



Creation

God and World

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1. ACCIDENT OR WILL?

The idea of a world created by God, on the one hand, and the knowledge of natural science about the evolution of the world and of humanity, on the other, are by no means contradictory.¹ Rather, these two views are but different perspectives on the selfsame issue. When both theology and natural science recognize their capacities and limitations, they complement one another with their different epistemological potentials, thus making creationism superfluous. With its own specific competencies, natural science seeks to reconstruct the emergence and development of universe, world, and humanity all as precisely as possible—an undertaking that can be achieved only by bracketing out any idea of God, pursuant to the empirical method. Theology, by contrast, aims to fathom the meaning of why a hospitable earth exists in the midst of an inhospitable universe or why humanity experiences life not merely as the sum of vital processes but as a gift and a successful coexistence. Anyone who plumbs the depths of this connection between experience of self and world cannot help but speak of God. Such questions place the individual in an ancient community of inquirers that stretches back millennia. Recording its experiences and insights, this community has been deemed a credible witness by innumerable generations. Through a critical interrogation of the Bible's testimony to the genesis of world and humanity alike, natural science has developed its own methods and areas of inquiry, but its inevitable emancipation from theology does not demand an inevitable rivalry between the two realms. Natural science does not, and cannot, respond to questions of meaning and significance: here, a conversation between theology and natural science is urgently

required. Where the contemplative individual poses those inescapable questions about the understanding of self and world, these epistemological spheres complement each another.

Indeed, theology and natural science can prove mutually beneficial where their convictions and observations converge. Both accept the finitude of earth and humankind. Moreover, each considers our planet almost certainly unique within the universe at large—this is most evident in the fact that life in all its diversity has become possible here. Such life depends on space and time. Though threats abound, this great diversity of life arises in an environment where hospitality prevails. Whether one counts the time of the world in eons or billions of years does not result in any greatly significant difference between theology and natural science. The difference between these perspectives can indeed lead to a fundamental opposition: either a divine will or the play of chance lies behind this temporally limited but nonetheless good order that lies amid a universe both inhospitable and chaotic. Yet such an alternative does not necessarily or unambiguously demarcate an absolute divide between theology and natural science. Just as a skeptical theology can recognize in coincidence and destiny the bad counterpart of a good creation (Qoh. 2:12–23, 3:18–22, 9:11–12), so natural science has no compulsion to grant sheer coincidence alone all probability as the reason for what it observes about the genesis of the world and of the human race. Theology stems from wonder at the miracle of life and combines such marvel—in accord with the credible witness of Scripture—with a God who desires a relationship with the world and therefore becomes its creator. Whether the world is plausibly seen as God's good creation, and humanity as chosen by God within it to bear God's likeness and to preserve the creation's hospitality for life, or whether, on the other hand, life arose amid a threatening chaos from sheer coincidence—these questions can be answered differently. For theology, life and the connectivity of the living are a wonder that a believing reason can only understand as a reality desired by the Creator-God. The central texts of the Jewish and Christian religions that witness to such understanding will be examined in their origins and intentions.

2. CHAOS AND CREATION

The canonized Jewish and Christian Scriptures seek to know nothing about God except in his relationship to the world.² Indeed, even the first page of the Bible depicts an active and dynamic God, a God who creates himself a counterpart (Gen. 1:1–2:4a; hereafter Gen. 1). Crafting his creation—from light and firmament to sea and land to sun, moon, and stars to fish, birds, and land animals (Gen. 1:3–25)—God ultimately forms a creature of particular nearness to himself, humanity (Gen. 1:26–28). God creates humanity “as his image” (*bēšelem*, Gen. 1:26–27). This divine likeness consists in God allowing human beings participation in himself and includes a blessed commission to rule over all fellow creatures (Gen. 1:28). Such a mandate, however, expressly precludes the consumption of animals (Gen. 1:29). On almost each day of creation, God himself declares his work to be “good” (*tôb*, Gen. 1:4, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31): humanity's dominion over its fellow creatures can only have the aim of helping to preserve God's own creation.

Even the choice of eight works, allotted to six days, is meant to reflect the good order God has established. Rather than list God's creation in all its entirety, Gen. 1 provides a careful selection of works. Comparison with Psalm 104 and Job 38–41 proves instructive: diverse intentions determine different collections. While God constructs a place for creation through the works recorded in Gen. 1, he also builds a concrete time frame through the chosen number of seven days. Time and space are shaped and filled by the presence of the Creator. Creating light first (Gen. 1:3–5), God precipitates a certain conflict with the heavenly bodies of day four, which themselves are also intended to give light (Gen. 1:14–19). But this functional overlap is allowed for because light as the first creation signals the presence of God from the start, for light in the ancient Near East, and in classical antiquity as well, reveals the divine presence, be it of gods or of God. Wrought by God himself, the space for creation comes from his presence, a presence that likewise displays the desire for a relationship with the world he thus creates.

