

THE USE OF CREATION LANGUAGE IN JOB 3, 9 AND 38 AND THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

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Abstract

This essay attempts to discern an approach to the problem of suffering by analysing the use of creation language in three passages in Job (Job 3:1-10, 9:1-10 and 38:1-15) on the background of the theology of cosmic order and retribution common in the ANE. In the first two passages, Job responds to the moral disorder he perceives in his suffering by deconstructing, through his language, the physical order of the universe assumed by the theology of cosmic order. In his answer in Job 38, God asserts a more subtle order, in which chaos is not banished from the world, but allowed a place in a higher order. Through this, a space is created for playfulness, freedom and gratuitous beauty. Suffering is therefore not a direct result of moral transgression, but a consequence of a world-order which allows for the freedom to transgress. A parallel is drawn between this more subtle order, which includes possibilities of chaos and the development of a new approach in physics, especially in chaos theory.

1. Introduction

The Book of Job deals with the problem of suffering - the suffering of the innocent in this world. Even if their innocence is not absolute, their suffering is out of all proportion to their guilt. Additionally, this suffering is not at all matched by punishment on those who are much more guilty than they. This state of affairs is as true today as it was in the time of Job. Suffering poses as much questions today to the afflicted in this world as it did to Job.

These questions are also posed to us, who are not equally afflicted by suffering. We, too, are asked how we can find meaning and order in a world where innocent suffering occurs. Asking further, one is led to the question of God. Can there be a intelligible, unified reality behind a world of such meaningless happenings? Can the origin, the originator of this reality be considered 'just', with an intelligible justice?

It seems that only two answers to this question are possible: The first is to hold fast to the principle of a moral order in the universe, a just God, and to close one's eyes to all the evidence controverting this, and one's ears to the cries of those suffering. One would answer them: 'You suffer because you sinned', adding the burden of guilt to their pain. Either that or one desists from such a principle. If one chooses the second option, one effectively asserts that the universe is morally nihilistic, and that suffering is but a capricious fate, having no meaning. Is this, then, not worse than the first option, for does the absence of a moral order of the universe not also remove all basis for a social order? If might is right in the universe, why should it be different in society? Is any other possibility then open than irresponsible flight from a universe not worthy of the human soul's capacity to conceive justice?

These are the question with which the Book of Job wrestles (Gutierrez 1987: 5). This essay wants to involve itself in this wrestling.

That it is necessary to be a careful listener to discern the answer the Book of Job gives to the questions of innocent suffering has been made clear by the history of interpretation. Most interpreters agree that the God-speeches at the end of the book (Chapters 38-41) are intended to be an answer to the questions posed in the book, but it is clear to most interpreters that the sense in which they answer is problematic: they do not refer to the terms in which the question is posed in the debate preceding it at all. Therefore, it is not surprising that the opinions about the answer the God-speeches give are widely divergent. This essay attempts one approach at observing the links between the God-speech and the debate preceding it. I hope it will throw some light on the relation between the God-speeches and the preceding chapters, and therefore the answer of Job to the problem of suffering.

The approach of this essay begins with the observation that the one unifying characteristic of the God speeches is that they deal with God's creative power. I therefore think it is useful to look at the use of creation-terminology in the debate posing the problem in Chapters 1-37. One could, doing this, see whether the different uses of the creation-language in the two sections shows in what sense the God-speech answers the problem posed in these chapters. Because an exhaustive consideration of all links would go beyond the scope of an essay as this, I choose to restrict myself to three shorter passages, in which the use of cosmogonic language is particularly marked and where relationships are apparent: Job's introduction to the debate in 3:1-10, Job's first reply to Bildad in 9:1-13 and the first part of the God speeches in 38:1-21. This selection consciously disregards references to the creation in the speeches of Job's friends. The reason for this is that God evaluates these speeches negatively, and ignores Elihu completely. This indicates to me that their conception of the problem is not valid, as Job's is (42:7).

However, though in the end shown to be invalid, it is the conception of the friends that forms the basis on which the problem of suffering is discussed. This must therefore first be briefly outlined.

2. Job's friends: The principle of retribution

The answer Job's friends give to the question of meaning and justice in history is well summed up by Bildad in Job 8:3f:

'Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin. But if you will look to God and plead with the Almighty, If you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place.'

This way of seeing the world is generally called the principle of retribution. It forms an integral part of the concept of world order common to the ancient near east.

