responding to the speeches made by Job and his friends than with anything foundational to the world as he has made it. Perhaps it is their focus on wickedness and righteousness that drives God's words about the wicked, a topic which he might not otherwise have raised. In the sections below I will discuss options for the implied responses to God's questions and potential interpretations of his words about the wicked. Here, I simply wish to point out that, for God, the world does not seem to be divided into righteous and wicked groups, with the lives of the righteous revealing the way the world ought to be, and the lives of the wicked revealing the way the world ought not to be. God's speeches, then, cannot be approached in the same way as those of Job and the friends. Indeed, God is not concerned to present opposing pictures of the way the world ought and ought not to be. Instead, he presents the world as it is, the world as he has created it to be, and does not seem to recognize any other kind of world. His words about the wicked, whatever they may mean, do not serve to illustrate any kind of anti-world which exists in opposition to the created world. Furthermore, although it might be argued that God's presentation of the world as he created it can also be understood as a depiction of the world-as-it-ought-to-be, this designation loses significance in the absence of an oppositional world-as-it-ought-not-to-be. For God, there is only *the* world, which is *his* world, and this is the world he describes to Job in chapters 38–41.

God's Speeches as a Response to Job's Claims about the World-as-It-Ought-to-be

There is, of course, a problem with the argument made in the last few sentences above. When he responds to Job, God counters Job's own claims about the world-as-it-ought- and ought-not-to-be. It is not strictly correct, then, to say that God's world-as-it-is does not exist in opposition to any other world. It does. God, though, in his speeches does not address this opposition outright or in detail, but only by his claims that Job has spoken "words without knowledge" (38:2b), and by the fact that the world he describes is utterly different from the world Job has supposed God intended to create. That is, in his speeches, God does not hold up aspects of the world-as-it-ought-to-be and of the world-as-it-ought-not-to-be in order to illuminate the points of contrast between them, as Job and his friends do. Still, tension does exist between God's apparent denial of

the existence of the world-as-it-ought-to-be over against the-world-as-it-ought-not-to-be and his insistence that the world Job has described is not the-world-as-it-ought-to-be, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5. Here, I want to proceed as if this tension does not exist. I want to take God at his word, even if, with more prodding, that word may show itself to be not entirely reliable. After all, at this point in our 'forwards' reading of the book, God still retains the authority that inheres in his name, and we should assume that what he says goes.

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 question 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, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" In Hebrew, the "words without knowledge" which God accuses Job of having spoken are מלין בלי־דעת. The word מלין is a plural form 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 nature of the world-as-it-ought-to-be, which he has detailed in chapter 29, have also been without knowledge. In addition, God's sarcastic "surely you know!" (כי תדע) echoes his opening "you shall declare to me," in which the verb is the Hiphil of ידע, 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.[34] Although I think it is possible to read the book as making the claim that Job does have things to say to God which

[34] Janzen, for example, writes, "Throughout the divine speeches, images and motifs and themes from earlier in the book are taken up and re-presented in such a way as to engender the suspicion that these apparently rhetorical questions are to be taken . . . as veiling genuine existential questions posed to Job." Janzen, *Job*, 225.

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. 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,[35] 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.

The Attention of the Animals

What, then, is this world like, specifically with respect to relationships between persons? First off, it must be said this question can hardly be asked of God's speeches, for, with the exception of the wicked mentioned in 38:13,15 and in 40:11–13 and a few other possible oblique references, 'persons,' as in 'human persons' do not figure at all in God's description of his world. Instead, God is concerned with animals. These are the 'persons' who inhabit his world. Is it, then, impossible to actually compare God's description of the world with the world-as-it-ought-to-be described by Job and his friends? Are they so fundamentally different that it is useless to try to inquire into more nuanced differences? That is, instead of examining

[35] Daniel O'Connor lists 8 issues brought up in the prologue and dialogues which God does not address. Daniel O'Connor, "The Futility of Myth-Making in Theodicy: Job 38–41," *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 9 (1985): 84. Luis Alonso-Schökel, however, cautions against viewing the Yahweh speeches as failing to address the issues at stake in the book, writing, "The fact is that the commentator's judgment depends on his expectation of what will happen when God intervenes." He goes on to list 5 ways in which God's words *do* address Job's questions and the claims of the friends. Luis Alonso-Schökel, "God's Answer to Job," in *Job and the Silence of God*, ed. C. Duquoc and C. Floristán (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 45.

the nature of relationships between persons as described by Job and his friends and by God, is the most we can say that Job and his friends are concerned with what goes on between people, whereas God is concerned with what goes on between animals? I do not think we are limited in this way. God's depiction of animal relationships is intended to apply to humans as well. Both share the same status as God's creatures, in the light of which the human/animal distinction is minimized. For this reason, what God says about animals can be compared and contrasted with what Job and his friends say about humans. They are providing models for relationship that are different from each other, and not talking about completely different subjects.

Where Job has described himself as the central figure in the world-as-it-ought-to-be, around whom all others are organized, God's world is diffuse. There is no central point on which the animals fix their gaze, even though it might be tempting to claim that, in the world described by God, God himself is the one who matters, the one upon whom all eyes are focused. If this were the case, God's depiction of the world would be no different from Job's. The central figure would be different—God instead of Job—but the overall configuration would be the same.[36]

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

[36] Schifferdecker, in her reading of the divine speeches, claims that God presents this kind of world. She writes, "God's description of creation reveals to Job that the world does not exist for the sake of humanity, but rather that humanity plays only a part in creation. The world exists for the sake of its Creator. The divine speeches, in other words, are radically theocentric." Schifferdecker, *Whirlwind*, 111. Although I agree that God presents his creation as 'nonanthropocentric,' I disagree that the alternative is a "radically theocentric" world. As will be seen below, it seems to me that the world God describes does away with centricity altogether.

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: "[I]t 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" (41:34a), 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," it cannot be said that this gaze designates God as the world's central figure, to whom Leviathan surrenders its own reality. The verb translated 'survey' in the NRSV is plain old ראה, 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: "[I]t 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 the most important figure 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 central position in God's world. 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 figure, 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

The loneliness 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 wicked 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. 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, becoming one of the farmer's possessions (39:9–12) and contributing to his greatness. 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. Moreover, what constitutes 'aloneness' is called into question in God's speeches. When God describes the wild ass which "ranges the mountains as its pasture" (39:8), the word translated 'pasture' is רעה, 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 and his friends have failed to perceive as a possibility. Moreover, 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. In God's speeches, then, two things happen to the concept of aloneness as described by Job and his friends. First, God denies the claim that aloneness is a sign that something has gone wrong, either for the creatures involved or the world they inhabit. Lone creatures are not, of necessity, wicked, nor is the world they inhabit an anti-world. Second, God calls into question Job's and his friends' ability to assess the aloneness of their fellow creatures, revealing himself and his world as providing companionship for those who might appear to be alone. This, though, does not mean that God re-stigmatizes aloneness. Instead, he seems to be saying that, although it is possible to be alone in the world he has created, this aloneness does not look the way Job and his friends have supposed it must. In a world where even a mountain pasture provides companionship, the lone are not lonely.

God's Centrality: The Question of Power

In the last section but one I argued that God does not present a world in which he is at the center, and cited the diffuse attention of the animals as proving this point. Yet, despite the fact that, in God's description, the animals are not looking at him, it is still possible to argue that God is presenting himself as occupying the central place in the world of his

creation. Such an argument inheres in the claim, first advanced by Henry Rowold, that the implied answer to all of the questions asked by God "is not merely, 'No, I can/did not,' but rather, 'No I can/did not, but you (Yahweh) can/did,' "[37] a view shared by Habel,[38] and by Whybray, who writes, "[T]he answer to the questions 'Can you . . .?' . . . and 'Who can . . .?' . . . can only be 'Only Yahweh can!' "[39] 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. . . . God asks almost exclusively rhetorical questions in this unit. Most of the questions ask "who?", the inevitable but unspoken answer being "you, God."[40]

If these scholars are right, it might be correct to say that God's focus is not on the diverse multitude of creatures his world 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 'person' in a world whose existence emanates from his own and which, without him, would cease to be.

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. 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."[41] 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.

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[37] Henry Rowold, "Yahweh's Challenge to Rival: The Form and Function of the Yahweh-Speeches in Job 38–39," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 no. 2 (1985): 201.

[38] Habel, *Job*, 529.

[39] Norman Whybray, *Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 169.

[40] Michael V. Fox, "Job 38 and God's Rhetoric," *Semeia* 19 (1981): 58.

[41] Habel, *Job*, 529.

Among those who view God's display of power positively is Walter Brueggemann, who writes,

> [I]t is evident that the ground of Yahweh's response is in power.... These doxological verses strain for words to articulate the massiveness and awesomeness of this God.[42]

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."[43] 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.[44]

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.[45]

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.[46] 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," and concludes, "A god so remote, so unfeeling, so unjust is worse than no god," a conclusion he believes is shared by Job, as shown by his final response to God's words.[47] Finally, Jung condemns

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[42] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 390.

[43] Roland Murphy, *The Book of Job: A Short Reading* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 96.

[44] Pope, *Job*, 250, 267.

[45] Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 314.

[46] Ibid., 316.

[47] Curtis, "Job's Response," 497, 510.

the god who "comes riding along on the tempest of his almightiness and thunders reproaches at the half-crushed human worm."[48]

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 if the world is to be as it ought. Still, 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 it is 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 these animals 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.[49] 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, in fact, does seem to be what these questions are intended to convey, then his power is of quite a different sort.

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[48] Carl G. Jung, *Answer to Job*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London and New York: Routledge, 1954), 16–17.

[49] 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." Milton Horne, "From Ethics to Aesthetics: The Animals in Job 38:39–39:30," *Review & Expositor* 102 no. 1 (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.

Power is generally understood as power *over* something, 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 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 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.[50] 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, instead of viewing them either as too insignificant to warrant his attention or as beings whose only value is in their potential to contribute their meager share to his greatness.

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. Some scholars argue that, when God speaks about Leviathan, he is speaking of a chaos monster defeated as the necessary prelude to the creation of the world, against which he must be constantly vigilant in order to ensure the maintenance of his creation. They understand that God's history and relationship with Leviathan are similar to those of Marduk and Tiamat in the Babylonian myth *Enuma elish*. Tryggve 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

[50] 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 as a community of beings empowered by a creator who delights in the flourishing of life." Dale Patrick, "Divine Creative Power and the Decentering of Creation: The Subtext of the Lord's Address to Job," in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, ed. N.C. Habel and S. Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 113.

> article, as proper names. . . . Thus, the names . . . have unmistakable mythical overtones. One gets the idea that these animals stand as symbols of the dark, chaotic side of existence.[51]

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).[52]

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 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."[53] Similarly, John 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. . . . Yahweh is arguing that he masters every force in the world.[54]

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[51] Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, "The Enigma of Job: The Deconstruction of God in Intertextual Perspective," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 23 no 2 (1997): 12.

[52] This translation is based on the emendation of the Hebrew לי־הוא, "to me" or "mine" to מי־הוא, "who is he?" an emendation supported by Pope. Gordis, Dhorme, and Habel read לא הוא, "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.

[53] John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 103.

[54] John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 518. 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, Gordon, Murphy, Habel, Whybray, Cox, and Ash.

Furthermore, 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 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 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 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, thereby contributing 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. Nor is their purpose to demonstrate God's central position in a world which, without his presence there, would deteriorate into chaos. Rather, their purpose is to focus Job's attention on the diverse multiplicity of creatures which inhabit God's world. Where God's power is revealed is in his creation of this complex world, but, in creating such creatures, God relinquishes power rather than hoarding it for himself and steps to the side instead of entrenching himself at the center of the world.

The Place of Human Beings in God's World

Although God's speeches contain a multitude of animals, they are noticeably short on humans, who appear only in oblique references. When God speaks of rain, asking "[W]ho 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.[55] In the next chapter humans are laughed at by

[55] "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.

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 certainly includes what was human, 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."[56] 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."[57] 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."[58] In the readings proposed by Balentine and Janzen, God's treatment of the animals serves as a model for how Job ought to behave in his relations with other creatures. If God does not include human beings in his picture of the world, it is because God himself stands in for human beings. That is, it is not that the human presence is implied in God's description of the animals, but that the human presence is implied in God's description of himself. 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. If it is the case that God reveals his own creative activity as involving a relinquishing of power and a movement away from the center, perhaps this is a model Job and his fellow humans are meant to adopt. At the same time, I am not convinced that the fact that God addresses Job means that Job's place in the world is in some way equivalent to God's. This interpretation keeps humans at the center of God's world, elevating their status above that of other creatures, in a way that is at odds with the minimal reference God makes to them. It seems to me that although God's address to Job serves to keep Job 'in

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[56] Samuel E. Balentine, "What Are Human Beings, That you should Make so Much of Them?' Divine Disclosure from the Whirlwind: 'Look at Behemoth,'" in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, ed. T. Linafelt and T.K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 260.

[57] Ibid., 269.

[58] Janzen, *Job*, 229.

the picture' of creation, it does not grant him special status in the world. Rather, humans are part of the creation and contribute to its diversity, but they are deliberately slighted in God's speeches due to their tendency to claim more importance for themselves than is warranted.

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. 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 wicked cannot inhabit the world-as-it-ought-to-be, but live, instead, in an anti-world where punishment, rather than blessing, is the order of the day, God seems to allow the wicked to remain in his world, as a part of that world, 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. . . . [T]read 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. (40:10–11, 12b–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. Interpreters who read these speeches as a battle between God and Job, in which God is asserting his power over 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. 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.[59]

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.[60] 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.[61] 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.

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[59] Hartley, *Job*, 497.

[60] The word translated 'proud' in 40:11b-12 is גאה, whereas in 41:34, 'proud' translates בני־שׁחץ. 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.

[61] 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." Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 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 is awed by Leviathan," an answer that is supported by the text.

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 order for the world to be as it ought to be, the wicked must be punished and the proud brought low, activities which consign them to the anti-world which exists as the flip-side of the world-as-it-ought-to-be. 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 how he wishes it to be. Athalya Brenner argues that "the passage [is] a straightforward, although partial, admittance of divine failure. . . . God is . . . conceding that he cannot dispose of the wicked and of evil."[62] 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!"[63]

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, in his ineptitude, has failed to create, an interpretation with which I do not agree. It is, after all, Job and not God, who has shown himself to be preoccupied with the fate of the wicked.

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. Patrick describes this world:

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[62] Athalya Brenner, "God's Answer to Job," *Vetus Testamentum* 31 no 2 (1981): 133.

[63] Gordis, *God and Man*, 12. Janzen raises an important objection to this kind of interpretation, writing, "[Gordis'] comment . . . presupposes that 'perfection' of 'world order' would involve the coercive crushing of evil and wickedness. This in turn involves the presupposition that the perfect reign . . . of order and justice would exemplify irresistible exercise of unilateral power, imposed 'from the top down,' a vision the totalitarian character of which should not be less odious for being projected upon God." Janzen, *Job*, 244.

> 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.[64]

If Job has enough power, Job can create a different world, one from which Leviathan and the wicked are banned and consigned to the anti-world, and which is organized around Job as the only person who matters. But Job does not have that kind of power, at least God doesn't think he does.[65] The world described by God in his speeches is a world characterized by complexity and inhabited by a diverse multitude of creatures, some of whom live alone and some of whom do not, and whose attention is diffuse, rather than focused on one central figure. God may impose constraints on these creatures, but he does so in the service of the flourishing of the many. His power is not a power which conquers, but a power which sets free. In consequence, it is not God who is *gadol*, but the world of his creation.

[64] Patrick, "Creative Power," 113.

[65] The prose epilogue casts doubt on this assumption, as will be discussed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER THREE

TIME IN THE WORLD-AS-IT-OUGHT-AND-OUGHT-NOT-TO-BE: STASIS, CHANGE, AND DEATH

Nothing Ever Happens: Stasis in Job's World-as-It-Ought-to-Be

When we describe a place as 'untouched by time,' we mean that it has not experienced the changes that have affected other places, those which have, presumably, been 'touched by time.' Time is bound up with change. Change is how we tell that time exists, and, if there is no change, there is no time, at least insofar as we can perceive it. For Job—and also for his friends, as will be discussed below—the world-as-it-ought-to-be is a place where nothing ever happens, which is to say, it is a world that exists outside of time. It is not, however, a 'land untouched by time,' according to its usual usage, for this phrase presumes that change is happening all around the unchanging enclave: change is the norm and stasis is the exception. Rather, for Job and his friends, timelessness is the norm, and change is the exception. Those who are affected by time and its attendant ravages are the wicked who inhabit the anti-world, a world that ought not to exist at all, whereas the righteous, who inhabit the world-as-it-ought-to-be, have no truck with time. This is perfectly understandable. If the world is as it ought to be, *positive* change is an oxymoron. The world-as-it-ought-to-be cannot become *more* as-it-ought-to-be, unless it was not really as-it-ought-to-be to begin with. The same is true of a person who is as-he-or-she-ought-to-be. Change, therefore, can only be for the worse, resulting in a lessening of the existent perfection. If change is to happen in the world-as-it-ought-to-be, it must be change in the service of stasis; that is, change which happens in order to bring about a more stable incarnation of the world which already exists. It is pseudo-change.

This is the kind of change that happens in the prose tale, if the prologue and epilogue are (re)united.[1] 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

[1] See my discussion of the relation between prose and poetry in the previous chapter, footnote 5.

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. 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 figure, surrounded by a multitude of others whose focus is on him. There is, it is true, one difference between the Job of the prologue and the Job of the epilogue. What is different is that, at the end, Job's fear of God has been 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 significant we consider this change 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 that Job, who was great, is for a time brought low. At another, more fundamental 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. What's more, 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. If Job does not change in the tale, and if the only thing that changes is that we now understand that Job is incapable of change, 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. Job, as the central character of the 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.

The fundamental stasis of Job's character in the tale allows us to perceive that Job views the world-as-it-ought-to-be as similarly static. It is true that Job does not speak the prose tale, but that the world depicted in these chapters corresponds to Job's world-as-it-ought-to-be is evidenced by the similarity between this world and that of chapter 29, as discussed in the previous chapter. When Job says "Oh, that I were as in the months of old" (29:2a), he is referring to the months described in the prose tale. Of course, to speak of the "months of old" is to assume the existence of time. Something has changed to differentiate the present moment from the past. In the poetic section of the book, Job laments the change that has befallen him, thrusting him into an anti-world beset by time, and he wishes for a return to the time before time existed. I have argued above that the prose tale in its entirety—taking prologue and epilogue as halves of the same story—presents a static world, for the reasons discussed above. It must be asked, though, why, when Job is afflicted with change in the prologue, this does not indicate that the world-as-it-ought-to-be has been replaced by the anti-world, whereas in the poetry this does seem to be the case. In both sections Job clings to his integrity and eschews those behaviors which would indicate that he has himself changed in response to the changes in his circumstances. What makes the change evidenced in the prose pseudo-change, and that in the poetry real change?

