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The Divine Speeches of Job 38-41: Chaos Is a Friend of Mine

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Abstract

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The divine speeches in Job 38:1-41:34, along with Job's final reply in 42:1-6, stand as the theological and literary climax of the book. The speeches, which take the form of a legal dispute, utilize a number of different genres that are intended to evoke an emotional response from Job. A rhetorical analysis shows that the purpose of the speeches is to show Job the error of his worldview that had misunderstood the relation of God to creation (and by extension, to humanity), and to re-orient Job to a right understanding of God, God's governance and God's justice. When confronted with the cumulative effect of the storm, the vision of God, and the vivid imagery found in God's speeches, Job, realizing the inadequacy of the worldview from which he had contended, merely retracts his lawsuit against God and ceases his mournful posture.

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THE DIVINE SPEECHES OF JOB 38-41: CHAOS IS A FRIEND OF MINE

INTRODUCTION

The book of Job is a deeply equivocal text, capable of generating multiple interpretations that are defensible exegetically and rhetorically. This ambiguity permeates the book, from its very structure, which juxtaposes the interior dialogue with the framing narrative, to the dialogical nature of much of the work, and even to the syntax and grammar of the text itself. Indeed, the book of Job remains enigmatic, seemingly resistant to any final analysis that one might seek to impose upon it.

Recent scholarship has tended to celebrate this ambiguity, arguing that the dialogical, contradictory nature of the book is itself the key to understanding it.[1] The multiple voices and genres found within the book work in dialogue with each other to produce tensions, that the book, in its final form, does not even attempt to reconcile. The quest for a definitive solution to the problems posed within the book is thus seen as a remnant of the old historical-critical mindset, a static understanding which the book itself seems to resist.

Nowhere is the ambiguity of the text more evident than in the divine speeches, found in chapters 38-41, and in Job's reply to those speeches, in 42:1-6. At first glance, the speeches themselves appear irrelevant at best, answering questions that Job never

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[1] Carol A. Newsom, "Re-Considering Job," *CBR* 5.2 (2007): 157.

explicitly asked and overpowering him with a raw display of power, just as he had feared (9:14-20, 32-35). Likewise, Job's replies to the speeches appear ambiguous: is Job disgusted with the words of God, striking a defiant tone, or is he chastened by what he has heard, repenting of the words that he has spoken without understanding? And if Job *is* repentant, how did the rhetorical content of the speeches affect that transformation? The oblique nature of the speeches, coupled with the equivocal nature of Job's response, presents unique hermeneutical challenges.

Since the divine speeches and Job's response to them are generally recognized as the climax of the book, both theologically and literarily, the answers to these questions, if indeed there are any definitive answers, will tend to color one's interpretation of the rest of the book. Many interpreters seem to bring their preconceived notions and understandings of the book as a whole to this particular text, and their resultant analysis often distorts it, forcing the text to mold into their prior understanding. Of course, when dealing with such a difficult text as this, any interpretive effort must necessarily contain some subjectivity, downplaying certain elements within the book while emphasizing others, but the most cogent argument will at least account for all of these differing voices before making the interpretive move toward the book as a whole.

This paper will take such an interpretive posture, pushing back a bit against that scholarly trend that embraces exegetical pluralism[2] while arguing that the divine speeches do, in fact, serve a definite, cogent, rhetorical purpose, and that Job's response is equally

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[2] We would not mean to misrepresent those scholars who embrace the ambiguity of the book as advocating that all interpretations are equally defensible. We merely argue that the meaning of the book is not left open, that the author of Job had a definite rhetorical strategy which was intended to show a change of thinking on the part of the protagonist, Job. This paper will seek to discern that rhetorical strategy.

coherent. That purpose is doubtlessly subtle and multi-faceted, but may, in fact, be discerned through careful exegetical and rhetorical analysis of the text. Admittedly, the final form of the book of Job remains full of tensions and contradictory elements, and these should not be downplayed, but neither should that ambiguity itself be understood as the hermeneutical key to the book.[3] The book of Job cannot be distilled down to one reductionistic purpose, just as a classic work of art resists simplistic interpretation. However, certain themes do recur throughout the book, and this paper assumes that the text does indeed follow a trajectory that culminates in the divine speeches found in chapters 38-41 and in Job's response to those speeches.

In the texts that this paper will review, God speaks to Job from the tempest, and Job ends his period of mourning as a direct result of what he sees and hears during this encounter. This paper will examine the rhetoric, form and function of what Job heard and will ask why these speeches impacted him as they did. It will argue that the divine speeches in Job 38-41 were framed either by the author or by the final redactor in such a way that they forced a realignment of Job's worldview, a shift that had been brewing under the surface of the text up to this point. All of the characters in the book, including Job and his friends, Job's wife, Elihu, and even the *satan*, had operated out of an understanding of retributive justice.[4] Job pushed against this worldview throughout his dialogues with his friends, but could never quite break free from this understanding that a moral order permeates the world, such that righteousness is always rewarded and sin is always punished by God. When Job encountered God in the tempest, however, God

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[3] Contra Newsom, *Ibid.*

[4] Andre LaCocque, "Justice for the Innocent Job!", *BibInt* 19 (2011): 25.

disabused him of this notion of retributive justice altogether, through a series of tight, purposeful images, culminating in the extended, admiring descriptions of Behemoth and Leviathan that reoriented Job toward the true nature of God and God's relation to the created order.

God's rhetorical questions and vivid imagery brought Job to understand the beautiful symmetry found throughout God's creation. For all of the order and design that manifests itself throughout nature (cf., 38:4-6), there also exists disorder and chaos (cf., 38:8-9). God provides life-sustaining water to the righteous (38:34, 37), and God also waters the wilderness so that grass might grow, quite distant from human eyes and concerns (38:25-27). God provides food for God's people, and God also ensures that the young lion's appetite is sated with its prey (38:39-40).

Unlike "Prince Job" (cf. 31:37), who would trample unrighteousness and remove injustice altogether, God acknowledges the presence of chaos and disorder in the world, and God engages these elements in ways other than mere force. When bad things happen to good people, this does not necessarily imply moral causation, on the part of God or of those who suffer. This paper will argue that when Job realizes this truth, and recognizes that his fundamental presupposition regarding God and God's judgment has been exposed as woefully inadequate, he simply retracts his legal case against God and ceases his period of mourning.

While this understanding of the purpose of the divine speeches and of Job's response is certainly not new,[5] it will be argued that this thesis best accounts for all of the

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

different rhetorical elements that comprise this complex passage. The disequilibrium that the reader experiences upon encountering the divine speeches is felt perhaps more acutely because the author or final redactor has made them privy to the heavenly court scene and the wager between God and the *satan*, of which Job knows nothing. The reader has an entirely different perspective upon Job's dialogue with his friends and upon the divine speeches than do the characters themselves, for the reader has been assured in the prologue that Job deserved none of the evil that befell him. Thus, from the reader's perspective, God's response to Job at first appears arrogant, irrelevant, and a bit out of touch with Job's argument. However, as this paper will demonstrate, God's self-revelation was directed at Job, who lacked the privileged perspective of the reader, and the rhetoric contained in the divine speeches was designed to destroy the last vestiges of Job's archaic worldview, that viewed God as culpable for the evil that had befallen the upright Job.

CHAPTER 2

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING JOB

The book of Job does *not* center upon Job and his suffering. The central question of the book, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" occurs in 1:9,[6] while Job is still a wealthy landowner, and the question appears to be resolved in Job's answer to God in 42:5-6, while Job still suffers. God's approbation of Job is confirmed in 42:7-8, before Job's fortunes have been restored. The suffering that Job endures, and the dialogue that takes place throughout between Job and his friends, ultimately derives from the *satan*'s challenge in the prologue. Likewise, the book concludes once this question has been resolved, in chapter 42.

The primary issue of the book, then, as framed in the *satan'*s question, may be seen as that of humanity's relation to God,[7] although in framing the work this way, other questions must necessarily be taken up as well. Can Job serve God out of purely disinterested piety, one that seeks no recompense for righteousness and that will remain faithful to God even through undeserved calamity? Conversely, does God bear moral responsibility when bad things happen to good people, or perhaps even more shockingly, when good things happen to bad people? These are the questions of the book of Job, and

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[6] LaCocque, "Justice for the Innocent Job!": 21.

[7] Henry Rowold, "Yahweh's Challenge to Rival: The Form and Function of the Yahweh-Speech in Job 38-39," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 210.

so it should not be surprising that the divine speeches of chapters 38-41 would, in some way, speak to this primary theme. In fact, it will be demonstrated that the central arc of the divine speeches, the hermeneutical key to understanding them, is their unveiling of God's relationship to creation, even those parts of creation that are amoral and chaotic from the human perspective.

While we have chosen to frame the issues found in the book of Job within this context, it should be stressed that this is by no means the only way of understanding the book. As stated in the introduction, the ambiguity and complexity of the book have led scholars in numerous hermeneutical directions, looking for the purpose of the book and of the divine speeches. In a fundamental way, then, one's framing of the central issues and themes of the book will direct one's exegetical conclusions regarding individual portions of the text, if one even chooses to look for a central issue at all. The challenge then becomes interpreting individual passages within that framework while still allowing the passage to speak on its own terms, accounting for the differing voices within the text while still discerning an overall theme.

Similarly, the manner in which one approaches the book as a whole will profoundly impact how one views the divine speeches. If the book is seen as inherently disjointed, a collection of disparate parts which have been cobbled together over time,[8] then the divine speeches can easily be misinterpreted or dismissed altogether. The historical-critical scholarship of the mid-nineteenth through twentieth centuries regarded

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[8] Cf. Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job, Together with a New Translation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921) and Marvin H. Pope, *Job,* The Anchor Bible, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965) for classic examples of critical engagement with the book of Job.

the book as a jumbled mess, and a convoluted transmission history was postulated that accounted for the tensions seen within the texts. The third cycle of dialogue among Job and his friends had been corrupted, and the Elihu speech represented a late redaction. The divine speeches were usually regarded as secondary, and the Behemoth and Leviathan material from the second divine speech was seen as a later addition, still. Scholars postulated that Job's original reply had been dissected, displaced and expanded to account for the new material in the second speech, and the text of the book as a whole was considered corrupt and poorly edited.[9]

Critical methodology, while still directing much of the current theological inquiry regarding the book, has slowly been displaced by a renewed emphasis on final-form reading,[10] that is, an appreciation of the book in its received and canonized form. Such an understanding approaches the text as a finished work of literature that may then be engaged according to standard literary and hermeneutical rules. This view typically does not discount the foundational insights of the redactional and historical critics, but chooses rather to focus upon the canonical literature's affect within the community of faith, in which it is considered authoritative.[11] This paper chooses to take such an approach, viewing the book of Job as a unit rather than as a collection of disparate parts, while certainly not discounting the probability of a complex transmission history.

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[9] Tony Campbell, "God and Suffering – 'It Happens': Job's Silent Solution," *ATI* 3.1 (2010): 160.

[10] Newsom, "Re-Considering Job," 155-56.

[11] Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 533.

This choice to regard the final form of the book as fundamentally coherent necessarily limits the scope and relevance of certain historical-critical arguments. Is the God who speaks with authority from the tempest the same God who placed a wager on Job's reaction to adversity?[12] Is Elihu merely a late interloper who decided to write himself into the text, or is he perhaps even the original author of the book, giving his authoritative answer through the character Elihu? Are Job's replies to the divine speeches in their original locations, and are the divine speeches themselves even original to the story? These and similar historical-critical questions, while they do indeed bear directly upon the exegesis of the text at hand, lie beyond the scope of this paper and must necessarily be deferred, except where absolutely essential. Problems of authorship, dating and background of the book will be left to others, in favor of understanding the meaning of the text in its final form. The synchronic, literary reading that this paper favors assumes the basic unity of the text and appreciates the book of Job as a whole, "not despite its complexity but because of it."[13]

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[12] Norman Habel, "In Defense of God the Sage," in *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job* (ed. Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin; Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 25-26, argues that two different and quite distinct gods are presented within the book of Job.