2.1 The principle of retribution and the concept of world order in the Ancient Near East

The traditions of creation form a constant pattern in the religions of the Ancient Near East (ANE). In the creation traditions, the ordering activity of God, who overcomes chaos and creates a realm in which life can exist, is central. This ordering activity of God comprehends both the natural and social realm as an inseparable unity (Schmid 1974: 11). The realm of order and comprehensive well-being so created is called *al*

overcomes chaos and creates a realm in which life can exist, is central. This ordering activity of God comprehends both the natural and social realm as an inseparable unity (Schmid 1974: 11). The realm of order and comprehensive well-being so created is called *šalôm*. This comprehensive order relates fundamentally to the idea of retribution (*Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang*): Any disturbance of the order causes an objective state of non-well-being in the community, which experiences this as judgement. The type of behaviour corresponding to the order is denoted by *tsedaqah*, righteousness. Reflection on, and codification of, this order and of the righteous behaviour necessary not to disturb the order and well-being of the community and the created order is the province of wisdom (Schmid 1974: 13f; Wittenberg 1979: 145). The principle behind this reflection is that the world is a realm of both social and natural order. Any disturbance in this order through wrong behaviour (no *tsedaqah*) leads to a decrease in well-being (*šalôm*). The logical correlate of this principle is that all absence of well-being must be occasioned by unrighteous behaviour. This is the principle of retribution. It gives a framework for asserting a moral order in the universe and enables one to give meaning to occurrences of experience and history.

2.2 The principle of retribution in Judah and Israel

In Jerusalem and Judah, these common ANE traditions were the basis of the religion and cult: Yahweh was identified with El (Schmid 1974: 38), the high God of Jebusite Jerusalem since the time of David. The Judean reception of this thinking emphasized Yahweh as the one creator and sustainer of this natural and moral world order. It is Yahweh who protects nature and human society against the forces of chaos always threatening to overwhelm it, both in nature and socially. The latter involves defense against external threat and establishment of internal justice: *tsedaqah* is an associated concept of *šalôm*, which denotes both 'the positive condition of restored world order and the well-being and prosperity resulting therefrom' (Sisson: 1986: 431)¹. Any act disturbing the comprehensive order required expiatory action restoring order and peace. This was function of the cult.

1 In court wisdom, the King is regarded as the channel through which Yahweh establishes such order. This legitimates his power. Wisdom was thus part of the complex of royal ideology, as in other ANE nations (Sisson 1986: 431; Schmid 1974: 37). Wittenberg (1991, 256) argues that this setting in the royal court and royal ideology was, however, not the only setting of the principle of retribution in Hebrew society and history. He argues that wisdom also had a place among the rural population of free peasants, who were the original basis of Judean and Israelite society. Here, the principle of retribution was based not so much in a mythological world view, as in the original experience of free and self-sufficient subsistence farmers. In this experience it was apparent that industry led to well-being, and sloth to poverty. On this experiential basis, a principle of retributive justice in the ordering of the universe was conceived. Wittenberg proposes that this conception was faced with a crisis when, in the later monarchic period in Judah, agriculture was commercialized, and the free peasant farmers were increasingly reduced to debt slavery in the system of early rent capitalism. In this social context, the fate and prosperity of an individual is not necessarily related any more to the conscientious work of that individual. Job is, according to Wittenberg, a response to this crisis. Whether this is indeed so could be measured by the mythological content of Job: A greater orientation to the ANE creation myths would place it more in the setting of court wisdom, which was associated with these myths.

Judah, like Israel, however, did not experience *šalôm*: The poor in the rural areas experienced oppression and exploitation in the crisis of rent capitalism. The righteous, hardworking person was impoverished and suffered, while the unrighteous exploiter profited (Wittenberg 1991: 165). This led to the prophetic critique of the establishment, especially regarding issues of social justice. The prophetic critique, with some wisdom influence, whether from court (Coote 1981: 99f) or countryside (Wittenberg 1991: 13f), led to what is known today as the Deuteronomistic movement. Characteristic of this movement is a perpetual insistence on the principle of retribution, illustrated especially in the refrain of Judges, e.g. Jud 10:6-16 or Ps 78. This was supposed to explain the suffering of the exile that had befallen Judah. The deuteronomistic retribution-doctrine might be another background for the questions of Job. The author would then represent Israelites who, like the author(s) of Pss 44 & 89, struggle to comprehend their fate (exile) in the light of the principle of retribution.

