



“The Blackness of the Day”: Job’s Regressive Paradise as Creation Unmade

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Early in his book *Tears and Saints*, E. M. Cioran (1995: 17-18) describes the “original forgotten vision” which individuals pursue as they age. Cioran argues that God is everyone’s initial memory, and he asks, “Are they haunted by dateless memories which evoke the immediate proximity of God in paradise? Could they be hiding in the depths of their memory the figure of Divinity?” The entrapment individuals feel, being subject to temporality, inevitably awakens an awareness or a foreboding of the otherworldly, the eternal. Cioran is fascinated – and maddened – by saints, for they alone are able to successfully enter “dateless memories,” indeed the very presence of God, although what they aim for is not completely grasped.

Increasing age is not the only thing that propels individuals to retrogressively pursue their first memory of God, if indeed this is true; suffering also has the power to drive one toward one’s original memory, God (hence why many of the saints, particularly in their youth, inflict suffering upon themselves in pursuit of mystical rapture). Such is the case in the book of Job; readers are introduced to Job, a man who is “blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil” (Job, 1, 1). Nevertheless, God agrees twice to allow Job to suffer in response to Satan’s requests. As calamity sets upon him over the course of two separate days, Job’s mind turns not to nostalgia but instead to God himself; Job pursues God in an attempt to place his suffering in a suitable and sufficient framework for understanding. Job also pursues God in an attempt to investigate this perceived change in God, who now seems not beneficent but malevolent.

While Job chooses to pursue God through the despair caused by his [Job’s] undeserved suffering, readers should be uneasy with Satan’s return into God’s court,



having been cast out for rebellion against God. In his reflection on the presence of Satan before God in chapter two, Burrell (2008: 24) argues that the writer of the book of Job purposely conflates the actions of God and Satan, thereby depicting God as a problematic trickster figure with questionable intentions. Zuckerman (1991: 27) is likewise surprised not by Satan's presence so much as his absence throughout the remainder of the book of Job, for Job's friends are rebuked for their error, but Satan, who initiated the ordeal, escapes without condemnation for his injurious plotting against Job. That an all-holy God allows a sinful, fallen entity into his very presence (and not simply upon the earth, "the devil's playground") is what alerts writers like Burrell to the concern that a dimension of evil (or at least antagonism) is somehow present within God himself. The book of Job thus raises suspicion that the actions of God are conflicting, and signals a deep schism within his very being.

Prior to Job's first substantive speech, he suffers the tremendous loss of his servants, livestock, and, worst of all, all his children. News of his losses is not spread out over time but arrives simultaneously; one sole surviving servant has hardly finished informing Job of his loss before another servant bears news of other ill tidings. In response to this, Job disrobes in grief and, naked before God, blesses the divinity despite his [Job's] misfortunes; "Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God" (Job, 1, 22).

Job's suffering intensifies when Job's suffering is incarnated, as he is afflicted with sore boils (Job, 2, 7) on his entire body. Convinced that God has cursed Job and stripped him of his dignity, Job's wife exhorts Job to denounce God and, forsaken, perish. Job, however, refuses to sacrifice his integrity, and he chides his wife for her unwillingness to accept suffering in addition to prosperity. Rather than attempt to drive Job from God, his three friends – Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite – arrive to lament with and later console Job.

Most discussions of Job gravitate toward Job's loss of fortune, probably because such topics are much easier to conduct, especially with texts like Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* in mind. Having framed discussions of Job in this way, the secondary affliction Job suffers (sore boils) is perceived as just another setback. Satan suggests this form of affliction (2, 4-8):

Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. However, put forth your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to your face. So the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.'"

Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.

The writer of the book of Job's description of the ailment's onset suggests its affect upon Job is total; his entire body suffers. Burrell's suspicion that some evil dimension of God existed is evidenced by this text by the ambiguous possession of the imperiling hand; Satan requests that God stretch forth his hand, and God seems to do so vicariously through Satan. If he is not an active agent, God nonetheless



participates passively. Job's wife extols Job to curse God, probably because she recognizes Job himself is cursed, as evidenced by not just his misfortunes but also the desolation of his very body.

