

JOB'S ASSAULT ON CREATION

by

LEO G. PERDUE

Phillips Graduate Seminary, Enid, OK 73702

I. Introduction: Wisdom and Creation

One of the cardinal features of Wisdom thought is creation. Prior to Ben Sirah in the early part of the second century B.C.E., Wisdom texts are silent about salvation history, covenant, and the David-Zion tradition. Rather, the sages spoke of God, the world, and humanity within the framework of the two major traditions of creation present in the religions of Israel and the ancient Near East: cosmology and anthropology.¹ Creation provided the basis for sapiential ethics, for the sage participated in sustaining the continuity and harmony of the world by creating a sphere of well-being in which all life flourished and continued. Truly ethical actions, from a sapiential perspective, were actualizations of divine creativity.

Zimmerli's affirmation that wisdom "thinks resolutely within a theology of creation" (1964, pp. 146–168) represents the consensus of modern wisdom scholars, though few have attempted to describe in comprehensive fashion the salient features of the sapiential understanding of creation. Previous approaches to the topic, mainly taking the form of prolegomena, have followed a thematic approach: anthropology (wisdom is essentially a human enterprise to master life within the context of the world and society),² theodicy (the questioning of divine justice and rule of the cosmos),³ cosmology (originating at creation, a moral order permeates cosmic and social reality),⁴ and a dialectic of cosmology and anthropology (there is an evolution in wisdom thought

1. For recent studies of creation in the Hebrew Bible, see Anderson (1984), Knierim (1980, pp. 59–123), Schmid (1984), and Westermann (1974, 1984).

2. Brueggemann (1972), Priest (1968, pp. 281–288), Rankin (1936), Zimmerli (1933, 1964).

3. Crenshaw (1983, 1985) and Mack (1970).

4. Gese (1958), Hermisson (1978), and Schmid (1968).

from emphasis on the human effort to master life to the understanding of God as creator).⁵ However, each of these thematic approaches suffers from serious limitations. The anthropological approach tends to undervalue the importance of God and divine action in the literature, and is challenged not only by the tradition's internal witness (e.g., "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," Prov. 1:7) but also by important studies which see a religious undergirding to the earliest strata (e.g., Gemser, 1968). To view theodicy as the center of wisdom thought is to read the tradition through the lens of Job and Qoheleth. Certainly the issue of divine justice is critical in wisdom texts, but it would be difficult to fit the entirety of the tradition under this matrix. Even the view of "order" (צדקה) as central to wisdom does not take into consideration the passionate image of Woman Wisdom wooing youth to her embrace, and often conveys the notion of a static, inflexible structure which negates divine freedom and human initiative. Finally, the dialectic of anthropology and cosmology is far more inclusive of the variety of expression that characterizes the complexity of creation thought in wisdom literature. However, the weakness of this presentation is its evolutionary depiction of the movement from anthropos to theos, and from the individual's attempt to master life in early wisdom to the understanding of the creation of the world by means of divine wisdom.

A more convincing portrayal of the interaction of anthropology and cosmology would see these as interacting within the structure of a dialectic that dynamically shapes the creation tradition in wisdom. But in the analysis of this dialectic what needs to be avoided is a too systematic and rational accounting of the tradition which obscures its linguistic and aesthetic dimensions. Indeed, the tendency to shape wisdom thought into a rationalistic form and to avoid the poetic nature of its language has been the greatest weakness in previous investigations.

The wise poets forged a synthesis between the Dionysian dance and the Apollonian vision. There was the formal ordering of experience through proverb, admonition, and instruction, but equally important was the passionate and joyous response to the beauty, goodness, and elegance of creation and life in Dame Wisdom's invitation and in the composition of sapiential hymns. It is my contention that creation language, i.e., how creation is talked about, provides the major entree into the world of the sages. In the crafting of their creation tradition, the wise used language to construct a mythic world into which they entered

5. Albertz (1974), Doll (1985), and Murphy (1985).

and lived. This world, which provided the context for meaning and orientation to existence, was created, sustained, and revitalized by the power of words. And central to the language of creation in wisdom, was indeed the active agent which shaped this linguistic reality, was metaphor.

II. The Metaphorical Process

Understanding the Character of Metaphor

The primal component of religious language is metaphor (Tracy, 1979, pp. 89f.).⁶ Properly understood metaphor is not a mere rhetorical device which only embellishes, but does not have to do with the substance of language. Rather, being "as ultimate as speech itself, and speech as ultimate as thought," metaphor "appears as the instinctive and necessary act of the mind exploring reality and ordering experience" (Murry, 1931, pp. 1-2). While language constructs reality, metaphor is the essential feature of that world-building process. However, metaphors are not only semantic building blocks which construct new worlds. They are themselves constructed by the very worlds they build. When denied their potency by being either forced outside the context of the reality systems which they produce or transformed into literal referent, they become estranged from their world which consequently disintegrates and returns to chaos.