The end of creation on the seventh day does not culminate in a final work. Ostensibly the crown of creation, humankind must share day six with other land animals (Gen. 1:24–31). Such a close connection between the two is intentional, for humanity bears the burden of preserving its

fellow creatures and thus God's good creation; steward rather than autocrat, humanity retains responsibility for all creation. As the image of God, it represents God in and to the world. For this divine image to destroy or even endanger the goodness of God's creation would directly contradict God's will for his created order.

The goal of God's creation lies not in the formation of humanity but in divine rest on the seventh day (Gen. 2:1–3). The Hebrew *mēlā'kā* thrice occurs to mark the work of God (Gen. 2:2–3). Though first attested in this particular context, the lexeme describes all sorts of human endeavors, an observation that then illuminates the rest of God upon the seventh day. Indeed, God needs no rest; his labors do not exhaust him. Instead, humanity requires rest from its work; God allows humankind to take part in his own repose. Like light at the start of creation, divine rest at its end stresses divine presence throughout the entire process. Such tranquility proves so important to God that he not only blesses but even hallows the seventh day (Gen. 2:3). Accordingly, this theological rationale precedes all pragmatic justification for human rest from work: God permits all creation to participate in his divine reality. Through the word *mēlā'kā*, God not only relates his own creative activity to that of humankind but incorporates his own creatures in the rhythm of work and rest as well. Stemming from the exilic/postexilic Priestly writer, this text (Gen. 1:1–2:4a) cannot yet designate the seventh day as *šabbāt* (i.e., Sabbath), since the Priestly work attributes all of Israel's regulations to the laws received by Moses at Sinai. Still, the verb *šābat* twice depicts the rest of God (Gen. 2:2–3), unmistakably evoking the Sabbath. God's repose reveals his will that the good creation should remain good for all creatures in toto, including those that bear his image. In the end, God fashions his creation as himself: good (Ps. 136:1–9). In accordance with the will of God, Creator and created remain closely tied yet strictly distinct. It will soon become evident that this contains a potential problem.

The creation of God has beginning and end alike, the latter implied but not explicit. No text suggests that God created any of his works to last forever; otherwise, the distinction between created and Creator would disappear, as creation belongs to the finite. Formed by God himself, creation's time and place entail a certain limit. Consequently the space for things to exist in is at the same time linked with the week of creation—a conception of time that itself implies limitation. But the lim-

itation of creation emerges, too, in Gen. 1:1–2:4a, but from a different angle³: God's creation as described at the beginning of the Bible is not a creative act out of nothing. The conception of *creatio ex nihilo* first came to the fore in Hellenistic Judaism (2 Macc. 7:28). After the heading of Gen. 1:1 comes a description of the world before God's first deed, the generation of light. Three elements characterize the world at this time: *tōhū wābōhū* (formless and void), *ḥōšek* (darkness), and *tēhôm* (the deep). Present in Mesopotamian myths and even Old Testament texts, this triad alludes to Chaos. The term *tēhôm* betrays an inherent conception of Chaos, the philological equivalent of the goddess Tiamat.

Excursus: Divine Rest in Mesopotamia

Composed around the transition between the second and first millennia BCE, the Babylonian Epic of Creation—also called *Enuma Elish*—identifies the goddess Tiamat and the god Apsu as the first divine pair.⁴ The first represents salt water, and the latter, freshwater, and from their union spring forth other deities whose power and number increase from generation to generation. Theogony turns to theomachy as younger gods turn on their progenitors, that is, Apsu and Tiamat. His rest disturbed, Apsu is ready to destroy the younger gods, but Tiamat rejects his plan categorically. Ea, God of Wisdom, foils Apsu's scheme by murdering him altogether, whereupon he seizes Apsu's insignia (belt, crown, and coat of light) and founds his temple upon the Apsu, the freshwater, which he continues to rule thereafter. Yet a greater threat to the divine world is still to come. Tiamat, who once protected the younger generation of gods, has her peace disturbed by their clamor. Consequently, she hatches a plot to wipe out the troublemakers, a maneuver she organizes with other divine or numinous helpers, especially her lover Qingu. Though one may dispute the legitimacy of an annihilation based on the mere disturbance of peace, ancient Near Eastern cultures deemed divine rest the highest good. This conceptual context proves essential for a proper theological assessment of God's magnanimous rest in the Genesis account of creation. Divine repose in the ancient world was also proof of power, for gods who enjoy the luxury of rest belong to the highest class of divinity, obliging the inferior classes of gods to undertake sundry labors. In this way, a divine struggle for power lies behind Tiamat's plan of

destruction—a theme that comes to the fore as those gods now under threat begin to formulate countermeasures. Alongside other divinities, Ea, victor of Apsu, shies back from battle with Tiamat. Despondent and afflicted, the gods choose Marduk, son of Ea, as their champion, appointing him their king and thereby affirming his privileged status even before the battle begins. Having slain the mighty Tiamat, he takes captive her champion, Qingu. If the theogonic phase generated the cosmos's fundamental elements in the form of the various deities (sky, earth, freshwater, salt water), Marduk forms the world into its tangible dimension with the components of Tiamat's corpse, all through the guidance of his wise father, Ea/Nudimmud. His creation transforms the rebellious goddess of Chaos into a world suitable for cultivation and habitation, the latter through the temples of the gods. With the investiture with kingship as thanks for his deed, Marduk rules the gods from Babylon, which also becomes the privileged resting place of the gods (even though they have temples in other locations as well).