[13] Daniel Timmer, "God's Speeches, Job's Responses, and the Problem of Coherence in the Book of Job: Sapiential Pedagogy Revisited," *CBQ* 71 (2009): 289.

CHAPTER 3

FORM AND GENRE CONSIDERATIONS

Outline

Before considering the genres and forms found within the divine speeches, it would be helpful to provide a basic outline of Job 38:1-42:6.[14]

1. **First divine speech** (38:1-40:5)
   a. Narrative introduction (38:1)
   b. God calls out and challenges Job (38:2-3)
   c. God's governance on display (38:4-39:30)
      i. God's governance and sustenance of the universe (38:4-38)
      ii. God's secret knowledge of the animal kingdom (38:39-39:30)
   d. God demands a response (40:1-2)
   e. Job responds (40:3-5)
2. **Second divine speech** (40:6-42:6)
   a. Narrative introduction (40:6)
   b. God calls out and challenges Job (40:7-14)
   c. God's creatures on display (40:15-41:34)
      i. Behemoth (40:15-24)
      ii. Leviathan (41:1-34)
   d. Job responds (42:1-6)

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[14] Cf. Carol A. Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *1&2 Maccabees, Introduction to Hebrew Poetry, Job, Psalms* (ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 596.

Note the similarities in form and content between the two divine speeches. Both begin with a brief narrative introduction, followed by God's challenge(s) to Job. In these challenges, God forecasts the themes for each speech: the first speech corrects Job's misunderstanding of God's governance (עצה),[15] while the second speech focuses upon God's justice or judgment (משפט).[16] Similarly, God challenges Job twice with the imperative, "Now gird up your loins like a man" (38:3, 40:7), so that Job may answer God's charges. The bodies of the speeches are similar in form, if not entirely in content. Finally, Job responds to God after each speech.

For all of their similarities, the speeches also demonstrate marked differences. The body of the first speech is divided between cosmic, universal imagery and observations about a number of wild animals, whereas the second speech confines itself to the extended presentation of only two creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan. Also, in the first speech, God demands a response from Job, who quietly demurs, whereas Job's response to the second speech comes unbidden, after Job has come face to face with the rhetorical images of Behemoth and Leviathan.

Genres and Forms

Before the purpose(s) of the divine speeches can be rightly discerned, the speeches themselves must be understood within the context of their specific genres. Unfortunately, the length and sheer complexity of the speeches renders this task difficult, at best. Numerous genres and forms can be detected within the speeches, some more speculative

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[15] Rowold, "Yahweh's Challenge to Rival," 200.

[16] Timmer, "God's Speeches, Job's Responses," 294.

than others, which helps to explain the variety of scholarly opinion upon the passage, and thus upon the book, as a whole.

This paper will examine four of the most pertinent form and genre considerations to the thesis at hand, demonstrating how the divine speeches participate in these genres. Again, this list of forms found within the divine speeches is not exhaustive, but is simply laying the groundwork for the later explication of the passages. The four types of texts that will be examined are the legal disputation, the Creator hymn, the *wasf*, and the challenge-to-rival form.

Legal Disputation

In terms of form, the divine speeches should primarily be understood as a disputation between God and Job. Beginning with the initial, seed insight in 9:2-3, in which Job exploited the nuance of the verb צדק to include its forensic use ("to be [legally] in the right"),[17] Job increasingly explored the possibilities of going to trial against God. Initially, in chapters 9-10, Job wished merely to stand vindicated of the charges he assumed had been brought against him by God, but by 31:35-37, Job's posture had shifted dramatically, to the point that Job issued a formal summons to God as the plaintiff in this legal case. While the use of legal imagery can be found elsewhere in the Old Testament, typically within the context of God's covenantal relationship with the people of Israel (cf. Isa. 3:13-15, Mic. 6:1-2), such an extended understanding of taking God to court as the defendant was unprecedented in Hebrew literature.[18]

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[17] Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 409.

[18] Gregory W. Parsons, "The Structure and Purpose of the Book of Job," *BSac* 138.550 (April 1981): 148.

This legal metaphor eventually comes to dominate Job's understanding of his relationship to God. Throughout the book, Job vacillates between despair that God would never answer him in this legal context (9:3, 16) or that God would overpower him (9:19-23), and a sense of righteous anger and longing that he might one day succeed in his lawsuit against God (13:18, 23:3-7). Beginning in 9:33 and continuing in 16:18-21, Job appeals for a mediator, or an arbitrator, who can ensure that Job receives a fair trial against God.

In chapter 24, Job delivers perhaps his most striking legal indictment against God, charging God with endemic indifference toward injustice. These charges resonate with prophetic irony, for they are the very legal charges that God levels against the Israelites repeatedly through the prophets (cf. Isa. 1:21-23; 5:3-7) as evidence that they have forsaken God, and as justification for divine judgment. Within this context, Job uses such legally and emotionally charged language to demand a response from God.

Unfortunately, a fuller discussion of this dominant theme within the book of Job is beyond the scope of this paper. This basic understanding of the forensic context, however, informs the manner in which the divine speeches may be understood, especially regarding their form. When God answers Job from the storm in 38:1-41:34, God's speeches should be seen within this legal framework which Job has constructed throughout the book. By this point in the text (38:1), Job has worked through his earlier trepidation and appears ready to stand trial before God (cf. 31:35-37). His speech in chapter 31 ends on a triumphant note, as he proclaims that he will approach God "like a prince" (Job 31:37, NRSV).

If Job expects God to take the defense, then this notion is shaken rather quickly. Instead, God levels a series of accusations against Job, following the standard rhetorical construction of a legal disputation: "formal summons … (38:2-3; 40:7-14), the defense proper … (38:4ff; 40:15ff), and the rival's retraction … (40:3-5; 42:1-6)." [19] While this disputation makes use of differing genres within its arguments, the basic framework of the divine speeches flows from and follows this legal metaphor.

Creator Hymn

While the legal disputation acts as the framework of the divine speeches, their genre most closely approximates that of the creator hymn, specifically that found in Psalm 104.[20] In this psalm, "rigorous thinking and rapturous wonder find a compelling convergence,"[21] as God sustains and enjoys the inhabitants of God's creation, even Leviathan, who is traditionally regarded as God's primordial enemy elsewhere in Scripture (Ps. 74:14; Isa. 27:1). Since this psalm bears such close relation to the structure of the divine speeches in Job 38-41, it will prove fruitful to analyze its thematic elements, so that we can then discern whether the author of the divine speeches in Job shares common rhetorical interests with the psalmist.

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[19] Norman C. Habel, "The Design of Yahweh's Speeches," in *Sitting with the Sages: Selected Studies on the Book of Job* (ed. Roy B. Zuck; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 415.

[20] Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 596.

[21] William P. Brown, "The Lion, the Wicked, and the Wonder of it All: Psalm 104 and the Playful God," *Journal for Preachers* 29.3 (Jan 2006): 15.

Psalm 104 follows a basic structure:[22]

vv. 1-4	God and the heavens
vv. 5-13	God and the earth
vv.14-23	God and people
vv.24-30	"All" God's works
vv. 31-35	Conclusion: God's joy and human joy

Several points bear mentioning regarding the structure of Psalm 104, as it relates to the divine speeches in Job. First, and perhaps most importantly, human beings do not appear in the psalm until v. 14, and even then, they are accorded no prominence or distinction from the other animals.[23] Rather, the psalm begins with traditional cosmogonic imagery before transitioning to God's continuing care of creation, which includes, but is not centered upon, human beings. Similarly, after their respective introductory materials, the divine speeches in Job begin with cosmogonic imagery (38:4-38:38) before transitioning to God's continuing care of creation (38:39-39:30), and finally concluding with extended, admiring descriptions of the greatest of God's creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan (40:15-41:34). Humanity plays no role in the bodies of the divine speeches, except perhaps as a rhetorical foil against Behemoth and (especially) Leviathan.

The list of animals in the Joban divine speeches mirrors that found in Psalm 104, although not exclusively or in the same order. Lions (Job 38:39-40; Ps 104:21-22), mountain goats (Job 39:1; Ps. 104:18), wild donkeys (Job 39:5; Ps 104:11), and

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[22] J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *1&2 Maccabees, Introduction to Hebrew Poetry, Job, Psalms* (ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 1097.

[23] Richard Whitekettle, "A Communion of Subjects: Zoological Classification and Human/Animal Relations in Psalm 104," *BBR* 21.1 (2011): 174.

Leviathan (Job 41:1-34; Ps. 104:26) are represented in each passage. This common list of animals, along with the similarities of theme and structure, suggests either a common origin for the two works, or perhaps a purposeful subversion of the psalm by the author of Job. This would be most pronounced in the case of Leviathan, who is presented in Psalm 104 as a peaceful, playful sea creature, but in Job, his is a fierce, terrifying presence.[24] Since subversion of traditional forms and motifs was practiced by the character of Job throughout the book, it would seem more likely that the author of the divine speeches in Job is borrowing and modifying characters and themes from the Psalm.

A final note should be made regarding the depiction of the animals in Psalm 104, as it relates to Job. In both works, the animals are depicted in their daily routines, quite apart from human concerns. They are shown partaking in universal activities such as eating, drinking, and providing for their families (Job 38:39-41; Ps. 104:10-15), giving birth (Job 39:1-3), experiencing love and joy (Job 39:13), and playing (Job 40:20; Ps. 104:26). The obvious implication is that the animals, even those who live in the wild and never encounter humans, exist in relation to their creator, and thus have integrity in and of themselves.[25] As will be demonstrated later, this notion is integral to the rhetorical purpose of the divine speeches.

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[24] Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 597.

[25] Whitekettle, "A Communion of Subjects," 182-184.

Wasf

"*'Wasf*' is an Arabic word meaning 'description'."[26] The term refers to a poem that is traditionally recited at Arabic weddings, praising the physical attributes of the bride and groom.[27] Within biblical studies, the *wasf* is typically used as a genre-label within the Song of Songs to describe the poetic approbation between the bride and her beloved.

As a strictly literary device, the *wasf* rubric may be used outside of this immediate context of the Arabic or Middle Eastern wedding, to highlight literary forms and constructions, and to help identify the purposes of certain passages. The *wasf* construction may only be discerned in a few places in the Old Testament, apart from Song of Songs (cf. the *wasf* to Goliath in 1 Sam. 17:4-7). Perhaps its most extended use, however, is in the divine speeches of Job, as God admiringly describes the creatures Behemoth and Leviathan.

Although Hebrew poetry is complex syntactically, *wasf*s adhere to a fairly standard construction. Obviously, they exhibit parallelism and utilize simile and metaphor, as would be expected of poetic constructs, but when they describe a male, the first syntactic position of the sentence will usually be the body part which is being described, followed by the description. Thus, when speaking of Behemoth in 40:18, עצמיו אפיקי נחושה ("his bones are tubes of bronze"), and of Leviathan in 41:22, בצוארו ילין עז, ("in his neck lodges strength"). The purpose for this construction is quite possibly to "evoke an emotional response"[28] by highlighting the body part and then

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[26] David Bernat, "Biblical *Wasf*s Beyond Song of Songs," *JSOT* 28.3 (2004): 328.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Bernat, Biblical *Wasf*s, 332.

describing it in fantastic detail. In Song of Songs, the emotional response to these body parts is aesthetic satisfaction and love; in Job, the response is shock and fear.