The principle of retribution is, without question, of prime concern in Job. It is to this principle that Job's friends are committed in their argument with him, and which they reiterate repeatedly: They allege that Job's suffering is due to his sin, and that his suffering would end if he only would repent and confess. To them, this moral order in the world seems to them indispensable to any meaningful interpretation of history and any moral education. They therefore insist that Job's questioning of this principle is not only foolish, but dangerous to society (Job 8:1, 15:1-6).

Job, and the reader, however know that the principle of retribution does not apply in Job's case: Job was declared innocent by God right in the beginning (1:1,8) (although Job, not knowing this, is in the anguish of doubt as to God's position regarding him). The principle of retribution, of a perfect moral order in the world, simply does not work. It does not work for Job, and it does not work for untold others. Job, who comes from the same background as his friends, believing in the harmony of the world order, as made clear by his offerings to reestablish this (1:5), experiences his suffering as a fundamental questioning of the retributive doctrine.

3. Job's response to the principle of retribution

Out of the anguish of his suffering, and out of the interpretive frame of the principle of retribution and the unity of social and natural orders, Job responds. The first response of Job in the dialogue section is Job 3:1-26. To this we will now turn our attention, keeping in mind the questions that we have posed.

3.1 Job's opening statement: 3:1-10-10;

- 1 *After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed his [birth-]day.*
- 2 *He responded [to his situation] and said:*
- 3 *'May the day perish on which I was born,*
and the night [in which] it was said, 'A man³ is conceived!'
- 4 *That day - Let there be darkness;*

2 Interpretive additions in translation will be placed in square brackets. I will not argue their validity in each case, as this essay does not attempt completeness. See the commentaries cited for discussion on this, as on other text-critical matters.

3 Or 'warrior' - *gibbôr* denotes someone fit for the tribal military levy.

- nor be entered in any of the months.*
- 7 *Look! May that night be barren;
may no shout of joy come in it.*
- 8 *May those who curse days curse it,
those who are ready to rouse Leviathan.*
- 9 *May its morning stars become dark;
may it wait for daylight and it does not come
and not see the eyelashes of dawn,*
- 10 *For it did not shut the doors of my [mother's] womb
and did [not] hide trouble from my eyes.'*

The build up of tension, through the seven-day silence in 2:13, is shattered by the thunderblast of Job. Our concern is, as explained in the Introduction, the use of creation language in this passage. The passage consciously uses imagery of creation, but here in a negative sense. This passage is almost entirely composed of such references⁴: Whereas in Gen 1:3 God said: 'Let there be light', Job here proclaims 'Let there be darkness'. Whereas God called the light day in Gen 1:5, here he is not to seek it out. God's creative activity in banishing the forces of dark chaos results in life sprouting. Here, however, darkness and death shadow, from which God distinguished the world, are to renew their claim as nearest relatives to the world.⁵ The day, which should be characterized by light, is to be returned to darkness (v.5). God's distinguishing, ordering activity is to be reversed.⁶

The same holds true of the night: Through the ordering work of creation, by being bounded by day, the darkness of night was made part of the wholesome reality of creation. It was made into a time of sleep and conception, into an origin of rest and new life. This is to be undone (v. 7). The night is no longer to be part of the ordered time sequence of day and night, months, seasons and years (Gen 1:14). It is to return to the primeval darkness of chaos. The wholesome ordering is to be removed by no new day breaking on the dark of night (v.9): The forces of the chaos-monster are to be raised against it.⁷

From these considerations evidently Job is, through his language, deconstructing the order of creation. Throughout the book the emphasis is on language. This emphasis starts with the initial and continuing question whether Job will curse God (1:5.11.22, 2:5.9.10). It continues through the accusations in the debate about ill-considered or dangerous language (15:1-6). The emphasis on language culminates

4 Although the direct literary parallels which Fishbane (1971, 154) alleges between this passage and Gen 1:3-2:4a seem to me forced, the close correlation between this passage and the creation account in Gen 1, generally associated with Babylonian creation epics, makes it much more probable that Job was written in circles which had association with Babylonian royal ideology. This contradicts Wittenberg's (1991, 254) argument for the setting of Job in rural wisdom.