The desecrated body is a serious problem for those subject to Old Testament law and thus merits increased investigation, particularly of its implications for Job and, by extension, his community. Berquist (2002: 1, 11) identifies the individual's body as a central concern in the Old Testament, and he explains that "Israel's understanding of the body paralleled its understanding of social reality. Society's organization matches the perceived realities of the body. [...] Watching the body is the same thing as observing society." Since the condition of the individual's body symbolically parallels the condition of society as a whole, afflicted bodies suggested society itself was somehow afflicted with God's displeasure or wrath (Berquist 2002: 20). Considering the strict regulatory laws given to the priests (as seen in Leviticus), failure to properly isolate a "contaminated" individual could have serious repercussions, perhaps not so much sanitary as spiritual. The very ministry of the priests to properly handle the contaminants could jeopardize their ability to intercede before God on their people's behalf.

Job, one presumes, was not privy to the latter conversation between God and Satan, in which Satan receives God's permission to smite Job with sore boils; nevertheless, Job is well aware of the ominous symbolism of a plagued body in his society, and, now plagued himself, he understands the completion of his ruin, signaled by his cadaveric body. Job is no longer merely unfortunate, having lost his children and his economic prosperity; he now harbors the sign of being accursed on his very body in the form of his sore boils. Job recognizes that his accursed body also signals that his society of fellow Israelites is also cursed. It might have been one thing for a profligate, a glutton, or a debaucher to suddenly undergo such a curse, but Job is introduced as almost saintly; he is certainly one of the most righteous men in all of Uz, if not the most righteous. So if Job, a figurehead of righteousness for his land, is accursed, there is very little hope that his entire society is not also accursed in some way.

It is well to remember that Job's bodily calamity comes *after* he denudes himself, having heard of his losses and the death of his children (1, 20-22):

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said,
"Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked I shall return there.
The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.
Blessed be the name of the Lord."
Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

Newsom (2003: 58) rightly observes from this passage that Job's nudity indicates both Job's acceptance of "the hard but necessary task of relinquishing what cannot be held" and also "the vulnerability of exposure" he experiences, bare as he is before his



wife and those select few servants who survived the onset of disastrous calamities. Yet one cannot neglect that Job remains naked upon the onset of sore boils.

The onset of Job's affliction does not transpire in response to an act of sexual indiscretion or any other sinful bodily or sexual transgression. Rather, the first chapter concludes with a reaffirmation of Job's innocence, commendably sustained through the onset of his initial calamities. Furthermore, God repeats his praise of Job before Satan again, almost verbatim, when Satan re-enters God's presence (2, 3). Yet Job nonetheless contracts sore boils once Satan convinces God to again try Job – and Job contracts his second, and more serious, calamity in a state of exposed bodily innocence. The sore boils do not develop underneath his clothes, the traditional symbol of sin, beginning with Adam and Eve's anxious covering of themselves once they sin and discover their nudity. Say what his friends will about Job having to have committed some wrong meriting his dual calamities, the cursing of an innocent form, the defiling of a created body presented in the text in its original created state – that of nudity – is cause for great consternation.

As Giorgio Agamben demonstrates, nudity cannot but initiate discussions of nature and grace, of creation and salvation, and the "form" of clothing one wears. In its prelapsarian form, nudity is, as Agamben (2011: 57) notes, emblematic of their perfect state: "[...] Adam and Eve were not naked; rather, they were covered by the clothing of grace, which clung to them as a garment of glory." Having sinned, however, they are stripped of this clothing of grace. Job, it must be said, admits to sins of his youth (for which it seems almost certain he atoned for, considering how, worried for his children's spiritual well-being, Job makes atoning sacrifices on their behalf). Yet at the onset of Job's calamities, one is extremely hard-pressed to find any hint of evil in Job, any evidence of even the most trivial sin that would trigger the onset of so harsh a trial as that which he begins to undergo.