If divine repose remains the highest good in Mesopotamia, the question arises as to how the gods and their temples could be cared for appropriately. This demand prompts the creation of the prototypical human, again effected by Marduk with the counsel of Ea. Made from the blood of Tiamat's warrior Qingu, humanity must now assume responsibility for serving the great deities, a task once executed by the inferior divine classes. Caring for the gods is humanity's foremost duty.

Enuma Elish not only gathers but also transforms any number of themes from older Mesopotamian myth, especially that of Atrahasis.⁵ Though intentionally omitted from the Babylonian Creation Epic, one episode from the latter bears directly upon the Bible's primordial history (Gen. 1–11). As in *Enuma Elish*, *Atrahasis* features a humanity created to care for the gods, under the guidance of Enki/Ea in this case. The humans make so much noise, however, that they disturb the rest of the gods, who then decide—with Ellil/Enlil leading the way—to destroy the humans by flood. Avoiding total destruction, the creator of humankind, Enki/Ea, commands Atrahasis and his family to build an ark to survive the flood. This myth of Atrahasis shows just how much the themes of threat and creation—and even the extermination of creation—correspond in Mesopotamian tradition. Such correspondence surfaces

in biblical tradition as well, emerging, even earlier than the flood narrative of Gen. 6–9, in the first account of creation.

In light of *Enuma Elish*, the three components of *tôhû wābôhû*, *hōšek*, and *têhôm* betray a clear conception of Chaos, a reality that rumbles beneath the apparently peaceful surface at the beginning of God's creation in the account of Gen. 1. Indeed, Gen. 1:2 consciously and purposefully portrays this potential menace as merely a sort of stagnation, thereby incapacitating Chaos. The spirit of God (*rûah*) hovers above the waters (*mayim*), not the Deep (*têhôm*)—spirit in the Priestly source being no longer the wind or a storm but, rather, a patent reference to the presence of God. Encountering God's presence, the waters immediately lose their threatening power.

To accomplish his creation, God need not *battle* Chaos; but the triad evinces God's will to act as Creator as itself an act against Chaos, which cannot countenance life. Consequently, the Priestly source selects the verb *bārā'* (to create) as a central concept in Gen. 1 to designate the creative action of God. A verb that only ever has God as its subject and which is a technical term for the specific type of creative activity that God prefers, *bārā'* indicates neither the matter nor the means of creation; rather, it serves as the most comprehensive term for God's creative actions in primeval times and the eschaton as well as each day of creation. Beneath this principal term fall other, more concrete conceptions of creation throughout the text of Gen. 1.

A proper exposition of God's creation in Gen. 1 requires due attention to two distinct dimensions: a feat against Chaos and a sovereign act. With this duality, God pursues a single goal: a good creation made to sustain a good life—in terms of time and space alike—not only for his “likeness,” humanity, but also for all creatures, which he entrusts to that very “likeness.” The various motifs woven throughout the Gen. 1 narrative largely come from Mesopotamian mythology, particularly *Enuma Elish*, though these texts do not, and cannot, serve as a final point of reference. In fact, *Enuma Elish* functions as such a good conceptual model precisely because it absorbs and commingles a host of mythic components from Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Syria. A comparable compound almost certainly formed the basis of the Gen. 1 composition. As a result, works such as *Enuma Elish* provide a matrix for viewing the theological

contours specific to Gen. 1. Creation springs from a genuine desire of the one God to fashion a counterpart to himself from his own good work, that counterpart being a means of enabling life in general, and toward which he acts in blessing and protection. Humanity receives such privileged status not for the benefit of God alone but for the sake of all creatures and creation. Moreover, God actively desires a specific kind of relationship with humanity, his likeness. God entrusts it with a dominion that deliberately lacks the trappings of kingly power, for God himself shows in the account of Gen. 1 that he ascribes no importance to royal power. Instead, human mastery must concentrate entirely on preserving the good creation. Even God displays care for his creation, deviating from standard Near Eastern convention. Rather than claim all rest for himself, God founds and commands rest for all his creatures on the seventh day. Whereas the creation of the world in *Enuma Elish* centers primarily upon space for divine repose, an occasion for Marduk's kingship, and the creation of human beings to relieve the gods of work and to serve them, the God of Gen. 1 decides to create for the sake of relationship with all his many creatures. Even further, this Creator seeks to realize his own goodness through creation itself: against a hostile chaos and for a wholesome life, God fashions a space to foster relationship among God, world, and humankind. But if such an account of creation places the goodness of creation at its core, the question inevitably arises how evil could have come to be so successful.