5 The *go'el* is the relative who has the right and duty to represent the interests of someone.

6 The root '*bd* (perish) in v.1 actually has the connotation of 'reduce again into nothingness'.

7 Throughout this sequence, it is continuously emphasized by the definite article, the definite pronoun (v. 4.6.7) and the suffix of the first person singular (v.1) or other possessive indicators (v.3) that Job concentrates the curses on his day: he is not so vindictive as to want to reverse the whole created order because of his suffering (Clines 1989, 81). And yet, while he concentrates on his day, the reversal of the order of creation for this one day awakens these forces for the whole of creation, and if no light is to dawn on the one night, can there ever be another day? (Fishbane 1971, 164).

with the assertion of God that it was Job, and not his friends, who spoke rightly of God (42:7). Therefore, this use of language is significant. In the conception of the ANE, words are events of power. Job's being is reduced almost to nothingness. He therefore may have little power of creation to draw on. (Clines 1989: 79) For this very reason he may, however, have all the more share in the forces of nothingness and chaos. On these powers his words draw. As creation was accomplished through the word, so the destruction of the cosmos is accomplished through words. This invocation of the chaos-forces through an incantation, is especially obvious if this curse is compared with its nearest biblical parallel, Jer 20:14-18. This parallel has the same function as far as lamenting one's existence goes. However, it (Clines 1989: 80f) refers far less to cosmological realities (Weiser 1951: 38) and does not leave one with the dark expectations of the inbreak of Chaos.

It is significant to note that Job starts with this de-creation wish. Later in the dialogue, his main point will be the assertion of his innocence and the challenge of God to justice, though always coupled with his death-wish. The controversy with his friends will be about their assertion of the principle of retribution, which Job denies to be valid in his case. The connection between this passage and the later theme becomes clear if we embed the principle of retribution in the inseparability of the natural and moral ordering of the world. Both are authored by God, according to the concept described above under 2.1.

This is not stated explicitly. Considering this background it is, however, probable that Job's speech undermining the natural order of creation is occasioned by his experience of the absence of the moral order he expected in creation. He experienced the chaos breaking into his life through things happening to him that controvert the moral order. (Gutierrez 1987: 8; Clines 1989, xliif) Therefore, he expects at least so much consistency in this pattern that chaos will also break into the natural order. To him, the natural-moral order has shown itself to be chaotic, and therefore not different, or preferable to, the uncreated chaos. In the latter, at least, the suffering is not consciously experienced. Therefore, it is logical that on the curse of his day a death wish follows in vv. 11-26.

We shall concentrate on these links between the natural and moral order as we now go on to consider the other passage in which Job refers extensively to the creation.

3.2 Job describes the capriciousness of God's creation: Job 9:1-13;

9:1 Then Job responded:

- 2 *'Indeed, I know that this is so.
how can a man be righteous before God?*
- 3 *If any one wished to contend with him,
he could not answer him one out of a thousand.*
- 4 *His is of wise heart, his power is vast.
Who has resisted him and been at peace?*
- 5 *He, who moves mountains without their knowing it
and who overturns them in his anger.*
- 6 *He, who shakes the earth from its place
and its pillars tremble.*

- 7 *He, who speaks to the sun and it does not rise;
and on the stars he sets a seal;*
- 8 *unfolding the heavens by himself
and treading on the heights of the sea;*
- 9 *making the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the mansions of the south;*
- 10 *doing wonders that cannot be fathomed,
miracles that cannot be counted;*
- 11 *Behold! he passes me, and I cannot see him;
when he goes by, I cannot perceive him.*
- 12 *Behold! he snatches away, who can stop him?
Who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'*
- 13 *God does not withdraw his anger;
even the cohorts of Rahab cowered under him.*

In this passage, the connection between the natural and moral order that we surmised above is made more explicit. In v. 2-4, Job asserts the impossibility of entering and winning a court-case (*rib*) with God. Job's cause is just. Winning a court case with God is impossible because God, by his power, can define what is right or wrong without reference to others. This is precisely Job's problem and assertion: He perceives no moral order in the universe, because even and especially for God, might is right (Gordis 1965: 247). His lament is precisely that no impartial tribunal, no impartial moral ordering power, exists that he can appeal to against the blind, chaotic fate that destroyed his life.