A metaphor is a "double unit," involving "two ideas," or "two halves." Richards calls them "the tenor and the vehicle" (1936, p. 96), "where we speak of something (tenor) as though it were another (vehicle)" (1936, p. 116). More simply put, in this double unit the tenor is the principal subject which is conveyed by a vehicle, or secondary subject (Booth, 1974, p. 22). To define metaphor involves more than the task of delineating characteristic features. Rather to understand metaphor is to see its meaning in the process of becoming. For meaning is shaped not only by the mere act of objective describing, but also by the engagement and movement of both the poet (or implied author) who suggests the metaphor and the hearer (or implied audience) who responds.⁷ This active

6. Tracy underscores the common affirmation "that all major religions are grounded in certain root metaphors" (p. 89). For important studies of metaphor, see Barbour (1974), Black (1962), Caird (1980, pp. 131-197), Ferré (1968), McFague (1982), Richards (1936), Ricoeur (1975, 1977), Sacks (1979), and Wheelwright (1962).

7. Booth (1974, p. 22) emphasizes the role of the reader in noting that he/she "must reconstruct unspoken meanings through inferences about surface statements that for some reason cannot be accepted at face value."

engagement of the perception of poet, metaphor, and audience is the metaphorical process. The constituent features of this process as it unfolds include the following.

First, essential to the character of metaphor is the seeming incompatibility of its two ideas. That is, a vehicle depicts its tenor in a manner that is false when taken literally. The metaphorical relationship constructed between tenor and vehicle is not one of factual, literal correlation. Indeed, the linking together of two incompatible ideas shatters the previous structures of linguistic reality that made these ideas initially incompatible (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 51; 1977, p. 199).⁸ It is this initial incompatibility that at first disturbs and confuses, but then engages and awakens the hearers to the possibility of new insight (Ricoeur, 1975, pp. 77–78). The poet presents through metaphor a potentially revelatory state to the audience.

Mimesis is the second feature of metaphor. Once the hearer examines the tenor through the lens of its vehicle, a new set of associations is attached. Through this unusual set of associations, new insight into the tenor is presented, and the hearer may become aware that something in the relationship is unquestionably true. There may be a shock in the relating of tenor to vehicle, but it is what Wheelwright calls the “shock of recognition” (1962, p. 74). Caird notes that “in a living metaphor, although both speaker and hearer are aware that vehicle and tenor are distinct entities, they are not grasped as two but as one” (1980, p. 152).⁹ Without the vehicle, something in the tenor would have remained hidden and obscure. Metaphor, having broken down its own linguistic relationships, mirrors reality by creating for it a new vision.

A third feature of metaphor is transformation (*metamorphosis*). Metaphors serve not only to restructure one’s perception, but, if they are compelling ones, they may even become organizing images which restructure the hearer’s understanding of the visible world, including both perception and activation of values. Metaphors become dangerous things, for they possess the innate power to transform vision and its

8. Booth (1974, p. 23) is more skeptical about the capacity of metaphor to “shatter” linguistic reality to force a decision about seeing the world in different terms. According to him, the metaphorical process does not usually involve “repudiation or reversal,” but rather “exploration or extension.” “There is no moment of shock when incompatibles are forced upon our attention, with the demand for active negative judgment, or if there is, the shock is relatively muted, and it is caused only by the misleading form of the statement (identity claimed where similarity is meant), not by any absurdity or impossibility in what is said. The essential process . . . is addition or multiplication, not subtraction.”

9. Here Caird is following Richards (1936, pp. 96–97).

sustaining values.¹⁰ And when metaphors become the shared heritage of a culture, they become symbols so long as they and the culture that gives them expression remain active and vital. Other metaphors become stock metaphors incapable of producing response and transformation. Losing their semantic power, these metaphors die, and the worlds which they have constructed and maintained collapse (McFague, 1982, p. 41).

A fourth feature accompanies metaphor through the three stages of its becoming: "tensiveness" (Wheelwright, 1962, pp. 45–69). Invariably there is something in the relationship between tenor and vehicle which is not true. Yet it is this tension between vehicle and tenor which provides both vitality and transformative insight. Correlation and difference serve to sustain the integrity and power of all metaphorical language. However, when vehicle and tenor are made one, when metaphor is denied its semantic integrity and corrupted into literal description, when similarity becomes identity, metaphor loses its dynamic character and dies. Or worse, metaphor is reborn as chaos, distorting if not destroying perception.

The fifth characteristic of metaphor, ambiguity, also accompanies the three stages of becoming and continues after meaning is shaped (Wheelwright, 1962, p. 33). Metaphors are by nature ambiguous, in part because they evoke potentially different types of experience, and in part because the tenor is in some way mysterious. This is especially true of religious metaphors seeking to speak of the ineffable.¹¹ Potent metaphors do not possess "steno-meanings" which are shared by a large number of people in exactly the same way. Rather they are incapable of being limited to the boundaries of precise definition. When ambiguity is denied, that which is fundamental to metaphor is lost. Then metaphor loses its semantic value and dies. And the world which it has constructed is reshaped into inflexible dogma.