Since he is introduced as essentially without sin or fault at the start of the book of Job, Job thus appears to readers as an alternate version of Adam (in Adam's prelapsarian form, that is). Interestingly, the author of the book of Job does not present Job within his patrilineal ancestry ("Job son of ..."), as nearly all men in the Old Testament are introduced; like Adam, then, Job appears as unbegotten save by God, as the man who begins a human line. Job's ability to refuse the temptation proffered by his wife and to preserve his integrity and blamelessness is a strength Adam seems to lack, seeing how he takes from Eve and eats with little resistance. Job's wealth, his accumulation of goods, his land, and his family could be read as an act of obedience in response to God's command in the Garden of Eden to be "fruitful and multiply" (Gen, 1, 28). To say that Job's residence in Uz is paradise would be unfounded, but it is still evident that his upstanding conduct has earned him a paradisiacal homestead.

What one cannot afford to miss is the paradisiacal focus of Job's first extended speech to his three friends once his bodily affliction takes effect. Job does indeed attempt to fathom something resembling paradise, but it is not a paradise in which all suffering has been relieved, where he can finally be at rest, having toiled through all his time and now enjoying a well-deserved rest from his afflictions. Job's paradise is,



rather, a *return to creation*, to the earliest recollections of existence, consciousness, and ontological existence within the Judaic tradition and mentality. And Job does not stop there; in the act of creation, he purposes to regress even further by cursing creation, by beseeching creation to collapse in on itself and to return to black emptiness. (Satan was thus only partially correct; Job indeed curses when his body is accursed, but Job curses creation, not God.) In this sense, the example of Job's opening shift parallels, if not surpasses, Cioran's notion of the regressive memory of man toward God. Rather audaciously, Job pursues God, the memory of God, not at the dawn of his own consciousness, but rather the dawn of consciousness itself, within the set parameters of Judaic thought and life; there, Job seeks to capsized human consciousness through the destruction of existence.

Though Job blessed God in chapter one, he does not bless creation by echoing God, whose refrain in response to his creation is "It is good." Rather, Job curses the day of his birth—and, beyond that, all creation. Though readers are told (3.1) that Job only curses the day of his birth, his curse immediately extends to all creation (3, 3-7, 9):

Let the day perish on which I was to be born,
And the night which said, "A boy is conceived."
May that day be darkness;
Let not God above care for it,
Nor light shine on it.
Let darkness and black gloom claim it;
Let a cloud settle on it;
Let the blackness of the day terrify it.
As for that night, let darkness seize it;
Let it not rejoice among the days of the year;
Let it not come into the number of the months.
Behold, let the night be barren;
Let no joyful shout enter it.
.....
Let the stars of its twilight be darkened;
Let it wait for light but have none,
And let it not see the breaking dawn.

As is often the case with someone who suffers, Job's focus begins with himself, but he extends his focus outward and soon attempts to make cosmic speculations in relation to his suffering. In verse three, Job prays for the day of his birth to be obliterated; as he develops his thought here, the day about which he speaks universalizes beyond his own day of birth to, rather, the birth of all, signaled by the beginning of creation. And here, at the point where God speaks the heavens and the earth into existence, Job beseeches the dark void to return, and he charges God to remain silent, to resist creating and declaring creation "good."

Even when he returns to what seems to be a personal reflection in verse 10 – "Because it [the day of Job's birth] did not shut the opening of my mother's womb, / Or hide trouble from my eyes" – in his newly-acquired, perhaps self-appointed position as speaker for all creation, Job conceives of his mother's womb in broader terms. As



Schifferdecker (2008: 27) argues, Job's evocation of a mother's womb signifies not the actual womb of his mother but rather "the womb of mother earth"; Schifferdecker proposes that Job's evocation of the experience of childbirth allows all men to relate to and have some vested interest in that which Job is saying and will say. Job has left the specificity of his own suffering behind and now speaks on behalf of all, and he addresses the pressing existential questions of life.

For those who find Job unbearably lachrymal, this opening speech embodies the perceived eccentricity of Job, who prays the day of his birth be sucked up in a nihilist vortex, leaving no trace behind. In their eyes, Job exaggerates the magnitude of his suffering. Perhaps God's acquiescing to alter the division between day and night in the heat of battle for the Israelites can be justified, but to sweep away the day of one's birth, as Job earnestly and desperately requests, is preposterous.