The second purpose of the *wasf* construction manifests itself in Song of Songs, as the daughters of Jerusalem ask the woman: "What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women?" She responds with a lengthy *wasf* that is intended to persuade these other young women of the superiority of her lover. In extolling his virtues, the woman is thus able vicariously to participate in his status, as well.[29] Similarly in Job, when God extols the awesome and terrifying characteristics of Behemoth and Leviathan in particular, God's power and strength become all the more pronounced. By focusing so intently upon these awesome beasts, the reader is drawn beyond them, to the God who alone can subdue their raw power.

Challenge-to-Rival

Within the context of the legal disputation found in Job 38-41, Rowold discerns a distinct sub-genre, which he labels the "challenge-to-rival" genre. In this "confrontation between rivals…one challenges the antagonist to duplicate the deeds that constitute his claim to authority."[30] The most notable parallels may be found in deutero-Isaiah, as Yahweh challenges the rival gods and idols in a legal process, to determine who among them may truly be called God.

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Rowold, "Yahweh's Challenge to Rival," 209.

As its name would imply, this genre is characterized by the use of challenge-questions. A comparison of such rhetorical questions in the speeches from deutero-Isaiah and Job reveals structural and thematic affinities:

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? (Isa 40:12)	Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out 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'? (Job 38:8-11)

In this comparison, note that the challenge questions between the passages are remarkably alike in both form and content. Notice also the similarities in the vivid, cosmological imagery between the two passages. In both cases, God challenges God's rivals with God's experience as the creator and maintainer of the primal waters and of the land. God asks questions that are intended to elicit only one answer: "You." This form of questioning thus asserts God's lordship, as the only one who has actually performed such acts in the primordial past, and who, by implication, alone retains the power to perform similar acts in the present and future.

In a similar manner, God asks Job several series of rhetorical questions whose implicit answer should be understood as "No": for example, "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion?" (38:31), or "Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook, or press down its tongue with a cord?" (41:1). The fact that Job cannot perform such feats merely points out the absurdity of his approaching God as a rival. We see then that the rhetorical questions found in the divine speeches should not necessarily

be regarded as didactic tools meant to teach Job knowledge,[31] for Job can be presumed to already know the answers to the questions, as they are self-evident. Rather, the questions that God asks Job legitimate God's lordship, even as they undermine Job's position as a rival to God.

As a result of Job's ignorant and subversive use of language, God approaches Job as a rival claimant to God's throne, who is thus worthy of the excoriating rhetoric that would usually be reserved for rival gods and idols. Job had challenged God's righteousness and sense of justice (cf. 9:24), and he had offered a blistering indictment of the sins that God apparently condoned (chapter 24). In this manner, Job had presumed to judge God and God's activities as a moral peer. Thus, even as God attempts to re-orient Job's understanding of God's relationship to the created order, God must deal seriously with Job's arrogant usurpation of power and authority. Job approaches God as a prince (31:37), and God must set Job back in his proper relational place before Job can properly understand God's rhetorical purpose within the speeches.

Conclusion

The divine speeches in Job 38-41 are lengthy and complex literary compositions. In form and function, they should be understood as the climactic legal disputation to which Job's and his friends' dialogues have been building. When God speaks from the storm, God seems to treat Job as a rival claimant to God's lordship, so God subjects Job to the same

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[31] Contra Von Rad, "Job XXXVIII and Ancient Egyptian Wisdom," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1966), who postulates that the divine speeches are modeled upon Egyptian onomastica, acting functionally as didactic, catechetical tools in line with the Wisdom tradition.

type of questioning that may be found in deutero-Isaiah, wherein God asserts lordship over the various idols and gods found in the land.

This disputational form makes use of a number of different genres, most notably the Creator hymn, as exemplified in Psalm 104, and the *wasf*, as seen throughout Song of Songs. The resultant imagery and rhetoric found throughout these different forms reflects a careful composition that is designed to elicit an emotional, visceral response from its audience. The next chapter will discuss in greater detail how these disparate elements, forms and genres cohere to form a cogent, rational argument that ultimately persuades Job to drop his legal case against God.

CHAPTER 4

PURPOSE OF THE DIVINE SPEECHES

Introduction

The divine speeches in Job 38-41 have one major purpose, collectively, and that is to re-orient Job's understanding of God's relationship to God's creation, and even more specifically, of God's relationship to humanity. We have already seen how the speeches employ a variety of genres and forms within their general framework of a legal disputation, and now we will examine how these forms cohere into a rational argument. The paper will conclude that the speeches indeed have a profound impact upon Job, who retracts his legal case against God and repents of his mournful posture.

Before proceeding too far, it seems necessary to clearly define the worldview which the divine speeches seek to correct. With the exception of God, every character in the book, from Job and his wife, to Job's three friends, Elihu, and even the *satan*, operates out of the same basic notion of morality. This worldview understands the world and reality as fundamentally just, such that righteous behavior is always rewarded and evil is always punished by God.

The *satan* sets the theme for the book with his question in 1:9: "Does Job fear God for nothing?"[32] In the first 37 chapters of the book, this remains the operative question. God initiates a test wherein Job loses his wealth, all of his possessions, his

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[32] LaCocque, "Justice for the Innocent Job!": 21.

children, and finally even his health, in an effort to prove that Job will ultimately serve God despite the loss of everything except his life.

Initially, after the calamities have fallen upon him, Job appears to pass the test, as he twice affirms that both good and evil come from God. In 1:21, Job says, “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." Shortly after this, in 2:10, Job rebukes his wife: “"You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" The narrator makes it a point to note that, “in all this Job did not sin with his lips” (2:10).

Beginning in chapter 3, however, and coinciding with the arrival of his friends, Job’s tone changes dramatically. His insistence upon his own innocence forces him to conclude that his suffering is wrongful, and so he turns his attention toward God. Job accuses God of being capricious (7:19-20) and morally corrupt (9:24), and of obsessively hunting Job down to destroy him (16:9). In chapter 24, Job universalizes this vision, accusing God of rampant injustice, since the wicked continue to take advantage of the widows, orphans and needy, unimpeded. Through the process, Job subtly shifts from protesting his own innocence to indicting God for the evil and injustice that runs rampant in the world.

Worldviews by nature are implicit and thus extremely difficult to articulate or modify. Throughout the dialogues with his friends, Job pushes against his worldview of divine retribution, sensing that something is wrong but never quite being able to make the shift and realize the inadequacy of his moral understanding. He grounds his understanding of reality through his senses, in what he knows and perceives to be right.

Therefore, since Job knows that he is innocent of any moral wrongdoing, his search for moral coherence ultimately impugns God and God's governance of the world.

For their part, Job's friends take umbrage at Job's characterization of God and God's justice. While they implicitly share Job's moral worldview of retributive justice, they arrive at radically different conclusions than Job does, since they seem unwilling to acknowledge the possibilities that Job ascribes to God. The friends work through the implications of their own worldviews through the cycle of dialogues as well, ultimately concluding that Job must indeed be a sinner (cf. 22:5), or else such judgment would not have befallen him. Eventually, the dialogue among the friends and Job breaks down, because they have reached an impasse. All start from the same moral premise that Job's misfortune requires that somebody be guilty, yet differing epistemological assumptions lead to such divergent positions that further communication becomes impossible. Whereas Eliphaz generally appeals to experience and revelation (cf. 4:7-21) and Bildad appeals to tradition (cf. 8:8-10), Job appeals to the primacy of his own senses (cf. 13:1-2), what his body and mind tell him is real.

Even Elihu, the late interloper who appears from nowhere and disappears just as abruptly, shares this same understanding of retributive justice. His are the words of traditional religious discourse, so to grasp how endemic such thinking was in this particular milieu, we will consider now the words of Elihu (*italics* added for emphasis):

> Therefore, hear me, you who have sense, far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should do wrong. For *according to their deeds he will repay them*, and according to their ways he will make it befall them (34:10-11).
>
> Thus, knowing their works, he overturns them in the night, and they are crushed. *He strikes them for their wickedness* while others look on, because they turned aside from following him, and had no regard for any of his ways (34:25-27).

> *If they listen, and serve him, they complete their days in prosperity*, and their years in pleasantness. *But if they do not listen, they shall perish by the sword*, and die without knowledge (36:11-12).

In a work as complex and deeply dialogical as Job, it is unexpected and significant when all of the characters share implicit assumptions on such a fundamental theme as divine retribution and retributive justice. Throughout the book, from the *satan's* insightful question in the opening chapter, to the friends' and Elihu's traditional, if uninspired, speeches regarding God's dealings with humanity, to Job's characterizations of God and God's manner of interacting with the world, this implicit assumption abounds. The purpose of the divine speeches, then, should be understood primarily as God's correction of Job's fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of God's moral relationship to humanity.

Since worldviews are by their very nature tightly held and not easily modified, we should expect deeply evocative language and imagery in the divine speeches, forms and metaphors that might induce intense emotions and thus a change of mind and heart. God must present a world so vivid that it displaces Job's own sense of reality. To this end, it is important to note that God speaks to Job from the midst of a storm. Elihu's speech in chapters 32-37 ends as the storm approaches, and the tension builds as Elihu masterfully incorporates the elements of the storm into his parting words.[33] The reader can almost see and feel the storm that swirls around Job and his friends:

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[33] As stated in the first chapter, this paper willfully adopts a synchronic reading of the text, even while acknowledging the possibility that the Elihu speeches are a later redaction. Whether Elihu was original or inserted later, the author of this material masterfully builds Elihu's argument to a literary crescendo, utilizing the storm imagery to anticipate the theophany from the tempest.

> [Behold!] God is great, and we do not know him" (36:26). "[Look!] He scatters his lightning around him" (36:30). ""At this also my heart trembles, and leaps out of its place. Listen, listen to the thunder of his voice and the rumbling that comes from his mouth (37:1-2).

Elihu rightfully sees God in the approaching storm, even before God speaks from its midst. While this paper will focus upon the rhetoric that is used within the speeches, we should not lose sight of the fact that Job heard these words in the midst of a profound, personal encounter with God. Not only are theophanies in the Bible often accompanied by storms (cf. 2 Kgs 2:1, Ezra 1:4, Ps 148:8),[34] which may connote the wrath and power of God, but earlier in the book, Job had accused God of bruising him with a tempest, and multiplying his wounds without cause (9:17). Perhaps ironically, then, God does appear to Job within this context of a storm. We shall now turn to the divine speeches themselves, to see the manner in which God's rhetoric from the storm radically alters Job's moral understanding. While this section of the paper will not be strictly an exegetical exercise, words matter, especially in this book, as we shall see; thus, God's use of deeply evocative imagery and rhetoric in these speeches deserves careful scrutiny.

The First Divine Speech and Job's Response (38:1-40:5)

God's Charge Against Job

Job's final speech in chapters 29-31 provides perhaps the most poignant view of Job's moral understanding, and of what he expected from his relationship with God. When God did not deliver as Job had expected (30:26), Job was devastated. Presumably, the answer which Job expects to hear from God now is, "Job, you are more righteous than I,

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[34] Helmut Utzschneider, "'…But Mine Eye Seeth Thee!'(Job 42:5): The Book of Job and an Aesthetic Theology of the Old Testament," *CTR* 8.1 (2010), 95.

since I did not stretch out my hand when you cried out to me in your distress, even though you had upheld your side of the bargain" (cf. 30:24). The God who in fact does answer Job from the whirlwind is certainly not that socially constructed God from Job's prior understanding (cf. chapter 29, in which Job seems to expect God to behave consistently with social conventions of the day), and the answer that God brings to Job is wholly unexpected and confrontational.