Metaphors and the Mythic Traditions

Israel's sages appropriated from ancient Near Eastern mythic traditions and those biblical texts which were indebted to these traditions four major metaphors for speaking about creation: fertility, artistry,

10. Ferré (1968, p. 331) and Ricoeur (1975, p. 75).

11. By ambiguity I am not suggesting the notion of vagueness. Rather the experience of and knowledge about the holy take on multiple meanings and interpretations, not only in the expressions of different religions and their various cultural contexts, but also within the same religious tradition. Even root metaphors of major religions, for example "covenant" in Judaism, receive multiple associations and evoke a variety of understandings.

language, and battle.¹² The major literary genre which was the context and narrative extension of these metaphors was myth, though mythic formulations often influenced the *theologoumena* of other genres.¹³ These metaphors in their mythic formulations provided the major cultural traditions for securing existence in the world, legitimating social structures, and undergirding religious faith and practice.

Myths of origin and maintenance often speak of creation in terms of intercourse, procreation, midwifery, and parenting. Theogonies, the birth and providential care of humans, and the seasonal rhythm of life and death were mythic themes expressed and shaped through the fertility metaphor.¹⁴ In the Hebrew Bible, God is primarily the father of the Davidic king (Ps 2, 2 Sam 7), Israel (Hos 11:1), and the individual (Job 10, Ps 139:13–16), but on occasion also the mother who bore and gave birth to Israel (Deut 32:18), experiences a mother's tender feelings (Isa 49:15), and gives the infant Israel nourishment from her breast (Num 11:12). Theogonic images are used by the sages in portraying Wisdom as a goddess given birth by the Lord prior to the beginning of creation (Prov 8:22–31).¹⁵ And Job 10 speaks of God's formation of Job in the womb, granting life, steadfast love, and providential care.

The artistry metaphor portrays God as a craftsman fashioning an elegant piece of art (Keel, 1978, pp. 204–205). Two images are frequent: God is the architect who constructs the cosmos in the fashion of a well-planned, beautiful building (Pss 18:7, 82:5, Job 38:4–7), and a skilled potter or weaver who shapes humans from raw materials with care and skill (Gen 2:7, Ps 139:13). The sages used these images to describe Dame Wisdom's construction of her seven-pillared house in Prov 9:1–6, in my estimation, a cosmogonic activity in which wisdom constructs and orders the world. Since the building of temples was considered a cosmogonic activity in the ancient Near East, Woman Wisdom is the divine architect who orders and shapes a world of beauty and life (Eliade, 1959, pp. 6f.). And in Job 10 God is the potter and the weaver who shaped Job in his mother's womb.

12. Westermann (1974, pp. 39–40). For visual depictions of these metaphors, see Keel (1978). Jacobsen (1976) argues that central metaphors are the key to understanding the changing character of religion and cosmology in Mesopotamian religion.

13. For an important survey of studies of myth in Israelite traditions, see Rogerson (1974). Important analyses of myth in the Hebrew Bible include Childs (1962) and McCurley (1983).

14. McCurley (1983, pp. 73–124) and Keel (1978, pp. 201f.).

15. For a discussion of the feminine metaphor used for wisdom, see Camp (1985) and Lang (1975).

The third metaphor used to describe creation is language (Keel, 1978). The creator speaks reality into existence by the potency of words. In the Memphite theology, Ptah conceived in his heart (=Horus) what he wished to create, spoke the mental image into being, and named the newly created object. Thoth, the god of wisdom, became Ptah's tongue which spoke the creative word giving existence to all things (*ANET*, pp. 4-6). Genesis 1 and Psalm 33 are the best examples of creation by word in the Hebrew Bible. Ben Sirah used this metaphor to speak of Dame Wisdom who proceeds out of the mouth of God (Sir 24) and to describe God's ordering and maintaining creation (39:17, 39:31).

What unites these three metaphors in their appropriation by conventional wisdom is the presentation of the cosmos as an aesthesis, a harmonious and beautiful order in which the various components of creation have their place, function, time, and norms for existence. Creation is a well-constructed, elegant house, its arrangement and appearance one of beauty and delight, and its laws those of a harmonious society regulated by authoritative decrees. Humans are those who receive the gift of life and enjoy the providential care of God. The task of the sage was to shape aesthesis through language and act, perceive and delight in its coherence and elegance, and contribute to its maintenance through righteous existence, proper and elegant language, and the making of lawcodes and moral instructions. Wise behavior helped to shape and sustain creation and the social order grounded in the structures of life. These three metaphors express the sage's confidence that the world was orderly, intelligible, beautiful, and just. And while there were limits to knowledge and troubling instances of the chaotic, the sage trusted in a beneficent creator who provided for the needs of creatures and maintained the ongoing order of creation (von Rad, 1972, pp. 97-112). Even more, reality (cosmic and social) was dynamic and open, not static and closed to human participation, in either shaping and maintaining or distorting and destroying.