This assertion about the moral order of the world is now immediately followed by assertions about the natural order. This verifies the link we made above. The cosmogonic imagery we have already encountered in 3:1-10 is taken up again in 5-10. The first section, 5.6 is concerned with the earth. Contrary to normal cosmogonies, which portray the creator God as securely establishing the earth on strong pillars, God here is presented as destroying the order that exists: He shakes the pillars, and moves the mountains. God subverts the spatial stability of the whole natural order, just as Job experienced God to undermine the moral order by letting him suffer. (Habel 1975: 52) The next section, 7-9, is concerned mainly with the heavens. By contrast to Gen 1:3, God does not cause light to come, but prevents it from coming by prohibiting the sun to rise and sealing in the stars. God therefore disrupts the time-ordering of nature. Again, his power is represented as source of Chaos in the world. Vv. 8.9, by contrast, refer to the conventional images: Heaven, like a tent, is stretched out by the creator; The creator vanquished the Chaos-monster Yam, sea, standing on its back⁸. This section concludes in an ironic statement about the wonder of such disturbing activity of God, with a sardonic impact that such activity is, indeed, beyond understanding.

8 Pope (1971, 69f) suggests that *bamôt* is to be translated as the back of the monster on which the victorious creator has placed his feet as sign of victory. This could indicate that God is vividly trampling on the vanquished - another sign of his 'might-is right' attitude.

The next section relates God's activity directly to humans: God cannot be apprehended, even if his passage makes itself felt in destruction, like Job experienced (Rowley 1976: 78) (v.11). In v.12, God is depicted as a robber, who cannot be brought to justice, because humans are helplessly delivered into his hands (Weiser 1951: 73). Again in v. 13, a reference to the subjection of Chaos in the creation is made. Rahab is generally taken to represent Tiamat, the Sea-goddess of Chaos. According to the Enuma Elish, Marduk killed her. He then created the world out of her body. (Pope 1965: 70; Rowley 1976, 78) However, the parallel Job sees is again destructive: God loosens his anger at will today as he did in creation, and no resistance is possible.

In summary, clearly Job is here sardonically depicting God, whom the friends referred to as the ordering agent of the universe (5:8-16), as the great disturber of the natural order. He will later depict God also as the destroyer of the social and moral order (9:22-24, 12:14-25) (Gordis 1965: 80).

Again, we find that Job's words subvert the order-conception held by his friends: They see in the world a natural and moral order, securely established by God, and do not allow for any exceptions to their rule of retribution (Gordis 1976: 150f). Job, because his experience denies this rule, denies the existence of both natural and social order in this form. He therefore views God as now acting as a capricious disturber of the order of the universe, even though he might have established it originally. Job cannot see any order in the world. Therefore he is also unable to see any meaning for his life or suffering, and any hope. Consequently, this chapter again ends with a death-wish. Job's nihilism, however, points beyond itself. In asserting the injustice of God and challenging God to court, he asserts what he simultaneously denies: that some framework of order exists within which such actions have meaning. This is why Job effectively appeals to God (the author of this unknown frame) against God (who destroyed the previous, too superficial frame that Job had had in common with his friends) (Gordis 1976: 248). This appeal to a higher order, beyond the order the appeal denies, cries out for resolution.

4. God's response to Job's denial of order in the world 38:1-21-21

The God speeches, it is generally agreed, form the climax of the Book of Job. The unresolved conflict between the friends' dogmatic and unrealistic insistence on a rational, easily understandable world order, and Job's nihilistic deconstruction of the order of the world, which yet points beyond itself in asking for resolution, is here resolved. But how? This essay wants to approach an answer by looking closely at the correspondences in references to creation between the opening of the God speeches and the two Job speeches studied above. We will consider the passage Job 38:1-21 in detail, though we will refer to relevant material outside this scope when necessary⁹.

38:1 *Then Yahweh answered Job out of the storm. He said:*

2 *'Who is this that darkens my design*

9 It is difficult to decide on the end of the passage to consider, because the God speech as a whole contains many references to creation language, and yet that would obviously be unwieldy. I therefore decided to take only 38:1-21, as it is in this section that most verbal parallels to the two passages occur. These verses also form a unit in that Yahweh in four sections (4-6, 7-11, 11-15 and 16-21) questions Job about the four regions of the world: earth, sea, sky and heaven. These sections are also parallel to the sections of the previous passage, concerned with earth, heavens and sea.

