

The Reversal of the Death-Wish Poem in the First Whirlwind Discourse as Guidance to  
Discern the Way Characteristic of Life in the Book of Job

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Job's confession following the voice from the whirlwind is where the Job commentator puts the interpreter's stamp (42:6). The syntax is notoriously ambiguous such that the results of the translation more distinctly bear the interpreter's coloration more than would otherwise be evident (see Jones 2021, 546). Furthermore, God's judgment that Job's friends "have not spoken rightly of Me as did My servant Job" (42:7)<sup>1</sup> only exacerbates the issue of evaluating Job's integrity as Oeming explains:

The unqualified positive judgment concerning Job, "God's servant," is a blatant contradiction of all the preceding: Job was in the wrong for all sides—the friends, Elihu, God, and finally himself—only to be judged right by God at the end? This hard to conceptualize phenomenon is "the greatest thing . . . , that the book of Job offers," and before hard tests, the interpreters place their fashionings. (2000, 104; trans. mine)

The book of Job culminates with an un(self)resolvable resolution. The narrative leads the reader to expect that the divine revelation of the whirlwind speech will answer the question of turmoil (*rōgez*) in all social locations (see Newsom 2003, 94; Brown 2014, 81–2). Instead, on offer is a syntactically difficult confession—of guilt? (Alter 2011, 2019; Newsom 2003) of comfort? (Brown 2014; Middleton 2021) of resolve? (Ansell 2017a)<sup>2</sup>—with the long-awaited evaluation of God, whose evaluation is an "unqualified positive judgment" of Job after a

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<sup>1</sup> All translations of the Book of Job are from Alter (2019). As I explain in this section, Alter's (2011, 2019) reading of the narrative structure in Job informs the primary substance of this paper's argument. Alter's (2019) translation gives special attention in the diction and poetic rendering to the structures of intensification as per Alter (2011). Where I consult the Hebrew text, I follow the *BHS*.

<sup>2</sup> For the curious, the conclusion Oeming offers is a similar evaluation to Middleton's (2021)—namely, that the issue at hand in 42:7 is that Job spoke *to* God in a personal way and did not speak before God in a distanced way (2000, 114). Theology is *coram Deo*: one ought to speak to God in a manner of personal participation (112–6). Hence, Oeming translates 42:7: "You have not rightly spoken *to me*" (*ihr habt nicht recht zu mir geredet*, 113; emphasis and trans. mine); cf. Middleton 2021, 113–22, esp. 126. The argument of this paper concerns the anticipation in the whirlwind discourse of the moment of un(self)resolvable resolution, which the book of Job offers as a call for the reader to discern the way which is characteristic of life; see Ansell 2013, 2; 2017a, 277.

whole narrative of digging in heels regarding Job's integrity. If the reader is to supply the narrative resolution to Job's question regarding the place of suffering in God's world—especially of the righteous, oppressed, and marginalized—then the reader requires a framework to resolve the narrative in answer to Job's question.

I aim to investigate the first part of YHWH's discourse (Ch. 38–39) for the guidance to answer the "test" at the end of the book of Job. In my interpretation of the "wisdom thinking" in the Hebrew Bible, which characterizes the underdetermination of 42:6 among other aporias, I follow Ansell (2012, 2013, 2017b) who takes

. . . “wisdom thinking” (within and beyond Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes) to be discernment that finds the way to “life” (Prov. 3:18, 22; 4:13, 22–23; 8:35; 10:17; 11:30; 14:27, Deut. 30:14–20; 32:47) via attunement to the spirituality of existence. Such wisdom begins with “the fear of [Yahweh]” (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33, cf. Ps. 111:10 and Job 28:28)—the “fear” without “fear,” according to Exod 20:20, that signifies the presence of the sacred in the light of which creation is revelation. Hence the kind of writing we find in Prov 30:18–19 . . . (2012, 124n47)

Since the text at 42:6–7 functions as a "test of discernment" for the reader, I look to the first part of the whirlwind speech (Ch. 38–39) to offer guidance for the ambiguities of the second part of the whirlwind speech (Ch. 40–41) and the judgment (Ch. 42:1–7).

To establish the first part of the whirlwind speech as guidance for discerning "what Scripture calls the 'way' that is characterized by 'life' rather than 'death'" (Ansell 2017b, 281), I follow Alter's (2011) reading of the structures of intensification primarily between the death-wish poem (Ch. 3) and the first part of the whirlwind speech (Ch. 38–39). While Alter (2011, 2019) reads the whirlwind speech as an affirmation of God's distant hierarchical

relation to Job, his analysis of narrative structures provides a strong foundation for a reading with a high(er) anthropology (viz., Ansell 2017a, Brown 2014, Middleton 2021). Taking my lead from Alter's observations, I divide the paper into two sections based on the reversals that occur as structures of intensification. The first primary section concerns the reversal of the darkness imagery of the death-wish poem with the light imagery of the meteorological section of the whirlwind discourse. The second primary section concerns the reversal of death imagery of the death-wish poem with the life imagery of the first part of the whirlwind speech (Ch. 38–39). I argue that both sections through their respective light and life symbolism affirm the principle of life in their reversal of darkness and death and yet that these affirmations of life acknowledge the inherent risk of turmoil (*rōgez*), which comes with the way that characterizes life in the world as it is. Furthermore, the Job-poet provides the reader with two examples of wisdom's insight in creation, preparing the reader for the "test of discernment" at 42:6–7.