Battle is the fourth major metaphor for creation in Israel and the ancient Near East (McCurley, 1983, pp. 12-57; Keel, 1978, pp. 219-222). Creation is a struggle between the creator and primeval chaos, usually depicted as a dragon or serpent residing in the cosmic ocean. The classic depiction is that of the *Enuma elish* which narrates the ascendancy of Marduk, the god of Babylon, to kingship over the divine council, a status gained by the defeat of Tiamat (*ANET*, pp. 60-72, 501-503). This battle with chaos is part of a larger mythic pattern that included conflict, victory over chaos, kingship through enthronement and the building of the temple, judgment, and creation. This metaphor and its extended

mythic pattern (Fisher, 1965) are found in Old Testament laments (Ps 74), theophanic hymns (Hab 3), and eschatological prophecy (Isa 51:9–11). However, Job is the first and only text in the Israelite and Jewish wisdom corpus to make use of this important metaphor. And it is this metaphor that challenges conventional wisdom's cosmology and anthropology. Indeed, the literary pattern of the myth of the *Chaos-kampf*, transmitted through the tradition of the theophanic hymns (Exod 15, Hab 3; cf. Jeremias, 1965), provides the external frame of interpretation for the Joban drama: the Lord is the king of the divine council who comes each year to defeat the embodiments of chaos, enter into judgment, and recreate the world. Creation as seen through the lens of this metaphor is not an ordered world of beauty secure under divine providence, but a reality, ever under threat, which must be maintained through the struggle with the forces of chaos. But what makes the use of the battle metaphor in Job even more disorienting is the contention by the hero that the Divine Warrior has turned against his own creation and his faithful servant to destroy them. It is the use of an unconventional metaphor in a most unconventional way that is at the center of the drama.

These four metaphors, central to and expressed by mythic and other generic forms, were the linguistic building blocks of ancient Near Eastern and Israelite understandings of creation and the social order. They became the shared cultural symbols which expressed the fundamental features of the mythic constructions of reality. Through metaphors and the literary forms which became their poetic and narrative extensions the world was ordered and the structures of life were maintained. To threaten these metaphors, which became major religious symbols in the cultures of the ancient Near East (Keel, 1978), was to place in jeopardy the mythic constructions of reality which provided meaning and orientation to existence. Indeed, it is this assault on the metaphorical construction of reality that is waged in the Book of Job. By destabilizing these metaphors, Job attempts to return creation to chaos.¹⁶

III. Job's Destabilization of Creation (Job 3)

The opening chapter of the poetic dialogues provides an abrupt, though not entirely unexpected, shift from the "god-fearing" hero of the Prologue to the devastated victim who begins an all-out assault on creation and those mythic structures which keep the world from return-

16. I am presently completing a manuscript which demonstrates how metaphor functions in deconstructing and then reconstructing the narrative world of Job (*Wisdom in Revolt. Creation Theology in the Book of Job*).

ing to chaos.¹⁷ The poet has used the old hero legend of Job to raise questions about the integrity of Job, the moral nature of the universe, and most importantly the power and justice of God. Now, after seven days and nights of silence, a period immediately evoking the imagery of creation (Gen 1:1–2:4a), the opening words of Job are curse, exactly as the satan had predicted and the wife had urged.

Translation

INTRODUCTION

1. Afterwards, Job opened his mouth and cursed his Day.
2. And Job responded¹⁸ and said,

STROPHE I

3. "Let the Day perish on which I was born,
And the Night which said, 'A Mighty Man¹⁹ is conceived.'
4. Let that Day be darkness,
Let not Eloah above divine for it,
Let not light break forth upon it.
5. Let primordial darkness and deep blackness defile²⁰ it,
Let a thick cloud settle upon it,
Let the eclipse of Day²¹ fill it with terror.

17. The shift from pious worshipper in response to the first testing of the Prologue to curser and indicter of divine justice in the dialogues may have been signalled by the narrator's remarks about Job's response to the second testing. In the first response to testing, the narrator assures us that "Job did not sin or charge God with wrong" (1:22). However, in describing Job's second response, the narrator remarks that "Job did not sin with his lips." This remark leaves open the possibility that Job's own thoughts are beginning to change. The matter of intent behind words and actions had been clearly underscored in 1:6.

18. The Syr. and Targ. agree with MT's ענה ("responded"). The term often means to reply to a situation, not necessarily a speech or statement (1 Sam 9:17, Judg 18:14, Num 11:28). Verse 2 provides the typical pattern of introducing speeches in Job (4:1, 6:1, 8:1, etc.).

19. Interpreting גבור ("man") as "mighty man, warrior, hero," on occasion one of royal stature (Exod 12:37, Judg 5:30), a meaning more often associated with גבור (Judg 6:12, 11:1, 2 Sam 9:1). The parallel text in Jer 20:15 speaks of the birth of a "male" (זכר).

20. Reading גאל as "defile," not "redeem" (see Dhorme, 1967, p. 26). The ritual cursing would include desecration (cf. Mal 1:7, Ezra 2:62 = Neh 7:64). Fohrer translates the term "redeem," interpreting the expression to mean that chaos will redeem day, thereby asserting its right of ownership, for Day originally belonged to the powers of darkness (1963, pp. 110, 117).

21. כמרירי יום literally means "like the bitterness of day." However, Pope's association (1965, p. 29) of the root with a Syriac cognate meaning "black, gloomy" fits the present context.