Yet Job's aspiration of reversing existence is not solely for his own benefit, as the subsequent verses after his initial curse of creation show. Should Job's request be granted, should all creation be blotted out and return to paradisiacal emptiness, the demands, strain, and exhaustion of life would be lifted from all, regardless of one's social standing and prestige. Job shifts from his prayer for the obliteration of existence to imagining how much better off he would have been had he never existed – and, likewise, kings, princes, the wicked, prisoners, slaves, and slave-masters would all be better off in the obliterated, non-existent emptiness (3, 17-19):

There the wicked cease from raging,
And there the weary are at rest.
The prisoners are at ease together;
They do not hear the voice of the taskmaster.
The small and the great are there,
And the slave is free from his master.

Job thus aspires to paradise, a place where all troubles are left behind; yet Job's paradise is a regressive paradise, one reached not by progressing forward through the trajectory of history to history's culmination but instead backward, past the onset of the suffering everyone experiences, past the initial act of sin in the Garden of Eden, past the divine inception of earth – and to God and nonexistence.

Job is perhaps only able to conceive of such thoughts because of his own suffering, his bodily degradation, and thus the dismantling of social order. Had he not undergone these travails, he most likely would not have entertained such thoughts as those he seriously contemplates in his opening speech to his friends. Recognizing that his own degradation and the sign of social degradation are undesirable, he is more easily able to deliberate regarding whether the existence of all would be better off in a state of nonexistence. In nonexistence, in pre-created paradise, everyone of whom Job thinks would be free from the responsibilities of social roles; all would be free, and all could live free of the burdens brought on by their respective social role.

The seriousness of what Job says in his initial speech indicates that his experience of suffering alerts him to a serious and terrifying notion of the inherent



fallibility of created existence. Beal (2002: 37) describes Job's cry here and throughout Job as "the voice of utter disorientation" and the book of Job as "a giant breach in the biblical corpus" that questions the traditional understandings of suffering, both its origin and its consequences. His body plagued, Job now finds he resembles not untainted Israelite society but rather heinous beasts. Beal (2002: 41) later says that Job aligns himself with "*the monstrous forces of uncreation against the creator God*" (namely, Behemoth and Leviathan), an act Beal classifies as a *chaogony*, "a return of chaos against cosmos." While Job's comments originate from his own plight and misfortune, his opening address against God and against creation is an address with universal and cosmic implications; it affects far more people than just himself.

Beal's classification of Job's efforts as chaogony coincides with Job's anti-creative rhetoric. Drawing on Fishbane and Habel's writing on Job, Schifferdecker (2008: 29) argues that Job's agony convinces him not just he but all creation should be annihilated; thus, Job attempts this destruction by sequentially cursing the elements of creation in the order in which those elements were created. So Job's attempt to return to his first memory, to the first memory of consciousness, almost certainly amounts to an attempt to blot out existence itself.

Job's bold attempt to negate creation does not go without criticism; when God chastises Job in his whirlwind speech, God essentially seeks to undo the de-creative act of Job by re-creating creation, by restoring creation's magnificence so as to reprove Job. According to Alter (1985: 110), Job is unexpectedly presented with the extravagance of creation, something so vast only God can govern, and Job's having seen this allows him to situate his relatively small plight in relation to the surge of life within God's created cosmos. The "immense world of power and beauty and awesome warring forces," of which Alter speaks, is far more specific than the original act of creation recorded in Genesis 1. In Genesis, God tugs binaries – the heavens and the earth, day and night, the surface and the seas – out of the abysmal void preceding creation; in the book of Job, however, God works to repair the damage Job enacts with a sweeping panoramic evocation of his creation. According to Burrell (2008: 124), God essentially reenacts the sudden creation of the world before Job. Job has returned in his mind and his speech to the act of creation, and God, as he must, meets Job there and begins his speech based on Job's destructive curse.