### **From Darkness to Light**

One of the major "image-for-image responses to the death-wish poem" is the recursion of darkness imagery (Alter 2019, n32:2), which Job will juxtapose and then conflate with light imagery. The darkness overcomes the light in the death-wish poem. Alter demonstrates the thematic reversal of Job's speeches, especially the death-wish poem (Ch. 3), through recursion characteristic of Hebrew poetry in the whirlwind discourse—namely, the reversal of darkness to light and death to life. YHWH presents Job with a "radical" alternative imaginary through the affirmation of life (Alter 2011, 104). In his opening discourse (Ch. 3), Job pronounces regarding his birthday: "That day, let it be darkness./ Let God not seek it out,/ nor brightness shine upon it" (v. 4). He then follows with merging the imagery of darkness with a metaphor of death as a figure: "Let darkness, death's shadow, foul it/ let a cloud-mass

rest upon it,/ let day-gloom dismay it" (v. 5). From cursing the day itself, Job moves to curse the day-night rhythm: "Oh let that night be barren,/ let it have no song of joy" and "Let its twilight stars go dark" (v. 9), and associates light with death through birth imagery: "For I would lie and be still/ . . . or like a buried stillborn I'd be,/ like babes who never saw light" (vv. 13, 16), resembling the wrapping of that day in darkness (v. 4; Alter 2011, 79). Newsom points to the grimness with which the Job-poet perverts the light: "Consider the ambivalence of "light." In the curse, light is a positive value, and to deprive "day" of it is to do day great harm. Yet Job wishes that he himself, like the stillborn child, had "never seen the light" (3:16b)" (2003, 94) In the death-wish poem, Job pronounces darkness over the day of his birth. Light enters oblivion in the curse of the day. Then through the image of a stillborn, light takes on the symbolism of death.

The consequence of darkness for the character of Job concerns his search for some counsel or comfort regarding justice through wisdom amid the sudden onset of intense suffering despite his integrity. With the advent of his suffering and injustice, "To a man whose way is hidden,/ and God has hedged him about" (v. 23), the way of and to God becomes hidden under the shroud of darkness, even though Job remembers: that "To His [God's] steps my foot held fast,/ His way I kept, and I did not swerve" (23:11). As the poetic argument progresses (esp. Ch. 14–29), the theme of God's absence also intensifies (Brown 2014, 95), evidenced in the imagery of the occluded path in 3:23. At the culmination of Job's discourses (Ch. 29–31), Job remembers before his suffering when both he and God were in the communion of the covenant participation (see Brown 2014, 103):

Would that I were as in moons of yore,  
as the days when God [אֱלֹהִים] watched over me,  
when He shone his lamp over my head,

by its light I walked in darkness,  
 as I was in the days of my prime,  
 God an intimate of my tent [בְּסוּד אֱלֹהִים עָלַי אֶהְיֶה].<sup>3</sup> (Job 29:2–4)

With God as the lamp, the path to God was lightened amid the darkness that Job would encounter in the world. The presence of God in covenant communion was light not of the perverted sort, which serves as the place in the imagination for the Job-poet to conceive of Job's non-birth or oblivion. If this was the light before the perverted light of suffering which takes on the grim imagery of the stillborn, then this is the light of life into which God as the lamp had been the midwife of Job's birth into the world (3:10–16, 38:8–11). With God's "friendly counsel" or "intimate council" (סוּד) absent, darkness—that is, Job's suffering and the suffering of the oppressed and marginalized—overwhelms the path Job had followed. The order that should be the structure of the cosmos—namely, the wicked come to justice, the marginalized included in communion, and righteousness honored—is hidden from Job. The association of darkness with the metaphor of the figure of death (“death’s shadow”) envelops not only the light of life—of the successful birth—but also the way of counsel, which comes from the intimacy of covenant communion with YHWH.

Given the intensification of darkness imagery which shrouds life and counsel, it is no surprise that the theophanic whirlwind speech begins in a manner to suggest a strong parallelism with the imagery of the death-wish poem:

And [YHWH] answered (וַיַּעַן־יְהוָה) Job from the whirlwind and He [YHWH] said:

Who is this who darkens counsel  
 in words without knowledge? (38:1–2)

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<sup>3</sup> Alter (2019), n29:4: “Literally, ‘When God’s council [that is, His exclusive intimate company] was at my tent.’”

Notable is the appearance of the covenantal name for God (יהוה), which was not in use until the whirlwind theophany.<sup>4</sup> The name YHWH is “the name most often used to signify God’s covenantal character and promises” (see Ex. 3:14–15)” (Harris and Konkel 2008, n38:1).<sup>5</sup> The narrative reaches its climax as YHWH enters into co-presence with Job just as Job remembered of God’s intimacy with him in the tent (אֹהֶל), comparable to the “tent of meeting” with Moses (וַיִּקְרָא לֹו אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד, Ex. 33:7). Brown reads the theophany of YHWH as a resolution for Job’s heart, restless for communion with God (2014, 128). Just as God as a lamp had lightened the way before Job’s feet, YHWH addresses the darkness which hid the way introduced in the death-wish poem in the rhetorical question “who is this who darkens counsel...?” The first imagery of darkening counsel signals the reversal of the way hidden under the shroud of darkness for which Job yearned (28:28).

The cosmogonic and meteorological sections of the whirlwind speech (38:1–21, 22–38) contain an interplay of dark and light imagery with birth imagery. In the cosmogony, God affirms light in a direct reversal of Job's world-annihilation. Once Job has moved from the condemnation of his birth to the annihilation of day and night rhythms of the natural world, he declares:

Oh, let that night be barren,

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<sup>4</sup> Some editors use YHWH in the hymn to wisdom for *'adonai* (28:28): “And He said to man:/ Look, fear of the Master (יִרְאַת אֲדֹנָי), that is wisdom, . . .” Alter observes that this is the only appearance of אֲדֹנָי in the book of Job and that the appearance of YHWH as late as the whirlwind theophany is significant. He attributes the reason to the pronunciation of יהוה as “*'adonai*” to account for the differences in other manuscripts (2019, n28:28).