6. Let the darkness of the underworld seize that Night,
Let it not be joined²² to the days of the years,
Let it not enter the number (of days)²³ of the months,
7. Behold, let that Night be barren,
Let no ecstatic cry occur in it.
8. Behold, let the cursers of Yam²⁴ damn it,
The skilled ones who awaken Leviathan.
9. Let the stars of its dawn²⁵ become dark,
Let it wait in hope for light but find only nothingness.
Let it not look upon the eyelids of Dawn,
10. Because it did not close the doors of my womb
And conceal sorrow from my eyes.”

STROPHE II

11. “Why did I not die at birth,
Expire at the time I came forth from the womb?
12. Why did the knees receive me,
Or the breasts that I should suck?
13. For now I would be at rest and silent,
I would sleep, then I would have rest,
14. With kings and counsellors of the earth,
those who rebuild ruins for themselves.
15. Or with princes who have gold,
who fill their houses with silver.
16. Or why was I not like an aborted fetus,
Like infants who did not see light?
17. There the wicked cease their raging,²⁶
And there those whose strength has expired are at rest.

22. יחד (*Qal* imperfect jussive, “to be joined”) is read in place of the MT חרה (“to rejoice over”). See Gen 49:6 which parallels the same two verbs, “be joined to” and “come, enter” (בא). The parallel passage in Jer 20:14–18 has the motif of “joy” (v. 15).

23. The LXX adds “into days,” probably an explanatory addition.

24. Reading ים (“Yam”) for יום (“day”). The “cursers of Yam” is a subjective genitive meaning that priests of Yam are skilled to arouse Leviathan from the depths of the Deep to destroy Night, Job’s primordial enemy.

25. נשף can mean either “dawn” or “evening twilight,” though here it is probably the former.

26. רגז refers to God’s wrath shaking creation (Ps 18:8, Job 9:6). In Job 3 the allusion may be to the “noise” (destruction, rebellion) that led to the near annihilation of humanity by the gods in *Atra-hasis* (Lambert, 1969; cf. Isa 14:16).

18. There the prisoners are together in repose,
They do not hear the voice of the taskmaster.
19. The small and the great are there,
The slave is free from his lord."

STROPHE III

20. "Why is light given to the weary,
And life to the bitter in soul?
21. Those who wait for Death, but he does not come,
And dig for him like hidden treasures.
22. Those who rejoice greatly,
And exult when they find the tomb.
23. Why, to one whose way is hidden,
Whom Eloah has hedged in?
24. For my sighing comes before my bread,
And my groanings are poured out like water.
25. For what I exceedingly fear comes upon me,
And what I abhor approaches me.
26. I am not at ease, and I am not quiet,
I do not rest for wrath comes."

Job 3 and the Language of Negation

The dominant leitmotif which establishes the mood for this three strophe, lament-like soliloquy is the contrasting word pair of light and darkness. This creation motif connotes the fundamental duality of reality which is re-presented in this poem: day/night, life/death, birth/death, order/chaos, and knowledge/mystery. The mood of dark despair is set by the rich variety of words for darkness: חֹשֶׁךְ ("darkness"), צֶלְמוֹת ("death's shadow"), עֲנָנָה ("thick cloud"), אֶפֶל ("heavy darkness of the underworld"), מִרְרֵי יוֹם ("bitterness of day" = "eclipse") and לַיְלָה ("night"). Mythic darkness is to engulf all forms of light: נְהַרָה ("daylight"), כּוֹכְבֵי נֶשֶׁף ("stars of twilight"), אֹרֶךְ ("light"), and יוֹם ("day"). The image of darkness is the key motif for the first strophe (vv. 3–10), while light is central to the last (vv. 20–26). What is unconventional in the use of these creation images is the dominance of darkness over light and the attempt through curse to obliterate all sources of light. Even in the concluding strophe, the motif of light is used in a negative fashion. Here it is the unwanted image of life that is thrust upon those sufferers who desire death, but it refuses to come. Also negated is the typical association of light with enlightenment (e.g., Ps 19), since Job denies there is any explanation for why life is filled with unbearable suffering.

Two other leitmotifs, also suggestive of creation, contribute significantly to the thematic center for the poem: the word-pair “day and night” in strophe I and “rest” and its associated terms in strophe II. The first strophe centers on the Day of Job’s birth and the Night of his conception, personifying them into archfiends whom Job attempts to destroy by the power of the curse. Following the first line in which Day and Night are paired in the two parallel cola (v. 3), the initial strophe subdivides into two parts: the cursing of Day (vv. 4–5) and the cursing of Night (vv. 6–10). The word-pair “day and night” is common in creation contexts, marking both the basic temporal dichotomy between chaos and order and forming the major unit of time. In the Priestly narrative, the first act of creation is the speaking of light into existence and separating it from darkness. Light is then “named” Day and darkness “Night,” sealing and securing their differentiation by another linguistic act of creation (Gen 1:3–5, cf. 1:14, 16, 18, 8:22; Jer 31:35, 33:25; Pss 19:2, 74:16, 137:7–9).