- with words without knowledge?
 3 Gird your loins like a man;
 I will question you, and you shall let me know.
 4 'Where were you when I founded the earth?
 Tell me, if you know understanding.
 5 Who marked off its dimensions? For you know!
 Who stretched a measuring line across it?
 6 On what were its footings set,
 or who laid its cornerstone -
 7 While the morning stars sang together
 and all the sons of God shouted [for joy]?
 8 '[Who] shut up the sea behind doors
 when it burst out and came from the womb,
 9 When I made the clouds its garment
 and thick darkness its swaddling cloth,
 10 When I broke on it my limit
 and set its doors and bars for it,
 11 When I said, 'This far you may come and no farther;
 here is where your proud waves halt'?
 12 'Have you, in your days, given orders to the morning,
 or caused the dawn to know its place,
 13 That it might take hold of the ends of the earth
 and shake the wicked out of it?
 14 The earth takes shape like clay under a seal;
 its features stand out like those of a garment.
 15 Their light is withheld from the wicked,
 and the raised arm is broken.
 16 Have you entered into the springs of the sea
 or walked in the recesses of the deep?
 17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you
 or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?
 18 Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?
 Declare, if you know all this!
 19 Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
 and where is the place of darkness,
 20 that you may take it to its territory
 and that you may discern the paths to its home?
 21 You know, for you were born then
 and the number of your days is great!

God is now again, as in the prologue, called Yahweh. During the debate the names El and Shaddai were used. Yahweh answers Job from the storm, a sign of Epiphany and of the Storm-God. The Storm-God is also the creator and comes to fight chaos (Perdue 1991: 203) (Marduk uses the wind as one of his weapons in slaying Tiamat in the Enuma Elish). The difference in name might be significant: Could the author intend to show that behind the too superficial El/ Shaddai, whom the friends defend and against whom Job appeals to a higher God, there is a deeper, more complete reality? Could it be that behind the too superficial order the friends assert and Job

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'Darkens (*māhsîk*)', in v.2, is parallel to Job's calling up the forces of darkness in 3:4. *êtsah* could refer to the plan or order of creation. Yahweh, in this reading, is accusing Job of destroying the order of creation ('providence') (Pope 1965:250) by his calling up of the forces of darkness with which Job opens his speeches. This (Perdue 1991: 203) subversion continues throughout his speeches by his denial of a fundamental order of the universe. This denial is 'foolish', not only because of its ignorance, but because it is subversive of the moral and natural order (Perdue 1991: 204). Though this meaning is not set out directly, it is, in a literary and poetic text, such as Job, important to be sensitive to allusions such as these. In this reading, Job's words are then without knowledge because they do not recognize the ordering that does exist, but destroy order.

Job had been asking a hearing of God. He had indicated that he thought of this in terms of a court case (*rib*, 9:3). However, Yahweh's response is on quite another level: He will contend with Job, but the terms used shows that the dispute is not to be conducted in legal, but in military terms. This seems to support Job's assertion in Ch. 9: God is not prepared to answer in a court case, but uses his superior power to simply overwhelm any argument. The allusion is fulfilled in the following speech: It is not matters of justice that are disputed here, but questions of power and ability. The main form in the following is either command or rhetorical question, not debate, as before. However, God does enter into the verbal level with his appearance, although his questions are mainly ironical and self-answering.

Yahweh now systematically questions Job about his knowledge of the order of the world, and his power to change or improve it. He does so in four strophes dealing with the four regions of the world: earth, sea, sky and nether world. (Perdue 1991: 204f)

v.4-6 are concerned with the earth: Here, the world is depicted as a well-planned, measured building, securely constructed by Yahweh (Perdue 1991: 206). This contrasts with Job's depiction of God as the one who disturbs the foundations and order of the world in 9:5f. Though not in logical contradiction to Job's statement, Yahweh challenges the implication of Job: that God is disorderly regarding the

spatial ordering of the earth. Quite the opposite - Yahweh's activity is cause for great joy and praise among the morning stars and the divine attendants.