<sup>5</sup> Brown notes that the covenantal name suggests an invitation to the intimate company that God and Job kept in days of yore (2014, 128). The taunt beginning both parts of YHWH's guidance prods Job to transform face fear and speak *to* YHWH in a participatory manner (38:3, 40:7; Ansell 2017, 111–4a; Brown 2014, 110; Middleton 2021, 120–2; Oeming 2000, 112–6). Notwithstanding Harris and Konkel's (2008) observation of the shift to covenant language, they, as Alter (2011), observe YHWH imposing limits as YHWH does with creation on the pride of Job calling God to search him out.

let it have no song of joy.

...

Let it's twilight stars go dark.

Let it hope for day in vain,

and let it not see the eyelids of dawn.

For it did not shut the belly's doors

to hide wretchedness from my eyes. (3:7, 9–10)

Having hailed the addressee as "the one who darkens counsel" and heard the pronouncements of "death's shadow" such that the "twilight stars go dark" in an annihilation of the life of the natural world, YHWH remembers the sight and sound of the natural world at its birth:

or who laid its cornerstone,

when the morning stars sang together,

and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (38:6b–7)

Rather than a glimpse of the death and oblivion of the natural world that Job visits in despair, YHWH directs Job to the labor and birth of the natural world. Beyond the cosmogonic remembrance, YHWH also reverses Job's condemnation of his birth. Whereas Job prays a curse upon the "triumphant cry on the night of conception" (Alter 2011, 98–9), YHWH returns exultation to the day of birth with the shout for joy of the world itself on the night of its conception and birthday in 38:9. The perspectival movement through which YHWH rejoins Job's curse is itself a reversal of Job's movement. Job extrapolates the curse from finitude beginning with his birth to the rhythm of the entire natural world through day-night imagery. Just as Job ends with the whole, YHWH responds with a fruitful morning sky

exulting in song. The third part of the verse moves from the whole to the particular "triumphant cry on the night of conception" when the night of oblivion bursts forth with life in the morning. Regarding the generativity of structures of intensification, Alter cites this parallelism as "perhaps the finest illustration of this nice match of meaning and imagery between the two poems"—namely, "the beautiful counterbalance between the most haunting of Job's lines wishing for darkens and the most exquisite of God's lines affirming light" (Alter 2011, 98).

Then, just as Job perverted light imagery through association with death, YHWH associates a shrouding cloud with life-giving birth imagery:

Who hedged the sea with double doors,  
                   when it gushed forth from the womb,  
 when I made cloud its clothing,  
                   and thick mist its swaddling bands?

which comes as a direct reversal of cloud and death imagery of the death-poem:

Let darkness death's shadow foul it [Job's birthday],  
                   let a cloud-mass rest upon it,  
                   let day-gloom dismay it.

As the midwife for the successful birth of the sea, YHWH takes the imagery of darkness and occlusion—namely, the "cloud" and "thick mist"—as clothes to augment the violently powerful vitality ("gushed forth,"  $\text{נִשְׁפָּק}$ ; cf. Jg. 23:3, Ez. 32:2, Mc. 4:10). The reversal of association between the shrouding cloud and death to the covering cloud and life shifts the

annihilation and stillness of creation—beginning with Job’s birth—to the gushing emergence and play of life, which comes to a climax in YHWH’s play with Leviathan (40:20).

Moreover, YHWH, too, requires the reader to contend with an apparent paradox. Whereas the death-poem perverts light imagery through envelopment within death imagery, the shrouding cloud and thick mist preserve the new life of the natural world with YHWH as the midwife.

### **The First Call to Discernment: the Way of Light and the Place of Darkness**

The gushing birth of the natural world develops into the establishment of the day-night rhythm in which morning, day, twilight, and night cycle according to their guidance from YHWH who "delegates" their roles in the self-renewing of the natural world (Brown 2014, 113; Alter 2011, 103).<sup>6</sup> Alter observes the following to be the continuation of the reversal of 3:7, 9–10, discussed above (2019, n38:19), which likewise moves into the rhythms of the natural world. YHWH directs Job to YHWH's relationship with the heavens:

Have you ever commanded the morning,  
                   appointed the dawn to its place,  
 To seize the earth’s corners,  
                   that the wicked be shaken from it?  
 It turns like sealing clay,  
                   takes color like a garment,  
 and their light is withdrawn from the wicked,  
                   and the upraised arm is broken.

Have the gates of death been laid bare to you,

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<sup>6</sup> Brown says “preserve creation” (2014, 112). Regarding the fecundity of the natural world in the birth imagery of the cosmogony and the bestiary, Alter observes that YHWH sets boundaries and guides the natural world toward not only the preservation of life but also to the creation of new life itself (Alter, 2011, 101–3; 2019, nn38:28–9). The natural world joins in creation with the Midwife/Mother-Father of the natural world.

and the gates of death's shadow have you seen?

...

Where is the way that light dwells,

and darkness, where is its place,

That you might take it to its home

and understand the paths to its house? (38:12–20)

In the reversal of death to life—night to day, darkness to light—YHWH directs Job to the establishment of the morning, day, twilight, and night cycle, each having an integral role in the life of the world of YHWH's midwifery and nurturance (cf. 39:1–4; Alter 2011, 103). Beginning with the death-wish poem and throughout the body of the poetic argument, the symbolism of night enveloping day—thus becoming endless night or de-generated nothingness—includes the arbitrariness of the violence against life. Job, Mourning the oppression of the marginalized, cries: "Why are dire times not stored by Shaddai/ and those who know Him behold not his days?" (24:1; see too Alter 2019, n24:1).<sup>7</sup> Here, Job conflates the day and night because of the rampant, unchecked violence against the vulnerable: "By light the murderer rises,/ he slays the poor and indigent,/ and at night he is like a thief" (24:14). Through speaking to his experience of "the rent in the heart of the world," Job holds Shaddai's divine judgment of the friends' imaginary and the mysterious lack of realized divine action of his imaginary in tension (Newsom 2003, 166).<sup>8</sup> The paradox or mystery of divine inaction in the face of blatant and rampant oppression represented in the conflation of day and night in Ch. 24 finds its boundaries in the play between night and day in YHWH's speech: "and their light is withdrawn from the wicked,/ and the upraised arm is broken"

<sup>7</sup> Both Brown (2014, 96, 96n80) and Newsom (2003, 164–167) are inclined to identify 24:1–17 as Job's position, whereas 24:18–24 "seem to mimic Job's friends" (Brown) such that they "represent a measure of distance as well as appropriation" to speak the mysterious lack of realization of divine action for Job "who has experienced 'the rent in the heart of the world'" (Newsom 2003, 166).