An important leitmotif for the second strophe (11–19) is “rest” (נוח; vv. 13, 17) and its related terms: “lie down” (שכב; v. 13), “be quiet, at peace” (שקט; v. 13), “to sleep” (ישן; v. 13), “cease tumult” (חדל רגז; v. 17), and “be at ease, secure” (שאן; v. 18). שקט, נוח, and רגז (plus the term שלו) recur in the final verse of strophe III (v. 26), when Job laments that rest will not come. In the Priestly narrative, the Sabbath is the climax of creation, the special day separated from all others and sanctified by God. As the day on which God “rested” (שבת), the Sabbath is the day which secures the temporal order of creation and maintains the structures of life. “Honoring” and “remembering” the Sabbath are human actions in which the sovereignty of God over creation is recognized, and humans, through imitative action, participate in divine creativity that orders and maintains the cosmic and social structures necessary for life to continue. While the Joban poet does not use the term שבת, he twice uses the synonym נוח which occurs in several legal codes as a parallel term (Exod 20:11, 23:12; Deut 5:14). Yet in contrast to Sabbath rest which sustains life, Job longs for the rest of the tomb in which all the toil and trouble associated with life cease.

IV. Job 3 and the Destabilization of Creation Metaphors

As noted in the dominant *Leitwörter*, this lament-like soliloquy uses language to attempt to reverse creation, that is to return the world and all life to primordial darkness (Cox, 1973, 1978). Through the language of negation, Job also destabilizes the metaphors which were at the center

of the mythic texts of origins and maintenance. Once the mythic traditions which had shaped and interpreted reality have disintegrated, the plausibility structures of society and religion deconstruct. The world returns to chaos.

Creation by Word

The major metaphor deconstructed by Job is creation by word. The form of chapter 3 is similar to a lament, though without the standard invocation and petition for divine aid (Murphy, 1981, pp. 23f.). Laments on occasion referred to the primordial defeat of the chaos monster as the basis for calling on God to arise and save the individual or community from distress. In the place of the invocation and petition, however, is an extended curse, consisting of seven incantations directed against the Day of Job's birth and the Night of his conception (vv. 3-10). Curses were normally spoken by magicians and priests in order to destroy an enemy.²⁷ In Egypt curses were placed in the Book of the Dead in order to provide the deceased with power against the monster Apophis who would threaten them on their journey to the afterlife (*ANET*, pp. 11-12), while priests uttered maledictions against Apophis, the incarnation of the king's historical enemies and the powers of chaos, to preserve the order of the kingdom and the rule of the king, both founded in the eternal order of Maat (*ANET*, pp. 6-7). Akkadian incantations were often initiated by references to creation, thereby participating in the power of creation itself (Fishbane, 1971). Thus, curses drew on the vital power of creation itself in order to maintain the order of nature, the state, and individual life.

In stunning contrast, Job reverses the process by turning the maledictions against creation. With seven incantations, Job attempts to destroy his arch-enemies, Day and Night, not merely the times which are associated with his own birth, but also the temporal order of creation. And he calls on the priests of Yam, the Yam-cursers and skilled ones, to use their destructive powers to arouse the sleeping Leviathan, the monster of chaos, to devour Day and obliterate all creation. In contrast to laments which called on the God who had conquered chaos to arise, Job attempts to arouse the monster of the Deep to work his destruction.

27. See the Balaam cycle (Num 22-24) where the King of Moab hires the seer to utter curses to destroy the invading Hebrews. Ironically, the prophet can utter only blessings. For detailed studies of the curse, see Blank (1950) and Schottroff (1969).

Important in the effort to return creation to chaos are the significant allusions to the Priestly account in Gen 1:1–2:4a. The number of incantations, some seven directed against Day and Night, echoes the temporal frame of Gen 1:1–2:4a. Further, Fishbane has convincingly argued that the sequence of Job's incantations approximates that of the priestly narrative (Fishbane, 1971, p. 154). Also important is the fact that the eight major commands (altogether fifteen jussives) used to create and structure the cosmic order in P are doubled in Job 3:3–10. Job uses sixteen jussives and prohibitions in formulating the curses directed against Day and Night, attempting thereby to overpower the creative structure of divine language. Finally, in shaping the first incantation in Job 1:4 ("let there be darkness," יהי חשך), the poet reverses the first act of creation in P, the speaking of light into existence ("let there be light," יהי אור). From these rather clear allusions, the deconstruction of creation by word, given classic formulation in the P narrative, is underway in Job 3.

Creation by Birth

The second metaphor reversed by Job in chapter 3 is fertility. In the first strophe, Job hurls seven curses against the Day of his birth and the Night of his conception. In the P narrative, divine blessing is issued to creatures and humans in order to enhance procreative power, thereby ensuring the ongoingness of life. Once again Job reverses the language of creation in Genesis 1, this time by cursing the powers of fertility which led to his existence.

The fertility metaphor is very important in the traditions of the creation of the individual. The personal god or goddess is the one who is responsible for conception, shapes the fetus in the womb, and either gives birth or serves as a midwife at birth. This personal deity then nourishes and sustains the individual after birth. In the Hebrew Bible this tradition is found in such texts as Jer 1:4–10, Job 10:8–13, and Ps 139:13–18. Conception and birth are a new creation, the cause for festive celebration, as this time is marked and remembered (1 Sam 1–2). It is a primal time of passage from nothingness to being, from darkness to light. Through memory the individual is ritually transported to that time of beginnings to reactualize the vitality and power of new life. And renewed by festive occasion, the individual moves into the future to engage the fullness of life. Yet in Job's language of negation, memory has awakened tragic consciousness and the desire to annihilate his and all life.