3. GOOD AND EVIL

The story of creation and fall in Gen. 2:4b–3:24 (hereafter Gen. 2–3) seeks to answer this very question. Closely tied to the Priestly creation account through Gen. 2:4b–7, the narrative expounds the first human pair's formation. In its current form, Gen. 2–3 hails from the postexilic period, though a preexilic etiology may well lie at its base (2:5–9a, 18–24; 3:20–21, 23). This rather straightforward etiology, like the rest of the story in its current construction, calls God by his personal name, Yahweh. He shapes the *'ādām* (earthling, human) from the *'ādāmā* (soil, earth) and plants the Garden of Eden as a protective realm to pursue his creative interests. Having formed the *'ādām* and founded the garden,

Yahweh turns his creative efforts to molding a proper partner, as “it is not good that the *'ādām* should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). The animals owe their existence to this search for an adequate mate, though *'ādām* accepts none of them as an appropriate counterpart. Only a new creature formed from part of him will finally suffice. Styling this new being *'iššā* (woman), the *'ādām* quickly succumbs to an intuitive love for her. In relation to *'iššā* (woman), the *'ādām* becomes *'iš* (man) (Gen. 2:23); as a result, the *'ādām* of Gen. 3:20 transitions from generic term (*human*) to proper name (Adam). While such an appellation names him for his origin in *'ādāmā* (soil, earth), it also evokes his mission: to work the *'ādāmā* as a fundamental necessity for the conservation of life (Gen. 3:23). The woman receives a personal name as well, *hawwā* (Eve), expressing her commission to preserve and proliferate “all that lives” (*kol-hay*) (Gen. 3:20). As for their endeavors, God commissions the first human pair to procreate and cultivate, not in the Garden of Eden itself or as an immediate consequence of their expulsion from it. According to Gen. 3:23, Adam and Eve are sent from the garden to act in the world so that all humankind might spring from the first human pair.⁶

This etiology underlies the narrative of creation and fall, curse and eviction, recounted in Gen. 2–3. Even further, the story of evil enjoying such massive success in God's good creation (Gen. 2–3) significantly expands that original tale of a prosperous human creation and the distribution of duties, not to mention the overt declaration of creation's fundamental goodness (Gen. 1). A product of the postexilic period, this final version undertakes the connection of good and evil, an inquiry absent from the creation narrative of Gen. 1. The origin of evil in the good creation, however, even this later, completely composite account ignores, though it strictly precludes God as evil's author. In the middle of God's garden lies the potentiality of evil, as Chaos precedes creation in Gen. 1:2. Chaos may therefore have something to do with evil.

This, however, is not the issue: the issue is humanity's relation to evil. Indeed, humanity possesses the power to awaken the slumbering force of evil into a reality to be reckoned with. The gift of will and ability to choose act as evil's gateway, these capacities being divine endowments to humankind—to the “image” of God himself. The created can turn such faculties even against their creator. In fact, this course of action occurs when the primal humans defy the divine prohibition of eating from the

tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). Theologically, the ability to choose entails a judgment as to life's foundation, meaning, and goal: a grateful bond to God as Creator of life or an autonomy that brooks neither command nor interdiction in an attempt to determine, discern, and decide all things independently and—driven by a lust for power—to remain no longer created but to become instead the Creator oneself. This choice between a bestowed freedom in obedience to the Creator and a sovereign freedom without any connection to the Creator is an unavoidable crossroads. With reference to Gen. 1, God's charge for his "likeness" to rule transforms into a human pretension to rule, freed from connection to God. The story in Gen. 2–3 admits the success of evil in seducing the humans to disobey God. Such a breach is no mere trifle but raises a fundamental question: whether the "opened eyes" the serpent enticingly promises in Gen. 3:5 will indeed bestow that godly power so coveted by humanity.

Invested by God with the freedom to choose, the created being hopes to abandon its bond to him and even itself become God. This aspiration is, in essence, a rejection of creation and thus a triumph of Chaos, the sinister partner of evil. Chaos and evil, working together, build on the groundwork of a rebellious humanity's pursuit of an inflated status. Consequently, those who rebuff the Creator inevitably spurn the proper order of life. The voices of Gen. 1–3 may not know the origin of evil or Chaos, but they know full well the object of evil's seduction: humanity—the image of God, destined for knowledge, yet both willing and able to defy the will of its maker. Loath to be a God without relationship to the world and to the human race he himself created, this God must engage with a creation that would rather be an image of itself than an image of him. God's good creation, opposed to the hostile chaos, is eminently vulnerable, vulnerable to that human creature that seeks not only to deify itself but also to abuse its charge to safeguard God's good creation.

Although the divine curses of Gen. 3:14–19 punish those parties responsible for aiding and abetting evil's triumph in creation, they by no means abrogate the blessings awarded to that creation in Gen. 1:22, 28, and 2:3. Instead, they create a tension between curse and blessing in the world, which then reflects the tension in God's engagement with the world, especially the creature of his foremost devotion, humankind. These curses have serious implications for creation. His hand then forced to

punish, God himself suffers in the subsequent spiral of violence and retribution (Gen. 4), up to his final decision to annihilate his creation so tainted by evil (Gen. 6–9). Yet the same God rescinds his decision to wipe out creation at the end of its near-destruction by flood (Gen. 8:21; 9:11, 15), renewing his blessing upon it (Gen. 9:1). Such antagonism between blessing and curse, as well as divine discipline, remains a source of conflict throughout the primeval history (Gen. 9:26, 11:1–9), for evil remains in the world. Nevertheless, God holds to his creation and all its many creatures. He wants to see himself within his likeness and maintain a bond between likeness and maker (Gen. 9:6).