<sup>8</sup> Newsom (2003) is quoting Buber (1949), 191.

(38:15). Both the way to light and the rightful place of darkness remain in tension and need of guidance. YHWH invites Job to guide the darkness to "its place," which Job must discern just like the dawn must. As God delegates the dawn to discern its place, thus withdrawing the cover of darkness from the wicked and exposing oppression, so YHWH puts the tension of light and darkness in Job's hands: "That you might take it [darkness] to its home/ and understand the paths to its house" (38:20). Both light *and* darkness have a place. With the guidance of the affirmation of light, Job must discern the way of light while understanding that darkness has a place in the diurnal rhythm, just as Job observes of the dawn's task. The tension here between light and dark recurs in the bestiary in birth and death imagery, especially in killing for food.

## From Death to Life

### Death Imagery and *Rōgez* in the Death-Wish Poem

Arriving at a thematic peak in the curse of the natural world with the imagery of night enveloping the day of Job's birth (3:3–10), Job turns to wish for the stillness of the grave (3:11–23). On account of his being born into life, Job would that he had entered into the world as a stillborn without the lived experience of "trouble" (רָגַז; Alter 2019, trans.), "agitation" (Brown 2014, 81), or "turmoil" (Newsom 2003, 94).<sup>9</sup> At the end of the death-wish poem, Job characterizes his suffering as *rōgez*, which Newsom explains "is to the order of lived experience as chaos is to cosmic order" (2003, 94). In the first part of the death-wish poem, Job moves from part to whole: from the day of his birth to the day-night rhythm of the cosmic order. According to Job's curse, the darkness of night overcomes the light of day, and the night itself will even enter oblivion through chaos (3:6–8). Newsom points out the symmetry in Job's de-creation imagery in which the natural world moves into oblivion with the death imagery of the stillborn (2003, 94). In the case of the natural world, the day-night rhythm of the world suffers disruption—that is, chaos—and finds its relief in oblivion: "Oh, let that night be barren, . . . let it not see the eyelids of dawn (3:9). Likewise, to seek a state of "quiet," "still," and "repose," Job notes that such would only happen in the tomb: "For now I would like and be still,/ would sleep and know repose . . ." (3:13). As Job lives, though near death—even having the seven days and nights of mourning (2:13)—even the return of a privileged life, such as the "kings and councilors of earth" (3:14), holds no promise of relief from *rōgez*.

The observation that even seemingly meaningful life offers no relief from suffering, no realization of justice, such that oblivion is desirable over life, beginning from the womb

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<sup>9</sup> Newsom (2003, 94) notes the denotations of רָגַז in the Hebrew Bible: "But what does [Job] mean? This noun and its cognate verb and adjective denote a state of agitation. With respect to inanimate objects they describe a physical shaking (2 Sam. 22:8; Amos 8:8; Hab. 3:7); when used of human or divine beings, they denote intense emotional agitation (2 Sam. 19:1; Jer. 33:9; Joel 2:1; Ps. 99:1)."

(3:11), is itself shrouded by the darkness of death with the closure of the second birth-death movement of imagery in the “tomb” and “grave” (3:22). Alter notes both the assonance between the movement from stillness of the womb to the turmoil of life in *מִרְחֹם* (“from the the womb,” 3:11a), and from the turmoil of life to the stillness of the tomb in *בְּקִבְרֵךְ* (“at the tomb,” 3:22, and “grave”; Alter 2011, 80). The Job-poet through this structure encloses the continuum of life—glorious to wicked, free to slave—all experience life with the oppression of *rōgez*. As Alter observes, the enclosure of the myriad of socio-economic statuses within the repose of the tomb “has the effect of locating Job's suffering as only one particular acute instance of the common human condition,” which the Job poet summarizes in the minimal line: “The small and great are there,/ and the slave is free of his master” (3:20; Alter, 2011, 81). While Newsom agrees with Alter that the catalog points to Job's observation that all of life includes *rōgez*, Newsom makes two further observations about the imagery of sociality with thematic implications for the poetic argument. These observations concern Job and the friends' moral imaginations of the world. Ultimately, YHWH offers re-orientation in the affirmation of life through birth and freedom imagery in a world whose moral imagination is devoid of human hierarchy. (1) Firstly, in Ch. 24, discussed briefly above, Job challenges the moral imagination of the friends through the observation of unrealized divine action in the face of rampant suffering such that suffering is arbitrary rather than a mode of punishment for sin. The arbitrariness of *rōgez* and the lack of divine action to relieve or redeem life from *rōgez* begins already in this catalog of the death-wish poem. Like those in Job's lament over who lack autonomy on the margins of society in Ch. 24, the oppressed—the “small” and “slave”—are those “who rejoice at the tomb,/ are glad when they find the grave” (3:22) because life will not have repose from trouble or realization of justice due to divine inaction. Clearly, in the case of those at the margins of society, the kings, councilors, and enslavers will exercise their will over others. As long as such social structure exists, the oppressed will not