Like Dawn and Dusk in Canaanite mythology, Day and Night appear in the guise of two deities of fertility who engender life in the womb, protect the fetus, and enable the birth to occur without harm. Against these two personified gods, Job utters curses of sterility, designed to negate their power to produce life and to return them to the realm of chaos where all fertility and light are ended.²⁸ Day is to be engulfed by the darkness of death, the blackness of chaos, and the impenetrable cloud which conceals the mystery of God.

Identified with the powers of reproduction which this nocturnal god rules, Night, guardian of the womb, who brings about conception, possesses the knowledge that life's first stirrings have occurred, and pronounces the sex of the child, is to become barren, incapable of bringing about conception. Night will neither cry out in ecstatic climax during sexual embrace, nor respond to God's call to come forth. Seized (לקח)²⁹ by Darkness, Night will not join (יחד)³⁰ with Day during his appearances each month. Denying the embrace of Day and Night, the curse is designed to destroy their powers of fertility.

To aid his efforts to negate the powers of fertility possessed by Night, Job calls on the priests of Yam to curse Night and to arouse sleeping Leviathan to devour her. Like Apophis who threatens to swallow the sun during his nocturnal journey across the foreboding cosmic ocean, Leviathan is to swallow Night, negating the light of the stars of her morning twilight. Night will not escape the grasp of chaos to gaze on the enchanting eyelids of Dawn which signal the stirrings of Day from slumber. Rather, Night is doomed to barrenness and darkness for not closing the womb which gave Job life³¹ and led to his travail (עמל).³²

The negating of the fertility metaphor continues in the second and third strophes. In the second strophe (vv. 11–19) Job questions why he did not die at birth. Implicit is his indictment of God as creator and sustainer of the individual from the time of formation in the womb and birth. God is the Lord of the womb, a theological affirmation residing behind the epithet "God of Mercies" (רחמים), and invoked by the

28. See the curse of sterility against the soil in Gen 3:17.

29. The verb is used in the sense of sexual assault (cf. 2 Sam 11:4).

30. In this context, the verb may suggest sexual coupling.

31. The opening and closing of the womb is a divine power (see Gen 17:16–19, 25:21–26, 29:31, 30:22–24).

32. "Travail" refers to suffering in laments (Ps 90:10) and to meaningless labor in Qoheleth (1:3, 2:10).

psalmists to receive divine, parental care and protection (Pss 22:9–11, 139:13–16). Job's strong desire to have died at birth is a direct repudiation of the tradition of divine conception and care from birth.

Further, in the second strophe, Job also negates a significant wisdom understanding of creation. For the conventional sages, the creation in the womb by God meant common origins for rich and poor. God's care and protection were given to all, though this did not disallow social inequality. Even so, the integrity of human existence meant one was due the goods necessary for life (Prov 17:5, 22:2; Job 31:13–15). Yet, for Job the poor and slaves enjoy no divine protection or support by the wealthy. The metaphor of birth is not used to substantiate the theory of justice as the just right to goods necessary for existence, but rather to stress that Sheol is the only place where rich and poor, master and slave are equal. It is the tomb, not the womb, that is the place of commonality for all social classes.

The third strophe continues the fertility metaphor in two ways. First, Job describes life in the image of light, the first experience of the new born child. Second, in the effort to find out why humans suffer, Job complains that God "shuts them in" (סָנַן). The same verb occurs only one other time in the Bible, Job 38:8. In this latter occurrence, the term refers to God's "shutting in" the destructive waters of Yam at his birth in primordial times.³³ In Job 3 the verb refers to God's decision to keep humans in the dark about the "why" of human suffering. This is the first of many occasions where images applied to chaos will be transferred to Job (e.g., 6:4, 7:12).

Creation as Art

In the second strophe, there is an echo of the artistry metaphor which is more pronounced in later texts (cf. Job 10:1–17, 38:4–7). In speaking of those who will enter into Sheol along with prisoners and slaves, Job speaks of "kings and counselors of the earth who rebuild ruins for themselves." "Ruins" (חֲרִבוֹת) refers to "desolate cities" (Lev 26:31, 33; Isa 44:26), including the city of Jerusalem (Isa 52:9), and on occasion to the destroyed temple (Ezra 9:9). In royal theology, the kings are commissioned by gods to build and maintain sacred cities and temples for divine dwelling. The construction of sacred sites was a ritual act with

33. Cf. Marduk's restraining the flood waters of Tiamat after her defeat (*ANET*, p. 67).

cosmogonic significance.³⁴ This rite ordered creation and human society. For Job even the mighty kings who engaged in these ritual acts of world construction came to the same lowly end as the slaves they forced to build their magnificent edifices.