4. CREATION AS PRESERVATION

Though enjoying pride of place at the beginning of the Jewish and Christian Bibles, the initial constitution of the creation is not the earliest version of creation present within the Old Testament. In fact, the oldest concept of creation appears not in Genesis but in the Psalms. There, the kingship of Yahweh, which stands among the earliest theological conceptions of the Hebrew Bible, has a direct relationship with his ability to defend his earthly domain from the pretensions of other numinous powers. Already apparent in *Enuma Elish*, stories of theomachy feature in preexilic psalms concerning Yahweh's royal rule and even earlier arrangements from Syria in general and Ugarit in particular.⁷ Ugaritic texts depict the god of chaos and sea, Yammu, and the chthonic deity, Motu, as the greatest opponents of Ba'lu, a weather and vegetation divinity who stars not as an adversary but as the prototype of Yahweh in various Old Testament psalms. In this context, the earth and at times even the heavens need not be created at all. Instead of the *origin* of earth, such texts concern its *ruler*: that is, who preserves (Ba'lu) and who imperils (Yammu, Motu) it. The Ugaritic Ba'lu myth tells the tale of a kingdom recurrently threatened. Temporary losses notwithstanding, Ba'lu proves victorious in his dominion over the earth, both granting and preserving life for all.

The psalmic conception of a creation constantly threatened by numinous forces but consistently preserved by the divine king Yahweh would, in fact, be incomprehensible without this religious backdrop from ancient

Syria. If the god-king Yahweh must protect the earth from otherworldly threats in the preexilic period (Pss. 24, 29, 93), in the postexilic period he must defend his own people in a world of hostile others (Pss. 2, 46, 48, 68, 76, 98, 99). In the context of the former, earth stands not as Yahweh's primal creation (*prima creatio*) but as his possession and domain, whose persistent need of care continues to challenge his power. Psalm 93 exhibits such views of creation:

Yahweh is king,
Clothed in majesty,
 clothed is Yahweh,
 girded in might.
Indeed, the world is established, it does not waver,
 established is your throne of old
 from eternity so also are you.
Streams raised up, O Yahweh,
 streams raised up their voice,
 streams raised up their crashing.
More than the roar of great waters,
 more lofty than waves of the sea,
 is Yahweh, lofty on high.
Your witnesses utterly fixed,
 your house a beautiful holiness,
 Yahweh for evermore.

Centered on the god-king Yahweh, this psalm was probably sung already in the Temple of Solomon, persisting into the Second Temple, albeit slightly modified. While his persona appears as divine warrior—a role he adopted from Ba'lu—the power of Yahweh features in universal kingship. Accordingly, the world is his throne's pedestal, a throne of all earthly dimensions upon which he himself sits, exceeding all earthly dimensions.

Nonetheless, Yahweh's kingdom comes under threat, with currents and masses of water surging up against it. Only through Syrian myth does this vignette become fully intelligible. Behind these waters stands a rival to Ba'lu's kingship, Yammu, god of chaos and sea. Present in Psalm 93 by the mention of water (*yām*, 93:4) and streams (*nēhārôt*, 93:3), this same figure arises as the enemy of Yahweh, with the epithets *zbl ym*

(Prince [of the] Sea) and *tpī nhr* (Ruler [of the] Stream) well attested in the Ugaritic texts.

In Psalm 93, however, no combat comes into question. Yahweh rules forever (Ps. 93:2, 5). His name in each line of the psalm, his presence ends any dispute, with this presence further manifest in 93:5 as well. The “witnesses” (*‘ēdôt*) may stem from later theological revision, but the ensemble of eternal name, royal-divine power, and holy temple all trace back to earlier times. Though the text assumes a universality for the power of God, such an idea is not in tension with the factual particularity. Mythologically, the god Yahweh rules the world in its entirety from the Temple in Jerusalem, just as Ba'lu from Mount Zaphon and other weather and vegetation deities from other mountains in Syria and Anatolia do. Divine power is always contested power: the struggle for power must always be fought for the survival of the world. In Psalm 93, however, the question of power among the divinity's rivals is already settled. Nonetheless, Yahweh must still be on guard so that his kingdom and his right to rule and preserve the earth do not succumb to all the threats surrounding him.

Other texts with roots in the preexilic period show that the divine king's formation and preservation of the earth was of central importance. For instance, Psalm 29 stresses the threat posed to Yahweh's power by other numinous beings. With the creation of the earth comes the foundation of the temple upon the quieted waters of chaos, which stresses Yahweh's lasting claim of ownership on the earth (Ps. 24:1–2; see Exod. 15:17; Pss. 50:10–12, 78:69). Creation's beauty and purpose then move to the center when Yahweh founds his heavenly-earthly temple-palace, which, in turn, serves as the indispensable prerequisite for the space and time of creation (Ps. 104). This good order is that participation in God's glory (Ps. 19) or reflection of his presence's fullness with which cosmos and creatures are endowed (Ps. 148). Humanity's distinction lies not in its mere creation but in its incomparable closeness to God, an exaltation not only in heaven but also on earth (Ps. 8). With regard to the motif of birth, human formation lies on the periphery; it is the significance of nearness to God that stands at the center, a relationship that justifies trust (Pss. 2:7, 22:10–11, 71:6, 139:13–16; cf. 94:9).