God's opening words set the tone for the first speech: "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge" (38:2). The question, "Who is this?" may be seen as a direct response to Job's final demand for justice in 31:35, 37: "Let the Almighty answer me!...Like a prince I would approach him!"[35] The true imbalance of power between God and Job may be felt strongly in God's response, here in the opening line of the divine speech. This imbalance appears purposeful, and has caused quite a few commentators to argue that God's agenda seems to be bullying Job into submission, as Job had earlier feared (9:3-4, 14-15).[36]

God does indeed address Job as a rival, since Job has elevated himself to that stature, but God's purpose does not stop at Job's denigration and submission, as it does in parallel passages from the same genre in deutero-Isaiah, where God confronts the false idols and gods (Isa. 41:24) and embarrasses them with their own impotence. Rather, we shall demonstrate that God's purpose in the divine speeches is twofold: first, God aims to set Job in his proper place in relation to God, even if this means shaming him into submission, and second, God seeks to re-orient Job toward a proper understanding of

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[35] Rowold, "Yahweh's Challenge to Rival," 200.

[36] Cf. Andre Lacocque, "The Deconstruction of Job's Fundamentalism," *JBL* 126.1 (2007): 83.

God's relationship to the created order. This twofold purpose does not reveal itself sequentially, for Job must glimpse the true scope and mystery of God's cosmic governance before he can understand his limited role within that newfound reality. In that light, this initial query from the storm sets the tone for God's first objective to be met, as Job's stature is immediately diminished toward its proper place.

In this same opening line, God brings forth the first charge against Job: "Who darkens counsel by words without knowledge" (38:2)? Job stands accused of darkening God's counsel (עצה) in some way through his words and speech. The Hebrew word עצה is a multivalent word, and may carry several connotations. While most versions render it as "counsel", the word's scope is broader, including the idea of active planning or design,[37] and "also the power and governance to carry that plan through."[38] In other words, Job is charged with darkening, or perhaps occluding and distorting, the true nature of God's divine governance.

The context for this charge may likely lie in 12:13-25. In this passage, Job affirms that counsel (עצה) and understanding belong to God, but then Job offers a subversive view of God's governance, presenting it as a plan that tears things down and imprisons men for nothing (v. 14), a power which controls the water so that there is either drought or flooding, both of which are extreme and superfluous (v. 15); a purpose that pours contempt on kings and nobles (vv. 18, 21) and makes nations great, only to destroy

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[37] Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 601.

[38] Rowold, "Yahweh's Challenge to Rival": 200.

them (v. 23). Thus, Job argues that God's עצה is "capricious, arbitrary [and] malicious."[39]

The charge is that Job darkened and twisted the understanding of God's עצה through his use of words without knowledge. Elihu had earlier accused Job of multiplying words without knowledge (35:16), and it seems that God has taken up his charge.[40] Words hold a special prominence in the book of Job: the initial wager between the *satan* and God was whether Job would curse God to God's face (1:11), and the narrator makes a point of telling us that "in all this, Job did not sin with his lips" (2:10).

Words figure prominently throughout the dialogues between Job and his friends, as well. This perhaps should not be surprising, due to the dialogical nature of much of the book, but the Hebrew word מלה , which translates as "word", appears 34 times in Job, and is often used among the disputants to refer to the overarching content of one's argument. The book of Job is built, in a very real sense, upon words and arguments, rhetoric that delineates and sometimes betrays worldviews. Words in themselves appear to convey power, both as a positive force (4:4) and as a crushing, negative one (19:1). The rhetoric of Job and his friends carries immense weight, as they each struggle to convey their worldviews through the use of words. Job's wife suggests that the use of words will end Job's suffering (2:9), and Elihu and God both accuse Job of using his words subversively, to shroud or darken God's עצה.

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[39] Ibid.

[40] David R. Jackson, "'Who Is This Who Darkens Counsel?' The Use of Rhetorical Irony in God's Charges against Job," *WTJ* 72 (2010): 155.

In chapter 29, Job paints a vivid scene of his previous social standing, and we see that the entire social arrangement was oriented toward speech. Job would sit at the gates of the city, counseling and judging (vv. 14-16, 21-22). The princes and nobles deferred to Job, putting their hands over their mouths (v. 9) and keeping silent as they listened and waited for his counsel (vv. 21-22). We find that Job's moral world was relational, mediated by words and arguments, which explains why the rhetoric in the divine speeches also assumes a relational, questioning posture.

God's commands Job in v.3: "Gird now your loins like a man!" The phrase "gird up your loins" is attested elsewhere in the Old Testament (2 Ki. 4:29, 9:1; Jer. 1:17), and may mean simply to tie up one's skirts or clothing in preparation for action. In Jer. 1:17, however, the phrase seems to carry a psychological connotation as well, implying a fearful servant who must prepare himself mentally for the challenge at hand. The addition of "like a man" here (and repeated at the beginning of the second speech, in 40:7) seems to carry this additional weight, as God challenges Job to prepare himself for the charges which have been brought against him, and to act like a man.

God's Use of Rhetorical Questions

The primary literary device that the divine speeches employ is the rhetorical question.[41] The questions in the divine speeches are rhetorical in the sense that they "ask something that both the questioner and his auditor know, and that the questioner knows that his auditor knows, and that the auditor knows that the questioner knows he knows."[42] In

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[41] Chapters 38-41 employ over 65 rhetorical questions.

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

other words, these are questions for which the intended answer is no answer, because they are in some sense self-evident.

God uses such questions throughout the speeches as a rhetorical device, not merely to "impose information"[43] upon Job, but to allow Job to reflect upon knowledge that Job already possesses and needs to ponder anew. Job already knows who laid the foundation of the earth (38:4), who gives wisdom and understanding to the mind (38:36), and who gives the wild donkey his freedom (39:5). These and other similar questions merely serve to draw Job's focus toward those particular aspects of God's relationship to the created order, allowing him to see them from a fresh perspective.

The rhetorical questions that permeate the divine speeches also serve to soften the tone of the monologue. This may be seen clearly by changing the interrogatives into declarative statements: "*You* were nowhere when I founded the earth. (Admit this, if you indeed have understanding). *I* set its measures, as you know, and *I* stretched a line over it. Its sockets were sunk upon nothingness. *I* set its cornerstone" (38:4-6).[44] The tone here is braggadocious and arrogant, not drawing Job into the imagery and power of the metaphors but rather sneering at his relative impotence compared to God.

Many commentators do see God's speeches as disdainful and bullying,[45] and indeed it would be a mistake to discount their direct, challenging nature, as Rowold has pointed out with his proposed "challenge-to-rival" genre.[46] However, we would propose

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Fox, "Job 38 and God's Rhetoric," 59.

[45] Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 169.

[46] Rowold, "Yahweh's Challenge to Rival": 199.

that despite the necessary initial forcefulness of God's questioning, the use of rhetorical questions does change the character of the speeches from a domineering to a more catechetical posture. By catechetical, we do not mean to imply that the rhetorical questions impart newfound knowledge to Job,[47] but rather that they allow God to focus sharply upon a series of vignettes that draw Job into their metaphorical constructs and together form a rational argument. Thus, in the end, Job does receive new awareness as God reorients his moral understanding.

Cosmological and Climatological Imagery

The first divine speech, in chapters 38-40:5, is divided roughly in half, between cosmological and climatological questions and a series of questions related to the animal kingdom. This sequence is important to note, for the cosmological rhetoric that begins the first speech serves initially to shock and awe Job. Even though Job knows the answers to the questions, the staccato repetition of questions that lie beyond the bounds of human activity serves to magnify God's stature while simultaneously diminishing Job's.

The initial questions employ primordial, cosmological imagery. In 38:4-7, God speaks of laying the earth's cornerstone, of measuring and laying its foundations. The extended imagery is quite remarkable, as God exhibits the knowledge and expertise necessary to perform such a massive undertaking. This process of planning and building in an orderly fashion speaks directly to the charge against Job, and demonstrates both the wisdom and efficacy of God's עצה.

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[47] Contra von Rad, "Job XXXVIII and Ancient Egyptian Wisdom."

Similarly, in vv. 8-11, God speaks of enclosing the primordial sea and placing boundaries and bars[48] to limit its advance. The sea here should be understood as the primordial waters, the classic representation of chaos, which was a personified force that God subdued at creation.[49] This mythological entity is attested in Egyptian, Babylonian and other Near Eastern texts that predate the biblical writings, and was universally recognizable as an enemy or opposing force to the gods.[50] God's עצה, then, may be seen in this image as constraining chaos and evil.

However, the imagery in vv.8-9 in particular reveals a theme that lies at the heart of the speeches, as God describes the birth and care of the newly born sea. This subversion of the traditional understanding of God's relationship with the sea[51] (cf. Ps. 74:13, 89:9-10, Isa. 51:9-10) does not deny the chaotic nature of the sea, but rather pictures God as its caring parent![52] Thus, the order, structure and laying of the earth's foundation by God lies juxtaposed with the birth, care and containment of the chaotic waters, and these disparate images all inform Job's understanding of the עצה of God. In both cases, the imagery is quite specific, and the cumulative rhetorical effect is that God's creation, while it certainly displays order and symmetry, also inherently exhibits disorder

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[48] Cf. Jonah 2:6, in which Jonah speaks of descending to the roots of the mountains, where the earth with its "bars" was around him.

[49] F. Stolz, "Sea," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed. (ed. Karel Van Der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van Der Horst; Grand Rapids: Brill, 1999), 740-41.

[50] Ibid., 737-38.

[51] This subversion of traditional texts and understandings is a common rhetorical technique in the words of Job, and seeing it employed so skillfully here, in the opening salvo of God's rhetorical argument, suggests common authorship of the texts. The diachronic discussion lies beyond the scope of this paper, but such carefully crafted subversion would point toward the primacy of at least the first divine speech, or at a minimum suggest common authorship with the dialogue portion of the book.

[52] Cf. Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 602.

and asymmetry, aspects which God birthed and cares for. Chaos, then, may be seen as a fundamental part of the divine order.

While the next vignette in the speech (38:12-15) initially appears awkward and out of place, its purpose clauses may be shown to further explicate the nature of God's עצה. In these verses, God is shown as superintending the daily cycle of light and darkness, but to what end? The hermeneutical key to this passage was provided by Job himself, with his indictment against God in 24:15-17:

> 15 The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight, saying, 'No eye will see me'; and he disguises his face.
> 16 In the dark they dig through houses; by day they shut themselves up; they do not know the light.
> 17 For deep darkness is morning to all of them; for they are friends with the terrors of deep darkness.

This passage in 38:12-15 may be seen as God's reply to Job's charge in chapter 24. While it may be true that the adulterer and the thief operate under cover of darkness, God's daily re-creative effort of "commanding the morning" (38:12) sets limits upon their activities. God does not destroy the wicked altogether, but rather contains them, in an analogous manner to the containment of the sea, whose tides rise and fall daily, but never exceed their prescribed limits.

Throughout the divine speeches, we find this theme that acknowledges both good and evil, light and darkness, while displaying no hint of the human impulse that would annihilate the latter. God has knowledge not only of the constellations and the heavens (38:31-33), but God also knows where to find the gates of death (38:17). God knows where both light *and* dark reside (38:19), and God hunts prey for the lion in the night (38:39), killing so that life might abound. Within this metaphorical construct, the human distinction between good and evil disconcertingly blurs.