have the repose from trouble necessary to delight in freedom. (2) That Job includes those who wield such power in the catalog brings Newsom to her second observation. For Job, the stillborn is better off than the kings and councilors who ultimately meet the same end. In life, the kings and councilors "build ruins for themselves" (3:14b). Even they who oppress to acquire capital ("who fill their houses with silver," 3:15b) become "exhausted by the rage of their emotions [*rōgez*] and the attempt to use their power in what is ultimately a futile gesture" (2003, 96). Newsom finds this in Job's statement that "There the wicked cease their troubling, / and there the weary repose" (3:17). She differs from Alter (2019) in reading the second half of the verset as "one worn out by power" (הַיָּוֵשׁ בְּכֹחַ), noting that the expression "is ambiguous, however, since 'power' might be either subjective or objective genitive, that is, the image might be of one being worn out by being subjected to power or by wielding power" (2003, 95). In the latter reading, even if one is not on the margins, one experiences *rōgez* in the exercise of power such that it is always in vain. Whether one exercising power strives for blessing or oppresses the marginalized, it makes no difference because *rōgez* is a given across all walks of life. As briefly discussed, that *rōgez* is a given becomes for Job a sign of a lack of coherence between God's justice and Job's lived experience:

The intentionality of human existence, which expresses itself in projects and relationships and gives to life a sense of coherency, has been shattered for Job. All that remains is turmoil—incessant and emotionally charged events without coherent meaning—from which misery only death can provide relief. (Newsom 2003, 96)

The indiscrimination of *rōgez* has shattered Job's moral imagination such that striving in life is futile. Those who die at birth have a better outcome than those who must live a life of *rōgez*. Moreover, Job is so bound with *rōgez* that he lacks the capacity to fulfill his

death-wish: "Why give light to the wretched/ . . . To a man whose way is hidden,/ and God has hedged him about." On this account, Newsom articulates Job's moral imagination as it intensifies throughout the poetic argument: "God, not human lords, is responsible for the deprivation of even minimal autonomy, which makes life a matter of dread and death a matter of rejoicing" (Newsom 2003, 96). YHWH challenges Job's imaginary when Job enters the divine imaginative space in which Job finds a moral order that is quite unlike his expectation.

### **Birth and Nurturing Imagery in the Meteorological Section**

The narrative structure of the whirlwind speech is de-creational with an inverse direction of the death-poem (Ch. 3) from the cosmogony to individual creatures, culminating in the Behemoth and Leviathan. While Brown (2014) argues with Newsom (2003) that YHWH places the transcendence of the divine imagination in juxtaposition with Job's imagination, finding its height in Chs. 29–31, Brown looks to the second discourse (Chs. 40–41) to observe an affirmation of creation. Ansell (2017a) and Middleton (2021) take Brown's reading further to observe the structure of the whirlwind speech as a window for Job to gain insight into the role of the *imago Dei* rather than a show of transcendence. Alter (2011, 2019) falls within the traditional reading of the whirlwind speech as a reminder to Job of the onto-theological hierarchy. Despite Alter's conclusion, I continue with Alter's (2011, 2019) exhibition of the affirmation of life and the subjectivization (Brown 2014, 116) of the natural world. The birth-imagery of the cosmogonic and meteorological discourse reverses the shrouding of death over life in the death-wish poem (Alter 2011). In the same breath of YHWH's affirmation of life, YHWH exhibits the multiplicity of the natural world and demonstrates a kingship not of absolute dominion—as the friends hold and upon which rests Job's indictment of divine inaction—but a divine relationship of "care and freedom" (Brown 2014, 119). In this section, I demonstrate the reversal of death imagery in the death-wish

poem with birth imagery as a complement to the affirmation of light such that the first discourse with its birth imagery and freedom in "polycentrism" (Brown) firmly establishes the principle of life in the divine moral imagination. Just as the principle of light holds light and dark in tension, so does the principle of life—or "generation" (Alter 2011)—hold life and death in tension. YHWH points Job (and the reader) to the divine relationship with the natural world to discern what to make of the life-*rōgez* aporia.

The second major set of imagery of the whirlwind speech is the reversal of death imagery. YHWH affirms life through the reversal of darkness imagery and death imagery with light and life imagery. Preferring the death of a stillborn over a life of wealth and power because of the all-encompassing reach of *rōgez*, Job declares:

Oh, let that night be barren,  
                   let it have no song of joy.  
 . . . .  
 For it did not shut the belly's doors  
                   to hide wretchedness from my eyes.  
 Why did I not die from the womb,  
                   from the belly come out, breathe my last?  
 Why did knees welcome me,  
                   and why breasts, that I should suck?  
 For I now would lie still  
                   would sleep and know repose (3:7, 10–13)

While Job curses the womb that bore him (3:10) and the knees of his mother or the midwife along with the nurturing breasts of his mother or a nurse (3:12; Alter 2011, 2019), YHWH

affirms the movement toward life in the natural world, first, in the role of its midwife:

Who hedged the sea with double doors,  
     when it gushed forth from the womb,  
 when I made cloud its clothing,  
     and thick mist its swaddling bands?  
 I made breakers upon it my limit,  
     and set a bolt with double doors.  
 And I said, “Thus far come, no farther,  
     Here halt the surge of your waves.” (38:8–11)

With the proclamation of the joy under singing stars in the crafting of the natural world during its founding (38:4–7)—a reversal of the barrenness of the night sky of Job’s would-be conception and pervasive silence—the birth of the natural world follows its conception, welcomed by YHWH who guides the gushing birth of the primordial sea. Instead of shutting the womb’s doors, YHWH “hedged [אָדָּרַן] the sea with double doors” to bring the primordial force of the world into life. The nurturing of the world also requires limits on cosmic chaos, which Newsom analogizes to *rōgez* (2003, 94).<sup>10</sup> Beyond the midwifery of guiding the chaotic sea, imagery of nurture joins the birth imagery as the whirlwind speech moves to describe the involvement of YHWH with the natural world. YHWH sets in place boundaries and limits: “what results is a virtual oxymoron, expressing a paradoxical feeling that God’s creation involves a necessary holding in check of destructive forces and a sustaining of those same forces because they are also forces of life” (Alter 2011, 100). It is from the description