In terms of strengthening trust, the people's lament of the exilic Psalm 74:12–17 (cf. 89:10–15) proceeds from proclamations about the divine

king to his battle with chaos at the Exodus, culminating in 74:16–17 with the association of Yahweh's creative acts with declarations of ownership, a theme also present in earlier psalms. Yahweh's portrayal as "Creator of Heaven and Earth" prevails through all literary divisions in the Persian period (Gen. 14:19; Pss. 115:15, 121:2, 124:8, 134:3, 146:6), often connected to other aspects of his activity (Pss. 33:6–7, 90:2, 102:26, 115:3, 119:89–90, 135:6, and 136) such as the creation of Israel and other nations (86:9, 95:4–7, 100:3, 149:2 [LXX]). Originally separate, the creation of heaven and earth as divine constitution and the creation of heaven and earth as divine preservation against all threats form a composite whole.

5. A CREATIVE NEWNESS AND A SAVING CREATION

Through the concept that God's creation is a constant, conservational activity (more: that God renews his creation each and every morning [Ps. 104:27–30], a theme attested in Egyptian religion as well), the idea arose that God not only renews the existent creation but even fashions new things that have never before existed.⁸ While the postulate appears only sporadically in the Psalms as the re-creation of heart and spirit (Ps. 51:12–14), such an assertion arises in the context of exilic and postexilic prophecy, most clearly in Isaiah and Ezekiel, which promise new divine dealings and include the gift of a new heart and divine spirit in either the present or the future (Isa. 11:1–5, 42:1–4, 61:1–3; Ezek. 11:19–20 [contra 18:31], 36:26–27, 37:1–14; Joel 3:1–5). In this conceptual context, new divine activities can even bring together the dimensions of primordial fabrication and anticipated eschaton into a unified sketch of creation. If God's work at the beginning is a creative triumph against not only the power of chaos but also that of the Egyptians (through the Exodus), his work at the end is not just the *end* but the *ultimate*: the newly created that is also a fight against chaos and powerful peoples, a renewed deliverance that surpasses all previous experience of rescue.

For this hope, texts from the second half of Isaiah, that is, after chapter 40, prove paradigmatic. Crafted over a long process from the sixth to the fourth century BCE, these texts depict God as both creator and redeemer, casting a unity of will and deed alike throughout the past,

present, and future (Isa. 43:1, 44:24). His word says what he does. All things past and present he does in a unity of purpose. Whether championing his servant Jacob/Israel, drying up the chaotic waters of the Deep at the Reed Sea, or harnessing the king of Persia to rebuild and populate Jerusalem and Judah alike (Isa. 44:24–28a), God has the world's entirety within the plans he makes. And this plan has always been rescue. Consequently, the notion of God as creator of Chaos and addressor of darkness is deceptive (Isa. 45:18–19, consciously contra 45:7); rather, "light to the nations" and guarantor of salvation and justice, his servant Jacob/Israel advocates his will in the world (49:1–6). Salvation of the world hinges on the promise to this servant—the figure of Jacob/Israel and the corporate personality of a reformed Israel—and Zion alike: Yahweh returns, to the acclamation and amazement of the nations (Isa. 46:9–13, 51:9–11, 52:7–10). The word of God—the promise of salvation—is therefore fulfilled in times past, present, or future.

The expectation of imminent fulfillment weighs heavy for these texts of Isaiah, of course, and that unsatisfied anticipation continued to grow over time. By the end of the book of Isaiah, the uncertain things once promised (Isa. 42:9) become the concrete hope of a new heaven and earth (Isa. 65:17, 66:22) with its center in Jerusalem, a city without weeping or clamor, home to evil no more (Isa. 65:18–25; cf. 11:6–9). The primeval age provides a template for the end of days; the future is becoming hope, set free from the past. In this account, the work of God is always new creation, God's fundamental yes to world and humankind against all of evil's successes. Creation in the primordial era and the eschaton is the master narrative of God's desire for relationship, whose origin lies in his desire to love. Not every ancient story may have seen things in this way, but Isaiah 54:7–10 certainly sets things in this light.

6. WISDOM AND CREATION

Wisdom theology is, at core, a creation theology.⁹ From the world's good order, sages discover the ways that lead to a knowledge of God, for he himself created the heavens and the earth by wisdom and knowledge (Prov. 3:19–20; cf. Ps. 104:24). Playing before God as his "darling" (*'āmôn*, not "master workman"), personified Wisdom even boasts of spurring