The difference has to do with Job's perception of what is happening to him. In the prose tale, he may suffer, but he experiences his suffering as happening within a fixed system. He knows that the world he inhabits is stable, and so understands that the apparent change in his circumstances cannot be real or lasting. He anticipates that the end of his story will be a return to its beginning, and this is, in fact, what happens when he finds himself swiftly restored to his former position in the epilogue. Why, though, does he not perceive his situation in the same way in the poetic section? The answer, it seems to me, lies in the seven days of silence in 2:13. These seven days mark a transition for Job, in which the world-as-it-ought-to-be slowly ceases to exist and is replaced by the anti-world. During those days, Job waits for the restoration which is his due and which would indicate that the change he has experienced is only apparent and not actual. He fully expects this return. When, after seven days, it does not happen, he opens his mouth and, instead of speaking the blessings with which he had greeted the onset of his suffering, now curses the day of his birth, wishing that he had never been born. The change in his speech is indicative of his perception of the change in his circumstances. That is, Job's situation is changed not when God and *hassatan* begin to afflict him

in 1:13, instead it is changed sometime over the course of 2:13, as he sits in silence waiting for the stability of his world to manifest itself, an event which does not happen.[2]

Job's initial response to his perception that the world has changed—his wish that he had not been born—gives way to an insistence that God return the world to its former status. Although these desires are clearly different from one another, it is telling that what they have in common is a backwards movement, rather than a forwards one. What Job wants is not to move through his present situation and emerge on the other side of it. Rather, what he wants is to be returned to a previous position, either the one he occupied before he was born (his mother's womb) or the one he occupied before his suffering began. Job does not call for change, but for un-change. When Job speaks his oath of innocence in chapter 31, he does so not to effect his transformation but his restoration. He 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 Job 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 disruption of the static order of the world.

God as Agent of Change: Creator of the Anti-world

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)

[2] See my article, "Job's Crisis of Language: Power and Powerlessness in Job's Oaths," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36. 3 (2012: 333–54), for further discussion of this point.

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; 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 sakes. God is not a just judge, but a force, like a rolling glacier, which 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 it has gouged out of what used to be a flat plain, 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 אֵיתָן, which literally means "continuous (one) . . . perennial (one), eternal (one) . . . reliable (one)."[3] 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. If the world-as-it-ought-to-be is a place characterized by stability, the workings of God, as described here by Job, must be understood as creating the anti-world. God may have originally made the world-as-it-ought-to-be, but his activity since has been only to disrupt that world, making it into what it ought-not-to-be.

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[3] David J.A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993), 237.

Excursus: God's 'Wisdom' as God's Whim

A word should be said about Job's attribution of wisdom to God in both passages (9:3–18; 12:13–24). 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 Hebrew Bible does not describe mere knowledge but the ability to discern the right way to act and the undertaking of that right behavior. 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. 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, 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. In his speech which precedes Job's chapter 12 response, Zophar has spoken of God's possession of "the secrets of wisdom" (11:6a), 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.[4] Perdue identifies this passage as a parody of a hymn of praise, noting that, although Job

[4] See footnote 8 in the previous chapter.

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.[5]

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 God 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" (עמו חכמה וגבורה), in verse 16 he says, "with him are strength and wisdom" (עמו עז ותושיה), exchanging the placement of the words meaning 'wisdom' and 'strength.' If we read the two verses as parallels of each other, the effect is that wisdom and strength are seen to be being used as interchangeable terms. What

[5] Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 155.

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 תושׁיה, a word which can also be translated as "success" or "(good) results."[6] 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 (תושׁיה)." 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, but 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. As Job perceives it, God's wisdom and strength work together to topple the stable world-as-it-ought-to-be, replacing it with an anti-world beset by continuous, random change.

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

[6] Holladay, *Concise Lexicon*, 388.

forward to a new place on the other side of change. Against this interpretation, however, 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.[7]

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."[8]

I would argue, however, that the time that matters most to Job and his friends is not the future but the past. For all of them, the end of the story is marked by a return to the beginning, and this return occasions not another telling of the story, 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 must 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. 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. They offer him a 'futureless present.'

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

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[7] Newsom, *Book of Job*, 212.
[8] Idem.

> [God] 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. 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.[9] 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 static. Any change which occurs within this world 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, whereas for Job it is the binding up that

[9] See the discussion in the previous chapter, pages 62–64.

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, and those who are righteous are enabled to inhabit God's stable world, 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 to institute stasis. Job will undergo change of a sort 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 wars or wild animals, 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 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 he leaves when he goes to sleep will be the world he finds when he wakes.

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)

Now, 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 Job does not expect and welcome. Change may afflict others—those who dwell in the anti-world—but Job, as a righteous man, will experience the world as static and secure, as it ought to be.

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 Anti-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, and, 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.

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. Moreover, 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

In this verse (11:20), 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, 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 by 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.

Their point is that the world-as-it-ought-to-be is static. The righteous man, who is man-as-he-ought-to-be both supports and benefits from the stability of this world. 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 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 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 is troubled by the mortality of the righteous man, recognizing that his ability to live a stable life is compromised by his inability to escape the change wrought by death. Mortality prevents even the most righteous from participating fully in the world-as-it-ought-to-be.

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 אֱנוֹשׁ, which, though its plainest meaning is simply 'human being,' does denote humans in their frailty and mortality. The spirit pairs אֱנוֹשׁ, 'mortals' with גֶּבֶר, translated 'human beings' in the next line. גֶּבֶר, in its relation to the verb גָּבַר, 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: they may be righteous one moment, but they are dead and gone the next.

Not all scholars recognize that mortality is the issue here. 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."[10] Other scholars, however, agree with the assessment that it is mortality which distinguishes humans from God. Terrien writes that Eliphaz "implies, consciously or not, that finiteness is contiguous with moral corruption (vs. 19).[11] 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.[12]

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 humans, 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

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[10] Hartley, *Job*, 113.

[11] Samuel Terrien, *Job: Poet of Existence* (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1957), 75.

[12] Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *The Book of Job* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 47.

participate in and inhabit a world that is static. According to the spirit, however, humans 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."[13] 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," explaining, "If there is a contradiction here, it is intentional. . . . [T]he built-in safeguard to the logic of Eliphaz is its inconsistency."[14] 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,

[13] Janzen, *Job*, 75.
[14] Vawter, *Job & Jonah*, 53.

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, asking, "What are mortals [אנוש] 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 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 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.

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 problematic for all humans, but is quick to temper and obscure this acknowledgment. Although the mark of 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 and over which he has control: "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 changeable. Bildad's third speech is short and Zophar's third speech, which ought to follow it to complete the cycle, is absent. It is 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 [אנוש] 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 [אנוש] who is a maggot, and a human being [בן אדם] 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 as a human is in crushing a worm. Humans have the right to crush worms not just because they are 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. Moreover, 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, God is fully justified when he chooses to punish them, regardless of how they have behaved.

I have written above that Eliphaz's inclusion of the spirit's message in his own speech should be seen as serving deliberate aims and not merely as an indication of confusion or uncertainty on his part. I want to modify this claim somewhat. I do not doubt that Eliphaz's appropriation of the spirit's message is deliberate. He must know that the spirit's claims contradict his own deeply held convictions. He must also know, therefore, at least at some level, that his use of the spirit's message is not entirely honest. Despite this, he reports the spirit's message and adopts it, to a degree, as his own, because it serves his purposes to do so. How, though, has he come to have such purposes? What has happened to Eliphaz to make him adopt such a dishonest stance? Job's suffering has happened to him. It is not usual for scholars to comment on the effect of Job's suffering on his friends, beyond their initial response in 2:12–13,[15] unless to say, as Donal O'Connor does, "It was only when they broke their silence that they failed as comforters,"[16] assessing the friends' response in the rest of the book as evidencing their failure as friends. This failure, though, is not caused by a lack of compassion. The friends have compassion in spades in 2:11–13. If they lack something, for the lack of which they can be blamed, it must be imagination. They cannot make sense of Job's suffering except within a certain paradigm, and so they make it fit that paradigm—by hook or by crook—even if it does not really fit, and, in so doing, prove false to Job, choosing ideals over the individual.

This, though, is still not entirely correct. Can we really accuse Eliphaz, in his use of the spirit's message, of demonstrating a lack of imagination? Surely, we must see that this a bold, imaginative move. Almost from the outset, Eliphaz is conceding that he cannot make sense of Job's suffering using the usual paradigm. He continues to try, because he really believes it to be true, but, at the same time, he introduces a completely contradictory

[15] See pages 57–59 of this book.

[16] Donal O'Connor, *Job: his wife, his friends, and his God* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1995), 130.

possible cause. Does he believe this alternate possibility to be true? How could he, when it so completely contradicts the other beliefs to which he clings? At the same time, he does acknowledge it as a possibility. Job's suffering throws Eliphaz into a state of deep confusion. He has reasons for adopting the spirit's message, but those reasons are rooted in an inner turmoil. Eliphaz cannot make sense of Job's suffering. The fact of it overwhelms him. Nevertheless, he tries to cope with it. He has to cope with it, just as Job must. Job responds, in chapter 3, with a curse and the impossible wish to have never been born.[17] Eliphaz responds by trying to affirm contradictory claims. Under normal circumstances, Eliphaz has a neat way of reconciling the change brought upon all mortals by death with the fact that the world-as-it-ought-to-be is static and stable: the righteous man dies only when he is ready, that is, when he has arranged his house and his line to continue bearing his presence in the world into the future. Faced with Job's imminent death, however, death is unmasked for Eliphaz in all its destabilizing power. Job is not ready. His house has been destroyed, his line wiped out. This would be acceptable if he were one of the wicked, but, as discussed in the previous chapter, Job is not one of the wicked, whatever he may have done. For Eliphaz, Job is 'one of us,' and his impending death can only mean that the world is not as-it-ought-to-be.

If this is the case, we might wonder why Eliphaz does not join with Job in calling God to reinstate the world-as-it-ought-to-be, instead of accusing Job of wickedness. If Eliphaz experiences the world-as-it-ought-to-be as undone by Job's suffering, in the same way that Job does, Eliphaz, too, has a complaint to bring against God, who has caused this calamity. Here, though, is the crux of the matter: Eliphaz does not view God as responsible for Job's suffering and the breakdown of the world-as-it-ought-to-be evidenced by Job's imminent death; he sees Job as the guilty party. Job, by sinning—for he *must* have sinned—has brought suffering upon himself. And yet, Job is one of the righteous. Sinning, he calls down the penalty of sin upon himself, which is to inhabit the anti-world, the world-as-it-ought-not-to-be, but, as one of the righteous, he cannot inhabit that world, for he belongs in the world-as-it-ought-to-be. As such, his sin turns the world-as-it-ought-to-be into the anti-world, making what ought to be static and stable unstable and fraught with change. This is why it is so essential for Job to repent. Only by repenting can Job, who has turned the world upside-down, make things right again. The onus is on Job, not God.

[17] I will discuss Job's chapter 3 'birthday curse' in chapter 5 of this book.

Does Eliphaz suspect from the beginning that Job will refuse to do what is required—that is, to repent? He must, otherwise why introduce the spirit's message, with its obvious contradiction to the repentance option? Job's suffering is, in fact, doubly problematic for the friends. If he has sinned and thereby incurred the related punishment, the world is not as-it-ought-to-be, for Job is one of the righteous. If, however, Job is innocent, the world is also not as-it-ought-to-be, for innocence does not merit punishment. The spirit's message solves this problem, for it renders Job's suffering irrelevant to his innocence or guilt. He suffers because he is mortal; to be mortal is to merit suffering, however else one may be characterized. At the same time, however, the spirit's message, even as it seems to solve the problem of Job's suffering, is itself problematic. For, if the spirit's message is true, the world is most emphatically not as-it-ought-to-be; all of the friends' beliefs about that world are struck down and they find themselves inhabiting a different world altogether, one which they can hardly accept.

Eliphaz's belief in the stability of the world-as-it-ought-to-be is troubled by Job's suffering, which brings death home to him as a force of inexorable change that acts on righteous and wicked alike. Eliphaz is sent into a tail-spin by this recognition, and he makes incompatible claims in order to try to deal with it. His self-contradiction indicates that he does not really know what to say in response to Job's suffering and impending death. The same can be said of the other friends. Moreover, if Bildad, in fully embracing the spirit's claims (ch. 25) 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. Eliphaz has toyed with the view of the relationship between humans and God presented by the spirit, but when Bildad claims those views as his own and, by extension, those of his friends, all three are reduced to silence.[18] Not only are Job's claims of innocence invalidated by the spirit, but the friends' own beliefs about the importance of righteous-

[18] Some scholars attempt to make sense of the incompleteness of the third cycle of speeches by arguing that the text has become disarranged. Clines, for example, identifies Job's chapter 27 speech as Zophar's missing third speech. Clines, *Job 1–20*, 629. It seems to me, though, that my explanation above makes better sense. Zophar is prevented from speaking, not because the text has been corrupted, but because Bildad has effectively ended the discussion before Zophar has had a chance to make his third response.

ness 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 believe in the spirit's claims, but they cannot argue against them if they hope to use them to convince Job—and themselves—of the justice of his suffering.

Job and the Problem(s) of Human Mortality

Job, too, although he never adopts the spirit's message, is deeply distressed by his mortality, recognizing that it constrains his ability to interact with God. 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, as contrasted with Job's mortality. 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. . . . [W]hile 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 same 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, 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. 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. Job, though, asks why God should concern himself with such lowly creatures. 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. 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 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 always 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, as in chapter 7, Job criticizes God for his watching of human beings, but, whereas in that chapter God was depicted as looking down from the lofty heights of his immortality, Job now 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. "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 playacting. 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-as-it-ought-to-be and creates the anti-world in its place.

In chapter 14 Job returns to the problem of human mortality, repeating his claim of chapters 7 and 10 that God has no right to watch 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. 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 the world-as-it-ought-to-be as unchanging, 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. 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 rightly-ordered world. Humans, by contrast, experience death as the ultimate change; their death is wholly 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). Despite his reference to "my transgressions" and "my iniquity," Job believes that it is not he who needs to repent, but God. Hidden in Sheol, Job would be able to wait out the time of God's wrath, and would reemerge after God had 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 would be 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). 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. The mountain, whose 'life' cannot be considered fleeting is, nevertheless, similar to a human being: 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 from the face of the earth, either through death or erosion. Neither mountains nor human beings have any claim to stability; both are thoroughly changeable. Although this means that humans and mountains cannot participate fully in the world-as-it-ought-to-be, 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, for, in creating humans and mountains and the forces that act upon them in the way that he has, God has introduced change into what ought to be a stable cosmos.

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

When God speaks from the whirlwind, his initial questions to Job depict his creation as a stable place. God asks,

> 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)

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 counters by insisting that he is, instead, responsible for setting the earth in its place and for commanding the sun to rise on a daily basis. 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, as discussed in the previous chapter. 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. 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 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[19] (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). 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. 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. Since there is nothing in God's speeches to indicate that the world he is describing is not the world as

[19] Terence Fretheim writes that, answering Job, "God does not take Job into the temple or into the depths of his own soul. . . . God takes him to the zoo, or better, out to 'where the wild things are.' " Terence E. Fretheim, "God in the Book of Job," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 26 no 2 (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.

it currently is, it seems clear that God's depiction encompasses both the world-as-it-ought-to-be and the world as it is, and that, indeed, God does not draw a distinction between the two, but speaks only of one world: the world that he created.

Is God's message to Job, then, something like, "You're wrong in supposing that you're beset by change, because the world I created is static"?—as it seems to be when he recalls the founding of the earth—or, if we go deeper into God's 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. If this is the case, then God can be seen to recognize the changes that have affected Job, instead of denying the existence of change in his creation, while at the same time insisting that these changes are not indicative of the breakdown of the world-as-it-ought-to-be.

God's Changeable World

We have a hint that God is describing the world as changeable 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)

Though stated in terms of fructifying, rather than 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.[20] Those who were

[20] Admittedly, the Hebrew words translated 'waste' are not the same in both passages. In 12:24, the word is תהו, while in 38:27 it is שאה. Whereas תהו has overtones which link

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 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

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it to the pre-creation void, שׁאה 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 שׁאה of 38:27 is a more thoroughly wasted land than is the תהו of 12:24, but it is hard to say. What can be stated more definitively is that שׁאה is a more concrete term. It relates to actual, physical land. תהו, on the other hand, has a more metaphorical ring. God is speaking about actual land, whereas Job is speaking metaphorically.

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 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 human 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 (לא איש) 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 what is only human. That the passage should not be read this way is shown by the worth God accords 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 an 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.[21] Rather, if it is good for desolate land to become

[21] 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." Robert Barry Leal, "Negativity Towards Wilderness in the Biblical Record," *Ecotheology* 10 no 3 (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, 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

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, if the prologue is to be believed, these are illusions for which God, in his fencing in of Job, is responsible.

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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 desirable 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. The change to the wilderness depicted in Isaiah and Ezekiel is change which establishes a stable world; in God's speeches in *Job*, however, this is not presented as being the case.

The Purpose of Death in God's Speeches

In the course of his depiction of his creation, God addresses the presence of death. It is particularly important to look at how God deals with death, given the problems human mortality poses for the stability of the cosmos, as identified by Job, his friends, and the spirit messenger. God, though, 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 young may perish simply because of where the ostrich leaves its eggs. Of course, God admits this is foolish behavior. A wiser ostrich might leave its eggs elsewhere. Yet, God says, "[T]hough its labor should be in vain . . . it has no fear." (39:16b). 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. Moreover, although the ostrich acts unwisely in leaving its eggs on the ground and might expose them to less danger by storing them elsewhere, 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 could be inadvertently crushed by other animals, 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; 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" (38:18b) 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 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? Perhaps it laughs because it sees that the horse and rider are also fools: the rider because he thinks he is in control, when really the battle is instigated by the horse's love of a good fight; the horse because its apparently noble attributes—its "majestic snorting" (v. 20b) and its fearlessness—indicate, in reality, a recklessness that rivals the ostrich's own. The ostrich may be a less than conscientious parent, but such foolhardy behavior pales in comparison with the horse's battle-lust. The horse laughs at battle and exposes its breast to the thrust of the sword, while the ostrich laughs at the horse and leaves its young to fend for themselves, reasoning perhaps that surely they have a better chance at survival 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. Second, death exists because the world is a crowded place and animals cannot help but bump into each other, sometimes causing harm. Third, death exists because some animals—like the ostrich—cannot be bothered to try to avoid it, 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 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. 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. 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 description of 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 this world. 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 unable to fully participate in the order of the world-as-it-ought-to-be, 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 world, 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 2.

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.[22] 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 disruptions to the stability of the world-as-it-ought-to-be. At the same time, both he and the friends have insisted that the wicked, who inhabit the anti-world, 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. God's world may be a changeable place, 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

[22] See the discussion in chapter 2 of this book, pages 88–91.

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[23] and over whether Behemoth is even an animal at all, or whether it is, instead, a mythic beast, along with Leviathan, a kind of 'chaos monster.'[24] The actual identity of Behemoth is not, however, important to my reading of the text, at this point. For my purposes, it makes sense to understand Behemoth—which literally means 'beasts,' and is by extension, understood to mean 'great beast,' given that the singular pronoun is used to refer to it[25]—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?" (יקחנו)

[23] 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. B. Couroyer, "Qui Est Béhémoth?" *Revue Biblique* 82 (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. Rebecca 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." Rebecca S. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of 'Chaos' in the Hebrew Bible*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter (2005), 340.

[24] See the discussion of Leviathan as chaos monster in chapter 5 below.

[25] Edouard Dhorme writes, "The form is nothing more than the plural of בהמה (12:7), and it makes of בהמות a designation of majesty, the brute beast par excellence." Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. H. Knight (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons 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, *Job*, 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.

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 agree with John Gammie's suggestion that Job is meant to see himself in Behemoth, particularly the potential that he shares with the beast(s) to face whatever dangers may threaten. 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."[26] 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 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 like* the strength of stones and his flesh *is like* bronze, just as Behemoth's bones are (like) 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, 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.

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[26] John G. Gammie, "Behemoth and Leviathan: On the Didactic and Theological Significance of Job 40:15–41:26," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, ed. J.G. Gammie et al. (New York: Scholars Press, 1978), 226.