As Schifferdecker (2008: 69) argues, God re-creates creation for two reasons: to restore the essential story, or narrative, of creation and to allow that expansive narrative to contextualize the relative insignificance of Job's suffering. Though Job's suffering is itself, from God's perspective, relatively insignificant, the cosmic scope of Job's attempt to reverse creation is quite significant. Schifferdecker (2008: 82) also claims that God must adequately respond to the challenge Job sets before him; since God affirmed creation as good in his eyes, he is obliged to sustain and reaffirm his creation, and he must halt Job's effort to contest life and creation. Having recurrently proclaimed that his creation is good in Genesis, God must reaffirm his creation in defense against Job's destructive attacks; he must make good his word that all creation is indeed good.



The success of God's attempt to reaffirm and rescue his creation from and before Job is, however, questionable. Penchansky (1990: 71), for instance, argues that dissonance is the key characteristic of the book of Job, and he states that God's reaffirmation of creation inadequately responds to Job's pressing questions about suffering (both his own as well as that of the world at large); the vexing nature of the human condition remains improperly explained. When conducting a dissonantal reading, then, the impressiveness of the scope of God's creation sidesteps the central problem of suffering in the book.

A dissonantal reading focuses largely on the perceived inadequacy of God's response to Job's challenge. Beal (2002: 53) draws from Rudolph Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, where Otto classifies God's speech in response to Job as a "dysteleology" or [Beal's words] "an anti-explanation or anti-justification" in which meaning is unraveled. Beal (2002: 55) then argues that God seeks to tame Job's destructive effort through "out-monstering" Job by surpassing Job's evocation of chaos with the overwhelmingly chaotic scope of creation—and reveling, no less, in this extraordinary chaos. In agreement with those who see God's response as a demonstration of "supreme arrogance," Beal senses a sense of unfair competition in God's overwhelming reply to Job. "Now," God says to Job (38, 3-4),

gird up your loins like a man,
And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!
Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell Me, if you have understanding [...]

Faced with such an overwhelming opponent, Job cannot but back down (40, 4): "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? / I lay my hand on my mouth." Some read Job's statement here as a humble admission of inferiority, though perhaps a more adequate reading of this is rather an admission that even if he has a legitimate case against God, Job cannot attain a direct, comprehensible answer from an enraged God, and thus the best course of action is to humble himself before God. In keeping with this proposed alternate reading, Burrell (2008: 48) reflects on God's speech from the whirlwind and Job's response, and he claims that the "splendid proliferation of living things bears unceasing witness to the wisdom of the Creator, in the face of which Job only dares stammer . . ." Job has, as the saying goes, met his match, and he changes to a deferential tone before he also "meets his maker" – that is, before God annihilates he who attempted to annihilate or void all creation.

God is correct that Job is unable to completely grasp his relative insignificance in the scope of creation in all its vastness. Yet what Job unknowingly does (or knowingly to some extent, perhaps) is confront God with what God himself knows: that is, the act of creation is the moment in which all the troubles of the earth originate. For, indeed, the certainty of nonexistence leaves no room for man to fall and to suffer. Humankind, it must be said, did not ask to be given existence, it did not request to be insignificant amidst the unimaginable plane of all creation; it simply experiences suffering, and it cannot but wonder if nonexistence is indeed superior to existence.



That Job reveals the problematic nature of the act of creation does not mean he grasps what he has revealed. Had he fully grasped the extent of the danger established through the act of creation, he might not have backed down when God rebuked him; if anything, his integrity would have required that he stand his ground, even if he had to do so against the creator of all things. Yet it cannot be denied that Job strikes a cord with God; nowhere else in Scripture does God defend himself so erratically, in so scattered a manner, as he does before Job. What Job reveals is not only the problematic nature of the act of creation but also the inherent problem with an act; what Job discovers, without necessarily being able to put words to his discovery, is the way in which an act essentially divides a self, otherwise stable and self-sufficient.

Job thus prompts an exploration of the nature and power of an act. An act is, essentially, an affectation: the subject, the actor performing the act, does not simply affect the objective entity which receives, experiences, or suffers the performed act; the objective entity, through its experience of the subject's act, thereby absorbs or inherits traits or characteristics of the acting subject. Thus, the act is the *transference of identity* from the active subject to the receptive object. The identity transmitted is incomplete, and the receptive object does not become identical to the active subject. Nonetheless, the object's having been acted upon renders its identity akin to the acting subject; the more an object is acted upon, the more its resemblance to the acting subject increases, be that resemblance a positive resemblance (bearing the likeness of the acting subject) or a negative resemblance (bearing the subject's rejection of selfhood and its attempt to cast the undesired trait upon the object through a transgressive act against the object).