In v. 22, God's rhetorical focus shifts toward climatological imagery, and again, the same theme becomes apparent. God has reserved snow and hail for the day of battle, when they may be used as divine weapons. This understanding mirrors that found in Joshua 10:11, wherein God is described as "throwing down huge stones" upon the Amorites, such that more died from the hail than from the people of Israel in battle. In Job 38:24, God knows how the light (most likely "lightning")[53] is divided, as well as the way of the "east wind", which in the biblical tradition is a destructive force (cf. Ex. 10:13, Jer. 18:17). While all of these elements are depicted in this passage as tools of divine violence, the emphasis is that God has stockpiled and reserved them, to be used at God's leisure. This further nuance demonstrates that God not only holds the forces of chaos at bay, but that God stores them in reserve, to be utilized by God at the appropriate time!

If the cumulative effect of God's rhetoric in these passages awed and perplexed Job, then the next rhetorical scene would have been especially disorienting. In v. 25, God speaks of constructing channels for the floods, but this life-giving rain falls in the desert, "which is empty of human life" (v.26), so that grass sprouts in the wilderness. The wilderness lay desolate, outside of the human sphere, and was traditionally associated with chaos. Here was the place of wolves, jackals and demons (cf., Isa. 34:13-14).[54] The channels in this passage probably prefer to wadis, the seasonal riverbeds which route flood waters and then lie dry and empty for most of the year. The implication of this

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[53] Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 604.

[54] M. Hutter, "Lilith," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed. (ed. Karel Van Der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van Der Horst; Grand Rapids: Brill, 1999), 521.

scene is quite clear: God sustains and enjoys life completely apart from human interests,[55] even when that life will be short-lived, as is the case with the river grasses that sprout during the wet season.

In other words, God's עצה does not center upon those things which Job thought it did. In chapter 12, Job spoke of God's עצה exclusively in terms of human activity. Even when Job spoke of the rain cycle, which leads to drought or flood (v. 15), the focus was on how this impacted humanity. Job spoke of God's עצה misleading judges and elders, and of God overthrowing kings and kingdoms. In contrast, God speaks of watering the wasteland so that grass might grow, unseen by human eyes.

Vv. 28-30 continue the imagery of water and divine agency, picking up on the theme of the birthing of the sea from vv. 8-9 with the idea of the divine paternity and maternity of the various forms of precipitation.[56] Scholars debate the meaning of this passage on linguistic, rhetorical and theological grounds, but it seems that these verses employ the same rhetorical strategy as the rest of the chapter, in that God should be understood as the *de facto* answer to the rhetorical questions, as the origin and agent of these natural elements. Thus, God begat the dew (v. 28), and the ice and frost came forth from God's womb (v. 29). If this anthropomorphism does indeed seem violent to our traditional understanding of God,[57] perhaps the rhetoric was intended in part for this shocking and disorienting purpose.

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[55] David Wheeler, "Job 38:1-40:2 – Rain on a Land Where No One Lives, Oxen Who Won't Plow Your Field," *Review and Expositor* 96 (1999): 446.

[56] See Vall, "From Whose Womb Did the Ice Come Forth? Procreation Images in Job 38:28-29," *CBQ* 57 (1995): 504-513, for a fuller discussion of this passage.

[57] Vall, "From Whose Womb did the Ice Come Forth": 510.

The imagery shifts suddenly to the cosmic dimension in vv. 31-33, as God demonstrates knowledge and governance over the constellations. This expansive move suggests that the scope of God's עצה extends not just to the wilderness on earth, but that it has cosmic interests as well! God is pictured as directing the movements of the stars and constellations, a fact that Job would surely affirm, yet within this context, humanity is even further removed from the central axis of God's plan and governance.

This series of cosmological and climatological imagery concludes by re-affirming God's power over the elements (vv. 34-38). God alone has the wisdom to know the proper times to send forth the rain and lightning. God alone possesses the knowledge to count the clouds in the sky. By implication then, Job has neither the wisdom, nor the power, nor the knowledge to rival God or to challenge God's עצה.

To summarize God's explication of the divine עצה in the cosmological and climatological imagery of this passage, both order and disorder are fundamental aspects of creation (vv. 4-11). God utilizes the primal elements as forces of destruction, holding the hail, snow, lightning and wind in reserve for the day of battle (v. 23). Not only does God constrain evil on a continual basis (vv. 12-15), but God also dispenses life and sustenance upon the chaotic regions of the wilderness (vv.25-27). God is the father (and mother) of the rain and other forms of precipitation, and God's עצה extends beyond the human sphere, to include even the stars and constellations (vv.31-33).

Animal Imagery

As Job prepared to malign the עצה of God in chapter 12, with a rhetorical flourish he chided his friends: "But *ask the animals*, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the

sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this?" (12:7-9). In his final speech, Job bemoaned the fact that he had been shunned by his society, lamenting that he had become "a brother of jackals, and a companion of ostriches." Perhaps it should not be surprising then, that the rhetoric within the speeches changes abruptly in 38:39, as God begins challenging Job's knowledge regarding a series of wild animals: the lion, raven, mountain goat, deer, wild donkey, wild ox, ostrich, warhorse, hawk and eagle. With the exception of the warhorse, all of these animals exist either in the wilderness or beyond the control of humans (Isa. 32:14, 34:10-15; Jer. 5:6). In a very real way, the wilderness and desert represent the forces of chaos, especially when set against the structure and order of human society, and these animals act in a way that personifies this chaotic realm at the fringes of human existence.

Indeed, the hermeneutical key to understanding this section of the speech is 38:26-27,[58] which has already been discussed: "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" (*italics* added). As God challenges Job's knowledge of the wild animals and finds it lacking, the obvious corollary is that God's knowledge and עצה extend even to this chaotic portion of creation, to those "carnivores, herbivores, and scavengers who prosper even in chaos."[59] God provides for these creatures, and especially in the cases of Behemoth and Leviathan, God seems to admire their beauty and strength.

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[58] Michael B. Dick, "The Neo-Assyrian Royal Lion Hunt and Yahweh's Answer to Job," *JBL* 125.2 (2006): 266.

[59] Ibid.

This divine approbation for the chaotic elements within creation points to a profound and, no doubt, disturbing implication for Job's understanding of the divine עצה: since the animal kingdom is essentially amoral,[60] God's engagement with this realm may be "more aesthetically than morally driven."[61] In the animal kingdom, good and bad things occur, with no moral causation necessary or implied. The lion devours its prey, the wounded animal suffers and dies, the scavengers devour its remains, and all of this happens as a matter of course, with no sense of injustice or imbalance. If this understanding may be carried over to the human realm, then perhaps Job has conceived of his suffering within the wrong paradigm altogether, namely the paradigm of divine retribution. Perhaps Job's suffering has no moral causation whatsoever, in which case, God's charge against Job's subversive speech stands.

We will briefly trace the rhetorical arguments formed within this section of the first divine speech that lead to this startling conclusion, beginning with the vignettes of the lion and the raven, in 38:39-41. In these passages, God not only provides for their nourishment (v. 41), but God hunts their prey for them (v. 39)! The raven in particular is an unclean bird, along with the ostrich and eagle (or perhaps vulture) (Lev. 11:13-16), birds which will be mentioned later in this passage, yet God provides for their needs.

Here and in the following rhetorical scene which views the mountain goat and the deer, we find an unexpected focus upon the animals' young. God satisfies the appetites of the young lions (v. 39) and the baby ravens (v.41), and God knows the gestational details of the mountain goats and deer (39:1-3). The theme is picked up again in the

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[60] Campbell, "God and Suffering": 154.

[61] Brown, "The Lion, the Wicked, and the Wonder of It All": 16.

description of the ostrich (vv. 13-18), who is pictured as a foolish parent, abandoning her eggs so that they might be crushed. Perhaps the rhetorical intent with this imagery is to, in a sense, personify these animals that are traditionally associated with chaos and the wilderness. The animals are shown giving birth, feeding their families, and watching their offspring grow up and leave home, never to return. The ostrich acts in a foolhardy manner with its young, but even this is depicted as part of the עצה of God (v. 17). Whereas Job and his society had relegated these creatures to the wasteland, reviling them as wild and unclean, God here personifies them, showing Job that even the young raven has a certain inherent dignity, as part of the created order.

God introduces the wild donkey and the wild ox in vv. 5-12. Again, these animals were considered hostile toward an ordered society, yet God turns that image upside down by presenting them as truly free (vv. 5, 9). Not only does the donkey call the wilderness home (v.6), but he scorns the tumult of the city (v. 7), and the wild ox would never consent to serve Job, nor would she spend the night in his manger (v. 9). The rhetoric in these passages forces a new perspective upon Job, so that he may realize that the view that sees society as inherently good and the wilderness as inherently chaotic and evil is merely one position. Not only do the animals in this chaotic realm lead lives of dignity and worth apart from humanity yet still within the עצה of God, but they openly disdain that order upon which Job's moral foundation is built.

The scene shifts in vv. 19-25 to the only domesticated animal in the divine speeches, the warhorse. The vivid imagery depicts this animal, however, not as a tamed beast, but as a strong, brave, thundering presence whose lust for battle cannot be quenched. This extended description, in which the warhorse laughs at fear (39:22, cf.

40:23,41:33) and is not deterred by swords, arrows or javelins (39:22-23, cf. 41:26), seems to anticipate the second divine speech, which presents Behemoth and especially Leviathan in this same light. The warhorse's neck is clothed with רעמה ("thunder") (39:19), while Leviathan's neck displays strength (41:22). Both are fierce, powerful creatures who are neither dismayed nor deterred in the day of battle.

In the rhetorical context of this speech, then, perhaps the warhorse functions as a transitional figure between order and chaos. While he may be broken, he may never be fully tamed, and thus he serves his function in the midst of battle. The battle imagery in this passage also seems reflective of 38:22-23, where God stores the snow and hail for the day of war. Thus, this vignette serves a transitional role, looking forward to the extended descriptions of Behemoth and Leviathan in the second speech, especially the battle imagery in relation to Leviathan, even while looking back at that vision of God which sees God's עצה displayed during the day of war.

The battle imagery is amplified in the final scene, which shifts again to the image of birds. The hawk and the eagle are depicted as living in a high, inaccessible place on the craggy cliff (v. 28), far beyond the control or understanding of Job. The motif of the animals' young is reintroduced in the final verse, as the young birds (most likely "vultures", not "eagles", since the same Hebrew word may be used for each) are depicted feasting upon the bodies of those slain in battle (39:30). This disturbing image shifts the focus from the human perspective, which sees death and destruction on the battlefield, to the perspective of the chaotic, which draws its sustenance from the carnage of war. With this final, disquieting image, the rhetorical re-orientation of Job's perspective regarding God's עצה is complete, and the divine speech ends.

God's Demand and Job's Reply

God's speech began with the charge against Job that his words had clouded or darkened the image of God's עצה. God told Job how this "trial" would be conducted, in 38:3: "I will question you, and you shall declare to me." The rhetorical questions have ended, so now God demands of Job: "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Anyone who argues with God must respond" (40:2).

Job replies in humility: "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). A close inspection of Job's reply, however, reveals an "irreducible ambiguity" in the first word, הן (*hen*).[62] Since this word could be translated "if", then the possibility exists that Job has not been fully persuaded by the rhetoric of the divine speech, thus: "*if* I am of small account [as you assert], what [could] I answer you?"