Leviathan as the Embodiment of Unpredictable and Uncontrollable Change

Then God turns to speak of Leviathan. In the first part of this section, God returns to the question format, asking Job 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 understand that God is challenging Job to try to create 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?[27] As discussed in the previous chapter, I do not

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[27] 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, *Job*, 518. Similarly, Batto remarks, "[T]he 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 dry wasteland and the unformed ocean, respectively. Since Job obviously cannot subdue the chaos monsters, Job has no right to challenge the Creator about he way he runs this world." Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox (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, *Gods and Goddesses*, 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." Henry Rowold, "מי הוא? לי הוא! Leviathan and Job in Job 41:2–3," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 no 1 (1986): 108. See chapter 5 below for more discussion of the relation between the combat myth and God's description of Leviathan.

think the Leviathan questions should be interpreted in this way. [28] Moreover, it seems possible that God includes himself among those "under the whole heaven" who cannot confront Leviathan and be safe. Good suggests that "Job 41.17 [may be] an admission that Yahweh, like the other gods, has his moments of terror before his astounding monster," pointing out that, "[t]he 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.' "[29]

If, in chapter 40, God has presented Job with Behemoth as a mirror to show him that 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. If the changeability of the world stems from its multiplicity, then Leviathan, whose inclusion in God's 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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[28] See my remarks in the previous chapter, 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.

[29] Good, *Tempest*, 363–64. 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 advancing the view that God himself may be overwhelmed by Leviathan's power, a view which seems plausible to me.

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," perhaps "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. 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 before and ought to be still, in which 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"?

I do not think so. The chapter's ebullient praise of Leviathan prohibits this 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, an anti-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 his description of Leviathan, 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. If this is the case, God is not the agent of change in the world. Rather, it is his uncontrollable creatures who shape and change the world, Job included. God's creation, then, is a world over which he has relinquished control, over which he is not king, in which creatures are free to act independent of God's direction. God has equipped his 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.

CHAPTER FOUR

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE: THE CONFIGURATION OF SPACE IN THE WORLD-AS-IT-OUGHT-AND-OUGHT-NOT-TO-BE

Introduction

Just as for Job and his friends there are two kinds of people, the righteous and the wicked, so there are two kinds of space, 'inside space,' located within the boundaries of the town, and 'outside space,' which exists beyond its boundaries. It is the righteous who occupy the inner space, and it is here that the world-as-it-ought-to-be exists, whereas the outer space is inhabited by the wicked and is the location of the anti-world.

That inside space and outside space are often perceived as qualitatively different has been noted by a number of researchers, both those studying the Bible and those investigating cultural phenomena. Of this inside/outside distinction in 'traditional societies,' Mircea Eliade observes that a group's

> inhabited territory . . . is the 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.'[1]

The reason for this, Eliade explains, is that

> every inhabited territory . . . is the work of the gods or is in communication with the world of the gods. . . . The sacred . . . *founds the world* in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world.[2]

That is, it is the contact of the divinity with the space in which a group dwells that makes it cosmos and that designates them as insiders. Where 'we' are is where our god or gods have been and have created the world. Conversely, where 'we' are not is where our god or gods have not been, and where, therefore, no world has been created.

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[1] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. W.R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 29.

[2] Ibid., 30.

Mary Douglas, in her book *Purity and Danger* writes of the importance of boundaries and boundary-making to the creation and maintenance of social 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.[3]

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.[4]

Although using different terminology, Douglas, like Eliade, points to the privileging of inside space over against outside space. Conformity to the behaviors associated with being on the inside are rewarded at the same time as attempts by 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 is to open a breach in the boundary, allowing something external to enter in, even if the behavior was instigated by an insider. As observed by both Douglas and 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.

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

> All examples of the riddance of idolatrous impurities from Kings and Chronicles . . . explicitly state that the disposal occurred in the Kidron Valley. . . . The mention of the Kidron as the disposal place and the locative phrases ['outside' etc.] show that the concern was to remove the impurity from the city's boundaries.[5]

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[3] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1966), 15.

[4] Ibid., 137.

[5] David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 285–86.

In this example, we see the existence of distinct inside and outside spaces, with the inside space being the location of what-ought-to-be, and the outside space the repository for what-ought-not-to-be (or, at least, what-ought-not-to-be as part of the world-as-it-ought-to-be). Whereas Wright speaks of what does not belong inside being put out, Benedikt Otzen writes about what belongs outside trying to get in. Ozten claims that common to ancient Israel and its neighbors

> is the idea that chaos . . . threatens the world of man. . . . 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.[6]

According to Otzen, the main task of the Israelite cult was to maintain the boundaries between inside and outside: "to reinforce the cosmos and combat the destructive forces which assail it."[7]

Robert Cohn, in his exploration of sacred space in the Bible, notices this same inside/outside distinction at work. Corroborating the views expressed by the scholars quoted above, he writes, "Salvation is being within Yahweh's land; exile is always catastrophe."[8] To be inside Yahweh's land is to be inside 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 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 boundary around our community marks the boundary between the world-as-it-ought-to-be and the anti-world, because it is possible for us to find ourselves in exile, outside those boundaries. It must be said, instead, that inside, if it is not

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[6] Benedikt Otzen, "The Use of Myth in Genesis," in *Myths in the Old Testament*, trans. F. Cryer (London: SCM Press, 1980), 36–37.

[7] Ibid., 59.

[8] Robert L. Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space: Four Biblical Studies* (California: Scholars Press, 1981), 2.

where we are, is where we ought to be. When we find ourselves where we ought not to be, then we inhabit the anti-world, and must concern ourselves with finding our way inside, into the created world, the world-as-it-ought-to-be.

Wilderness as the Anti-world

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 inside space. Rather, the wilderness trek was a journey from the non-world outside into the inner space of 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 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.[9]

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."[10] God's presence with the traveling Israelites did not serve to transform the wilderness into inner space, precisely because God, despite his presence, had 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 outsideness. 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.[11] This, at least, seems to be the case in

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[9] Ibid., 13–14.

[10] Ibid., 20, 14.

[11] 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, "[T]he period of the wandering in the wilderness, in contrast to the

the Bible's depiction of the Israelite experience. As Walter 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.[12]

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

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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." Andrew Louth, *The Wilderness of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd , 2003), 33. In the same way, Roland de Vaux points out that in the Bible "[W]e 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)." Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. J. McHugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 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." Idem. Most scholars seem to concur with this caveat, and many of them take it still further. Shemaryahu Talmon, for example, writes, "[T]he 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 . . . 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' (G.H. Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought* [New York: Harper & Brothers,1962], 15) . . . 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." Shemaryahu Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif' in the Bible and in Qumran Literature," in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 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, "Negativity," 371.

[12] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (London: SPCK, 1978), 29.

> 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.[13]

It was not just for ancient Israel, then, that wilderness was associated with the outer chaos of the anti-world, but those culturally much closer to us also shared this view, partially because of the Bible's depiction, but not entirely.

Later in his book Nash makes an observation that is particularly relevant to this discussion of the distinction between inside and outside space. Nash points out that wilderness can only be defined over against civilization, writing, "[W]ilderness is an entirely human concept, an invention of civilized man."[14] Similarly, Ian Holder asserts,

> [T]he 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.[15]

These observations suggest that wilderness, by definition, is that which is outside human community, for human communities are created by its exclusion.

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

In their descriptions of the punishment that attends the wicked the friends demonstrate their assumption that the world-as-it-ought-to-be is located inside the boundaries of the human community, whereas the anti-world lies outside those boundaries. When God punishes the wicked, in the friends' depiction, he either uproots them from within the bounds of the community and casts them beyond the pale, or allows what it outside to come in and claim them. Untimely death, which the friends claim is the fate of the wicked, functions in both ways. 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

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[13] Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd Edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 8.

[14] Ibid., 270.

[15] Ian Holder, *The Domestication of Europe* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 11.

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 and transported beyond the boundaries of the community.

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.[16] The inner space of the house is collapsed, and what ought to have been kept outside by its walls 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, as discussed in the previous chapter. 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.[17] In addition,

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[16] For Eliphaz, to "die devoid of wisdom" is to die in an untimely fashion. The wise, righteous man, by contrast, dies only when he is ready. See Job 5:19–27, as discussed in the previous chapter of this book.

[17] Frank Frick points out that the gate functioned as the meeting place for the city's elders for practical reasons. He writes, "[D]ue 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

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 the anti-world beyond.

Although in chapter 3 Job imagines the world of death as an inner space, in general he agrees with the friends that death's place is an outer realm. Whereas in chapter 3 Job longs to make his home inside the halls of death, in chapter 7 he 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;[18] 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 live on the inside. 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

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of a public nature." Frank S. Frick, *The City in Ancient Israel* (Missoula: Scholars Press 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.

[18] Although Eliphaz would certainly agree with Job that those who go down to Sheol do not come up (עלה), 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.

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, 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 for 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.[19] Although in this speech, Job does not speak specifically of inside as the locus of the world-as-it-ought-to-be, 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)

[19] See the discussion of Job's description of the problem of human mortality in the previous chapter of this book, pages 115–20.

The walls that are meant to protect the wicked cave in upon them, admitting that which they intended to repulse. 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.[20] 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,

[20] Here, I am following the majority opinion that this is what has happened to Job. 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 psychically identify themselves with the rejected and destitute. The Septuagint in fact explains 'ashes' by its translation 'the dungheap outside the city.' " Clines, *Job 1–20*, 50.

> [Y]ou 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: "[T]hey will perish forever. . . . 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 and their possessions (or, rather, what would belong in, if these people behaved as they ought to, righteously instead of wickedly)—is dragged out.

Job as Outsider/Death as Inner Space

In general, Job sees as evidence of the anti-world's power over the world-as-it-ought-to-be the fact that the wicked are not dragged out beyond the boundaries of their homes and 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 realm 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*. 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—גדיש—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 (גדיש) comes up to the threshing-floor in its season" (5:26). Here, though, it is the wicked man's tomb that Job likens to גדיש, 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, in the world as it currently is, 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.[21] In chapter 27 he says,

> They build their houses like nests,[22] 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 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

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[21] 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 below. 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 world of his current experience the wicked are confined to outer space, instead of presenting this as the way the world ought to be but, currently, is not.

[22] בעש, which might also be translated 'like the moth,' which would allow for a similar interpretation to that I am proposing.

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,[23] while Habel gives them to Bildad.[24] 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, she explains, 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,

> 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.[25]

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,[26] 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 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.'[27] 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,

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[23] Clines, *Job 1–20*, 629.
[24] Habel, *Job*, 37.
[25] Newsom, *Book of Job*, 164.
[26] 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, *Tempest*, 289.
[27] Ibid., 287–88.

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 godly, even if God himself is behaving like one of the godless.[28]

In Alison Lo's interpretation, Job's words do not identify God as one of the wicked and himself as, consequently, godless, 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.[29]

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 that Job claims attends the wicked. If Job is indeed trying to turn the tables on his friends, there is no reason to expect his success. It does not make sense to reason backward from the fact of their silence to the idea that Job has successfully convinced them of their own wickedness.

Janzen's position is more 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)."[30] 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' 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.[31]

I want to propose a related, but somewhat different possibility. Perhaps Job's adoption of the friends' argument is related to Bildad's wholesale

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[28] 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.

[29] Alison Lo, *Job 28 as Rhetoric: An Analysis of Job 28 in the Context of Job 22–31* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 193.

[30] Janzen, *Job*, 173.

[31] Ibid., 174.

adoption of the spirit messenger's position about the impossibility of human righteousness (as discussed in the previous chapter). 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 merely 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, in the anti-world beyond its borders. If he sneers at the friends' claims about the world, he can only sneer to a limited degree. 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.[32] Of course, the

[32] Good avoids this conundrum by viewing Job's words as having undergone "ironic reversals" of their true meanings. Good, *Tempest*, 289. Job *is* speaking what he believes to be true, but his words do not mean what his friends (and we) think they mean.

friends themselves cannot charge 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 reveals his depiction of the fate of the wicked in chapter 27 as 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. In the same way, although God is not currently behaving as he ought, God-as-he-ought-to-be does exist. Job lays claim to these realities despite the fact that they to not currently exist, in the hope that his words will bring them into being once again.

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 spatial arrangements of the world-as-it-ought-to-be and the anti-world, I want to approach the depiction of the inside/outside distinction 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.[33]

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,[34] 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,

> [T]he 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.[35]

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.

Elaine Scarry, 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, identifies the body as a microcosm of civilization, arrived at through the house, which is both a projection of the body and a representation of civilization in miniature. She writes,

> [T]he 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

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[33] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 138.

[34] 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." Ibid., 148.

[35] Ronald Simkins, *Creator and Creation: Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 76.

> 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.[36]

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:

> [O]bjects which stand apart from . . . 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 civilization.

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 either performed itself or wished 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."[37] 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 negative 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.

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[36] Scarry, *Body in Pain*, 38.
[37] Ibid., 39.

The Breaking of Job's Body as Indication of His Outsider Status

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. He accuses God,

> 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 makes of breaching imagery later in the book, as will be seen below. 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 this state of affairs is an indication of the breakdown of the world-as-it-ought-to-be.[38]

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[38] It might be argued that the breaching of Job's bodily defenses results in a confusion in the meanings associated with inside and outside. If Job's body has become as-it-ought-not-to-be, then that-which-ought-not-to-be can be seen to occupy an inside space. Yet, there is never the sense that this arrangement is acceptable. 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, *Job 1–20*, 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

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), a question in which the unspoken accusation, "if you planned only to destroy me," is implied. The womb is an inside space; it exists within the boundaries of the mother's body, and the child who grows there is protected by those boundaries while its own boundaries are constructed. Job, having discovered that the boundaries of his own body cannot protect him from God's attack, wishes to be re-encompassed by 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 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 locations in which boundaries exist between Job and God—womb because it is the location of creation (and, therefore, not of the destruction 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

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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.

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,[39] 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 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

[39] The phrase translated "chaos" here is לֹא סְדָרִם. According to *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, סדר means "order, formation, arrangement, esp. of battle formations." David J.A. Clines, ed. The Dictionary of *Classical Hebrew*, vol. 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 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.

kill."[40] Job, though, insists again as he has insisted all along, "[T]here 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 against me, and encamp around my tent. (19:10–12)

[40] Crenshaw, *Whirlpool*, 68.

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.[41]

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

[41] Philippe Nemo, *Job and the Excess of Evil*, trans. M. Kigel (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 32.

> a transgression which, presumably, he committed freely. They are ready to discuss the latter; from the former they recoil in fear.

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."[42] His community's 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.[43] What happens to

[42] Ibid., 33.

[43] What is it 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

the wicked, according to Zophar, has happened to Job, by his own admission. The boundaries of their bodies are 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 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 the anti-world is to be kept outside, the outsider must be cast out, so that order of the world-as-it-ought-to-be can remain inviolate within.

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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." Balentine, "Job's Redeemer," 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, "Job and His Friends," 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.

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 תם (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.[44]

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 2 of this book. The observations I made there about Job's central position 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.[45]

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[44] Ellen F. Davis, "Job and Jacob: The Integrity of Faith," in *Reading Between Texts*, ed. D.N. Fewell (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 211.

[45] 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, *Book of Job*, 195. As Newsom sees it, it is the

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.[46] 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 security in the days when he was the consummate insider.[47] 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

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community that Job must convince of his insider status, and not primarily God, for God as "the social and moral order writ large" will necessarily agree with the community's evaluation. Ibid., 196. 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.

[46] Of Job's work on behalf of the righteous poor, Mark Hamilton writes, "[T]he 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." Mark Hamilton, "Elite Lives: Job 29–31 and Traditional Authority," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32 no 1 (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.

[47] The word translated 'nest' here is קֵן. In 27:18 'nests' is the translation of a different word, עָשׁ, which can also mean 'moth.'

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 a force that drags its victims outside the boundaries of the community, did not seem to function in this way for Job in the days before his affliction, at least in his imagination. 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, [48] for, given his position at the center of the community, without him the distinctions between inside and outside would break down and the world-as-it-ought-to-be would find itself overwhelmed by the anti-world.

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 wasteland 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 גבלת, 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

[48] Because the Hebrew חול 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.

formerly inside. By stealing from the 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.[49] 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 the world-as-it-ought-to-be from the encroaching of the anti-world.

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

[49] 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, 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. Clines, "Quarter Days", 247. 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.

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 wasteland (24:5b) and "cling to the rock for want of shelter" (24:8b).[50] Here, again, the image of 'home' is used as a 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

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[50] 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." David J.A. Clines, *Job 21–37*, Word Biblical Commentary 18A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 605–06. Yet, even if the language is metaphorical, the link between the poor and the animals of the wilderness is not lessened. William 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." William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 334. Even if they remain literally within the human enclosure, these people have been made into animal-like outsiders.

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־שׁם, '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,

> How can one . . . 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.[51]

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.")[52]—the outsideness of this group,[53] seeming to imply that they do not possess the characteristics necessary for participation in human community.

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 נהק, the same as is used

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[51] Janzen, *Job*, 205.

[52] Idem.

[53] 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.

by Job in 6:5, "Does the wild ass bray over its grass . . . ?", a noise that is thoroughly animal. A person may live like an animal and, arguably, 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.[54]

That the members of the "senseless, disreputable brood" are consummate outsiders is clearly established in Job's description of them. What is not so clearly established is what 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

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[54] 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 that 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 טרף, 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.

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 he values, namely the homage befitting a king.

When this behavior is contrasted with that of the "disreputable brood," what the members of that 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.

Not only does this group refuse to trade their deference for Job's protection, but Job believes they have more to offer than their destitution implies. 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. They ought to have adequate food and shelter, and would have if they would 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 Job 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," and are equated, instead, with wild animals (30:6–7).

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). [55] In other words, these are people from whom Job

[55] The word translated 'vigor' is the same as that used by Eliphaz in his description of the righteous man's death in 5:26, כלח. Eliphaz claims that the righteous man "shall come to [his] grave in ripe old age (כלח)." As Eliphaz sees it, the righteous man never loses his vigor. That the members of this group lack vigor, despite presumably being young men

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.

At the same time, although it is possible to identify this maligned group as consisting of laborers who have failed to fulfill their contracts with Job, it seems likely that the description is also metaphorical. Job identifies those who mock him as the lowest of the low, but their status is based on the way they treat him. What makes them so low is their failure to be true to the economic agreements—whether commercial or moral—they have made with Job. In fact, this is a description which applies to all the members of Job's community, God included. 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. In the world of chapter 30, economic agreements have lost their power and, as a result, the structures necessary to the maintenance of the community are undermined.

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 יתר, the same word translated 'tent-cord' in 4:21 where Eliphaz claimed

(given that Job can remember their fathers), is not just a sign of their weakness but of their moral turpitude.

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, "[M]y 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 world, protecting it against the ever-threatening incursion of the anti-world 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 the world-as-it-ought-to-be. 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.

The Meaning of God's Answer from the Whirlwind

God's answer to Job is based on a different set of assumptions about the organization of space than those held by Job and his friends. Whereas for Job and his friends the world-as-it-ought-to-be is located *inside* the bounds of the human community, meaning that whatever exists *outside* those boundaries must be the anti-world, God takes a radically 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, as described by Job and his friends. Before he gets to that, though, God drops certain hints that suggest where he is going. The first of these is his appearance in 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.[56]

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.[57]

According to Perdue, Job is an outsider who must be repulsed, and God appears in the whirlwind to effect that warding off. 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.[58]

In Robertson's reading, Job is not shown to be the one who must be blown away by God, but, rather, God shows himself to be in the wrong. The maintenance of the world-as-it-ought-to-be, then, 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.

Fretheim and Simkins offer explanations of God's appearance in the whirlwind that seem closer to the mark. They view the whirlwind

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[56] 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.