the Creator to his work. Creation is thus a success (Prov. 8:22–31). While God amuses himself with Leviathan—really a vile servant of the chaotic Sea (Ps. 104:26)—Wisdom takes pleasure in humanity, as God does in Wisdom itself (Prov. 8:30–31). As love and desire dominate creation (Prov. 8:17), neither God nor Wisdom can fathom the inhumanity of humanity: “The rich and poor meet together: Yahweh is the maker of them all” (Prov. 22:2; cf. 29:13). Though it contains neither warning nor threat, such a statement suggests that the dynamic of rich and poor should correspond to the proper world order, which God bestowed on his creatures. Reference to the Creator seems to enter here for those cases of abuse that endanger or even afflict the order ordained by God. Accordingly, oppression of the weak (Prov. 14:31, 17:5) and deception in trade (Prov. 16:11) summon a Creator who safeguards his order. God as fashioner of eye and ear (Prov. 20:12; see 20:27) implicitly appeals to a rightful use of gifts, but this divine capacity receives particular emphasis wherever the social structure threatens to unravel. Based on their knowledge of the parts, the sages venture to pronounce the wholeness of this order as willed by God. Accordingly, God himself made the order’s greatest foe, the wicked, whom he crafted for the day of evil (Prov. 16:4). This declaration of boundaries or limitations converges with that of Yahweh’s engagement with Leviathan in Psalm 104:26: with statements such as these, the sages reflect their hope that God will protect his order in the most vulnerable of spheres.

Throughout the Wisdom literature, positive and negative perspectives on creation are almost always juxtaposed, with skeptical voices increasing from the sixth century BCE. Formed in a lengthy process from the sixth to the fourth century BCE, the book of Job and that of Qohelet, which was written in at least the fourth but probably the third century BCE, display an irritation with and resignation from God’s dealings with the world. The God who makes all things—even the wicked for an evil day (Prov. 16:4)—and gives all knowledge to those who seek it (Prov. 28:5) becomes unrecognizable when calamity strikes a paragon of righteousness “without cause” (*hinnām*, Job 2:3, 9:17; cf. 1:9), as in the case of Job. Here, the entirety of creation becomes ordained by God, inscrutable and perilous (Qoh. 3:11).

If the Job novella avails itself of few creation concepts, the poetry of the book sets such conceptions center stage. In the first speech cycle

especially (Job 3–14), an ambivalent sense of creation emerges on both sides in various forms. Whereas justice and creatureliness do not at all converge for Job’s friend Eliphaz (Job 4:17–21), Job proves himself well versed in praise for the Creator, a praise he turns into an acid text of hymn and indictment alike (Job 9:5–10; 10:3, 8–13; 12:7–25; with a gloomy affinity to Zophar’s praise of God’s inscrutability in 11:7–10). For the character of Job, justness and creatureliness fundamentally diverge since God cannot tolerate any human righteousness (Job 9:2–4, 20, 28–31). The challenge of Job’s final speech (Job 29–31) once again places the question of law and justice at its center, yet the divine speeches and answers in Job 38:1–42:6 hardly even attempt a response. Parading his creation before Job—a presentation unique in the Old Testament for its systematization and completeness—God utterly rejects Job’s demand for justice. In fact, God never claims justice as a meaningful category for his creation. Creation, presented with a sovereign gesture, is no longer self-evident, since God is obliged to promote it with a speech of his own—a rare genre for Wisdom literature. Importantly, such self-praise shows no interest of the Creator in his work, least of all in humanity. No longer a mere toying (Ps. 104:26), God’s encounter with Leviathan (Job 40:25–41:26) is now a terrifying showdown with the “king over all who are proud” (41:34). Job’s immediate answer shows that he has understood God: “I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. . . . Therefore I despise (myself) and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:2, 6).

In the context of Qohelet, the paradigmatic problem is much less existential than in Job. God as Creator belongs to the fundamental thought of Qohelet, and yet he is unknowably distant, with totality—a frequent designation for creation—denied to human knowledge as well. This detachment proves all the more painful and frustrating as God has placed eternity in the heart of humankind, which, for Qohelet, is nothing less than the image of God. Although God and totality certainly belong together, totality and the good no longer coincide (Qoh. 3:10–11). An assertion of totality as the beautiful (*yāpeh*) likely functions as a denial of its goodness (*tôb*), a conscious critique of Gen. 1. Instead, the good can be experienced only as a contingent gift of God in the commonplace of toil (Qoh. 3:12–13; cf. 2:24, 5:17–19, 7:13–14, 9:7–10). The wholeness of creation betrays an eternal determination, one that inspires more fear

than reverence, and leaves in suspense whether God pursues an end both with and through world and humankind alike or whether God himself searches for what is lost (*nirdāp*, Qoh. 3:14–15), as Qohelet does.