This argument seems tendentious, however, especially in light of Job's very next words, "I lay my hand on my mouth." This gesture of deference and respect is exactly what the old men, nobles and princes used to do in Job's presence when he would speak at the gates of the city (29:7-10). They lay their hands on their mouths and refused to speak in Job's presence (29:21-22), which, perhaps a bit ironically, is exactly what "Prince Job" does here when faced with the words and presence of God. With his final words in v. 5, "I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but will proceed no further," Job indicates his wish to withdraw the challenge against God.

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[62] Janzen, *Job*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (ed. James Luther Mays; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 243.

The Second Divine Speech and Job's Response (40:6-42:6)

God's Challenge and Charges Against Job

God answers Job's attempted withdrawal with an additional set of charges in 40:8. These two charges set the theme for the rest of the second speech, and some commentators see here the "pivot on which the whole book turns:"[63] "Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me, that you may be justified?" In this double charge against Job, God again uses Job's very words against him. Increasingly throughout the dialogues with his friends, Job has explored the legal metaphor of משפט, here rendered as "put in the wrong", and which some other translations refer to as "judgment"(NAS) or "justice"(TNK). The Hebrew word משפט carries several connotations, from the idea of social order, to justice, custom, legal verdict or judgment. When paired with the verb פרר, which is a difficult construction, the idea is that Job has invalidated or attempted to break up God's justice or judgment.[64]

Was Job guilty of this charge of impugning or breaking God's משפט? In 8:3, Bildad asks, "Does God pervert משפט?" to which Job seems to answer in the affirmative, if not explicitly in 9:2, then through his contention in chapter 9 that humans cannot hope to receive a fair trial when such a discrepancy of power exists between them and God. In 9:24, Job explicitly accuses God of covering the face of judges, so that משפט may be perverted. By chapter 19, Job accuses God of "ignor[ing] his shouts for משפט (19:7),"[65]

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[63] Edwin Good, *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job, with a Translation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 353.

[64] Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 354.

[65] Timmer, "God's Speeches, Job's Responses": 295.

and by the third cycle of speeches, Job seems to be actively seeking out God so that he may present his *case* (מִשְׁפָּט) and be vindicated.

Job's error seems to be that he confined his understanding of מִשְׁפָּט to its legal usage, which restricted his view of its true, fuller nature.[66] This is made clear by God's second charge against Job in v. 8: "Would you condemn me, that you may be right?" Because of Job's understanding of retributive justice, since calamity fell upon him when he knew that he was, in fact, righteous, then it necessarily followed that God's sense of מִשְׁפָּט was perverted or corrupt. Conversely, Job's friends, since they could not fathom God's מִשְׁפָּט as anything other than right and just, reasoned that Job's misfortune betrayed some secret sin. All arrived at differing conclusions, but they started from a common, inadequate worldview which reasoned that Job's misfortune demanded that somebody was guilty. God's second speech from the storm sets out to remedy this mischaracterization of God and God's מִשְׁפָּט, particularly as articulated in the words of Job.

God's Comparison with Job

In vv. 9-14, God immediately resumes the "challenge-to-rival" form that had been on display in the first speech, wherein God issues challenges that are designed both to magnify God and belittle Job. Here, more so than in the first speech, God's purpose seems to be denigrating Job, as well as exposing Job's woefully inadequate understanding of divine מִשְׁפָּט. As in the first speech, no attempt should be made to soften

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[66] Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 616.

the tenor of the diatribe, since God here deals with Job as a rival claimant to God's throne. The tone takes an aggressive, almost mocking tone, as God sets Prince Job back to his proper relational position, namely that of a created being in relation to the exalted and powerful Creator.

In this passage, God contrasts God's self with Job, first through the use of two rhetorical questions, and then by inviting Job to assume God's power and abilities. God asks in v. 9, "Now, do you have an arm like God's? And with a voice like his do you thunder?" The obvious allusion in these questions is to God's power (cf. Exod. 15:16, Isa. 63:5, Job 37:4), and the equally obvious answer is that no, Job is not as powerful as God. Job himself has often lamented his relative weakness compared to God's power (cf 12:13ff), and here God affirms that inequality.

In v. 10, God shifts the rhetoric, inviting Job to assume the position and prerogatives of divinity. God rhetorically asks Job to adorn himself with exaltation, and to clothe himself in honor and majesty. These words that are rendered "exaltation and dignity" (גאון and גבה) literally refer to the idea of height,[67] and in a different context could be translated as "proud". The idea that Job, sitting in his present, decrepit condition, could elevate himself to the heights of majesty, seems cruelly ironic, and is also, perhaps, a mocking play on words. Job had described the present state of his flesh in 7:5 as "*clothed* with maggots and clods of earth," a lowly, unclean position far removed from the rhetorical heights of grandeur.

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[67] Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 616.

In vv. 11-13, God invites Job to assert his newfound authority against the wicked and proud. The idea of pride, as seen earlier in v. 10, will continue to be a theme throughout this second divine speech, culminating with the presentation of Behemoth and Leviathan as exemplars of proud creatures. Vv. 11-12 contain poetic parallelism, intended to emphasize not the proud ones whom Job is engaging, but rather the results of Job's engagement: "See every proud one, and *make him low*. See every proud one, and *humble him*." Job's mission is to humble these proud ones and set them in their rightful place, an imperative that does not imply that this is God's *modus operandi*, but would rather be Job's.

Job, in his speeches, had often accused God of pouring out God's anger unjustly (cf. 9:5, 13-15, 17, 22, 10:17, 16:9, esp. 19:11). Here, in vv. 11-12, God invites Job to abase the proud just as he has accused God of doing, out of anger. Job is to confront those whom he had accused God of ignoring in chapter 24, and to punish them for their actions. Since God was so obviously disinterested in the rampant injustice that Job delineated in his charge against God, then perhaps Job, in his might, could set matters straight.

God's invitation extends further, and again, Job's words seem to be used against him, in v. 13: "Hide them in the dust together. Bind them in the hidden place." In 3:16, Job had lamented that he had not been a *hidden* abortion, stillborn. In 14:13, Job had rhetorically asked God to *hide* him in Sheol, to *conceal* him until God's anger subsided enough to deal with him appropriately.[68] Here, God mockingly tells Job to do the same

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[68] Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 357.

with the wicked and the proud. Job is asked to tread upon them in anger, even to the point of the grave. The absurdity of this scenario is beyond dispute, as Job lacks both the wisdom and the power to deal appropriately with the proud and the wicked.

Finally, in v. 14, God says that if Job can act in such a manner against the proud and wicked, then God will confess that Job can indeed save himself. Of course, such a task is impossible, so it is hard to determine if vv. 9-14 represent an "actual challenge or ironic goading."[69] All of this is rhetorical, of course, because Job seemingly lacks the power to raise himself from the ashes of despair, much less to confront and humble the proud in a display of power and majesty. God's use of irony here, while undoubtedly harsh, seems designed to shake Job's self-assurance and pride.

Looking back to God's initial charge against Job in this speech, that Job impugned God's משפט, perhaps God, in these verses, is critiquing Job's characterization of the most appropriate way to deal with injustice. Job had repeatedly questioned why God allowed the unjust to prosper (cf. chapter 24), suggesting that given the opportunity, Job would act summarily and ruthlessly against injustice.[70] Indeed, Job presented his own prior activities in this very light, as "breaking the [jaws] of the unrighteous" (29:17). God seems to be setting the stage here for the main thrust of the second speech, wherein the visions of Behemoth and Leviathan reveal to Job the way in which God in fact does interact with evil and chaos in the world.

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[69] Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 358.

[70] Janzen, *Job*, 244.

Behemoth and Leviathan

In the first divine speech, God utilized the disputational form through a series of rhetorical questions that seemed designed to draw Job into the metaphorical world which God had constructed. The queries presented to Job were crafted to elicit either an implied "No," response, or "Only you know" or "Only you are able, God," thus demonstrating the wisdom and breadth of God's עצה. Beginning with the vivid description of the warhorse in 39:19-25, God shifted rhetorical techniques, asking Job to hold a sustained mental picture while God described the physical attributes of the creature, for a particular rhetorical purpose. God's second speech continues this technique, through the extended, poetic descriptions that celebrate the physical attributes of Behemoth and Leviathan.

The identities of Behemoth and Leviathan, the two creatures who share the focus of the second divine speech, have been sharply debated. No rhetorical discussion of this passage can ignore at least the broad contours of that discussion, for Job's reaction to the rhetoric of the speeches is intimately related to his understanding of the characters' identities. The traditional view in the modern era, following Bochart, "is that Behemoth is the hippopotamus and Leviathan the crocodile."[71] This view has serious difficulties, however, because the structure of the rhetoric in the Joban passages implies that the proper answer is, "Nobody can capture Behemoth or pierce his nose (40:24), nor can they draw out Leviathan with a fish hook (41:1)," that is, nobody except God. This implies that Behemoth and Leviathan, even while they belong to the created order, are greater than hippopotami and crocodiles.

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[71] John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, Number 265, JSOT Supplement Series (ed. David J.A. Clines and Philip R. Davies; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 102.

The other major view which must be briefly traced is that Behemoth and Leviathan are mythological creatures appropriated from other Mesopotamian and Canaanite cultures and religions. In 1895, Hermann Gunkel published *Schopfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*, a seminal work that postulated that the Babylonian C*haoskampf* myth influenced certain cosmological allusions found throughout the Bible.[72] Gunkel saw Behemoth and Leviathan as "monsters of the primordial age," lords of the wilderness and of the watery deep, respectively.[73] This corresponds to their depiction in 2 Esdras 6:49-52, in which they were both formed on the fifth day of God's creation. In this passage, Behemoth was given the portion of the land with a thousand hills, and Leviathan remained in the waters.

Gunkel postulated that the biblical allusions to Behemoth, Leviathan, the Dragon, Rahab and the Sea have this ancient *Chaoskampf* motif in view. Isa. 51:9 states that Yahweh shattered Rahab, disgracing the dragon. In Psalm 89, Gunkel also saw evidence that Rahab was destroyed before creation by God, an understanding that is juxtaposed with Isaiah 27:1, in which Yahweh defeats Leviathan, the twisting serpent, in the eschaton. Closer to our present text, Job 26:12-13 presents the primordial, divine conquest of Rahab and the Sea, and Job 9:13 refers to the powerful helpers of Rahab, whom God has subjugated.[74] Gunkel saw further, similar references to these creatures

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[72] K. William Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabinnic Jerusalem*, Number 63, Harvard Semitic Monographs (ed. Peter Machinist; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 1.

[73] Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12* (trans. K. William Whitney; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 39-40.

[74] Ibid., 21-31.

throughout the Bible, culminating in the vision of the great, red Dragon in chapter 12 of the Apocalypse of John, by which point the original significance, along with some of the form, of the myth had been forgotten.

Gunkel argued that these biblical texts demonstrate a clear dependence upon a common myth, and he located the origin of that myth in the Babylonian struggle of the god Marduk against the primordial monster, Ti'amat. The points of confluence between the Babylonian myth and the biblical texts, as Gunkel reconstructed them, are as follows: in primordial times, the world consisted entirely of water. The dragon (*Ti'amat*, Leviathan or Rahab) and his helpers rebelled against the higher gods, until finally, the god *Marduk* (Yahweh) appeared. The god rebuked the monster and its helpers before defeating it. The corpse of the dragon was not buried, but rather the world was formed from its body, which was split into two pieces, the waters above and the waters below. The god who slew the dragon and created the world is henceforth considered "Lord and God from this point on."[75]

While many of Gunkel's fundamental insights into the biblical *Chaoskampf* tradition still stand, the subsequent discovery of the Ugaritic texts at Ras Shamra, with its resultant insight into Canaanite mythology and religion, has forced many scholars to conclude a Canaanite origin for the tradition instead.[76] In this understanding, Leviathan may be equated with the seven-headed dragon *Lotan* of Ugaritic myth,[77] (although there

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[75] Ibid., 75-77.