[57] Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 202.

[58] Robertson, "Book of Job," 463.

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.[59]

In addition, God does not wear the storm as a kind of mask behind which he conceals his true appearance, but, as Fretheim explains, "[N]atural metaphors for God are in some way descriptive of God . . . they reflect . . . the reality which is God."[60] 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 his creation before Job, in all its wild splendor.[61]

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 anti-world. 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 accusation that God is not behaving as he ought, but, instead, is acting to overthrow the order of the world-as-it-ought-to-be. I, however, want to argue that God's appearance in the whirlwind undermines the distinction between inside and outside and, therefore, between the world-as-it-ought-to-be and the anti-world.

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.

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[59] Simkins, *Creator and Creation*, 130.

[60] Terence E. Fretheim, "Creation's Praise of God in the Psalms," *Ex Auditu* 3 (1987): 22.

[61] Simkins, *Creator and Creation*, 131.

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,

> [W]ho 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[62]—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, to which this mention seems to allude, 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

[62] "Whose womb?" we might ask. Catherine 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." Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London and New York: Routledge 2003), 131.

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."[63] Similarly, Janzen comments,

> [T]he 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.[64]

The 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.[65]

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[63] William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 93–94.

[64] J. Gerald Janzen, "On the Moral Nature of God's Power: Yahweh and the Sea in Job and Deutero-Isaiah," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56 no 3 (1994): 468. 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." Habel, *Job*, 66. Brueggemann ignores the birth story altogether, writing, "[I]t 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, *Theology*, 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.

[65] The verb translated 'shut,' in "who shut in the sea with doors," is the same word used 3:23 , סוך, and a similar word to that used in 1:10. In 1:10 *hassatan* questions God, "Have

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 (ישכן־אור), and where is the place (מקמו) of darkness, that you may take it to its territory (גבולו)[66] and that you may discern the paths to its home (ביתו)?" (38:19–20); "What is the way to the place[67] 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' (בית) 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.

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,

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you not put a fence (שׂכת, from שׂוך, a variant form of סוך) 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 (יסך)?" 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. (See also Schifferdecker's discussion of the three uses of שׂוך/סוך. Schifferdecker, *Whirlwind*, 74–75).

66 The primary meaning of this word is 'border' or 'boundary,' and it is used with this meaning by Job in 24:2 (though translated 'landmarks' by the NRSV, indicating boundary-markers). As a secondary definition BDB gives "territory (enclosed within a boundary)" (Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968], 148), further indicating that what God is talking about is inside space.

67 Technically, the word 'place' is absent from the Hebrew. However, it can be reasonably assumed to be implied.

> 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 an anti-world, distinct from the territory of the world-as-it-ought-to-be. 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. There is no space which exists in natural opposition to the world-as-it-ought-to-be.

Animals and the Economics of Insider/Outsider Status

Having begun his speech by giving glimpses of where he is going with his discussion of space, 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- and -ought-not-to-be, and so it is fitting that God should choose to respond to the ideas set out there. In them, Job shows God the world-as-it-ought-to-be and the anti-world, 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. 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 humans. 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[68] 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[69] 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. 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 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

[68] Prey here is Hebrew טרף. 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 (טרף) 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, צוד. 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 overtly confirm its corollary, that Job is that prey. Still, God's depiction of dead humans serving as prey for eagles in 39:30, as discussed in the previous chapter, should give us pause.

[69] The word translated 'wander'—תעה—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.

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 the 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 the "senseless, disreputable brood'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 disdaining 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.[70]

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).[71] Leviathan will not trade on its abilities, in the way that a sheepdog or a domestic ox is willing to trade, herding the sheep or pulling the plow in exchange for food and shelter. Leviathan will not

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[70] Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 138. 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." Norman C. Habel, " 'Is the Wild Ox Willing to Serve You?' Challenging the Mandate to Dominate," in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, ed. N.C. Habel and S. Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 184.

[71] 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.

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 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*. Leviathan will not trade its freedom for insider status, and, for this, God praises it.

The Breakdown of the Distinction Between Inside and Outside Space

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' 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 that 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 outsider's way of living as viable, perhaps more so than that of the so-called insiders.

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 dismantles the distinction between inside space and outside space, causing the distinction between the two to become hopelessly confused. Is the wild ox inside or outside? And what about the sea? With their boundaries so confused, inside and outside lose their meaning in relation (or opposition) to each other. God negates the claim that inside is sole location of the world-as-it-ought-to-be and outside the place of the anti-world. He denies 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.[72] Furthermore, God's removal of the

[72] 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

distinction between inside and outside as locations possessing fixed valuations serves as a refutation of the idea that there are such things as the world-as-it-ought-to-be and the anti-world. In God's world, the world-as-it-ought-to-be and the anti-world do not exist over against each other in identifiable spheres. Rather, there is only the world-as-it-is, which is quite a different proposition. The 'world-as-it-ought-to-be' is essentially a defensive designation, defined by its need to defend itself against the incursion of the anti-world. In God's speeches, there is no anti-world that threatens to break through its defenses, which means that the concept of 'the world-as-it-ought-to-be' dissolves. God's world is the world-as-it-is: complex, changeable, and unbounded.

belief that humans ought to engage in that activity, given that, in Genesis, 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.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE EXPLOSIVE FINALE: READING BACKWARDS FROM THE EPILOGUE

Job Goes Back Inside

God finishes speaking. The silence which ensues echoes with the thunder of his final words. The air is electric with the residue of the encounter. We wait to see what will happen. Job, perceiving the expectant silence, opens his mouth and responds. He says what he ought to say. He bows before God's majesty, and accepts that the world is as God has presented it, acknowledging that he was formerly mistaken.[1] He says,

> I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. "Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me." I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (42:2–6)

If, in the Hebrew, certain details of this response are not entirely clear—if the object of מאס, translated here as 'despise' is not specified, and the meaning of the phrase עפר ואפר, 'dust and ashes,' allows for some ambiguity[2]—we can elucidate them easily enough. Job's tone is repentant, but grateful. God has answered him, and has shown him a world different from anything he could have conceived: terrible in its nonanthropocentricity, but, nevertheless, wildly beautiful and madly loved.

And then, something strange happens. The sky lightens. The whirlwind recedes, and, when it does, we discover that Job is living not in the world God has just finished describing as the world of his creation—the only world God acknowledges as existing—but, instead, in a world which matches his old description of the world-as-it-ought-to-be, a world very

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[1] The *New Oxford American Dictionary*, under its entry for 'mistake,' gives the sample sentence, "[B]ecause I was inexperienced, I mistook the nature of our relationship." This might well serve as a summation of Job's response in 42:2–6. http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mistake. Accessed September 14, 2011.

[2] See the discussion of the difficulties inherent in this passage in chapter 1 of this book.

like the one he inhabited in the book's prologue. In his speeches, God has erased the distinction between inside and outside, demonstrating that inside does not exist, that, in his world, there is no such place. But, in the epilogue, Job goes back inside.

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 insideness, 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 stranger 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.[3] God repays Job

[3] Brown is the only scholar I have read who makes note of this detail, but he denies its strangeness, 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

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 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. Thwarting societal convention by giving his daughters an inheritance along with his sons, Job works to cement his familial bonds through mutual obligation to an even greater degree than normal. 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,[4] can be contrasted with God's descriptions 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 the world-as-it-ought-to-be, 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 the world of his creation. God says that there is no such place as inside to be contrasted with outside, but, in the epilogue, Job definitely goes inside. God has portrayed a world too complex to be organized around a central figure, but Job takes his place at the center of his community, surrounding himself with family who are bound to him and to whom he is bound by treaties of economic exchange. God has claimed that reward is not linked to righteousness, but Job inhabits the space of righteousness and reaps its rewards. Additionally, the space in which Job finds himself is the subdued space of the " 'subdue and have

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the rugged mountains or bare heights. Their place remains with Job, servile and at home within Job's reestablished familial kingdom." Brown, *Character*, 378.

[4] Granted, the fact that Job's wife is not mentioned in the epilogue may signal that Job's family is not as cohesive as the surface of the tale seems to indicate.

dominion' project," as is evidenced by his possession of domesticated animals over which he has dominion. In these ways, 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's more, Job's life possesses a stability that God's world lacks. At the end of the book, Job dies "old and full of days" (42:17), surrounded by four generations of family who will bear his name into the future, robbing death of its destabilizing power.

What Just Happened?

The transition from poetry to prose does not happen smoothly. We feel the disjunction, as the train we have been riding suddenly changes tracks, and speeds past what we thought was its destination. Feeling the car jerk and shudder, we eye each other nervously, as if to ask *What just happened?* This question, though, does not imply that we cannot see for ourselves what has happened. It is clear that we have crossed the border from one world into another, quite different world. There is no whirlwind here, no crackle of lightning or crash of thunder, no wild ass or ox, no ostrich, no Behemoth, no Leviathan. We can see that our train is picking up speed in a different direction, as the platform where we intended to alight grows smaller in the distance. What we are really asking is not *what* happened, but *how* what happened happened, and what it means. Where are we going? Will we ever get back to that rapidly disappearing station? Will we, perhaps, follow this track to an equally serviceable destination? Or are we headed for a precipice?

These questions are answered differently by different readers. Greenberg points out that different receptions of the epilogue have to do with how a given reader expects the book to end. 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."[5] 'Critics' and 'common readers'[6] alike notice the disjunctive effect of the appearance of the epilogue, but they appreciate it

[5] Greenberg, "Job," 300.

[6] I will continue to use Greenberg's appellatives in this section, with the understanding that I am referring to critics and common readers, as defined by his description of their expectations, but I will not continue to put them in quotation marks.

differently. For the common reader, who values the prose prologue over the poetry that has followed it, the return to the world of the prologue, though disjunctive, seems wholly fitting. In the original shift from prose to poetry, the book shook and rattled, like a train changing tracks; now, in the return to prose, the rattling is no less violent, but it has the opposite effect: the train is back on track. For the critics, who value the poetry over the prose, however, the return to the world of the prose prologue completely derails the trajectory of the book; just as it had reached its destination—the climax of God's speeches and Job's response—it picks up speed again, chugging off down a different track, to its passengers' dismay and alarm. Crenshaw, one such critic, offers this solution:

> 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.[7]

In other words, readers should simply exit the train where they expect it to stop, even if it has not come to a complete standstill. This should be easy enough to do since, after all, books are not really trains, and there is no physical risk involved. The book may keep going, but readers, simply by stopping reading, may choose not to go along.

How, though, is this legitimate? If the book is going somewhere else, shouldn't we go with it? Otherwise, we can hardly claim to have read the book. In this regard, common readers would seem to have the more acceptable strategy. They may discount the importance of the intervening poetry—"a funny thing happened to me on the way the epilogue"—but at least they go where the book is going, instead of getting off where they'd rather it had stopped. Critics' legitimation for getting off before the train has stopped is that it has been hijacked, either by an enemy author seeking to change the book's destination, or by literary conventions and the laziness of the author of the poetry. Curtis, who believes that the epilogue is an editorial addition to the 'real' Book of Job, claims that "The most important purpose of the prose . . . is that of deliberately misleading the reader" from the real import of the book.[8] For Crenshaw, prologue and epilogue are simply an unrelated "narrative framework" into which "the poetic dialogue . . . has been inserted."[9] That is, the poet needed a

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[7] James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (London: SCM Press, 1982), 100.

[8] Curtis, "Job's Response," 510.

[9] Crenshaw, *Wisdom*, 100.

framework so that his poem would have a beginning, for "otherwise it begins in media res,"[10] but he was not picky, and used whatever was closest to hand, presumably being too lazy to seek out a more appropriate narrative or to write one himself. Neither of these critical legitimations for ignoring the epilogue is particularly convincing, though they do account for the disjunction between the epilogue and the preceding poetry. The existence of a saboteur, affixing the epilogue in order to change the meaning of the book, is purely speculative, as is the pre-existence of a narrative into which the real author of the real Book of Job inserted his manuscript (a narrative which, though purportedly believed to be a necessary addition by the author of the poetry, readers must strip off if they are to get at the real book). Moreover, one must wonder why whoever affixed the epilogue did it so clumsily, showing the joins, letting the reader feel the jolt as the book changes tracks and speeds past its original destination. Surely a saboteur would have wanted to disguise his sabotage. Surely the author of the magnificent poem would have wanted to use more finesse. As it is, we feel the disjunction acutely, whether we understand it as a return to the book's correct trajectory or a deviation from it.

There are some readers, however, who claim to perceive no disjunction between the epilogue and what precedes it. Brown, for example, asserts 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.[11]

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 any kind of contradiction. Similarly, Schifferdecker writes,

> Job participates in creation not by inhabiting the wild realm of the divine speeches, but by joining again in human community. He . . . fathers more children, this time delighting in their beauty and giving them the freedom

[10] Ibid.
[11] Brown, *Character*, 114.

> God gives his own creatures. In this way, the epilogue can be understood as a response to the extraordinary vision of the divine speeches.[12]

I do agree with Brown and Schifferdecker that certain of the details of the epilogue may be read as evidence of a changed perspective in Job—of his acceptance of certain aspects of God's world and his partial emulation of God's behavior[13]—but I to not share their certainty that what the epilogue demonstrates is Job's wholesale acceptance of the world God has presented from the whirlwind. The world in which Job finds himself in the epilogue is so different from the world presented in God's speeches, that to insist that nothing unexpected has happened is to ignore this very real disjunction.

Schifferdecker's claim that

> Job's reply to the divine speeches and his restoration in the epilogue confirm the reader's sense that the divine speeches have engendered a change in the attitude and circumstances of the man from Uz[14]

is telling. She does not say that the epilogue *demonstrates* that the divine speeches have changed Job, but only that it "confirms the reader's sense" that this is what has happened. Where, though, does the reader get this sense, if it is only confirmed, and not created, by what happens in the epilogue? It must be, it seems to me, the reader's *own* response to the divine speeches. The reader, imaginatively entering into Job's position through the act of reading, knows how she would respond in Job's place; indeed, she knows how she *does* respond, because in the act of reading, she *is* in Job's place. And, after all, how could Job not have his 'attitude'—indeed, his entire conception of what the world is and ought to be like—infinitely altered by his face-to-face (or face-to-funnel-cloud) encounter with the divine? If he is not changed utterly, he must be an utter fool, somehow missing the magnitude of what has happened to him.

As can be seen, how a reader answers the question *What just happened*? and all it implies depends upon the reader's expectation of what is supposed to happen. I have used the metaphor of a train suddenly changing tracks and speeding past its intended destination, but, in reality, this metaphor fits only those critics, like Curtis and Crenshaw, who expect the book to end with God's speeches and Job's response. For Greenberg's common

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[12] Schifferdecker, *Whirlwind*, 110.
[13] I will discuss this possibility later in this chapter.
[14] Schifferdecker, *Whirlwind*, 11.

readers, the epilogue represents not a sharp turn away from an expected destination, but the unexpected arrival at that destination by an alternate route. These readers may be weak-kneed from their wild ride, but they sigh with relief as their train lurches into the station and comes to a stop. A third kind of reader, exemplified by Brown and Schifferdecker, denies any kind of disjunction between poetry and prose epilogue; this train glides smoothly into its destination station, having followed its expected track through the book.[15] Still another kind of reader, noticing the disjunction between poetry and prose, accepts this disjunction as integral to the strategy of the book and proceeds to inquire into its purpose. In this group are readers like Clines, Newsom, and Penchansky, and this is also the kind of reader that I am.[16]

In the prologue to this book, I have already discussed the validity of readers' genuine interaction with the text. There, I quoted Janzen, who argues that all reading is—and should be—shaped by readers' "interpretation of existence," making all interpretations "irreducibly confessional"[17] and Clines who claims that readers "would be . . . wrong to think that it does not matter, in reading the Bible, what they themselves already believe."[18] Perhaps, then, I should proceed by simply humbly acknowledging my membership in 'reader group number four,' and going on to show how the epilogue confirms my particular expectations, by which its meaning is already governed. Hubristically, however, I want to try to make a case for the superiority of my approach. Expectation, I want to argue, may be permitted to govern interpretation, but only to a degree, and, it seems to me, the readings of 'reader group number four' strike the best balance between expectation and attention to the text.

Types of Readerly Expectation and Their Relative Value

Those readers who would excise the epilogue altogether have, I think, the least defensible position, for they fail to deal with the book as it exists,

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[15] This is not to say that God does not say things that this kind of reader does not expect, but that this reader expects God to speak authoritatively about the creation and expects Job to accept God's authority, which is what happens in the epilogue, as this kind of reader understands it.

[16] I have already discussed the details of these readers' approaches to the epilogue in chapter 1 of this book, in order to highlight both my similarities with and differences from them.

[17] Janzen, *Job*, 228.

[18] Clines, *Job 1–20*, xlvii.

preferring some nonexistent—through theoretically more authentic—version over what we have.[19] They give reasons for this, as noted above, but these reasons are not convincing. The alleged saboteur, posited by Curtis, seems too clumsy to be credible, and the idea that the prose frame is merely a random piece of paper wrapped around the real book, as argued by Crenshaw—as if the poetry were a piece of raw meat requiring wrapping in newspaper so that it can be safely handed to the customer—seems unlikely. Texts don't work that way, do they? They're not bloody; they don't attract flies. An irrelevant 'wrapper' is more likely to cause confusion, compromising the text instead of protecting it. If his intention was to make his text presentable—able to be handed over to readers—the author would hardly have chosen this route. The 'wrapper' must be relevant.

Above, I argued that readers who prefer the prose over the poetry have a more defensible position than those who ignore the epilogue altogether, for they, at least, acknowledge all parts of the book as legitimate, even if they view one part—the poetry—as being of secondary importance. This, in fact, makes sense within the trajectory of the book: Job experiences difficulties, but, in the end, all comes right again. Indeed, William Whedbee identifies *Job* as a comedy, because it shares that genre's

> basic plot line that leads ultimately to the happiness of the hero and his restoration to a serene and harmonious society.[20]

Yet, readers who value the prose over the poetry do not really have a defensible position, either. The poetry, which makes up the bulk of the

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[19] I say this, and yet, at the same time, blithely choose to ignore Elihu in the discussion of *Job* that fills these pages. 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, *Book of Job*, 16–17, 30. I find Newsom's suggestion intriguing, but it does not provide me with a real defense for ignoring Elihu. Newsom herself does include discussion of Elihu in her book from which the above quotation is taken; he may be secondary, but any 'final form' reading must take him into account. I ignore him because he does not seem to contribute to the conversation about creation Job, his friends, and God are having, at least as I am hearing it. The categories by which I am engaging with the speech of the other characters do not fit Elihu. These categories may be artificial, but they allow certain details within the book to be highlighted and explored. If Elihu is a reader who has written himself into the book, it can make sense to bracket his speeches, to see what the book says without his interruption, even if he cannot *always* be ignored. So, I ignore him here, but I do not always ignore him. See, for example, my article *Job as Comedy, Revisited*, in which Elihu plays a major role.

[20] William Whedbee, "The Comedy of Job," *Semeia* 7 (1977): 5.

book, cannot really be written off as 'a funny thing that happened on the way to the epilogue.' It matters too much. If, for readers like Crenshaw, the prologue and epilogue are the Wonderbread encasing the poet's foie gras with black truffles[21]—he felt like he had to spread it on *something*, but, really, if one wants to do justice to the foie gras, one ought to scrape it off and throw away the Wonderbread—these other readers smash the prologue and epilogue back together so that the strange, smelly substance that was between them squirts out and lands on the ground to be judiciously stepped over. This results in a reading which summarizes the book in this way: Because Job is righteous, satan tries to trick him, but Job isn't fooled, either by the 'evil' satan or by his 'mean' friends, and in the end God rewards him for his faithfulness.[22] These readers may follow the trajectory of the book—they may take the train to the end of the line—but, during its careening journey through the poetry they have had their eyes closed, their knuckles whitely gripping the edges of their seats. They have traveled through the poetry, but they have tried to see as little of the scenery as possible, and so cannot really be said to have *read* the book in its entirety, any more than those who jump off before the train has reached its destination.