Composed in the first quarter of the second century BCE and translated into Greek at the end of the same, Ben Sira knows well Qohelet's skepticism toward creation. Rather than share or even restate such a view, however, Ben Sira consciously contrasts this perspective with a synthesis of authoritative traditions from the Torah, Prophets, and Writings (Sir. 16:26–17:32).¹⁰ The connection of Wisdom and creation assumes a formative function thereby. In Sir. 24:1–22, Wisdom, the firstborn of creation, abandons her heavenly throne to find a place of rest within God's wider world, with God finally assigning her to his most beloved stake upon the earth: Jacob/Zion/Jerusalem (Sir. 24:8–12). There Wisdom dwells in the law that contains her completely (Sir. 24:23–34). The characterization of God as "Creator of All" (Sir. 24:8; see 18:1, 50:22 [LXX]) reinforces Wisdom's universal worth, which suffers no restriction from her particular connection to Zion and the law. Two compositions may constitute the end of the book, but they correspond to one another with thematic importance: Sir. 42:15–43:33 begins with the praise of God's abundant glory in creation, while Sir. 44–49 follows with the praise of God's glory in its form as Israel's ancestors, from Enoch to the time of Ben Sira. Both parts together constitute a hymnic history of world and salvation, which shows how God formed creation and history with a conspicuous purpose that rebuffs any challenge from Qohelet. Furthermore, God himself is "the all," not in the sense that he is identical with it but in the sense of the transience of God in the world. God is therefore greater than all his works (Sir. 43:27–28).

The Creator's all-embracing presence together with his wisdom culminate in teleology. With an apparent though implicit critique of Qohelet, Ben Sira expands the goodness of creation to the point that all things have purpose and meaning. As for the gifts of creation, they turn to good for the good and evil for the evil (Sir. 39:16–35). Ben Sira thus counters Qohelet's determinism with predestination. Yet the author's theological aim lies not on this horizon but on that of praise for creation and the forefathers: their loyalty to God reveals the integrity of creation. Consequently, the service of the high priest Simeon II at the altar of the Jerusalem Temple stands at the zenith of the praise of the ancestors (Sir.

50). The grandson of Ben Sira poignantly translated Simeon's service at the altar with *kosmos kuriou* (Sir. 50:19). "Order of the Lord" may designate the rite, but the term *kosmos* indicates the world more broadly as well. As a result, service to God is "the world of the Lord," the true world, the true totality.

Written in Greek during the first century BCE, the Wisdom of Solomon (Sapientia Salomonis) seeks to fathom even further the purpose of creation.¹¹ God as being appears visible as Creator through his own creatures' beauty and greatness (Sap. 13:5)—so long as humanity employs its cognitive faculties to perceive him in the first place (Sap. 13:1–9). In addition, creation itself suggests that God has neither created evil nor rejoiced at the fall of the living (Sap. 1:13); on the contrary, "the creations of the world are salvific" (*soteriai hai geneseis tou kosmou*), for God exercises immortal justice in all (Sap. 1:14–15). The soteriological potential of all the divine creations cannot be reduced to an initial act: it is documented in the history of a chosen people and constantly present in Wisdom, the one saving, the other chastising (Sap. 10:1–19:22). Even so, such a history of deliverance is not restricted to a single group but is paradigmatic for the way God governs history, to enforce justice for the sake of the just (Sap. 12:15–27). Although God turns *ktisis* (creation) into a weapon against his enemies (Sap. 5:17), creation can also deploy its powers to comply with the deity's will for punishment or deliverance (Sap. 16:24, 19:6; cf. 16:17). As if the author had sensed the danger of an autonomous creation, he inserts an interpretation of Deut. 8:3 (LXX) here so that the sons—who should understand the wonderful gift of manna—are nourished not by "the creations of fruits" (*hai geneseis ton karpon*) but by "your word, which preserves all who believe" (*to rhema sou tous soi pisteuontas diaterei*) (Sap. 16:26). Wisdom may teach how to see the evidence of God in creation, but it also instructs in the art of interpreting God's word, whether the Torah, as in this particular case; the second half of Isaiah, where creation becomes soteriology; or Ben Sira, without whose connection of creation and predestination the Wisdom of Solomon could never have refined its teleology.

Second Maccabees interprets creation in a soteriological manner not all too distant from Sapientia Salomonis, especially in the story of the seven brothers' martyrdom (2 Macc. 7). With persecution under

Antiochus IV Epiphanes as its background, the legend portrays a tyrant sequentially executing seven brothers who have refused to eat pork. Their mother comforts her dying sons by referring to the power of the Creator, which gives confidence in life after death: "Therefore, the Creator of the world, who forms humanity and conceives the being of all things, will once again grant you spirit [*pneuma*] and life in his mercy, since you have not dishonored yourselves for his laws' sake" (2 Macc. 7:23). Most notable is the mother's speech to the last son, which articulates a conception of creation from nothing for the first time and thus derives a certainty that death will not have the final word:

I beg you, my child, look at the heaven and earth,
see everything that is in them;
thus you will realize that God did not make them from things that
(already) exist [οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων],
and humanity came about likewise.
Do not fear this execution;
rather, take this death upon you in a manner worthy of your brothers,
so that I might receive you, together with your brothers, again in the time
of compassion. (2 Macc. 7:28–29)

In his unintuitive power to create new life in precisely that place where evil ostensibly wins the ultimate victory—that is, death—God's creation from nothing belongs to the realm of soteriology. Such creation grounds a hope that only recourse to the initial good creation could possibly have borne. Indeed, creation's only hope lies in a God whose life-creating will can break the power of death. God's yes to life at the beginning becomes, reinterpreted, a reason for hope in his yes to life at the eschaton.

NOTES

I am deeply indebted to Paul Michael Kurtz (Göttingen) and John Barton for transforming my complicated German into fluent English.

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