Creation as Battle

The fourth metaphor which Job's assault on creation deconstructs is the battle with the dragon. In many ancient Near Eastern mythical traditions, the defeat of the dragon is the prelude to creation and the maintenance of cosmic order (e.g., the *Enuma elish* and the Baal Myth). The vanquishing of the dragon was a daily (Apophis) and yearly (Tiamat, Yam) activity necessary to preserve the continuation of the structures of life. Hebrew laments refer to the defeat of the chaos monster at creation and again at the Red Sea in order to incite the Divine Warrior to arise and save his people (Ps 74, Isa 51:9–11). Yet in this psalm of negation, Job attempts to incite Leviathan to arise and devour all of creation.

The curse of Night by Job in v. 8 calls upon the "Yam-cursers" "to awaken Leviathan." The "Yam-cursers" are probably incantation priests who, on the one hand, were skilled in magical formulae used to lull the dragon to sleep, causing him to cease his destructive terror.³⁵ On the other hand, they also had magical formulae to arouse the sleeping monster from his watery sleep and to incite him to attack a specified enemy.³⁶ An Aramaic incantation provides an important parallel:

I have . . . confronted the evil foes [and] said to them if you have in any way sinned against Abuma son of Gribta [etc.]. . . . I am enchanting you

34. See Eliade (1959, pp. 6f.). The construction of temples as a cosmogonic act is clearly expressed in the *Enuma elish* where the building of the Esagila—"The house of the foundation of heaven and earth," Marduk's temple in Babylon, is positioned within the myth of the creation of the world (*ANET*, 68–69). After the Esagila had been built by the Anunnaki, a festival and rites of dedication are held, and the norms for the ordering of heaven and earth are fixed. Temple raising and reconstruction, accompanied by ritual, establish and maintain world order. Baal's gaining of kingship, enacted by the building and ritual dedication of his palace following the defeat of Yam, is also a cosmogonic act in Ugaritic mythology (*ANET*, 129–138). Perhaps the best known example of a king involved in the rebuilding of ruined temples and reinstating their religious rites is Nabonidus.

35. Ritual language was used by priests of Re to repel Apophis (*ANET*, pp. 6–7), and Ea charmed Apsu to sleep, before dispatching him with the sword (*ANET*, p. 61).

36. Cf. Job 41:2 where Yahweh describes Leviathan as so fearful that no human would dare "stir him up" (עירר) to fight against him. In Isa 51:9–11, the image is reversed, as the community's lament attempts to "arouse" (עירר) a sleeping God to come forth to do battle against their enemies as he once fought Rahab and the dragon.

with the spell of the Sea and the spell of Leviathan the dragon. . . . I am bringing down upon you the ban and excommunication which were set upon Mount Hermon and upon Leviathan the dragon and upon Sodom and Gomorrah.³⁷

Spells were also used by Marduk and Tiamat against each other prior to battle.³⁸

Job wishes to have Leviathan to arise and devour Night, thus bringing to an end not only his personified enemy who caused his conception, but also the temporal order of all creation. The stars were not simply the lights providing guidance at night, but in theopoeic imagination became the armies of God, the heavenly hosts who fought under the Lord's command (cf. Judg 5:20). To devour the stars is to destroy this heavenly army and to defeat their commander.

Job's efforts to awaken Leviathan are not mere rhetorical embellishment of the language of an embittered sufferer. Rather, by means of the power of the language of curse Job attempts to destroy this mythical formation of reality and to collapse creation itself. And it is clear from the descriptive hymn sung by the Lord in praise of Leviathan (Job 40:24–21:26) that Job's efforts to arouse Leviathan have succeeded.

V. Conclusion

In Job 3 the sage-hero has transformed a lament into a soliloquy of curse and death. Job's own metaphors of meaning, grounded in the myths of creation, have been negated by his own experience. With the darkening of vision, orientation to existence has been lost, and the alluring peace of the tomb beckons. Yet, Job 3 is not a poem on the attraction of the grave in the fashion of the Egyptian sage who praises death and the well-being of the afterlife which awaits him (*ANET*, 407). Nor is it a poem in which Job curses only his own life and attempts to hasten his solitary journey toward the grave. Rather, Job's soliloquy is a direct assault against creation itself. Through the language of negation, which invokes curse instead of blessing, replaces Sabbath rest which restores the vitality of creation with the peace of the tomb, and returns light to its origins in darkness that time may cease, Job attempts to destroy creation. Most significantly, the four metaphors which are at the

37. Text 2 of Montgomery (1913). See Gordon (1966, pp. 1–9).

38. *ANET*, p. 64. קִבַּח ("curse") in Job 3:8 is the same term for the military curse in the Balaam episodes (Num 22:11, 17; 23:8, 11, 13, 25, 27; 24:10).

mythic center of the traditions of creation in Israel and the ancient Near East are destabilized by Job's language of negation. Word, procreation, artistry, and battle are reversed in the effort to collapse the mythical construction of reality. And with this collapse, the world would return to chaos.³⁹

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39. Job's personal experience of suffering points to a world that is "upside down," one in which injustice and disorder prevail. The desired collapse is not the annual return to chaos, represented in the change of seasons, but the annihilation of all existence.

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