The third group of readers, which includes Brown and Schifferdecker, has the advantage of attending to both poetry and prose and taking both seriously. These readers, however, are no less governed by expectation than the first two kinds of readers. Responding to Newsom's Bakhtinian reading of *Job* Schifferdecker contends

> While the notion of a 'polyphonic text' may be attractive . . . in a modern context, the ancient Israelite reader must have understood the divine speeches to be the answer to Job's situation. . . . The book does indeed have an 'end,' whether contemporary readers appreciate it or not."[23]

Here, Schifferdecker disparages the expectations belonging to 'contemporary readers,' while allying her own expectations with those of 'the ancient Israelite.' Because the ancient Israelite would have understood God's voice as authoritative, this kind of readerly expectation is justified, she argues. By contrast, those readers who inhabit a 'modern context' do not automatically attribute the same authority to God, and are, therefore,

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[21] Forgive this proliferation of metaphors. It's how my brain works.

[22] See Louis Ulmer, *What's the Matter with Job?* Arch Books #11 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974).

[23] Schifferdecker, *Whirlwind*, 11.

unequipped with the expectations which would allow them to read the text correctly. Or, rather, those who claim that the Book of Job itself questions the authority of God's words in chapters 38–41 are suffering from their own misguided expectations, whereas those contemporary readers who recognize God's absolute authority *do* have the right expectations.

This, though, seems a very narrowing way of approaching the book. The book can only say what the ancient Israelite would have expected it to say, and the only way for contemporary readers to deal with the text is to try to put themselves in the place of this somewhat hypothetical individual. This is problematic.[24] It means that there are very real limits on what it is possible for the book to say; it may go so far, but no further. God may respond to Job in an unexpected way. He may present a world very different from the one Job—and perhaps we readers—have understood as the world-as-it-ought-to-be, but once God speaks, that's it. The buck stops here. Only one kind of response is possible: one must bow before God's knowledge and power, acknowledge one's lowliness and mistakenness, and change one's ways to bring them into line with God's decrees. This, then, is what Job does, regardless of what it seems like he might do, regardless of any ambiguity inherent in his words and actions. He has no other option.

And yet, this expectation, despite supposedly being the only one available to the ancient Israelite, seems at odds with what happens in the book, in which challenges to God abound. Throughout the book Job accuses God of afflicting him unjustly. In chapter 16 Job laments, "He bursts upon me again and again; he rushes at me like a warrior . . . though there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is pure" (16:14, 17), a complaint the essence of which is repeated again and again. Scholars often smugly remark that we readers know the real reason for Job's suffering, even though Job does not.[25] Job thinks God is afflicting him because God thinks he is guilty of wickedness. We, though, having read the prologue, know that God is afflicting Job not because he is wicked, but because he is supremely righteous, as a way of gauging how deep his righteousness runs.

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[24] I have already noted the problematic nature of the historical-critical search for the author and his original reading community in the prologue to this book.

[25] Dick Geeraerts, for example, writes, "If Job's question is: 'Why do you torment me so [God] while I am innocent?', we as readers *know* the answer, and we have known it from the very start of the book. God is tormenting Job merely because God has been persuaded by the satan to test Job." Dick Geeraerts, "Caught in a Web of Irony: Job and His Embarrassed God," in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*, ed. E. van Wolde (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 52.

Job may be somewhat misguided, it's true, but our scholarly smugness also fails to take in the full import of Job's situation in relation to God. God, himself, after the first round of the prologue's test accuses *hassatan*, "you incited me . . . to destroy him for no reason" (2:3b), indicating that God views his own activity as not entirely justifiable.[26] God may blame *hassatan* for his role in the test, but he also acknowledges his own participation in a dubious enterprise.

So, the claim that for the ancient Israelite, God's speeches could only have been appreciated as appropriately answering Job's complaint—because God's words and actions are always authoritative and above reproach—is not supported by the rest of the book. Perhaps *in general* God's words and deeds were viewed in this way in ancient Israel, but we have to allow for the possibility that the Book of Job was saying something different, contesting this generally-held view. For this reason, the idea that the expectations of the ancient Israelite are more reliable indicators of the book's meaning than our own readerly expectations is flawed. Moreover, as regards the assumed authority of God's voice, I do not know that the contemporary reader's expectations are significantly different from the ancient Israelite's.[27] We may no longer, as a society, ascribe the same kind

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[26] See the discussion of this point in chapter 2 of this book.

[27] Schifferdecker's related claim that contemporary readers, unlike ancient ones, would prefer the book not to have an 'end' also seems debatable. I do not think we are really so opposed to closure in the books we read. Gabriel Josipovici comments that "A generation which has experienced *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*" should be able to accept the complexity of the Bible. He continues, "[M]any modernist works might well be described as more like . . . caves crammed with scrolls than like carefully plotted nineteenth-century novels or even fairy stories and romances. But we should also realize that this is a feature they have in common with a great deal of ancient literature." Josipovici, *Book of God*, 49. The point Josipovici is making has to do with the real unity of material that appears disunited, a point well taken in relation to *Job*. I want to use his remarks to engage in a slightly different argument. As contemporary readers we should not be too quick to insist on differences between ancient literature and our own, simply as a matter of course. Josipovici argues that surely, having been exposed to a book like *Ulysses*, we ought to be able to accept that disjunctions within a text do not mean that we are dealing with a composite text which was never meant to appear as a single document. For Josipovici, *Ulysses* ought to make it easier for us to grasp the disjunctive unity of the Bible and of biblical texts. In truth, though, I think it makes it harder. "Never in the history of humankind has anyone written books like these contemporary works," we tell ourselves. "Only now are we sophisticated enough to understand such works, and, as such they are wholly original and unique to our place in time. An ancient reader, coming across a book like *Ulysses*, would have been completely flummoxed; it is only we, now, who are capable of taking such works as a matter of course, only we who are not bewildered by them." This attitude, however, reveals something about these works and our appreciation of them. We may not be bewildered, but we believe others would be, precisely because we view these works as *inherently bewildering*. Works like *Ulysses*—if *Ulysses* is not, in fact, unique and in a category of its own—are the

of authority to God in the world, but, when we read a text—particularly when that text is in the Bible—we tend to assume, I think, that words attributed to God are intended to be understood as authoritative. The speaker's name—'God'—gives him authority, and this speaker, when he speaks in chapters 38–41, claims authority for himself: "Where were *you* when *I* laid the foundation of the earth?" (38:4; my italics). Moreover, that Job has been calling on God to answer him throughout the book sets us up to expect that God's response will be authoritative and appropriate, at the same time as God's behavior in the prologue and Job's accusations against him warn us against taking the authority of God's words for granted. This push-pull exists throughout the book, as Job simultaneously calls on God-as-he-ought-to-be to vindicate him and accuses the God who is afflicting him of failing to live up to what is expected of him. This tension must be evident to ancient and contemporary readers alike.

The fourth way of reading the epilogue seems less distorted by readers' expectations than the three ways discussed above, which either excise the epilogue, discount the poetic section, or insist that the epilogue cannot undermine God's authority because God's authority would not have been questioned by ancient readers, despite the fact that God's authority is questioned by Job throughout the book. Like Schifferdecker, I acknowledge God's words as the book's authoritative statement about the world, recognizing that God's depiction of the world as he has created it trumps Job's and his friends' claims about the world-as-it-ought-to-be and shows them to have been mistaken about the nature of the creation. Unlike Schifferdecker and Brown, however, I also recognize the intensely disjunctive effect of the epilogue, in which Job proceeds to inhabit a world God has just finished telling him does not exist. The effect of this is explosive, *precisely because of the authority we assume God possesses.*

The epilogue detonates; the book shoots into the air and rains down in a torrent of questions: Has God decided that Job's world-as-it-ought-to-be has merit after all and decided to give that world a place in his creation? Or has the epilogue world come into existence through an agency other than God's? If God is not responsible for creating the epilogue world, is

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exception, not the norm. These are not the books most contemporary readers spend most of their time reading. In fact, it is false to say that we, in contrast to what ancient readers would be, are not bewildered by them. Most of us are fairly flummoxed. Perhaps, then, *Ulysses* and *Job* should be grouped together, not separated according to whether they are 'modern' or 'ancient,' but, instead, categorized as bewildering books that defy the expectations of contemporary and ancient readers alike.

its existence still consonant with the world he describes himself as having created, despite its differences from that world, or does God's world preclude the existence of the epilogue world? If God's world precludes the existence of such a world, how does it happen to exist? If God did not create it, who did? If Job and/or his friends made it, how did they manage to do so? If the book ends with a world made by humans, does this mean that human beings, and not God, are the real creators? Or is the world inhabited by Job in the epilogue nothing more than a fantasy, with no basis in reality? If it is a fantasy with no basis in reality, does this mean that it is impossible to live there or is it perfectly possible to live in such a place? Is there, after all, nothing more to creating than imagining, or is God's creative activity of a different sort? Is there such thing as the 'real world' or are all worlds imaginary? If Job can create and live in his own world, what is his relationship to God? Is he a co-creator, endowed by God with creative faculties so that he may share in God's creativity? Or is he an anti-creator who has set himself up as God's rival? Or is he some third thing, neither subordinate co-creator nor antagonistic rival-creator?

Job as the Creator of the World of the Epilogue

I do not propose to address all of these questions in a systematic fashion. Nor do I plan to provide definitive answers, so that each question can be answered and subsequently checked off the list. I want, rather, to raise and explore possibilities, reading backwards into the book to do so, as discussed in my introductory chapter, fully aware that this exploration may yield contradictory evidence. I want to begin by offering the possibility that the world inhabited in the epilogue is a world created by Job himself. At first blush, this suggestion seems rather more impossible than possible. How in the world *could* Job have created the world of the epilogue? What kind of creative power could he possibly have? All of God's questions—"Where were you when I did X? Do you know Y? Can you do Z?"—in chapters 38–41, serve to hammer home the fact that Job has no creative power. God, not Job, is the creator of the world.

And yet, the shockingly disjunctive force of the epilogue stems from the fact that it, in no way, resembles the world God has described himself as creating. Rather, what it is like is the world Job and his friends have described throughout the book, in overt and oblique statements, as the world-as-it-ought-to-be. In the first section of this chapter I have already noted the points of consonance between the world of the epilogue and

Job's world-as-it-ought-to-be. The epilogue world has its location inside the confines of the town, where Job is the central figure of his community. Moreover, this world is stable; Job lives out his days with no fear of disruptive change. If we were not already convinced of Job's incapacity for creation, we would look at the epilogue and easily identify it as Job's world.

Why, though, are we so convinced that Job has no creative power? How do we know that Job could not make a world? We know because God has told us so: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? . . . Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?" (38:4a, 40:9), and so on. I wonder, though, whether God protests too much. "You are no creator, Job," God says again and again, but why should God be so insistent on this point? Job has never claimed to have creative power. His urgent cry for God to answer him and restore his disrupted life to its previous state is based on his belief that God alone is the world's creator. Only God can remake the world-as-it-ought-to-be, for "In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being" (12:10). Yet, when God appears, after asking Job about his presence at the founding of the earth, he continues, "Who determined its measurements—surely you know!" (38:5a), using sarcasm to imply that Job is under some misapprehension about the identity of the creator. Job was not there when the world was first made, and so he does not know *how* it was done or even *who* did it. The first implication—that he does now know *how* creation happened—makes sense. The second, however, is puzzling. Of course Job knows *who* is responsible for the creation of the world. He knows that God is the creator. This is precisely why he needs God to respond to his complaint.

God insists that Job has no creative power, but this insistence implies that Job needs to be disabused on this count. Since, however, as far as we can tell from his speeches, Job has never claimed this kind of power, we must wonder where God got the idea that this is what Job has done. Jon Levenson answers this difficulty by suggesting that God's speeches may have originally been composed as part of quite a different story, writing,

> [C]hapters 38–41 presuppose a . . . story . . . in which the protagonist was not an innocent sufferer, but a Prometheus-like figure who challenged God's mastery of the world and claimed knowledge comparable to his.[28]

[28] Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 155.

That is to say, God didn't get the idea from Job, as he appears in the book as we have it, but from some other Joe(b) whose words and actions we do not know, but whose broad outlines we can infer from the accusations inherent in God's questions. "Am I the Sea, or the Dragon, that you set a guard over me?" (7:12) Job has asked, meaning to remind God that he is no such threatening power. God, however, answers as if he is negating this claim—Job *is* the Dragon—and the reason God answers in this way is because he is answering some other Job who is, in fact, the Dragon. He is not speaking to 'our' Job, but to someone else, nothing like the man we know.

This manages to make sense of the puzzling nature of God's questions, while at the same time making a nonsense of the book as a whole. If God seems to be speaking past Job, it is because he is not talking to him at all. God has teleported into the wrong book, and is addressing the wrong audience. How awkward. One of God's aides had better whisper in his ear and tell him the room he wants is down the hall.[29] If, though, we want to try to read the Book of Job as we have it, it seems necessary to accept that God's words are intended to address 'our' Job, even if they seem to show that God believes Job to be different from the Job we have grown acquainted with over the course of the book. As Peggy Day writes,

> [I]f the theory is pursued to its logical conclusion, the book of Job in its present form has . . . no meaning. . . . 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.[30]

Actually, Levenson, despite his suspicion that God's words were originally meant for some other Job, does read God's speeches as integral to the meaning of the book at this point. He writes,

> [I]n their present position chapters 38–41 attack Job not for his belief that God can be sadistic . . . but for his insolence in expressing it. . . . The brunt of [God's] harangue is that creation . . . is not anthropocentric but theocentric. Humanity must learn to adjust to a world not designed for their benefit and to cease making claims (even *just* claims) upon its incomprehensible designer and master.[31]

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[29] On second thought, though, his aides may decide that since there is no way for him to make a graceful exit, dressed as he is in full whirlwind and having already knocked over several water glasses and a floral centerpiece on his way to the podium, he had better just stay and make the best of it.

[30] Day, *Adversary*, 71.

[31] Levenson, *Creation*, 155–56.

There is something strange about this interpretation, though. Job may be no Prometheus, the kind of character for whom God's words were originally meant, but, here, Levenson does attribute Prometheus-like behavior to Job and to humanity in general. Job has been insolent in his questioning of God's justice, and his complaint has revealed his underlying belief that humanity, not God, is of central importance within the creation. God's speeches quash Job's accusations by showing him that his assumptions about himself and his place in the world are untenable. In Levenson's interpretation, Job *has* in fact acted and spoken like a kind of Prometheus. Levenson does not put it this way, but what seems to be happening in his interpretation is an original perception that God's words do not match Job's character, followed by a new perception of what Job's character is like based on how God is addressing him. That is, Levenson's initial assumptions about who Job is are changed by how God speaks to Job; readers do not recognize that Job is like Prometheus, until God addresses him as such, and then, seeing him from God's perspective, they realize that this *is* what Job is.[32]

I think Levenson is right—or, rather, I think the implications of his argument are right—that God's speeches change our appreciation of Job. How God addresses Job changes our understanding of what Job has said and done. Of course, in Levenson's reading, what God declares Job guilty of is insolence and anthropocentrism, not of claiming to possess creative power and trying to exercise it. Yet, in his focus on creation and on himself as creator, I do think this is an accusation God is leveling against Job. As Levenson sees it, the epilogue does not represent an unsettling of God's authority, but, rather demonstrates Job's "open and unconditional submission to the God of creation," which, in turn, "grants humanity a reprieve from the cold inhumanity of the radically theocentric world."[33] As already noted, however, the world of the epilogue is so like Job's world-as-it-ought-to-be, and so different from the world of God's speeches, that, if we were not already convinced of Job's inability to create, we would easily identify him as its creator.

As far as we can tell, Job has not claimed to possess creative power, but God, when he answers Job, speaks as if Job has done exactly this. Our first

[32] I suppose this is not totally unlike those readers who claim that Job's sin, for which he was afflicted, is pride. Unable to accept that God would really punish Job for nothing, such readers breathe a sigh of relief when Job's hidden flaw is uncovered. In Levenson's interpretation, the flaw is not pride, an inflated sense of oneself, but anthropocentrism, an inflated sense of one's (human) species.

[33] Idem.

response might be to think that God is talking to the wrong Joe(b), but, if we accept that these are, in fact, the words God intended to speak to 'our' Job, then we have to wonder if there is, after all, something in the accusation. After that, we have to wonder whether God's insistence that Job has no creative power is actually true. On a first reading, we accept that the book's trajectory is leading up to God's appearance, and, having waited for God to speak the definitive words, we are convinced by God that Job has no creative power. And yet, the epilogue is so much Job's world. Job cannot have made it. And yet. And yet. *What if he did*? To explore this suspicion, it seems worth inquiring into the basis for the accusations brought against Job by God. What has made God think that Job claimed to have creative power in the first place? The prologue, with its similarity to the epilogue, seems a good place to look.

The Problem of the Prologue

As already discussed in the preceding chapters of this book, the world depicted in the prologue fits Job's ideal of the world-as-it-ought-to-be. In general, scholars have less trouble with the prologue than with the epilogue, despite their depiction of closely similar worlds. This makes sense. If the trajectory of the book is such that Job and his friends express erroneous opinions about the world, only to be set straight by God, the world's creator, at the end, the presence of the initial erroneous information is explained. It is the book's 'straw man.' The prologue describes the book's 'straw world.' So, it is not that scholars accept the world of the prologue but reject the same world when it appears in the epilogue, but that the book itself is set up in such a way that the prologue is automatically rejected. The offense of the epilogue lies in the fact that it represents the resurgence of the 'straw world' that the book has already struck down.

Crenshaw who, as already noted, is in favor of lopping off the epilogue altogether, since the book has already ended 'appropriately' at 42:6, permits the prologue to remain, albeit somewhat grudgingly: "Unfortunately, the poetry requires an introduction of some kind; otherwise it begins in media res and readers are left to supply a proper beginning which would illuminate the subsequent dialogue."[34] Despite Crenshaw's description of the necessity of an introduction as 'unfortunate,' he must, it seems, regard the current prologue as serving to properly illuminate the sub-

[34] Crenshaw, *Wisdom*, 100.

sequent dialogue, since it is precisely this which he views as necessary. Indeed, even if scholars find the prose prologue lacking in sophistication when compared with the poetry which follows,[35] they tend to take the information it presents at face value: Job is the most righteous man in the east; God and *hassatan* have devised and implemented a test to determine whether Job's righteousness is disinterested; this test is the source of Job's suffering, meaning that he does not suffer because God mistakenly thinks he is wicked, as he believes, but because God thinks he is supremely righteous and wants to determine the limits of his—and, by extension, human—righteousness. Without this prologue—if readers were, in fact, "left to supply a proper beginning which would illuminate the subsequent dialogue"—we would likely read the book quite differently. We might not, for example, believe Job's claims of innocence. We might find the friends' arguments more convincing that Job's own. We might welcome Elihu's intrusion as a fresh attempt to make the exasperatingly stubborn Job finally see sense. And instead of potentially viewing the whirlwind God as "riding along on the tempest of his almightiness and thunder[ing] reproaches at the half-crushed human worm,"[36] we might view such a display of power as merited, the only thing that will silence Job's annoyingly prolix complaint.