By sustaining the subject's act upon it, the receptive object thereby acquires alterity; it does not necessarily recognize its otherness in relation to the originating acting subject, but the subject which observes the affected object, the object sculpted into the other through the act of the subject, nonetheless cannot deny or ignore the likeness incorporated into the object through the subjective act. The subject may have acted upon the object, may have affected the object, with the intention of generating a positive resemblance between itself and its affected object. Nonetheless, once the affected object bears the likeness of the acting subject, the acting subject, initially pleased with the mirroring of itself in the form of the other, may become unsettled, troubled – yes, even terrified – by the alterity of the self located in the affected identity of the other. The individuality of one's being recedes at the sight of alterity.

Such is the case with God in the act of creation. Before the initial act of creation, God does not exist alone. Traditional dogmatic theology interprets the plural first person plural pronoun used in Genesis (1, 26), when God conceives of man, as the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Yet what one must consider is whether "us" includes not the traditional Trinitarian God – or at least not only the Trinitarian God – but also, or only, *the void or the emptiness existent within God*. God, then, exists not in some incarnate form prior to creation (or afterward, for that matter) but instead in an ethereal, immaterial form. Such a state of existence is



impossible to name without importing a conception of corporeality into our conception of the state of God's being; terms like "metaphysical" hardly belong here, for the term necessitates thoughts of physical, created beings, which, at this point, do not yet exist as we know and conceive of them. Even the description presented in Genesis (1, 2), where readers are told "the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters," gets tangled in imagery when, in reality, the earth exists at this point in the text only in word and not in form. Only the void allows us to properly conceive of the unimaginable state of being characteristic of God prior to creation; *God and the void are one*.

To make this claim, that God and the void are one, is not meant to enter nihilistic lines of thought. It is rather meant to evoke the infrequently considered coexistence, the consubstantial God-void, void-God, that ultimate subject which exists in all its totality and all its emptiness, in itself and for itself. This God, the God-void, does nothing, initiates no act prior to the foundational act of creation. A schismatic change, however, transpires when God commits his initial act: the act of creation. At the very moment of, amidst the event of, creation, God irreversibly dispels the void from his very being. The stability and unity of God's being is compromised through the desire for alterity. God, the ultimate subject which was previously able to exist eternally without the other, rejects such a state of being through the act of creation, and the void is divorced from the very being of God. The stability of being is compromised when the desire for alterity takes hold of God's will. With each subsequent act of creation, God drives the void further from himself – that is, he drives himself from himself.

God's denial of himself, his denial of unified being and his banishing of the void, is ultimately the origin of evil. Evil, in this sense, is the shame and the despair God experiences through the denial and casting off of the void through the act of creation, the generation of alterity and the other in the form of creation – at the expense of the disavowed void. With every act of creation, the void drives God to accuse himself of not wanting to be himself, the God-void capable of existing without the other. It is the evil act of creation which divides the two primary characteristics of God's nature: eternity and will. The void retains the fidelity of eternity, whereas will becomes defined by the desire for creation, for alterity, and thus the origin of evil, the division of self through the act of creation and the generation of alterity. The void, safe in eternity, does not need to accuse God; God, of his own initiative, accuses himself of dividing himself, of banishing the void.

Read this way, one begins to obtain the impression that, whenever God says "Let there be" or "Let," that he does not speak on behalf of his Trinitarian co-creators but rather in an attempt to impress the void and convince it to return to God. Yet the void will not return; with each act of creation, with the increasing generation of alterity through each creative act, the void eludes God further and further; it will not, it cannot, be convinced to return to consubstantiality with God. The name for that which God creates is good; God sees that the light is good, the earth and the seas are good, the entirety of his creation, all that he has made, is good. Yet the act itself, each act of



creation, is evil to the extent that God denies the void he is – or was, prior to the act of creation, the moment of the onset of evil.