<sup>10</sup> Alter translates “hedged” for אָדָּרַן here instead of “shut” to note the positive connotation here as a reversal of its use in the death-wish poem (3:23). He notes that the denotation “shut” for אָדָּרַן is unique to Job as the more common usage is a covering or sheltering (e.g., Ps. 139:13). The result at the end of the book of Job is that God’s or YHWH’s hedging of Job takes on “associations having to do with protection and nurture” (2011, 100).



### **Birth and Nurturing Imagery in the Bestiary**

The aporia at the center of the tension between the maintenance of the life-generating world rhythms and the guidance of the chaotic forces inherent to them finds intensification in the birth and nurturing imagery of the bestiary. Moreover, unlike Adam at the center of creation, Job is on the margins of YHWH's world with the ostriches and Jackals. The tension of life and chaos inherent to the beasts—along with the zoocentrism or "polycentrism" (Brown) of the natural world—leads Alter and Newsom on separate grounds to read the bestiary as a further intensification of the unfathomability of God's moral calculus (Alter) and the awe-inspiring sublimity of the chaos inherent to the world as the whirlwind speech approaches de-creation (Newsom). Regarding the same aporia, Middleton (2021) observes with Brown (2014) the delight that God takes in the world extending even to the desolate wildernesses where beings like the jackal and the ostrich dwell on the margins, taking nourishment from the provision of YHWH by acting within its authentic freedom. While YHWH ensures the conditions for life and delights in freedom, the bestiary demonstrates the inherent tension between life and death in the generative principle.

While shifting natural imagery from the meteorological to zoological, the birth imagery in the bestiary continues the reversal of death imagery from the death-wish poem. The birth imagery changes from the metaphorical and ironic (e.g., 38:29) of the meteorological section to the literal in the bestiary (Alter 2011, 102–3). The beginning of the bestiary contains images of provision and nurturing of YHWH for the raven whose young feasts on carrion, forming an envelope structure with the end of the bestiary in which the eagle on his path finds nourishment for his young from the carrion of the battlefield (38:39–41, 39:26–30; Alter 2011, 105). The bestiary then opens with a series of birth images, thus beginning with a direct reversal of the death imagery of the death poem. When Job

curses the night of his birth and moves into the de-creation of the day-night world rhythm, he "annuls" it from the flow of time (see Alter 2019, 3:3 and note). He then invokes the Leviathan with its symbolism of chaos to swallow the night of conception and day of birth into oblivion:

That night, let murk overtake it.

Let it not join in the days of the year,

let it not enter the number of months. (3:6)

Elsewhere, Job associates the number of months with human mortality, which God carefully counts (14:1–3), and the number of months from which Shaddai is absent from “his home” (21:20). In response to the association of birth with death and divine absence, YHWH continues the challenge of the first discourse (38:3):

Do you know the mountain goats’ birth time,

do you mark the calving of the gazelle?

Do you number the months till they come to term

and know their birthing time?

They crouch, burst forth with their babes,

their young they push out to the world.

Their offspring batten, grow big in the wild,

they go out and do not return. (39:1–4)

The opening of birth imagery in the bestiary reverses the association of the number of months with death and oblivion. Furthermore, it reverses the absence of God from the temple of the

world with the nurturing imagery in the envelope structure (38:39–41, 39:26–30) and the first section of the bestiary (39:1–19). YHWH affirms the principle of life in the natural world and demonstrates YHWH's intentional involvement that yet offers space for natural freedom.

### **Life-Chaos Tension in the Imagery of the Bestiary**

The latter two occurrences of birth and nurturing imagery in the bestiary are the undiscerning ostrich (39:13–18) and in the closure of the envelope structure with the discerning eagle (39:27–30). Having issued a direct “image-for-image reversal” of Job's annulment of the birth month, the life-chaos tension returns in these latter two images. The life-chaos tension occurs in the bestiary much as it occurs in the structure of the cosmogony. YHWH guides the birth of the natural world as the midwife during the birth of the chaotic sea. Then, YHWH delegates roles of world rhythms to elements and bodies which possess the respective capacity. Alter (2011) observes in the divine guidance of the natural world a paradox between YHWH's sustaining the principle of generation in the world and, as a result, the forces of chaos inherent to what is necessary for life.

Instead of images of domination, "nature abounds in images of freedom" in YHWH's imaginary, unlike that of Job or the friends in which God is the "absolute sovereign" who micromanages the workings of the natural world (Alter 2011, 91, 104; Brown 2014, 117; see Middleton 2021, 119–20). Each animal of the bestiary is the privative term of the city-wilderness binary yet possesses symbolism of indomitability such as the lion or unbrokenness like the goats and gazelles or wild deer, wild ass, wild ox, and the ostrich. The imagery of freedom in the bestiary reverses the imagery of domination in the death-wish poem. Nevertheless, even the free being that acts willingly according to the principle of life includes the risk of chaos.