Readers have a complicated relationship with the prologue. Its world is the book's 'straw world,' and yet we accept everything about it as true. We accept that Job really lived in such a world, that he really was singled out by God as supremely righteous, and that the source of his affliction is a test set by God and *hassatan*. If we do not accept these things, the book loses much of its significance. If, for example, Job was not righteous—as we might assume if we had only the poem without the prologue—it would not address the conundrum of righteous suffering, but only of self-delusion. The book needs the prologue—not just any prologue, but this one in particular. Yet, the book, as it progresses, at once negates the prologue, and draws meaning from it. So, it is not that readers have invented

[35] Although most readers find the prologue less sophisticated than the poetry which follows, as will be discussed in more detail below, not all do. Clines, for example, argues that the prologue is "a well wrought narrative that plunges directly into issues of substances that reach as deep as the fraught dialogues themselves," and goes on to describe how the events of the prologue prefigure the content of God's speeches. David J.A. Clines, "False Naivety in the Prologue to Job," in *On the Way to the Postmodern*, vol. 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 736, 744.

[36] Jung, *Answer to Job*, 17.

their complicated relationship with the prologue; the prologue plays a complicated role in the book.

Clines makes sense of the prologue's role in the book by arguing that the events of the prologue prefigure the content of God's speeches. He writes,

> In Job's case, says the prologue, his suffering is entirely for God's benefit. . . . In this crucial respect the prologue is in complete harmony with the divine speeches. . . . As I read them, their concern is to affirm that the created order exists for God's purposes and benefit, not humankind's, and that therefore implicitly and by analogy, so does the moral order.[37]

That is, in the prologue, Job suffers not because of anything he has done, but because God needs him to suffer:

> From Job's perspective it is gratuitous (*hinnam*), as God himself acknowledges (2.3), but from God's perspective it is necessary. . . . In a word, Job suffers for God's sake.

And, as God reveals in his speeches, this is why everything in the world happens—because God wants or needs it to happen.[38] I do not subscribe to this 'radically theocentric' interpretation of God's speeches, as expressed by Levenson, Clines, Schifferdecker, Brown and others. As already discussed in chapter 2 of this book, it seems to me that God directs Job's attention out toward the diverse creation, rather than presenting himself as the central figure of his creation, upon whom all eyes should be focused.

Moreover, when God says to *hassatan*, after the first round of the test, "[Y]ou incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason [*hinnam*; חנם]" (2:3), he does not say, as Clines' interpretation would have it, "Job thinks it was *hinnam*, but I had my reasons, and so, for me, it was not *hinnam*." Rather, what is indicated here is that *for God* the test up to this point has been *hinnam*, and, as discussed in chapter 2, what would make it not *hinnam* is not Job's passing the test—which is what he has already done—but, rather, his failing of the test. If what God needs is to know that he is worshiped unconditionally, as Clines' reading supposes, then this question has already been answered in chapter 1. In 2:3, God should not be accusing *hassatan* of luring him into a test that was *hinnam*. Instead, he should be gloating over the success of the test and his winning of the

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[37] Clines, "False Naivety," 744.
[38] Idem.

bet. At this point, *hassatan* may bring up his second challenge, insisting that the bet has been weighted against him because of the prohibition on touching Job's own body, and calling for a rematch, to which God may agree, seeing *hassatan's* point. But God should not, at the beginning of chapter 2, be complaining that the test is no good, or that he has engaged in it for no good reason.

God's claim in 2:3 that the test has been *hinnam* seems to indicate that what he needs is not for Job to demonstrate that he worships unconditionally, and therefore truly loves God, but, instead, to demonstrate that he does not worship unconditionally, and only loves God for the blessings God gives him. This is awfully strange. What God needs is not unconditional love, a need we can understand, and for which we might forgive his affliction of Job—Clines writes, "If innocent suffering is for God's sake . . . then does not undeserved suffering acquire a fresh and startlingly positive valuation . . . ?"[39]—but for Job to demonstrate that he does not really love God, that what has existed between them has been purely economic. Based on God's statement in 2:3, it seems that this outcome would be the one that would give the test meaning.

But what does God stand to gain from this kind of outcome? Why would God prefer this outcome over the other? Moreover, why does *hassatan* assume that this is *not* the outcome God desires? Why does *hassatan* bet God that Job will not show himself disinterestedly righteous, if this is also God's position? God is in the bizarre situation of losing, whatever the outcome. If Job demonstrates that his righteousness is based on expectation of reward, God loses the argument with *hassatan*. If, however, Job demonstrates that his righteousness is disinterested, God also loses, because this is not the situation he truly desires, as is indicated by his description of the test as *hinnam* in 2:3. Indeed, it would seem that, with this second outcome, God loses more deeply than if he had lost the so-called bet. The tribute paid to Job in the epilogue would seem to show that what God has lost is his own righteousness. As Francis Anderson notes, "[T]he Lord, like any thief who has been found out (Ex. 22:4), repays Job double what he took away."[40]

Is this, though, the God who speaks to Job from the whirlwind? Contrary to how Clines sees it, it seems to me that what God says in chapters

[39] Idem.

[40] Francis I. Anderson, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (Inter-Varsity Press: London and Downers Grove, IL, 1976), 293.

38–41 is not, "Everything happens for *my* sake, even though it may seem *hinnam* to you," but "Everything happens for *its own* sake." In this claim, an even deeper kind of *hinnam* inheres. God doesn't depict himself as receiving anything from any of the wild creatures he describes. The question, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" means something different in the world of God's speeches. It becomes not a question of whether Job engages in righteous behavior for a reward or not, with God insisting that the 'no reward' brand of righteousness is purer/better/higher than the 'reward' kind. Instead, what God reveals is that the reward—which is life itself—is given *hinnam*. Righteousness is beside the point. Is Job righteous *hinnam*? Yes. There is no other way in which to be righteous, for what reward there is *precedes* righteousness—just as it precedes other kinds of behavior—instead of following it. In the divine speeches it is God who is good *hinnam*, creating the world without requiring worship in return. If Job can in any way be said to suffer 'for God' as Clines suggests, it must be by living in a world that is complex, in which suffering and death are related to the multiplicity of creatures and their ability to effect change. Job's suffering, though, is not a special circumstance that, in itself "win[s] [God] some unguessed at boon;"[41] rather, the boon is the existence of the world as a complex, changeable, and unbounded place, and Job's suffering is simply the result of a potential contained within this world.

Like the epilogue, the prologue presents a world very different from the world described in God's speeches. The bet between God and *hassatan* over Job's righteousness is based on a very different set of assumptions about the relationship between righteousness and reward from those that inhere in God's speeches of chapters 38–41. Moreover, God's response to the results of the test in 2:3 shows an underlying problem with the bet: God stands to lose however Job fares. The one who stands to win in the encounter—and who, if the epilogue is the end of the story begun in the prologue, *does* win—is Job. I have already discussed what Job has to win from the bet in chapter 2 of this book. I wrote there that, based on this, one had to wonder whether Job had masterminded the whole thing.[42] What, though, would such 'masterminding' look like? How could Job possibly control the words and actions of God and *hassatan* in the heavenly council? The way he could do this is if he had dreamed them up, if they

[41] Idem.
[42] See pages 53–56.

were characters invented in a particularly vivid daydream to which we readers are made privy.

The Prologue as Job's Daydream

I want to argue that the bet between God and *hassatan* 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: In his mind's eye, Job 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 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.[43] 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.

Here, in the book as we have it, is where something unexpected happens: an interruption, a delay. Several interpreters speak of this shift as a move from fantasy to reality. Indeed, although above I have only read the bet and its consequences as the contents of a dream dreamed by Job, the bet only makes sense in a certain kind of world, one which is entirely different from God's whirlwind world. It follows that the entire world depicted in the prologue is the site of Job's creative daydreaming. Stephen Mitchell describes the shift from prose to poetry as signaling "a change in reality." He explains,

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[43] 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 בני נבל. 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" (כדבר אחת הנבלות תדברי) 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, at least from Job's perspective, has failed to understand what integrity means.

> The world of the prologue is two-dimensional, and its divinities are very small potatoes. 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.[44]

Peggy Day presents a similar account of the transition, writing "[I]n chapter three . . . [t]he cardboard character of Job all at once becomes animated, and he rails against his misfortune."[45] Neither Mitchell nor Day views the prologue as Job's dream specifically, but instead as a portion of the book which the author has written in a less realistic style than the poetry which follows it, with the intention of convincing the reader that it depicts a fantasy world. Meir Weiss, however, although he does not use the terminology of dreams or fantasy, does see the prologue world as belonging, in some way, to Job. Weiss sees a connection between the sound of the word עוץ, the land in which Job lives and the word עצה, '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, though, the bet between God and *hassatan*, instead of also belonging to Job, 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.[46]

Yet, although none of these scholars reads the prologue exactly as I do, we all agree that there is something about the prologue which allows it to be identified as fantasy, and something about the irruption of the poetry which feels like an awakening from a dream.[47]

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[44] Stephen Mitchell, *The Book of Job* (London: Kyle Cathie Limited, 1989), ix–x.

[45] Day, *Adversary*, 83.

[46] Meir Weiss, *The Story of Job's Beginning, Job 1–2: A Literary Analysis* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1983), 82.

[47] Clines, for his part, suggests that the entire book is the fantasy of the author, an unconscious manifestation of his subconscious fears and desires. Clines 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." David J.A. Clines, "Why is there a Book of Job and What Does it do to You if You Read it?" in *The Book of Job*, ed. W.A.M. Beuken (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1994), 11–12.

Perhaps, though, all this is simply another way of saying, again, that the prologue is the book's 'straw world,' a rickety construction set up by the author for the sole purpose of being torn down. In the poetry, Job gets a taste, or rather, a mouthful—he is fairly choking on it—of the real world, and he recognizes that his old world, with its 'small potatoes' God, was a sham. Except, again, we come up against the problem of the epilogue, which is what started this enquiry into the prologue in the first place. Mitchell asks,

> How could the author have returned to the reality of the prologue for an answer to the hero of the poem? That would have meant 'the Lord' descending from the sky to say, Well, you see, Job, it all happened because I made this bet . . .

He answers, "No, the god of the prologue is left behind as utterly as the never-again-mentioned Accuser."[48] On the first count, Mitchell is right: the idea of God talking about the bet in his answer to Job seems absurd. But, nevertheless, it is not true that the god of the prologue never makes a second appearance. He shows up in the epilogue. And, as I have been arguing, this opens up a can of worms, transforming the prologue from a 'straw world' that is struck down over the course of the book, into something that survives, however flimsy its materials, however shoddy its composition.

In his speeches of chapters 38–41, God speaks to Job as if he has tried to set himself up as a rival creator. For readers, this is confusing, for Job does not seem to have done anything like this for as long as we have known him. Levenson, as already discussed, explains this disjunction by suggesting that God's speeches were originally directed at a Prometheus-like character, instead of at 'our' Job. The epilogue, however, in which Job proceeds to inhabit a world completely different from the world God has just described as the world of his creation, and which, instead, tallies with Job's picture of the world-as-it-ought-to-be, forces us to ask whether God's accusations have, in fact, been justified. Has Job, after all, set himself up as a rival to God? The epilogue, though, comes *after* God has finished speaking, so this cannot be what God means when he accuses Job of trying to act as a rival creator. It is now that we remember the prologue, a world very like the world of the epilogue. It must be the prologue to which God

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In my view, however, the author *is* aware that the prologue—and perhaps the epilogue—is a dream. It is a dream he has given his character, Job, to dream.

[48] Mitchell, *Book of Job*, x.

takes exception. If we think we have left that 'cardboard puppet theater' far behind, we should remind ourselves that Job, however immersed in the 'real world' he has been, still hopes to return to that world. His entire complaint is geared toward winning himself readmission to that place. It is surely real to him. In his speeches, God tells Job in no uncertain terms that he never made that world, and that Job has no power to make that world, so it does not exist, and cannot have ever existed. And yet, the fact is, Job once lived there, as far as he can tell. Moreover, it is the fact that Job once lived there that seems to inform God's address to Job as a Prometheus-like figure, a rival creator.

Job, who has never thought of himself as any such thing, is suddenly presented with both the accusation that he has tried to act as a rival creator and the information that success in such an endeavor is impossible. But the accusation itself seems to have arisen from the fact that Job has had success, even though God now insists that such success is impossible. When God denies creation of the prologue world, Job must begin to realize that that world, where he once lived, and which he thought was God's creation, must have been a world he himself made, even if only by imagining it into existence. It is this recognition that makes the epilogue possible.

Job and the Chaos Monster

If, in retrospect, Job discovers that he may have set himself up as a rival creator to God, a question worth asking is whether Job is a chaos monster. Indeed, the Book of Job has a history of being read as a telling of the story about the conflict between order and chaos.[49] 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). Then, God devotes the entire second chapter of his second speech to describing the power and glory of the water-dwelling

[49] References to this kind of reading have popped up throughout this book, although I have made an effort to avoid use of the terms 'chaos' and 'order,' to describe the different worlds depicted in the book, preferring instead to use 'the world-as-it-ought-to-be' and 'the anti-world.' This is because of the loaded quality of the former terms, as will be discussed below.

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.

For most scholars who engage with this theme, the purpose of the presence of Leviathan in the book is to demonstrate that this is also Job's identity. John Day, for example, noticing that "The number of allusions to the *Chaoskampf* in the book of Job is most striking," asks, "How are we to account for this fact?" He responds, "[T]he 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."[50] Similarly, Michael Fishbane sees in Job's chapter 3 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."[51]

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.

For 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.[52]

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. 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

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[50] John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 49.

[51] Michael Fishbane, "Jeremiah IV 23–26 and Job III 3–13: A Recovered Use of the Creation Pattern," *Vetus Testamentum* 21 no 2 (1971): 153.

[52] Habel, *Book of Job*, 574.

returning the world to the darkness of night."[53] 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.[54]

All of these scholars answer the question I posed at the beginning of this section in the affirmative—Yes, Job is a chaos monster—and I agree that this answer is plausible. They all, however, come at it from a different angle from the one I am attempting. There are three main differences between my approach and theirs. First, all the scholars quoted above arrive at their understanding of Job as chaos via Leviathan. That is, it is the mention of Leviathan that tips them off to the fact that something is being said about the battle between chaos and order. For me, by contrast, as should be evident from the discussion above, the question of whether or not Job is a chaos monster was arrived at via the observation that Job seems to have created the worlds depicted in the book's prologue and epilogue. Second, following from this first difference, these scholars view chaos as purely destructive, instead of as potentially creative. Third, when these scholars say that Job is being presented as a representative of chaos, they are making reference to a story that has already been told and of which the ending is fixed and known. That is to say, if God describes Job as a chaos monster, he is depicting him as a destructive force which, though apparently formidable, has already been subdued. Job may rail against God, demonstrating his chaotic nature, but he cannot defeat God; the story simply does not end that way.

Excursus: What is Chaos?

These differences arise from what I think is a mistaken understanding of what chaos is on the part of these (and other) scholars. The idea of chaos, as generally understood in biblical studies, comes from the comparison of

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[53] Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 204.
[54] Ibid., 202.

biblical materials with other ancient Near Eastern myths, most specifically the Babylonian creation narrative, *Enuma elish*. Hermann Gunkel, 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.[55] 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 creation, with Tiamat, the monster 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, using it to create earth and sky, 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

[55] Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*, trans. K.W. Whitney Jr. (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006).

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.[56] 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 order-creating battle with the monster, a battle which God won at the time of creation, and which he continues to win whenever chaos tries to reassert itself.

This approach and the understanding of chaos it yields, though foundational within biblical studies, are problematic. For one, many scholars have disputed the notion that the biblical authors would have had access

[56] 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, *Slaying the Dragon*, 79.

to *Enuma elish*, positing instead a Canaanite origin for the Bible's *Chaoskampf* material. 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.[57]

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.[58] This, though, does not strike me as the biggest problem with this approach. What is most problematic is not which text has been posited as containing the original, influential version of the myth, but, rather, *how* that text has been used. The idea that any reference to an element of a story must mean reference to the *entire* story seems suspect. Rebecca Watson, voicing similar suspicions, writes

> This [method] has resulted in an approach whereby a divine conflict with the sea, characteristically resulting in creation, is often assumed in passages where the presence of such allusions could hardly be supposed on the basis

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[57] Day, *God's Conflict*, 4.

[58] This, too, however, is somewhat problematic, for this myth is not a creation story, as scholars have supposed *Chaoskampf* myths must be. What scholars want—and what they do not have—is a Canaanite myth that tells the same story as is told in *Enuma elish*. Day discusses the various ways in which biblical scholars have dealt with this mismatch on pp. 10–18 of his 1985 book. He concludes, "[T]he fact that the Old Testament so frequently uses the imagery of the divine 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, *God's Conflict*, 17. This conclusion, though, seems suspect. To say that the chaos themes in the Bible 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." Samuel E. Loewenstamm, *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures* (Germany: Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevalaer and Neukirchener Verlab Neukirchen-Vluyn, 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 Mesopotamian 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.

> 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.[59]

Although Watson wants to purge biblical studies of any discussion of chaos in the Bible, at least as defined by comparison with *Enuma elish*, I want to take her caution to heart while trying to chart a less drastic course. The biggest problem, as noted above, seems to me to be the way in which *Enuma elish* has been mapped onto the Bible as a complete text, so that any similar detail implies that entire story. It seems more useful to me to think of overlapping details as arising from the existence of conventional building blocks with which one can build a story. The stories one tells with these blocks will have certain similarities, but one need not always tell the same story. Rather, one can make use of them in different ways, meaning that the reader or hearer must pay attention to each individual telling, instead of letting her eyes glaze over as she envisages the story she already knows, seeing it already played out in entirety in her head, so that to see Leviathan (for instance) is to automatically see Leviathan already bound.

I draw support for this way of thinking about the relation between the Bible and *Enuma elish* from the fact that Leviathan, in God's speech of Job 41, is not described as crushed, bound, or subdued, but as freely swimming, a supremely valued member of God's creation. As Watson writes,

> 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.[60]

Yet, as noted above, Watson wants to get rid of any discussion of chaos and any reference to the themes of *Enuma elish*, insisting that they are simply not present in *Job* or any other biblical text. Schifferdecker, while presenting Leviathan in a similar light, does retain the term 'chaos.' She writes,

> Boundaries are set; the forces of chaos are not allowed free course over the world. These boundaries, however, do not exclude all things wild and

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[59] Rebecca S. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of 'Chaos' in the Hebrew Bible* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 2.

[60] Ibid., 348.

> dangerous. The Sea, understood mythically as a force of chaos, is given a place in creation, but it is also given limits.[61]

What, though, can it mean to say that, in the world God presents in his speeches, chaos is part of order, a restrained and yet valued member of God's world? What is this thing called chaos? Is it, as Watson assumes a "pre-creation monster inimical to cosmic order," or is it, as Schifferdecker implies, simply something very wild that must be controlled if other life forms are to flourish as well?

Neither of these definitions seems quite right to me, though Schifferdecker's seems less plausible than Watson's. I agree with Schifferdecker that, in God's speeches, what is very wild is given a place within the creation, and described as supremely valuable. No doubt Watson would agree with this assessment, as well, as is indicated by her description of Leviathan quoted above. I do not, however, think that it makes sense to call this wildness, embodied in Leviathan, chaos. What God's praise of Leviathan as his beloved creature seems to mean is that Leviathan, though very wild, is *not* chaos, which is, after all, Watson's point. Watson's definition seems closer to the mark. My problem is with its assumption that chaos is inherently destructive. This seems like a case of valuing the end of the story and the conclusions it asserts over what was taking place at the beginning and in the middle. In *Enuma elish*, it is only when Marduk defeats Tiamat that she becomes "inimical to cosmic order." Cosmic order, in this case, means Marduk's order, which is also 'ours,' since 'we' inhabit his ordered world.