v.7-11 are concerned with the sea and, as the previous verses, with Yahweh's spatial ordering of the world. While Job depicts Yahweh as a vindictive conqueror of the Sea (*Yam, Rahab*), who stamps on his vanquished victim and is ready, without appreciable occasion, to let loose his anger at other victims (9:8b.13), Yahweh here describes himself as a caring father of Sea, who, as a playful and yet destructive child, Yahweh cares for, and yet confines in bounds that it cannot transgress (Perdue 1991: 207). The black clouds Job calls up as forces of darkness in 3:5 are but swaddling bands Yahweh uses to carefully wrap little sea in. The power of the chaos monsters and god(esse)s in the creation myth can hardly be undermined more effectively than by such diminution. It is made clear that Chaos is no coeternal power, to whom one can appeal against God (Ch.3), nor is God identical with it or allowing it unchecked reign. Rather, Chaos is a creation of God assigned its specific, restricted place in the scheme of things. This allows for some truth in Job's assertion that God is the source of disorder, but also limits the truth by embedding it in a deeper order.

v.12-15 deal with the heavens and the temporal order of the universe. The first morning light is pictured as removing the cover of darkness like a blanket, under which the wicked did their wrong, and shaking them out of it. This contrasts with 3:9 (where also both the words *saḥar* and *kokbêy nispû* appear). Here, Job's curse depicts a vain attempt to command the morning to do exactly the opposite: It is to disrupt the good order given by Yahweh and not to break and end the reign of darkness. This contrast again reveals Job's speech as destructive of a world order set by Yahweh. The order of the world is also a moral order: Dawn brings the wicked to justice, and, though it does not destroy them, it limits their activity (Perdue 1991: 208; Gutierrez 1989: 71). So again Yahweh allows a place for (moral) disorder, but also limits this disorder.

v. 16-21 have as theme the nether world. Job, who in 3:4f calls up the shadow and darkness of the nether world, is challenged whether he knows at all where these are. The implication is whether he has any inkling of what he is doing. The text emphasizes that these forces of darkness have a specific, designed place. (Note the reference to the extent of the earth, the planning and measuring of which was referred to in v.5). These forces are therefore part of an overarching design of God (Perdue 1991: 208). God challenges Job whether he can design a better order: Does he have the power to carry out this design - to show to these forces their correct place in the order of the world? Again, reference to the birth of these forces shows that they are creatures of Yahweh. He has sovereignty over them: He had designed a place for them that is part of an order. While the order Yahweh sets for the universe is not a simplistic one, where retribution is absolute, without any chaos in it, the chaos is yet limited by Yahweh. This is confirmed later in the second speech (40:15-34), where Behemoth and Leviathan, both symbols of chaos, are described as creatures of God.

The speech of Yahweh then continues to show the ordering of Yahweh in the continuing management of world affairs. It relates this ordering in respect of the weather (v.22-30), both in its destructive and productive functions. It also emphasizes that rain falls where it is of no human use. This opposes an

imperfectly grasped by men, so there is order and meaning in the moral sphere, though often incomprehensible to man [sic].'

In summary, we can observe that the God-speech makes the point that both God's freedom and care are of greater extent than can be imagined by the simple retributive order, which sees only the immediate weal of the righteous human. The ordering of the world must take account both of freedom and the existence of chaos, and these two seem interlinked (Gutierrez 1989: 80f). However, only in a world of freedom is gratuitous love and beauty without function possible. But always the destruction wrought is limited by Yahweh. His loving care and joy in beauty is the origin of everything in creation, even the chaotic forces like Behemoth and Leviathan. Therefore, the Yahweh speeches show that there is an order in the world that Yahweh has constructed. It is an order that is more subtle, and greater, than the simple mechanical order assumed by the principle of retributive justice. It is an order that allows place for both conflict and yet places bounds on that conflict. This order has a place for forces of Chaos, and therefore also for freedom and gratuitous beauty. It allows for play and joy, because it originates in a free love and respect for freedom of Yahweh. It is an order with concerns greater than just the narrow perspectives of the human righteous.

5. Link to Modern Physics

This development from a mechanistic view of order to a more dynamic view, including possibilities of chaos, is, interestingly enough, paralleled in modern physics. The mechanistic order of Newton's theories is now replaced by more subtle theories, like Quantum theory and Chaos theory.