The bestiary challenges Job's moral imagination of the world that finds futility at the

center. While chaos does exist, the natural world exhibits a "polycentrism" in which YHWH affirms the wildness and autonomy of each animal: the "strange land is God's wild" Garden of Delight (Brown 2014, 115). YHWH's guidance of the wild ass and wild ox to freedom beyond the domination of the city reverses the imagery of *rōgez* that renders all life futile. As explored above, Job looks to the enslaved and sees liberation only in the tomb:

There the wicked cease their troubling,  
 and there the weary [one worn out by power]<sup>11</sup> repose[s]  
 All together the prisoners are tranquil,  
 they hear not the taskmaster's voice.  
 The small and the great are there,  
 and the slave is free of his master. (3:17–19)

All life for Job has *rōgez* as its center even for those who oppress. The fault, then, lies upon Shaddai whose unrealized divine action Job observes in the injustice of the world. Rather than the apathetic absolute sovereign of Job's moral imagination, YHWH governs with "care and freedom" (Brown 2014, 119). YHWH gives an answer to Job's account of *rōgez* that challenges the friends' and Job's moral imagination. While YHWH provides the conditions for the possibility of life, YHWH does not dominate the wild creatures such that they realize the principle of life. Thus, in their freedom, like the ostrich, they may do violence to life as a result.

YHWH begins the demonstration of divine rule with the imagery of the lion hunt. For Egyptian and Mesopotamian kings, the lion hunt was a "staging ground for the king's prowess on the battlefield, a symbolic assertion of royal power. By slaying wild animals, the

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<sup>11</sup> Newsom's reading (2003, 95), see discussion above.

king was ‘fulfilling his coronation requirement to extend the kingdom beyond the city to include the wilderness’” (Brown 2014, 115). Unlike the kings who would demonstrate power through their domination of the hostile lion, an animal charged with regal symbolism, YHWH hunts on behalf of the lion: "Can you hunt prey for the lion,/ fill the king of beast's appetite,/ when it crouches in its den,/ lies in ambush in the covert?" (38:39–40). Instead of a challenge to kill the lion to display Job's or humanity's superiority over animals, the challenge is to hunt on behalf of the lion as YHWH does (Brown 2014, 115). YHWH does not conquer the royal beast in a display of kingship nor subjugate the wild ass or ox, which function as symbols of wildness against the backdrop of the oppressive labor in the city (Newsom 2003, 246). YHWH ensures their freedom:

Who set the wild ass free  
 and the onager’s reins who loosed,  
 whose home I made in the steppes,  
 his dwelling place flats of salt?  
 He scoffs at the bustling city,  
 the driver’s shouts he does not hear. (39:5–7)

Within the death-poem, only in the grave does the one worn by power “hear not the taskmaster’s voice” (3:18). In YHWH’s exhibition, even the animals living in desolate lands for humans beyond the city receive the delight and attention of YHWH who protects their freedom and provides nourishment such that "the driver's shouts he does not hear" (39:7). Far from dominated and objectified under the weight of the yoke, "these animals are wholly 'served': each expresses its identity unhindered. They live and move and have their being as

God intended them" (Brown 2014, 116).<sup>12</sup> With a view to the irredeemable *rōgez* inherent to the absolute domination of a divine—yet with regal duties unfulfilled—of Job's moral imagination, YHWH exhibits a "'disordered' kingdom oblivious to human authority and hierarchy. It is a world devoid of dominance" where the animals receive YHWH's delight that "roam and play on the margins of civilization" (Brown 2014, 118). Even the stallion positioned in the middle of human affairs "allows his great power to be subjected to the uses of [humankind]; . . . he gives the virtual impression of joining in battle of his own free will, for his own pleasure" (Alter 2011, 106; 39:19–25). Under the rule of YHWH, the caretaker king, the wild animals are free of the turmoil (*rōgez*) which comes from the oppressive yoke in the field. Yet while YHWH and these animals delight in life, their life holds in tension the risk of *rōgez* inherent to the freedom of life.

As with the principle of light in the meteorological section, the bestiary re-presents the same life-death tension in the principle of generation. The ostrich with its wild, chaotic freedom and the eagle both exhibit the realization of the principle of generation while also the chaos—and death—inherent to the freedom of life. As YHWH invites the reader to the path of discernment before the display of Behemoth and Leviathan, the difference in anthropology between readings clarifies.

### **The Second Call to Discern: The Way of Life and the Place of Chaos**

The ostrich transitions the narrative to the climax of the bestiary with the stallion before the eagle, which closes the envelope structure of the bestiary. In the symbolism of the ostrich and the eagle, we observe two different pictures of response to the chaos inherent to life. When YHWH shows Job the ostrich—a symbol for the margin now centered (Brown 2014, 100; Middleton 2021, 119)—it puts on a full display of its freedom and playfulness:

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<sup>12</sup> Brown (2014) employs Christopher Southgate's (2008, 63) use of "selved" regarding the subjectivization of animals in the bestiary.

The ostrich's wing joyously beats.  
 Is the pinion, the plume, like the stork's?  
 For she leaves her eggs on the ground,  
 and in the dust she lets them warm.  
 And she forgets that a foot can crush them,  
 and a beast of the field stomp on them—  
 harsh, abandons her young to a stranger,  
 in vain her labor, without fear.  
 For God made her forgetful of wisdom,  
 and He did not allot her insight.  
 Now on the height she races,  
 she scoffs at the horse and its rider. (39:13–18)

The ostrich flaps her wings “joyfully” (הַנְּעִלְעִלָּהּ) of which “anarchic joy” Newsom notes that the root עלס denotes “cries of joy” (2003, 247). The ostrich exhibits her beauty and exuberance in her vitality on the margins of human order yet in the center of YHWH’s attention and care. YHWH sustains her life in the wilderness, which land YHWH ensures contains what is necessary for the life that dwells there when YHWH sends rain “to sate the desolate dunes/ and make the grass sprout there” (38:26–7). Even while YHWH sustains the ostrich's life, YHWH does not “micromanage” the lives that live in YHWH’s realm. The ostrich follows the principle of generation when she brings new life into YHWH’s realm as YHWH did in the cosmogony; however, the ostrich becomes careless with the fragility of life: “she forgets that a foot can crush them/ . . . in vain her labor, without fear” (39:15a, 16b). The narrator then offers the observation that “God made her forgetful of wisdom,/ and He did not allot her

insight” (39:17). In this empirical conclusion, the narrator singles out the ostrich from the other nurturers of the bestiary. The ostrich, like the others, participates with the “constantly self-renewing creation” per the principle of life (Alter 2011, 103). Nevertheless, unlike the others, she does not safeguard life according to the principle of generation. Furthermore, unlike the eagle, she does not search the realm for the nourishment available to sustain life—that is, she does not discern the way of life.