If one returns to God's speech to Job out of the whirlwind (another intangible form through which God is portrayed, similar to the un-embodied "spirit" hovering over the newly-created Earth in Genesis), God's inability to summon the void back into himself becomes all the more apparent. The panorama of creation that initially seemed so impressive now strikes readers, aware of the distance between God and his void, as startlingly desperate. In the verses included in chapter 38, God's speech concerns action, the very means through which God divided himself and relegated the void, his void and his very being, away for the sake of the image, for alterity. But for all the questions he asks, apparently to Job but actually to the void, the void does not answer – no, the void remains true to itself, the void remains within the void of itself, despite the provocation of God's series of questions; even to respond would be an act, and the void cannot act.

God's questions persist in the verses comprising chapter 39, but God's tactic with the void shifts to a psalm of the glory of his creation: calving deer, wild donkeys and ox, ostriches, mighty horses, and soaring hawks, among others. The essential point God means to make is that only a wise sovereign figure can sufficiently govern the affairs of so vast a network of created beings; Job, for all his experience with his livestock, is hardly suited for the task of being the cosmic sovereign over all creation. But the void, equally powerful to God because it is part of the character of God cast away through the schismatic act and the event of evil in an attempt to reproduce self and goodness – the void remains unimpressed, unmoved by this magnanimous appeal to creation. The silence of the void here drives God into a greater frenzy in his recreation of creation than the unspecific original act of creation.

God advances to Behemoth and Leviathan, two of his monstrous creations, and Job is sufficiently overwhelmed and awed by God's speech. Job verbally prostrates himself, admitting God's omnipotence and his [Job's] repentant and humble deference to what God will say to him (42, 2-6). God here successfully regains control over and support from Job. Convinced he has overstepped set boundaries, Job recants his words comprising the bulk of the book of Job. Again, though, readers struggle to understand why God would pressure Job into recantation, seeing that, immediately after Job recants, the poetic segment of Job ends and a prosaic conclusion begins, in which God tells Eliphaz (42, 7), "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has." What is important here is that Job, who aligned himself, most likely unknowingly, with the void in his opening speech in which he curses the day of his birth and all creation, is forced to side with God's explanation for the value of creation. The void, however, remains silent, remains within itself; it remains outside the affairs of God and alterity; the void remains faithful to the eternity of its being, a being sufficient in itself and able to exist, unlike God, without alterity.

Why, we must ask, does Job, in his opening speech in which he evokes the void, the void which so dismays God, fathom his inexistence alongside kings and princes,



still-borns and the wicked, slaves and slave-masters? His use of language gets the better of him in that activity nonetheless appears when Job attempts to praise the passivity of nonexistence. Nonetheless, what is striking is that each of these figures is essentially excused from having to act; in each case, alterity is removed, and the individual alluded to is free to remain true to his or her self without schisms in identity, without banishing the void which comprises a vital dimension of that individual's being. And Job, it should be remembered, imagines the void in a prelapsarian state; he is nude, but he has no shame, for he has done no wrong; he is clothed in grace—not the grace of God, per se, but rather the wordless grace of the void. To say that Job needs paradise is, in effect, to say that he needs God to reunite himself, for God and the void to be one once again, even if it is necessarily at the expense of all created life, even if it is necessarily at the expense of all created life, even if it means the blacking and the blotting out of life as he and all humanity are conscious of it.

Two trees existed in the Garden of Eden: not only the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but also the tree of life. Through the act of creation, God originated evil, signaled primarily through the dispersion of his being as God-void and casting away of the void. The tree of life, that which embodies eternity, was left behind when Adam and Eve committed their own act, sin, thereby initiating the event of evil for man: the shared event of evil makes man like God.

God, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The void, the tree of life—a created tree with which the void will have nothing to do, but a created form meant to commemorate that element of God's own being which God forsook through the act of creation. And it was good (or was it?).

Perhaps God, in the greatest expression of his love for the void, seals the void off from man in an attempt to leave the void alone to be itself, to be eternally, to be safe from action, from suffering another act. Yet the void, to God's dismay, does not indwell the tree of life but remains apart, within itself, evermore, independent even of created memorials commemorating it.



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