[76] Cf., Jakob H. Gronbaek, "Baal's Battle with Yam – A Canaanite Creation fight," *JSOT* 33 (1985): 28.

[77] Howard Wallace, "Leviathan and the Beast in Revelation," *BA* 11.3 (1948): 63.

is good linguistic reason to give the Hebrew name Leviathan priority over *Lotan*, or perhaps *Litan*),[78] and Behemoth may be equated with El's calf Atik.[79]

Perhaps a broader view of the *Chaoskampf* tradition is in order, one which understands the Babylonian, Canaanite, and Israelite *Chaoskampf* traditions as particular expressions of a "common ancient Near Eastern phenomenon."[80] Myth concerns itself not with historical realities but rather with primeval events,[81] and Cross sees the development of an *epic* tradition in early Israel which set these Near Eastern myths of the Divine Warrior within a historical context, so that the resultant texts are neither myth nor history.[82] At minimum, then, it would appear that the authors of the Hebrew Scriptures appropriated the prevalent mythological and cosmological motifs of the day, whether originating in Babylon, Egypt or Canaan, into the distinctive, epic biblical construct of Yahweh as the Divine Warrior.

Wasf of Behemoth

As we return to the text in Job 40:15-24, God presents a vision of Behemoth quite at odds with that understanding that would set the beast within the *Chaoskampf* tradition. In fact, the text makes a point of describing Behemoth as a being that had been created by God, just as Job had been made by God (v.15). Whatever Job's understanding of the allusion

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[78] J.A. Emerton, "Leviathan and *LTN*: The Vocalization of the Ugaritic Word for the Dragon," *VT* 32.3 (1982): 329-30.

[79] Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 102-103.

[80] Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 23.

[81] Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), viii.

[82] Ibid., 89-90.

to Behemoth was, whether mythological or otherwise, the text goes out of its way to mitigate any mythological echoes which may have been present.

The name בהמות (*behemoth*) itself is ambiguous, since it is simply the feminine plural of the Hebrew word for "beast."[83] Given the author of Job's preference for intertextuality, however, the name may allude to Job's own words in 12:7, 9: "but ask the animals (בהמות), and they will teach you…that the hand of the LORD has done this," words spoken even as Job was subverting the divine עצה. If this is the case, then בהמות may in fact be a creation of the author, with the plural of majesty indicating that this being is the "animal *par excellence,*"[84] that will be used by God truly to teach Job.

As appealing as this scenario may be, it also seems a bit unlikely. God says, "Behold, Behemoth," with the implication that Job is not viewing an entirely new animal or some archetype but is rather observing a familiar beast anew. V. 19 is seen by some as an allusion to the primeval battle between Yahweh and Behemoth, but this is tendentious, as it seems more likely to be a rhetorical device showing that only God *could* approach Behemoth with the sword. Actual violence is not part of the imagery of this passage, but rather rhetorical violence is implied. Thus, with scant textual evidence to support a mythological, *Chaoskampf* understanding of the passage, it seems best to understand Behemoth as an animal that was Job's contemporary, albeit one which no known modern species would seem to parallel.

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[83] B.F. Batto, "Behemoth," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed. (ed. Karel Van Der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van Der Horst; Grand Rapids: Brill, 1999), 165.

[84] Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 618.

Behemoth is presented as an ox-like herbivore (v. 15) of extraordinary strength and power (v. 16). His bones are as strong as bronze and his limbs are stout like iron. If indeed "tail" (זנב) is a euphemism for "penis",[85] then Behemoth is sexually potent and powerful, as well, with an erection like a cedar tree. The overriding theme found in the Behemoth imagery is that of power, along with the resultant peace and tranquility which the creature enjoys, betraying neither the hint of *chaos* nor of *kampf*.

Indeed, Behemoth is pictured lounging under the lotus plants, in the marshy reeds (v. 21). The mountains are personified as bringing him food (v. 20), and even the flood waters do not alarm his tranquil existence (v. 23). The only violence in this scene is rhetorical: only God possesses the strength to challenge Behemoth with the sword (v. 19), and the rhetorical answer to the questions posed in v. 24 ("Can anyone capture him?" and "Can anyone pierce his nose?") is "No."

Functionally, this vignette extrapolates upon the rhetorical challenge that God presents to Job in vv. 11-13. Behemoth serves as an exemplar of one who is proud, and the creature has every reason to be proud, based upon his physical description. God is inviting Job to imagine making this powerful creature low and humbling it. The obvious implication is that Job cannot perform this task in the face of such a remarkable physical specimen, and the equally obvious corollary is that only God, its maker, can subdue it. Thus, the *wasf* construction allows Job to focus upon the power of God through the imagery of God's created beast, Behemoth.

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[85] Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 553.

Wasf of Leviathan

If Behemoth was presented as a powerful, peaceful presence, the *wasf* of Leviathan in chapter 41 is quite the opposite, filled with images of terror and fear. The passage begins with a series of 14 rhetorical, interrogative clauses that focus upon Job's inability to approach or subdue the creature. If the divine speeches to this point may be used as a hermeneutical guide, then we would expect the implied answers to these questions to be either, "No," or "Only you can, God," and this is indeed what we find. Job *cannot* draw out Leviathan with a hook or press down his tongue. He *cannot* subdue him with a rope through the nose or a hook in the jaw. Leviathan *will not* serve Job, *nor* will he speak soft words of supplication toward Job. Job *cannot* bind Leviathan *nor* play with him. The traders and merchants *will not* catch Leviathan and trade his meat or skin in the market, because their harpoons and fishing spears are *incapable* of piercing Leviathan's skin and head. By implication then, only God *is* capable of such feats.

In v. 8, God resumes the imperatives of 40:10-13 by telling Job to lay a hand on Leviathan, after which Job will not attempt to do so again. The imperative here in v. 8 drives the rhetoric, explicitly connecting Leviathan, alongside Behemoth, with the proud ones whom Job would lay low in 40:11-13. Verse 9 summarizes this series of questions: "Any hope of capturing it will be disappointed; were not even the gods overwhelmed at the sight of it?" This translation in the NRSV follows the Greek text of the Syriac, emending the awkward Hebrew syntactical construction[86] so that the *Chaoskampf* motif comes into view. If this is the proper interpretation, then a possible referent is that tale found in the Ugaritic texts which describes the gods on the mount of El (Zaphon) bowing

[86] Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 622.

their heads in fear upon receiving the message from Yam, before Baal arose to defeat the enemy.[87] However, it is equally likely that the Hebrew phrase in v. 9 could be translated, "One is laid low by the very sight of him" (TNK). While the syntax is admittedly difficult, the non-emended Hebrew text should be preferred.

Vv. 10-12 present great exegetical and interpretive difficulties, due to their ambiguity and difficult syntax, which allows for multiple interpretations.[88] The differing Hebrew texts of v. 10b contain variants, so that the clause may be read either as "who is able to stand against *him*" or "who is able to stand against *me*." After the ambiguity in this clause, the difficulty in the following verses lies not so much in the construction of the syntax as in the translation itself, attempting to establish the speakers and the referents within the verses and tying it all back to this clause in v. 10b, while making sense of the passage as a whole.

As we have constructed the rhetoric thus far, the most obvious rendering of v. 10 would opt for the first-person construction, concluding that because Job cannot stand against Leviathan, how much less could he stand against God? The entire rhetorical unit has been leading up to this comparison, now made explicit, and it flows, along with the Behemoth pericope, directly from 40:11-14.

With this understanding, then, v. 11a serves as a transitional comment between two rhetorical units, vv. 1-10 and vv. 12-34. The two clauses together (10b and 11a) function as a double rhetorical question, and v. 11 sets the stage for the *wasf* to

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[87] J.C.L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends,* 2nd ed. (ed. G.R. Driver; New York: T&T Clark Ltd., 1977), 41.

[88] Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 622.

Leviathan. Confusion arises when the first-person speech of v. 11 is changed to the third-person,[89] in an attempt to preserve continuity. The Hebrew is clearly constructed in the first person: מי הקדימני ואשלם תחת כל־השמים לי־הוא, and thus should be rendered in a manner following the NAS: "Who has given to Me that I should repay *him*? *Whatever* is under the whole heaven is Mine."

Before resolving v. 11a's rhetorical function, we should briefly trace the argument of the second divine speech to this point, so that a definite exegetical and rhetorical strategy may be discerned. God's first charge against Job in the second speech is that Job subverted God's משפט , or justice. In 40:10-14, God rhetorically invites Job to assume divinity so that Job might demonstrate how he would execute משפט more appropriately than God. Job is commanded to *look* upon the proud and humble them, and if he can do this, then God will indeed confess that Job is a worthy rival to God's lordship.

Immediately, God tells Job to *behold* Behemoth, the peaceful, powerful creature who lives by the river. After gazing upon its physical attributes, Job is asked if it would be possible to bring this proud beast low. If this image of Behemoth were not enough to illustrate the absurdity of Job's executing divine משפט, God switches the imagery to that of Leviathan, who may or may not have mythological connotations, but who definitely elicits a greater emotional response than Behemoth.[90] Job is asked a series of rhetorical questions whose sole purpose seems to be demonstrating Job's impotence in relation to

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[89] So, e.g., E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. H. Knight; London: Nelson, 1967), 631.

[90] It is interesting to note that the series of rhetorical questions regarding Leviathan occurs *before* the extended description of him, implying that Job was already familiar with the creature and had at least a mental image of Leviathan's strength and physical capabilities. If this may be extrapolated to the image of Behemoth, then it seems likely that Job was already familiar with both creatures, before God forced him to see them again, in a new light.

Leviathan. Thus, the import of 41:10: "If you are not fierce enough to arouse *Leviathan*, how do you think you could stand against *Me*?" Job obviously cannot tame or subdue the great beast (41:1-9), so therefore, Job is not worthy to stand as a rival claimant to God's throne (cf. 40:14).

With the issue of Job's inability to save himself (40:14, cf. 41:9-10) and thus to critique God's משפט resolved, God turns now to the second charge against Job from 40:8, namely that Job was willing to condemn God so that Job might be justified: "Who has given [anything] to Me, that I should repay *him*? *Whatever* is under the whole heaven is Mine" (41:11, NAS). Here, God directly rebuts the notion of divine retribution, in the clearest manner possible. The "who" and "him" in this verse are universal, but in this particular instance they are directed at Job. Job's misunderstanding of משפט had compelled him to condemn God, as if God owed Job any manner of blessing or protection for living a righteous life. As the exposition on God's עצה in the first speech made clear, tragedy and chaos do not necessarily imply moral causation, which means that Job was mistaken in holding God culpable for the evil that had come upon him. Here, God's argument goes even further, striking at Job's underlying worldview of retributive justice, and arguing that God is not beholden to any created being, for good or for evil, because everything under the heavens belongs to God anyway. The idea of retributive justice assumes that God is bound to reciprocate, either for good or for evil, in response to human activity, and God here refutes that notion altogether.