In the flight of the ostrich to view the battle to which the stallion races, Newsom observes the "scene of the hunt, that symbolic enactment of the opposition between culture and nature and the defense of human order against the chaotic" (2003, 247). In the ostrich's chaotic delight, she is taken by the spectacle of the war-stallion as the horse willfully enters the chaos within the freedom of YHWH's life-guided realm (esp. 39:24). As the stallion leaves the scene to join the fray, we turn to the hawk and the eagle, of which the latter will approach the battle of human turmoil (*rōgez*):

Does the hawk soar by your wisdom,  
                   spread his wings to fly away south?  
 By your word does the eagle mount  
                   and set his nest on high?  
 On the crag he dwells and beds down,  
                   on the crest of the crag of his stronghold.  
 From there he seeks out food,  
                   from afar his eyes look down.  
 His chicks lap up blood,  
                   where the slain are, there he is. (39:26–30)

The hawk and the eagle, scavengers like the raven, rely on the principle of life to which YHWH points these animals. The ostrich did not employ wisdom's insight to take of the provision of the land to sustain the life of her young.<sup>13</sup> The hawk and the eagle, however, both employ wisdom's insight to realize the principle of life. Both are notable because of their employment of wisdom in searching for a way yielding nourishment, specifically one amid the chaotic, turmoil fraught battlefield. To search for a way to sustain life, the hawk soars by the wisdom of YHWH. Likewise, by the word (of life, or the principle of generation) of YHWH, the eagle finds a place to nurture his young and maintain the conditions for their full delight in life as YHWH does for the eagle himself. The tension between life and death imagery reaches another high point in the culmination of the bestiary. By the wisdom according to YHWH's word of life, the eagle discerns a path by which he "seeks out food" for his young such that they might live (39:29a; cf. Pv. 30:18–20; Ansell 2017b, 272, 77–8, 81). Per the insight the eagle acquired through wisdom, what sustains life came as a result of the human-originated chaos of battle within YHWH's realm: "His chicks lap up blood,/ where the slain are, there he is" (39:30; cf. Ansell 2001, 39–42). The bestiary continues the reversal of death imagery in its affirmation of life while holding the risk of *rōgez* in tension. Yahweh re-presents the life-chaos tension in the second part of the whirlwind discourse through the symbolism of Behemoth and Leviathan.

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<sup>13</sup> Alter provides two possibilities regarding what he reads as *הַמְרִי* in 39:18 (2019; whereas *תְּמָרִיא* in the *BHS*). While the Aramaic translation interpreted *hamrî* as "soar," he states that "ostriches don't fly." So, he reads *hamrî* as "races" in his more recent translation (2019, n39:18). His earlier reading suggests that the statement is hypothetical: "if the foolish ostrich only had wisdom, we are told, it would soar into the sky and 'scoff at the horse and its rider' (39:18)" (2011, 105). While Alter (2011) here reads 39:18 within the context of his transcendent sovereignty interpretation (only to have the ostrich in its playful giddiness reject the rule of the absolute king of the wilderness when the king is showing off the garden of power and lordship over the lion?), understanding *hamrî* as a hypothetical per the narrative context could anticipate the wisdom of the hawk and eagle. Where the ostrich does not discern the way to life, both the hawk and eagle employ wisdom to discern a path through the chaos to do what is necessary to promote life. While Alter (2011) does not follow Ansell (2017b) on the insight of wisdom, namely, "the *discernment* of the *way to life*" (Ansell 2017b, 281), Alter's narrative reading lays a firm foundation for Ansell's (2017b) approach to wisdom thinking about wisdom (2012, 160, 160n136). As ostriches do not in fact fly, this aporia may suggest a call to discernment from the reader per the convention of wisdom thinking regarding both the immediate context (e.g., 38:28–9) and—as in this case—what it anticipates (here, 39:29–30).

## Conclusion

As in the cosmological and meteorological sections, the affirmation of life in the bestiary comes with an inherent risk of *rōgez* (see Brown 2014, 131). Even as YHWH serves as midwife during the birth of the sea—gushing to life within the bounds YHWH set to nurture it—and delegates the life-sustaining diurnal rhythm to the dawn, YHWH points to Job to discern the proper place of *both* the light and the dark of the life-sustaining diurnal rhythm. Before the "climax beyond the climax" of Behemoth and Leviathan (Alter 2011, 105), just like the cosmogony, the bestiary concludes with a call to discern the path to life, which principle YHWH repeatedly affirms in the reversal of the unbounded death-darkness imagery of Job's death-wish poem. With the affirmation of life and freedom and the delegation of discernment to creatures in YHWH's care, the reader progresses to discern the displays of Behemoth and Leviathan. Even as YHWH ensures the conditions for the possibility of life, caring for creation in a relationship founded on the principle of life, the freedom of the creatures includes tension between *rōgez* and the delight of life. Given the guiding principle of the word of life and having observed the insight of wisdom in creation, the task for Job, the creatures, and the reader is to discern through wisdom the way to life amid *rōgez* as the eagle does in the chaotic battlefield. With this guidance, the reader must discern the substance of the second part of the whirlwind discourse (Ch. 40–41) and a path through Job's position relative to YHWH in the notoriously underdetermined 42:6–7.

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