- Quantum theory is applicable to phenomena on the atomic scale. Through the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, it precludes observers from determining exactly all relevant variables, such as both the speed and the position of a particle. The future can therefore not be exactly predicted. This holds true in principle: It cannot be overcome through refinement of measuring.
- Chaos theory is applicable to systems consisting of many interacting components. It is useful in describing phenomena ranging from weather patterns and molecular aggregates (especially organic molecules) to the description of the population of ecosystems. It asserts that, for certain forms of interaction, the behaviour of such aggregates can show behaviour in which very small-scale disturbances change the total state of a large system dramatically. In these systems, the unpredictability of quantum theory is therefore magnified from sub-atomic scale to a scale where it can be directly observed. Such systems also spontaneously develop ordered patterns of surprising complexity, without the order being prefigured in the arrangement of the system. An example is the ordered patterns of clouds (cloud streets) often observed. These include possibilities of indeterminacy, freedom and higher cooperative orders. (Schilling 1991: 365ff) Especially Chaos theory is instructive. It analyzes the development of higher levels of order, which are not apparent from a mechanistic, small-scale analysis of the system. They grow out of cooperation and competition of the elements of the system. Therefore, they allow for significance of the system history and the influence

of small-scale variations of components on large-scale behaviour. They also show patterns of considerable beauty. These analyses show that life, as a creative, self-ordering phenomenon, is only possible on the narrow border between total chaos and the frozen rigidity of total order (Prigogine 1984: 213).

- The development of classical, mechanistic physics, where the world was seen as a perfectly running clockwork, predictably governed by strict law, to quantum theory and chaos theory parallels the development of the concept of world order we found in Job: Instead of a predictable, superficial and mechanical order, where the existence of chaos and freedom is excluded, but where nothing new can arise, a world picture emerges in which the possibility of chaos and disorder serves the generation of a order of sorts on a higher level. Everything is not strictly planned, and for that very reason, new patterns arise that have a life of their own, that have freedom in their self-ordering. Beauty and novelty arise gratuitously on the edge of Chaos. Though Chaos threatens life and causes suffering, it is also its precondition and allows life itself the freedom to play and live, and not only to function.

5. Concluding summary

At the end we return to our question posed in the beginning: the question of the meaning of the world, and talk about God, in the face of the suffering of the innocent. The experience of innocent suffering seems to introduce humans to an unenviable dilemma: Chaos exists in the world. Therefore, one seems faced with the unpalatable and unlivable options: Either, one holds fast to a narrow-minded, unrealistic and dogmatic assertion of order in the face of controverting experience. This adds the burden of guilt onto those who suffer. Otherwise, one accepts moral nihilism. This leads to the cynical attitude of 'might is right'. It does not allow for any ordering of human society, nor for hope for those who suffer.

We have seen that Job wrestles with both. The simple attitude that evil is punished, and punishment implies sin, as propounded by Job's friends, is denied by Job. It does not accord with his experience. God in the end gives Job right in his protest against this simplistic position: God chides the friends for 'not talking right about me like my servant Job' (42:7). This sentence also implies that God gives humans the right to protest, like Job, against their suffering: The afflicted have the right to cry out, and their cries are to be heard very seriously. We compared the use of creation language in God's answer to that in Job's speeches. Here, Job's language is full of the moral cynicism that God is the great tyrant and disorderer of the world. In the end, God answered Job's wrestling: He depicted the world as having a less mechanical order. This order is therefore also inclusive of the possibilities of chaos, of freedom, of suffering, but also of beauty. It asserts history as a continuing battle with the forces of chaos, in which God respects the independence of his creatures, and in which we can be involved (Levenson 1988: 4-46; Tamez, in West 1991: 124). This does more justice to an ambiguous world in which, in spite of the signs of chaos, the signs of cosmos, of ordered creation, are yet legible.

Both alternatives - moral cynicism and blinkered dogmatism - are therefore rejected. The alternative given is a conception of the world as ultimately ordered by God. This ordering is dynamic, and less easily comprehensible. It opens up

possibilities of freedom for the creatures and allows chaos and conflict a place within the order of things. This view also corresponds with new developments in Physics.

Job is disillusioned with a too simple conception of the order of the world. This shows us the danger of constructing, in our own religion a too simple and superficial order, which does not allow for the ambiguity of the world. This will lead us, and those who believe us, into a crisis of nihilism, as it has Job. The only way of allowing for hope and meaning in the ambiguity of the world is, in the end, not to exclude this ambiguity from God. One must dare to assert that the gratuitous love of God, and his freedom, are more fundamental, and more significant, than this ambiguity. This insight is represented in the central symbol of Christian faith - the cross. Here, God is involved in the ambiguity and suffering of the world: Those who suffer from the ambiguity may not be excluded from God's presence, as Job has felt he was, and has seen he was not.

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