In and of herself, however, Tiamat is not a destructive force, but a *creative* one. As Janzen points out,

> 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.[62]

Thorkild Jacobsen notices an ambiguity in the myth's portrayal of Tiamat that may reveal the author's sense that he is laying blame where it does not belong. Jacobsen writes,

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[61] Schifferdecker, *Whirlwind*, 74–75.

[62] J. Gerald Janzen, "On the Moral Nature of God's Power: Yahweh and the Sea in Job and Deutero-Isaiah," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56 no 3 (1994): 462.

> 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.[63]

Tiamat is not, then, a purely destructive force, intent on toppling whatever order has been set up. She is, rather, the source of a different order; she is a rival creator. She is formidable not because she might destroy the ordered world, causing a descent into disorder, but because she might create her own world in its place, which would, in turn, earn the deposed Marduk and his world the designation of chaos.

For better or for worse, in biblical studies, Tiamat is the model for what we think of as chaos. If we inquire into what she is, we find that she is not primarily a destroyer, but a rival creator. If we generalize from this, we must say that this is what chaos is: a rival creator, not currently in power, who threatens to usurp order for him- or herself and turn the reigning creator's world into chaos. In fact, this is precisely the accusation God brings against Job in his speeches: "Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?" (40:8). The answer, then, to the question, "Is Job a chaos monster?" must be a resounding yes. God does think Job has behaved as a force of chaos, and he tells him this, not by comparing him with Leviathan, who is not chaos, but by describing the world of his creation in such a way as to highlight its difference from Job's conception of the world-as-it-ought-to-be, which is, it turns out, a rival world and not, as Job had thought, the world God intended to create. Leviathan serves as the symbol of everything God's world is that Job's world is not and God's praise of Leviathan drives home the point that Job has been very wrong, that he has allied himself with chaos, and not with the true creator.

Job as Chaos, or Not

I wrote above that the answer to the question, "Is Job a chaos monster," if a chaos monster is defined as a rival creator, must be a *resounding* yes. I want to rescind that adjective. The issue is more complicated than that.

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[63] Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 187.

As noted above, throughout the book Job certainly betrays no sense that he thinks of himself as a rival creator. Quite the contrary is the case. He firmly believes that God is the world's only creator, and he calls on God to act and remake the world-as-it-ought-to-be, believing that he and God share an understanding of what this world is like. Can one really be said to be a rival creator if one does not realize that one's idea of the world-as-it-ought-to-be is not consonant with that held by the creator-in-power, to whom one pledges complete allegiance? Moreover, when God appears and speaks to Job, although he does appear in a whirlwind, which, as Perdue points out "most often occurs in the context of theophanic judgment and the destruction of chaos in its various incarnations,"[64] he does not actually engage Job in battle, as might be expected if Job were actually an embodiment of chaos. "Gird up your loins like a man" (38:3a), God challenges, as if he were challenging Job to battle, but what ensues is a series of questions engineered to demonstrate that Job is too weak and ignorant to even join the fight, let alone have a chance at winning. The kind of man God enjoins Job to be here is a גבר (*geber*), a mighty, fighting man, which might lead us to think that God really is inviting Job to fight. The strength of גבר, though, is misleading, for what kind of man, however strong, is really a match for God? "Gird up your loins, as best you can," seems to be what God is really saying, which is to say, "Don't even bother trying to fight me."

Tiamat was a formidable force, a real match for Marduk, who, through scrappy ingenuity, managed to defeat her and seize control of the right to create. Job, though, is no match for the God who speaks from the whirlwind. God doesn't need to fight him. There's simply no contest. What God does instead is to scold him for his outspoken mistakenness and to show him what the world of his creation is really like, after which Job is on cue to say, "Thank you very much. I had no idea. But now I see what it's like, and, as always, I bow before your majesty." Perhaps Job has acted a bit chaotically, but only on the level of a child misbehaving when he doesn't know any better, for which reason it does not seem accurate to say that Job is a full-fledged chaos monster—a genuine rival creator—or that God thinks this is what Job is. So it turns out that the answer to the question, "Is Job a chaos monster?" is not any kind of yes, but a measured, well-reasoned, "Not really."

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64 Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 202.

This, though, is still not quite right. The issue remains more complicated than this answer admits. On the one hand, God seems to take Job's powerlessness for granted. There is no way Job, a human being, even if he girds up his loins like a גבר, can hope to compete with God. The battle does not even begin, because it is over before it has begun. Job is not defeated; he is simply told how things are. On the other hand, God does come out swinging. He does not gently admonish Job, tenderly taking his hand as he kneels down to Job's level and lisps that "The world is really too big for a little boy like Jobie to understand." Rather, as Perdue points out, God appears with his own loins girded for "theophanic judgment and the destruction of chaos." Although I stand by my claim that God does not intend to engage Job in battle, at the same time there *is* something in what Perdue has noticed.

God's approach to Job is multivalent, to the point of containing contradictory elements. God seems to take for granted that Job is too weak to enter into any kind of competition with him, insisting throughout his speeches that Job has no creative power, while at the same time the force of his approach would seem to indicate that he believes Job actually capable of posing a threat to his position as creator-in-power. Moreover, if God has arrived at the suspicion that Job has tried to act as a rival creator by looking at the prologue world, a world which may have been created by Job, then God's insistence that Job has no creative power would seem to be at least misguided, and at worst a deliberate lie. Is God bluffing? That is, having seen that Job *does* have creative power, is God trying to convince him that the opposite is true by making a display of his own prowess and insisting that Job cannot compete? This seems possible.

Other scholars have argued that the force with which God answers Job is indicative of God's shame over his own wrongdoing—the bet with *hassatan* and his affliction of Job for no good reason (*hinnam*)—and is a deliberate attempt to mask this wrongdoing. Miles, for example, argues that 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.[65] On a related note, Geeraerts points out that

[65] Miles, *God*, 316.

> [T]here is an ironic discrepancy between the message of God's indirect speech act ("you're in no position to ask") and the message that we assume God is trying to avoid ("I am in no position to answer").[66]

I am not convinced, however, that God's 'double-talk' is quite as deliberate as these scholars contend. For one, if the God who speaks from the whirlwind is not, in fact, responsible for the bet with *hassatan*—if, instead, the bet is a figment of Job's imagination, and a transaction from which Job stands to benefit, as argued above—then God does not have the thing to hide which Miles, Geeraerts and others[67] assume he is trying to conceal. Although I do think it is possible that there is an element of 'bluffing' to God's speeches, it seems likely that the urge to bluff comes from a deeper confusion within God. God is not simply trying to conceal a culpability of which he is fully aware; he is not a cold-blooded villain brazenly lying so that he can get away with murder (or torture, as the case may be).

Rather, it seems to me that God is genuinely perplexed by his encounter with Job.[68] God knows that Job's creative power cannot rival his own, but at the same time he sees that once-upon-a-time Job did inhabit a world of his own creation, the world of the prologue. But what a flimsy world that was! What a cardboard-and-paste affair! Hardly a world worth reckoning, not much more than a daydream. Not much real about it, when compared with the world of God's creation. And yet, Job lived there, and still believes that world to be the real world. That's the world he is trying to get back into. That's the world he wants God to recreate. How God must shudder at the thought. "You're no creator, Job," God says. "That world you lived in was not my world. It wasn't much of a world at all. Look at the world I made. See how complex it is, how diverse its creatures, how changeable, how vast. My world contains even Leviathan! By comparison, your world is more like a painting. It's just a picture of yourself. It doesn't move and breathe. It doesn't change. It's no world at all." And yet, again, Job lived there; that's the world he wants. We can imagine God going back and forth in his mind between these two facts: Job's world is no world, and yet, to Job it is a world. Job cannot create, and yet he did create, and yet what he created hardly counts, and yet, there it is, nonetheless. How

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[66] Geeraerts, "Web of Irony," 53.

[67] See, for example, Robertson, "Book of Job," 446–469 and Curtis, "Job's Response," 497–511.

[68] Or, at least, this explanation is as plausible as the idea that God is deliberately trying to conceal his guilt.

can God manage such a situation? What kind of approach is best? Diplomacy? War? No reply? The contradictory multivalence of God's response matches the contradictory multivalence of the situation. Job is no creator, and yet he has unwittingly set himself up as such. What Job has created hardly counts in the scheme of things, but to Job it counts quite a bit. So, God responds to Job as a rival creator, all the while insisting that he is no creator and seeking to convince him that this is, indeed, the case, while simultaneously aware that, however flimsy Job's world, Job believes it to be real. Does God view Job as a chaos monster? The answer is both yes and no.

What is ironic is that Job, throughout the book, has no sense of himself as a rival creator to God, as already noted. He firmly believes that his understanding of the way the world ought to be is shared by God. He believes that the way the world used to be, as depicted in the prologue and in his speech of chapter 29, is the world God intended to create, whereas the world of his current experience is an aberration, evidence that God has failed in his creatorly duties. "Pay attention, God!" he has been crying. "Your world has turned upside-down. Things are not going as you planned. Arise and re-create your world, the world-as-it-ought-to-be!" In his speeches, God successfully disabuses Job of his mistaken belief that his vision of the world-as-it-ought-to-be corresponds with God's. Job sees that the world God made is not the world he lived in before his affliction began, but the world of his current experience. His current experience, then, is not evidence of a mistake on God's part, which God, once apprised of the situation, will be eager to remedy. Rather, his current experience is perfectly possible in the world God has created.

Where God fails is in his attempt to demonstrate to Job that he has no creative power. Job has never thought of himself as a creator. He learns, however, from God's depiction of his world, that the world where he used to live was not God's world. Does he find God's world infinitely better than that world and consent to live there? I do not think that he does. It seems to me that what God's speeches show Job is that he *is* capable of creating, despite God's protestations to the contrary. Job would rather live in his own world than in God's, which, as is obvious from God's description, is not particularly hospitable to humans. Job did not know that he made the prologue world. He finds out that he was its creator in the same moment that God informs him that he lacks creative power. This latter fact, however, fails to convince him, contradicted as it is by the first piece of information. How does he respond? By making the world of the epilogue, that is, remaking the world-as-it-ought-to-be that God refuses to

build. Is Job a chaos monster, a rival creator? He was not, but now he is. Job renounces the God of the whirlwind, and lays hold of the God he worshiped in the prologue, who pays him double what he stole,[69] in recognition of his wrongdoing in afflicting Job *hinnam*.

Job's Curse of Chapter 3

In this chapter so far, I have read 'backwards' into the prologue from the starting point of God's speeches and the epilogue, and have concluded that, whereas Job was not a rival creator before the epilogue, in the epilogue this is what he becomes. Moreover, reading backwards, the prologue is shown to be the site of Job's creative activity, and its world, post-epilogue, can be claimed as such by Job. There is, however, another passage where such 'backwards reading' might be fruitful: Job's cursing of the day of his birth in chapter 3, identified by some scholars as evidence that Job is allied with chaos long before the epilogue. For these scholars, such as Perdue and Fishbane, quoted above, what Job tries to do in chapter 3 is to uncreate the world made by God, and, by calling up Leviathan, reduce it to pre-creation chaos. Then, when God responds to Job he speaks of Leviathan in order to demonstrate that Job has no chance of controlling this mighty monster. God, not Job, has power over Leviathan/chaos, so Job's attempts to use Leviathan against God's creation cannot succeed. Is there anything in this?

This second claim—that God speaks of Leviathan to demonstrate his control over chaos—has already been discussed and rejected above. In God's portrayal, Leviathan is not chaos, but a valued creature, which, though very wild, has an appointed place within the creation. As Keller points out,

> 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.[70]

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69 On God as thief, see Anderson, *Job*, 293 and Melchert, "Job," 19.

70 Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 133–34.

That this second claim is not viable does not mean, however, that the first cannot be true. Alter argues that Job's attempt to rouse Leviathan in chapter 3 makes reference to the cosmogonic combat myth—that is, Job assumes that God's act of creation involved the defeat and binding of the chaos monster—even though God's own language counters this assumption in its failure to make use of the idiom of war.[71] Job, in chapter 3 tries to use Leviathan to plunge the world into chaos, but it does not work both because Job has no power to control Leviathan, and because Leviathan does not symbolize what Job thinks it does. Similarly, Janzen, commenting on 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."[72]

Just because Leviathan (or the Sea) turns out not to be a chaotic figure, however, does not mean that Job's intent was not to rouse chaos and uncreate God's world. Job can be guilty of 'attempted uncreation' even if the gun he thought was lethal turns out to shoot only blanks.

But is Job, in fact, guilty of 'attempted uncreation'? Is this really what he is trying to do in chapter 3? There, Job says,

> Let the day perish in which I was born, and the night that said, "A man-child is conceived." Let that day be darkness! May God above not seek it, or light shine on it. Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds settle upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. That night—let thick darkness seize it! let it not rejoice among the days of the year; let it not come into the number of the months. Yes, let that night be barren; let no joyful cry be heard in it. Let those curse it who curse the Sea [or the day, depending on how יָם is pointed],[73] those who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan. Let the stars of its

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[71] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 100.

[72] J. Gerald Janzen, "Another Look at God's Watch Over Job (7:12)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 no 1 (1989): 113.

[73] It was Gunkel who first suggested amending *yom* to *yam* (Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, 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, *Job*, 30. Gordis, while agreeing with Gunkel's suggestion, proposes a second

> dawn be dark; let it hope for light, but have none; may it not see the eyelids of the morning—because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb, and hide trouble from my eyes (3:3–10).

Job's description of the effective curse as preventing light from shining upon the days of his birth and conception 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 *boulversement*, or reversal, of the cosmicizing acts of creation described in Gen. i–ii 4a.[74]

Yet, against this argument, Clines points out that, at a textual level, 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 writes,

> [A]lthough 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).[75]

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 does offer an 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[76]—but this answer 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 the world's order *must be undone*, but as proof that the world's order *has come*

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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.'" Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 35.

74 Fishbane, "Jeremiah," 153.

75 Clines, *Job 1–20*, 81.

76 Fishbane, "Jeremiah," 153.

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. 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.[77]

If what Job is trying to achieve 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 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.

Of course, here, even as we move away from being able to identify Job as chaos, if chaos is defined as the destroyer of order, we veer toward the definition of chaos as rival creator that I have posited as a more appropriate understanding of the chaos-defining myth. Does Job show himself chaotic here, regardless of how chaos is defined, so that haggling over definitions is beside the point? I do not think so. In fact, the argument against the necessity of haggling over definitions would seem to arise from the opposite situation: whichever definition of chaos is accepted, Job does not show himself as chaotic. Job is no destroyer. As far as he can tell, the world-as-it-ought-to-be has already been destroyed. Neither, though, is he a would-be creator. The realm of the dead is not a place he hopes to create, but only a place he hopes to go.

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. They read the Leviathan reference as

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[77] Brown, *Ethos*, 322–23.

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."[78] 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. Clines offers a similar reading,[79] as does Watson who 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.[80]

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. 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.[81]

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[78] Thorkild Jacobsen and Kirsten Nielsen, "Cursing the Day," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 6 no 2 (1992): 200. 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, *Job*, 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.

[79] See Clines, *Job 1–20*, 86. Clines, who is quoted in Watson, in turn quotes Driver and identifies him as making a similar argument.

[80] Watson, *Chaos Uncreated*, 324–25.

[81] Ibid., 322.

What's more, even though Clines describes Job as uttering a curse which he hopes will have a discernible outcome, Clines also acknowledges that this curse has no real force, writing,

> 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.[82]

Whybray concurs, writing,

> [I]n realistic terms these verses simply express Job's futile wish that he had never been born. . . . Despite some of the language employed, there is no justification for interpreting these verses literally.[83]

Naphtali 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."[84]

"You Can Have It": Job's Rejection of God's Blessing

I find these interpreters more convincing than those, like Fishbane and Perdue, who read Job's curse as an attempt to undo the order of creation, an interpretation which is problematic, as discussed above. I want, though, to offer yet another possible way of reading chapter 3, one which does not see Job as being as weak as Watson, Clines, Whybray, and Tur-Sinai presume, nor as strong as Fishbane and Perdue suggest. He is neither simply passive nor simply aggressive, but 'passive aggressive.' What

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[82] Clines, *Job 1–20*, 79.

[83] Whybray, *Job*, 37.

[84] Naphtali Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher Ltd, 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. Bruce Zuckerman, *Job the Silent: A Study in Historical Counterpoint* (NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 125–26.

Job retains and demonstrates in this passage are his wits. Although it is common to see a complete break in Job's attitude between the prologue and the beginning of the poetic section—that is, between chapter 2 and chapter 3—in that he closes his mouth insisting that he will not curse God and opens it to curse God's creation, in truth he does not burn his bridges with the prologue so completely. Both of his refusals to curse God in the prologue are linked to his belief that what has been taken from him already belonged to God. He says, first, "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), and second, "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" (2:10b). What he says in chapter 3 is essentially, "God, you can have it."[85] Job does not deny that God, who has given him everything, has a right to take everything away. Rather, Job attempts to preempt that right by refusing to take what is offered from the outset. He would rather go from womb to tomb, than expose his nakedness to a clothing that can rightfully be stripped from him. Job respectfully declines to participate in life, for if he takes nothing from God, God cannot rightfully take anything from him. Instead of cursing God, he cleverly rejects God's blessing, which, experience has taught him, is a candy-coated poison pill. "You can have it. I prefer to die before having been born."

Yet, of course, as Clines and others have pointed out, Job can hardly undo his existence at this point. He might kill himself, but he cannot go back and make it so that he was never conceived and was never born. He has already lived. He has already taken the candy-coated poison from God, and he cannot give it back now that the sweet coating has dissolved, without effectively changing his tune and saying, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; *cursed* be the name of the LORD." The most he can be saying, then, in chapter 3, is that if he knew then what he knows now, he would not have taken what God offered him. Having taken it, though,

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[85] This interpretation was suggested to me by Philip Levine's poem, "You Can Have It," which begins, "My brother comes home from work/ and climbs the stairs to our room./ I can hear the bed groan and his shoes drop/ one by one. You can have it, he says." The poem goes on to detail his and his brother's hard labor in a factory in 1948, when they were twenty, and ends, "Give me back my young brother, hard/ and furious, with wide shoulders and a curse/ for God and burning eyes that look upon/ all creation and say, You can have it." http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/179090. Downloaded August 2, 2011. Levine's brother's "You can have it" means, essentially, that the work is not worth what it earns, and, by extension, whatever good there is in life is not worth the bad of his current experience. He would, therefore, give back the good to avoid the bad. This is also Job's situation.

he can only swallow it and wish he had known better than to accept it when it was offered.

Yet, Job is not quite as powerless as this would suggest. It is precisely in his implied claim that he would have refused life when it was offered if he had known what was really in store that Job may have an actionable case. For when, after all, was life offered? When was Job given the chance to refuse? He was propelled from his mother's womb into the dangerous world without anyone ever asking how he felt about it. What's more, it is only now that he has all the facts before him. Even if anyone had bothered to ask whether he wanted to be born, if he had only been shown the blessing and not the curse, his decision could hardly be considered binding. "I would not have taken it if I had known what it really was," Job says, and, against the contention that he cannot un-take it now that he has already taken it, Job's curse of the days of his conception and birth offer the counterargument that he cannot really be held responsible for having taken life from God when God never asked him if he wanted to be born and never disclosed to him what his life would be like. Job cannot be unborn, it is true, but he can be absolved from having to bless God when life's good things are taken from him. He can have his right to curse ratified. Or, better yet, he can force God to reinstate the blessing which God had no real right to remove.