In this light, God's presentation of Leviathan in vv. 12-34 serves several purposes. First and foremost, since nothing on earth is like Leviathan (41:33), Leviathan completes the thought of v. 11, that everything that is under the heavens belongs to God,

including this exalted creature. Second, by highlighting Leviathan's extraordinary physical prowess, God's stature increases even more, as Job's vision is drawn past the powerful, ferocious animal, to the only one who has the ability to subdue the beast. Subjugation was implied in the rhetorical questions of vv. 1-7, wherein Job's inability to humble the beast was implicitly juxtaposed with God's ability to do so. Whereas Job *cannot* put a rope in Leviathan's nose, the implication is that God *can indeed* do so. While Job *cannot* play with Leviathan as with a bird, God *can* and *does* (cf. Ps. 104:26). Third, Leviathan is described as the "king over all that are proud" (v.34), so he functions as the clear referent to vv. 11-13, the proud one whom Job should humble.

Finally, Leviathan presents a compelling image of God's מִשְׁפָּט. While Leviathan is presented as a creature of terror (and also quite probably as a creature of chaos, as it is likely that Job understood the mythological allusion, at least to some extent), nowhere does this chapter speak of God contending with the creature, much less destroying or subduing it (except implicitly, in vv. 1-7). Rather, God simply admires Leviathan in all of its created glory.[91] In a fitting way, then, the image of Leviathan completes the divine speeches, re-orienting Job's understanding of מִשְׁפָּט to include the approbation of such a proud, violent creature, who reigns within the limits that God has placed upon it.

The image of Leviathan presented in these verses is truly breathtaking. He is strong and graceful (v. 12), with terrifying teeth (v. 14) and armored scales (vv. 15-17). He breathes fire (v. 19), and smoke comes from his nostrils (v. 21). His heart is as hard as a millstone (v. 24), and when he rises up, he causes the mighty to tremble (v. 25). Their weapons are powerless against him (vv. 26-29), and as he swims safely into the

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[91] Utzschneider, "The Book of Job and an Aesthetic Theology of the OT," 98.

distance, he leaves a boiling, oily trail in his wake (vv. 31-32). He is without equal on earth (v. 33), king over all the sons of pride (v. 34). And God admires him.

Job's Reply

Our understanding of the purpose of the divine speeches is inextricably linked to how we interpret Job's response, found in 42:1-6. Is Job enlightened with the understanding that משׁפט does not permeate the moral order, and thus he is freed to live a truly moral life?[92] Or maybe Job only makes a "tongue-in-cheek" confession to get away from God's presence.[93] Or perhaps Job utterly rejects God and walks away in contempt, because God's response was completely irrelevant to the subject matter of Job's questions.[94] The ambiguity of Job's reply proves every bit as difficult as the texts within the divine speeches, so it is no wonder that interpreters produce such varied results. As with the purpose of the speeches themselves, this paper will stake an exegetical claim regarding Job's response, although by no means should this interpretation be viewed as the only legitimate conclusion to be made.

In 42:1, the text says that Job answers the LORD, meaning that we could expect to find in the following verses Job's replies to the unexpected accusations made against him. Indeed, we do find Job's responses in the following verses. After Job's initial, general reaction in v. 2, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted,"[95] he quotes God almost directly in vv. 3a and 4, before offering his response.

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[92] M. Tsevat, "The Meaning of the Book of Job," *HUCA* 37 (1966): 92.

[93] David A. Robertson, "The Book of Job: A Literary Study," *Soundings* 56 (1973): 466.

[94] John B. Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yawheh," *JBL* 98 (1979): 497.

[95] Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995). Miles accepts the *ketiv*

In answer to God's initial charge in the first speech (38:2, cf. 42:3a), "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge," Job replies in v. 3b, "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." Here, Job acknowledges that he has indeed misrepresented God's עצה, primarily out of ignorance and incomplete knowledge. Job had not understood its breadth, nor did he comprehend its inclusion of those elements and animals traditionally associated with chaos, which exist with dignity outside the bounds of human comprehension.

In v. 4, Job quotes God's words from both speeches (cf. 38:3, 40:7): "I will question you, and you declare to me." In response to this imperative, Job declares in vv. 5-6: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you." The problem with this verse is that the text of the book never reports that Job sees God.[96] God *spoke* to Job from the tempest, but Job's vision of God remains tenuous. Perhaps Job refers here to a vision of God mediated by the intense imagery of the metaphors from the divine speeches, or perhaps he refers to the storm itself, which manifested God's glory and power through the elements of rain, lightning and wind, coupled with the sound of God's voice. Regardless of how exactly Job's words are interpreted in v. 5, the underlying idea seems to be that God's speeches have given Job new insight and a new vision both for God and for God's ways.

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in 42:2 which translates as "You know". This unnecessarily tendentious view changes the tenor of Job's response, leaving Job unrepentant and sarcastic toward God. This view distorts Job's replies in vv. 3b and 5, preferring to hide behind the inherent ambiguity of v. 6.

[96] Campbell, "God and Suffering – It Happens," 162.

The final verse in Job's reply, v. 6, is most troublesome of all, for its syntactical structure is quite ambiguous, and unique in the Hebrew Bible.[97] "The first part of the verse has two verbs and no object; the second part of the verse has two objects and no verb,"[98] which means that any combination of verbs and objects may be defensible exegetically. The first verb, מאס , usually carries the idea of rejecting, refusing, or perhaps despising, while the verb נחם in the *niphal* means "to be sorry" or "to be consoled." The objects of the two verbs are עפר (earth, dust) and אפר (ashes). The preposition על possesses a wide semantic range, and can mean "on, upon, above, over, concerning or against."

So does v. 6 present Job as rejecting God's speeches, thus, "I reject [you and your argument], and now I will stop mourning?"[99] Or perhaps Job despises and rejects the *sins* of which he was charged (by speaking without understanding), and he repents *upon* dust and ashes.[100] Or maybe Job is sorry that he is but dust, ie., human. Others take the two verbs together and the two objects together, rendering it: "I reject and repent of dust and ashes," or in other words, "I have had enough of this lamentation stuff."[101] With so many divergent opinions, perhaps there is wisdom in Newsom's idea of leaving the verse untranslated, "allowing it to serve as a Bakhtinian word with a loophole," which she sees

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[97] Ibid., 163.

[98] Ibid.

[99] So Curtis, "Job's Response," 503.

[100] So, e.g., B. Lynne Newell, "Job: Repentant or Rebellious?" *WTJ* 46 (1984): 315.

[101] Campbell, "God and Suffering – It Happens," 163.

as the author's attempt to leave Job's response, and thus the book as a whole, ambiguous and open.[102]

Despite the uncertainty of the passage, however, and even while acknowledging the subjective nature of *any* interpretation of this difficult verse, this paper favors the understanding that would group both the verbs and the direct objects together as unities. Thus "concerning dust and ashes" serves as the single object of both "reject" and "repent".[103] The translation then becomes: "therefore, I [reject and repent] concerning [dust and ashes]." Job, as a result of seeing a new vision of God and of God's relation to the created order, rejects and repents of his mournful position, ie., "dust and ashes", realizing that he has indeed spoken without knowledge and has impugned God unjustly. With this realization, Job arises.

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[102] Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations,* 255.

[103] Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The book of Job stands as one of the great works of world literature, not just for the literary style and techniques it employs, but more so for its incredible insight into the human condition. The psychological portrait of Job, the upright and blameless man who loses everything in a single day, is compelling. Perhaps the reader sees herself in Job's position on the ashes, lamenting the loss of people or things once held dearly, complaining to God with a bitterness of soul, as she tries to come to grips with the horrible reality of senseless chaos and suffering.

Or perhaps the reader sees himself in the words of one of Job's three friends, who try to reassure and educate Job with the clichés of traditional, religious language, that blessings will ultimately come to those who are faithful to God, despite the present predicament. If Job will merely trust in God and repent of his unconfessed sin, then God will bless him again and reward his righteous lifestyle: "Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves, so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty" (5:17).

The divine speeches in Job 38-41, then, come as a shock, both to Job and to the reader. God appears in the midst of a storm, and, rather than answering Job's queries directly, God asks questions in reply. Job had expected God to assume a defensive posture and explain why Job had lost everything; rather, God took the offensive and explained that Job was ignorant.

God charges that Job has spoken of God's plan and governance in an ignorant fashion. To demonstrate this, God first establishes the cosmological scope of the divine governance, demonstrating that both order (38:4-7) and disorder (38:8-11) are endemic to creation. God even depicts the Sea, that traditional icon of chaos, as a swaddling baby whom God nurtured in its infancy (38:8-9). God demonstrates hidden knowledge of the dwelling places of light and darkness (38:19), of the primordial springs of the sea (38:16) and the gates of death (38:17). All of these things are too great for Job to understand.

God explains to Job that an order exists in that part of creation that lies beyond the human sphere. Creation lives for itself and for God, not for Job. The stars and constellations will still ascend and fall (vv. 31-33), long after Job has returned to the dust. The wild animals do not regard Job (38:39-39:18), just as he has disdained them, yet they live their lives of quiet dignity apart from the cares and concerns of humanity, but still under the governance of God. At this point, God pauses to allow a response from Job, who quietly demurs (40:1-5).

God continues with further charges against Job, through the use of a series of rhetorical questions. Job has misspoken regarding God's justice and judgment, and Job has willingly impugned God's character even while defending his own (40:8). God offers Job a rhetorical challenge, wherein if Job can exert judgment upon the wicked and proud in the angry manner in which he has advocated that God does (cf. 9:5, 13-15, 17, 22, 10:17, 16:9, esp. 19:11), then God will admit that Job stands as a worthy rival in understanding and in power (40:14).

God offers Job the vision of two beasts, Behemoth and Leviathan, both proud creatures with whom Job is already familiar, either through experience or through

mythological folklore. God presents Behemoth first, as a peaceful, powerful, ox-like creature who lives by the Jordan River (40:15-23), and then God asks if Job could catch this beast or subdue it. In reverse manner and in an extended series of questions, God asks Job if he could control or restrain Leviathan, concluding that Job would indeed be laid low, even at the sight of him (41:1-9). Since nobody would dare to arouse Leviathan, how much less would they be able to stand against God (41:10)?

God shifts gears rhetorically in 41:11, explicitly rejecting the worldview that Job and his friends had all shared, that the moral world contains a *quid pro quo* between humanity and God: "Who has given [anything] to Me that I should repay? *Whatever* is under the whole heaven is Mine" (41:11). God, in no uncertain terms, tells Job that this idea of retributive justice is wrong, for the idea that God would owe anything to Job or to any other created being as a consequence of their actions, is absurd.

As the dénouement of God's rhetorical masterpiece, God presents Leviathan, the mythological chaos beast who strikes fear in the hearts of the mighty (41:25) and who stands without equal upon the earth (41:33). Elsewhere in Scripture, Leviathan is depicted as the primeval opponent whom God, acting as the Divine Warrior, vanquishes, yet here, there is no hint of the *Chaoskampf* motif. God admires the creature, extolling its strength and ferocity and describing its physical prowess in explicit detail.

Here stands a liminal being, situated somewhere along the continuum of myth and reality, who lives under no illusion of moral retribution. He offers nothing to God, other than a life lived within the limits which have been prescribed for him, and he expects nothing in return. Leviathan, the supreme symbol of pride (41:34) and of chaos, lives for himself, and God approves.

Faced with the utter incongruity of this scene, in which God admires this beast that was traditionally conceived of as God's primordial rival, Job realizes that his worldview has been woefully inadequate. God's created order proves much more sublime than Job and his friends could ever have imagined. Chaos is every bit as integral to God's divine plan and governance as is order, and the two co-exist in a mysterious relationship that lies beyond Job's comprehension. Job had made inaccurate assumptions regarding God's character because he had not yet grasped this life-altering insight. Upon receiving this epiphany from God, Job realizes that there indeed *is* no cause-to-effect in the moral realm. Realizing the absurdity of both his legal case and of his mournful posture, Job arises, ready to live his life anew.

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