I began this section by saying that it seemed to me that Job, uttering his chapter 3 curse, was neither as aggressive as those who view him as trying to rouse chaos insist, nor as passive as those who see him as simply a broken man longing for death claim. I wonder, though, whether the Job I have presented is actually *more* aggressive than scholars like Fishbane and Perdue see him as being. Their Job's aggression is misguided. He is powerless, really, trying to call up forces that he does not understand and which he cannot control. He cuts as sorry a figure as the Job so crushed by suffering that he asks only to die. In chapter 3 as I have interpreted it here, however, Job actually has a case. His words may not get him anywhere, but he does have the right to speak them, and he does have a valid point. He has more wits and wiles than these other interpreters grant him. To return to the question at hand, though, what does this mean for this investigation of Job's creative ability and activity in relation to God? Has he, here, set himself up as a rival creator to God, that is, as a force of chaos? I do not think so—at least, not when we are reading the book *forwards*, the first time through. Job does not seek to create a new world. He simply acknowledges that God's world, as it is, is no good, and, instead, attempts to opt out, even if, making this attempt, Job is more actively critical of God

than passively resigned to his lot. Job is not a rival creator; he is, instead, simply defining his right to criticize the world God has made.

When we come back to chapter 3, after reading the epilogue, it looks somewhat different. Although it does not tell us unambiguously that Job is, here, presenting himself as a rival creator, certain details do look more suspicious than they might have the first time around. The aggressiveness of Job's argument with God, though evident in an initial reading, is highlighted. Although this aggression can be explained as the lashing out of a man in desperate circumstances, it should not be explained away. God's question, "Will you condemn me that you may be justified?" (40:8b) seems particularly apt in relation to chapter 3, where Job has attempted to give back everything God has given him in order to justify his right to utter curses instead of blessings, as discussed above. The world God has created is, fundamentally, not worth living in despite any seemingly good things it may contain, Job claims, and, because it is not worth living in, Job cannot be faulted for failing to appropriately worship the God who has forced him to live there. The realm of the dead, Job insists, is preferable to the world of the living, which God created.

When he 'first' speaks chapter 3, Job seems to assume that the world of the dead is the only alternative world available to him. Indeed, this makes sense in his attempt to preemptively reject God's gift of life. Never having been born, Job would enter a world that exists somehow prior to God's creation. When we return to chapter 3, however, it is with the knowledge that the realm of the dead is not the only alternative world available to Job. The epilogue demonstrates that Job is capable of rejecting God's world in favor of a world much closer to his own preferences than the world of the dead is. Indeed, even before the epilogue, Job's 'death wish' has become obsolete. In his subsequent speeches, and especially in his final long speech of chapters 29–31, Job adopts the position that the world of the living can be salvaged, if only God will take appropriate action, expressing his belief that God's vision of the world-as-it-ought-to-be matches his own. Throughout his speeches, Job works to attract God's attention, insisting that once God sees the disorder into which his world has fallen, God will be swift to enact a remedy, recreating the world-as-it-ought-to-be. When God speaks from the whirlwind, however, and reveals that his world does not match Job's world-as-it-ought-to-be, Job, instead of reverting to his wish to 'live' in the realm of the dead, takes up residence in the world-as-it-ought-to-be, which, I have argued, must be a world of his own creation.

The difference between the world of the epilogue and the world of the dead depicted in chapter 3 does seem to support the idea that, when he spoke chapter 3, Job did not intend to act as a rival creator. The only world he presents as a possible alternative to God's is very different from his own world-as-it-ought-to-be. When we look back at chapter 3 from the perspective of the epilogue, however, we can see the seeds of Job's epilogue action there. In chapter 3, Job has already rejected God's creation, and has argued for his right to do so, so that, although in the rest of his speeches he points to God as the only possible creator of the world, this acceptance of God's creative authority is prefaced by a rejection of it. When God reveals that the world of Job's current experience is the world as he created it to be, Job once again rejects this God and world. Why, though, does he not again wish for death? Why are possibilities open to him at the end of the book that were not there—or which he did not recognize as such—at the beginning of the book? The argument Job makes in chapter 3 provides, I think, an answer to this question, though it is somewhat complex to puzzle out.

Here is how I make sense of it: In chapter 3, Job says to God, "You can have it," and attempts to give back the life God has given him, preferring instead to inhabit the realm of the dead as one who has never been born. As Clines and others have pointed out, however, Job has already been born and to give back what he has already experienced is an impossibility. Job has already lived, and, although he might conceivably undo his life by dying, he cannot undo it to the degree of never having lived; what Job tries to do is nonsense. I have argued, however, that it is not nonsense. Even if Job cannot really return his life to God 'unused,' his attempt to do so can win him the right to curse God's creation and reject God as creator. For the sake of Job's argument in chapter 3, the realm of the dead is the only alternate world open to him. He cannot say, "I'll make another world within this world," for that would mean that he had accepted God's gift of life, acceptance of which would require him to worship God no matter whether God chose to bless or curse him. He can only say, "I'm choosing to die before being born, God." If God responds, "But that's impossible, Job. You have already lived," Job can cite the facts that he was never asked whether he wanted to be born, nor was he shown in advance what his life would entail, as proof of his right to return his life to God. Job cannot be unborn, but what he does is to earn himself the right to behave as one who was never born, by showing that his birth happened against his will. Having earned this right, Job pockets it. He does not mention it, but he still has it when God answers him from the whirlwind. And, then, when

Job discovers that God's world is actually the candy-coated poison pill he thought it was when he spoke his chapter 3 speech, Job is at liberty to make use of his right to reject God's world. He has not taken anything from God, because he was given no chance to reject it. As one never born, Job is a free agent. He is free to create his own world-as-it-ought-to-be, without being guilty of cursing God. He does curse God, but he does not incur guilt for it.

In our rereading, we see the book double. Contradictory facts show themselves to be true. Is Job a rival creator? No, not at first, but, in the end, yes he is. If we look back we find that the seeds of this activity were there all along. But a seed is not a plant. Just because a gun is present in the first act of a play does not mean that it has to be fired, 'Chekhov's gun' notwithstanding. If God had answered Job differently—in the way Job expected, for instance—Job would have reacted differently. The end of the book pushes us back into its midst, and we see there what we did not see before, or what we saw only as possibility and not as actualized fact. In chapter 3, Job argues indirectly for the right to reject God's world, and his argument is, I think convincing. So, at the end of the book, when he makes his own world, the world as he thinks it ought to be, we can look to chapter 3 and see, there, his justification for doing so. If Job is a chaos monster—a rival creator—he is one who has secured a 'permit' in advance. He is no watery monster, blindly destroying whatever lies in his path with a thwack of his mighty tail. He is something much cleverer: a human being.

God's Changeable World: An Alternate Reading of the Epilogue

In my reading of the meaning of the epilogue so far, I have claimed that the fact that Job proceeds to inhabit a world completely different from the one God has just described as the world of his creation identifies Job as a rival creator—his world is set up in opposition to God's—and I have looked back into the book, to the prologue and Job's chapter 3 cursing of the day of his birth, to find the seeds of this behavior. I stand by these observations. The epilogue world *is* a world made by Job. I want, though, to explore another possibility for what this implies about his relationship with God.

It seems possible that Job's creation of this world might not be totally at odds with God's plans for his creation. In chapter 3 of this book, I discussed the ways in which God's world, as presented in his speeches, is

changeable, and identified Leviathan, in God's depiction of the beast, as the agent of uncontrollable and unpredictable change that is sanctioned—indeed, *loved*—by God. I suggested that, perhaps, God's presentation of Leviathan was intended to hold a mirror to Job, not to show him that he has behaved in a way inimical to God's intentions for creation, and must, therefore, be crushed, as some have argued, but to show him that he, like Leviathan, is not entirely under God's thumb. Job, too, is a powerful beast, capable of taking matters into his own hands and surviving in a complex world. If Leviathan is capable of effecting change, so is Job.

Newsom describes Job's response to God in 42:2–6 and the epilogue as functioning as a Bakhtinian 'loophole,' through which Job slips. Gary Saul Morson explains Bakhtin's concept of the loophole, writing,

> 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.[86]

The epilogue as loophole, then, is evidence that even God cannot fully comprehend the world he has created. Although God tells Job that the world works one way, for Job, in the epilogue, it turns out to work in a completely different way. 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. In Newsom's reading, the loophole belongs to Job, who escapes being pinned down or fully defined by God's explanation of the world. Yet, although it is true that Job finds that things turn out differently for him than God has predicted, his escape need not be a 'narrow' one. That is, if my reading of Leviathan as indicating God's embrace of uncontrollable change is correct, Job 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* creatures who are capable of surprising him, and to be thrilled

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[86] Gary Saul Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 90.

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.

If an essential feature of God's world is that God's creatures are free to act unconstrained by God, then God cannot make the world he wants to make without such free activity on the part of creatures. That is to say, God cannot create on his own. If God is to be a creator, Job must also be a creator. There is a fair amount of irony here: God cannot create his world without Job's free participation, but the world Job wants to live in is not the world as God wants it to be. Job makes a world and genuinely surprises God, which pleases God, but the world itself is one which tries to exclude the capacity for surprise which God has built in. Yet, if God both wins and loses, so does Job. Job gets his world-as-it-ought-to-be. He lives there, even though this is not the world God describes himself as having created. The way he gets there, however, is by initiating change, a thing which does not exist in his stable world-as-it-ought-to-be. 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.

Moreover, his bestowing of an inheritance on his daughters may signal that he has learned something, in this regard, from the God of the whirlwind. Instead of clinging to his restored wealth, 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 real individuals. 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.

So, Which Is It?

Above, I have engaged in two main readings of the effect of the epilogue. In the first, Job shows himself to be a rival creator, making his own world in opposition to God, a reading which is supported by the tone and content of God's address to Job and, when the book is read backwards, by the prologue and Job's chapter 3 birthday curse. In the second, Job acts as a creator, but his creativity does not indicate a rivalry with God; rather, the fact that he creates a world different from the one God claims to have created only proves that God's world—in which creatures have been created to be agents of change—is really real. The epilogue may surprise God as much as it surprises readers, but, despite its surface differences from God's whirlwind world, Job's epilogue world could not exist unless God had laid the groundwork which makes its existence possible. Moreover, I have noted that Job's bestowal of an inheritance on his daughters may indicate that his prior idea of the-world-as-it-ought-to-be has been changed by his encounter with God. Whereas he once hoarded power for himself and insisted that he occupy the central position in an unchanging world, now Job relinquishes at least some of the that power and centrality, permitting his daughters to take control of their own lives, just as God permits his creatures to live freely and for their own sakes instead of simply for and by his own good pleasure. In this formulation, while the epilogue world is not identical to the whirlwind word, neither is it identical to Job's previous articulation of his world-as-it-ought-to-be.

So, which is it? Is Job a rival creator whose creation opposes God's and makes a definite break from God's world, or is Job instead a co-creator, whose world makes use of aspects of God's world and whose creative ability is granted by God's authority? It seems to me that, despite their appearance of mutual exclusivity, the book does portray Job as both these things, or at least keeps both options open as real possibilities. There is an unresolvable tension here. Both Job and God speak and act in ways which are genuinely contradictory. God both accuses Job of acting as a rival creator and insists that he has no creative power. The reason why God leans so heavily on this last fact, however, is because Job has successfully created a world, the world of the prologue. Yet, at the same time, the world God describes as the world of his creation should have room for Job to act freely and creatively. In fact, this is one of the major ways in which God's world is distinguished from the world Job describes as the world-as-it-ought-to-be, in which only one central figure—Job himself—is capable of real speech and action, while all other members of the community

are ranged around him, listening in dependent, anticipatory silence. Perhaps the problem here is that God has in mind a particular kind of free and creative action that he intends Job to take—the kind of action that maintains the world as God has created it to be. As Moore and Sherwood point out, "In all democracies . . . freedom is circumscribed no less than it is celebrated"[87] That is, one may do anything, as long as that 'anything' fits within certain predetermined parameters. Job is free, but only to a point. For his part, throughout the book Job ascribes creative power only to God, denying that he has any power to control his situation or to create the world as he would have it be. In the end, however, Job does act creatively, making the epilogue world, as, it turns out, he has also made the world of the prologue. If the free creativity God has in mind for his creatures is circumscribed by God's own plans for his creation, Job has other ideas about the world-as-it-ought-to-be and other plans for maintaining that world.

In the list of questions inspired by the epilogue, as given in this chapter and in the introduction, I asked whether it was possible that Job might be neither an antagonistic rival creator nor a subservient co-creator, but some third kind of thing. Above, I have indicated that the book portrays Job as *both* rival creator and co-creator, and I find myself wondering whether this does make him a third kind of thing, in which, somehow, these opposing characteristics are combined, albeit not without tension. I find myself wondering, moreover, whether the proper name for this tension-ridden third thing is 'a human being.' That is to say, it is not that Job has chosen to act in this way, as opposed to in some other way, but that this is precisely what defines who he is in relation to God. As a human being, Job is rival creator and co-creator, and his relationship to God, his creator, is in a constant state of flux, negotiated and renegotiated between these two opposing poles.

[87] Moore and Sherwood, *Invention*, 106. Moore and Sherwood are writing, here, about the discipline of Biblical Studies and not about the Book of Job, but their observation is applicable nonetheless.

EPILOGUE

NEGOTIATING AND RENEGOTIATING THE WORLD

Terrence Malick's recent film, *Tree of Life*,[1] begins with a quotation from God's speeches in the Book of Job—"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? (38:4a)—which sets the context for what follows. In the film, a mother's young son dies, and, when she, in anguish, cries out to God to tell her 'why,' the scene shifts to an extended montage of the origins of the world: lava erupting from volcanoes, bubbles skidding across the surface of a tidal pool, a dinosaur emerging from the undergrowth in a primeval forest. This montage does much to defamiliarize God's whirlwind speeches, which, for the most part, present a natural world with which present-day readers can be comfortable. "Do you know . . .?" asks God. "Sure," we answer, shrugging. "That's easy. Ask me another one." Malick's film, however, strives to recapture the strange, wild, dangerous otherness of the world depicted in God's speeches.

In this book, I have inquired into the world presented by Job and his friends, and by God, looking at what they have to say about relationships between individuals, the workings of time, and the configuration of space. I have argued that the world described as the world-as-it-ought-to-be by Job and his friends is a world organized around a central, influential figure, in which stability and stasis reign, and in which borders and boundaries perform the necessary work of separating what-ought-to-be from what-ought-not-to-be. God's world, I have argued, is this world's opposite: no central figure organizes its members' attention, change is valued over stability, and 'inside' and 'outside' have no meaning, for the whole of the world is the recipient of God's blessing and care. God's world is a better world than that of Job and his friends. This assessment has, I think, been clear in chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this book, in which I have ended with descriptions of God's world, letting that world have the last word, as the 'straw world' of Job and his friends is shown for what it is and struck down.

God's world is wild and beautiful, whereas the world of Job and his friends is cramped and narrow. Job and his friends are hung up on hierarchies and overly dependent on economic agreements. They are

[1] Terrence Malick, dir., *Tree of Life* (Fox Searchlight Pictures/EuropaCorp, 2011).

overly concerned to differentiate the righteous from the wicked, and to make sure that each group gets what it deserves. God, though, is free with his blessings. He loves his creatures, be they ravens, lions, wild oxen, eagles, Behemoths, or Leviathans. God's speeches, I have argued, provide a direct answer—or, rather, a direct retort—to the claims about the world made by Job and his friends. He shows them what his world is like, and what he shows them is so much better than what they have come up with on their own. "Here is where you really live," God tells Job. "You do not live in that narrow world you thought you occupied. That's not real. That's something you made up. Come out here and be free, as you were meant to be."

But Job doesn't go there. Job chooses his own narrow world over God's wild freedom. He may change this world in some ways, taking elements from God's world, but it is still more his world than God's. Those who insist that, because God must speak authoritatively, the epilogue world has to be God's world, are selling the whirlwind world short, failing to attend to its wild otherness. Moreover, we have become so accustomed to thinking of the wild as something threatened, that it is counterintuitive to see it, instead, as threatening. Malick's montage helps to remedy this, bringing home the wildness of the wild in a vivid, visceral way. Watching that world flicker across the screen, and seeing it as God's answer to Job, I immediately understood why Job goes 'back inside.' Job cannot live out there. There is no place for him, and, consequently, it is no place for him. God does not speak of humans for a reason: they do not belong in the world as God has created it. Describing his world to Job, God may want Job to belong there, but Job must instinctively know that he does not belong.

"Look at Behemoth which I made just as I made you" (40:15), God says to Job, and, although it is possible to read this directive as intended to highlight both God's power and the shared creatureliness of the human and the animal, it is possible to read it another way. It is possible to see in God's desire for Job to look at Behemoth and recognize their shared origins, a deep bewilderment on the part of the creator. Perhaps the directive is not even directed primarily at Job. Perhaps God is speaking half to himself: "I made both of these creatures. How is it that I know one so completely, while the other is a mystery to me?" It is possible to see something similar going on in God's depiction of Leviathan. As already discussed, many scholars read the Leviathan chapter as God's demonstration of his power over 'chaos,' or, at least, over what is very wild, and insist that what God is saying is that, because Job cannot control Leviathan as God does,

Job has no business questioning God about his governance of his creation. Furthermore, some scholars read God's words about Leviathan as words that are also descriptive of Job: like Leviathan, Job is behaving 'chaotically,' and, just as God defeated Leviathan, so God will defeat Job, who is no match for God's 'ordering' power.

Although, in this book I have understood God's words about Leviathan as showing, instead, God's commitment to a diverse, changeable, unbounded world, it is also possible, to understand God's words about Leviathan differently. In Psalm 139, the psalmist sings of being known completely by God, because God is his creator: "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb" (Ps. 139:13). Job, too, is aware of God as his creator: "Your hands fashioned and made me. . . . You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews" (10:8a, 11). But when God speaks, the one he knows so intimately would seem, instead, to be Leviathan. God describes Leviathan minutely, dwelling on every feature of its form. What if God does indeed intend his words about Leviathan to be words about Job, and his knowledge of Leviathan to stand in for knowledge of Job? God speaks about the most powerful creature he knows, and shows that he is intimately acquainted with this beast. If he knows Leviathan, he must surely know Job. But what if this is a kind of ruse? What if God speaks about Leviathan in the hope of distracting Job from the fact that he does not actually speak about Job? What if, moreover, the reason God speaks about Leviathan and not about Job, is because for Leviathan, as for the rest of creation, creation is destiny, whereas for Job, uniquely, it is not? "Here is what the world is like," says God. "I know, because I am its creator. Look how intimately I know even so formidable a beast as Leviathan. You could not get close enough to count this monster's scales, but I know what Leviathan is like because I made Leviathan." Job, though, if I am right about the force of the epilogue, answers that he does not see himself in the world God has made, and recognizing that he, alone of God's creatures, is capable of creating a world for himself different from the world made by God, does just that. For Job, origins are not destiny. "Come out here and be free. I made you. This is where you belong," God says. But Job answers, "Are you kidding? I would be eaten alive."

In my introductory chapter, I wondered whether, if Job rejects God's world, we ought to reject it too, or whether, instead, we ought to 'drop Job like a hot potato.' It seems to me that the Book of Job does not answer this question outright, nor is the answer obvious. God's world is better that Job's in many ways, but it is also true that, as it is presented, Job cannot

really live there. Job makes his own world, but it, too, is flawed; the walls surrounding him do protect him, but they also confine him. What the Book of Job says about creation is, it seems to me, that our relation to the world and to our creator is not a given, but must be constantly negotiated and renegotiated. The Book of Job is a space where we can do this work.

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