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MONSTER VIOLENCE IN THE BOOK OF JOB

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Abstract: In this paper, I explore the book of Job in terms of the symbolic and ideological warfare waged between God and the human protagonist, Job. Specifically, I argue that the invocation of various kinds of creatures under the “monster” rubric (such as Leviathan, Rahab, Yamm, the Twisting Serpent, and Behemoth) can be illuminated through a consideration of contemporary work—in the history of religions, literary theory, and film studies—that categorizes the monstrous in terms of ecological disorientation, metaphors of the torn human body, and the boundaries of the “home.” Moreover, I draw on the work of Marie Hélène Huet in her book *Monstrous Imagination* to argue that some of God’s showcase animals in Job 38–41 (most prominently Behemoth and Leviathan, but also others) should be discussed as monsters with reference to their ambiguous species representation and their “false resemblance” to other known creatures. When considered within the context of Job’s pervasive themes of geological and animal violence, Joban monsters take their place among the menagerie of creatures adduced by Job’s speaking characters as rhetorical gestures of disorientation, community redemption, and the meaning of small community experience within empire.

Key Words: Book of Job; Monsters; Monsters and Religion; Leviathan; Behemoth

Despite the fact that Job contains more monsters, and more different kinds of monsters, than any other single book in the Hebrew Bible outside of Daniel,¹ very few have yet ventured into an analysis of what role these creatures as a group play for the Joban narrative and why they seem to be mentioned so often in this book in particular. Is there a peculiar kind

¹In Daniel, see esp. chs. 7–12, and in the Christian New Testament, see the book of Revelation, which features many monstrous figures. For recent and explicit discussion of the Bible with reference to monsters, see, e.g., Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, esp. 16–33; and Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation*.

of violence in Job that can be rightly called “monster violence”? Should the violence of the monster be experienced, theorized or understood differently from other kinds of violence? And what does the Joban monster, in particular, tell us about the role of the book of Job as it represents (a) an alterior version of “wisdom” within the Hebrew Bible as well as (b) Job’s own experience of alteriority in the face of his human friends and the monster.²

In this essay I want to investigate these Joban creatures under the “monster” rubric—I have in mind the Leviathan, Rahab, Yamm, the Twisting Serpent, and Behemoth—and explore how they could be illuminated through a consideration of contemporary work in the history of religions, literary theory, and film studies that categorizes the monstrous in terms of ecological disorientation, metaphors of the torn human body, and the boundaries of the “home.”³ At the present moment, my goal is not so much to latch on to any one monster theory or definition as though it can provide a magic key to unlocking some mystery of the Joban drama. For the purposes of brevity in this article, I will focus on the identity of the monsters in the Divine Speech (Job 38–41) by invoking the work of Marie Hélène Huet in her book *Monstrous Imagination* to argue that some of God’s showcase animals in Job 38–41 should be discussed as monsters with reference to their ambiguous species representation and their “false resemblance” to other known creatures.⁴ I will then conclude by making a preliminary suggestion about how the monster can be read in Job’s first context of reception as a “cognitive shock” in what the anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse calls the “imagistic mode” of religion.

²I want to thank the organizers of the American Academic of Religion panel in which a version of this essay was first presented (Comparative Approaches to Religion and Violence Group) in San Diego (November 2014), and especially Margo Kitts for her response during that session and encouragement. Elements of this paper appeared earlier in my book *Consider Leviathan: Narratives of Nature and the Self in Job* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), and I am grateful to Fortress Press for allowing me to reproduce parts of that study here. Though my focus in that work was not on the category of the monster or violence as such, readers should consult *Consider Leviathan* for my extended treatment of various themes treated here in this essay.

³Recent research has produced a torrent of critical works on the monster, some trending toward popular audiences, others thick with academic jargon, and some appealing to both popular and scholarly audiences simultaneously; in addition to the sources discussed below, see, e.g., Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*; Marina Levina and Diem-My T. Bui, eds., *Monster Culture in the 21st Century: A Reader*; Joshua David Bellin, *Framing Monsters: Fantasy Film and Social Alienation*; W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting*; David J. Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*.

⁴Marie Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*.

Recent theorists have defined the monster in predictably varied and sophisticated ways, drawing on chronologically diverse material from the ancient world, the medieval period, and contemporary film, fiction, politics, and visual art of all kinds.⁵ To choose one strand of discussion convenient for some points I want to make later in this essay, many monster definitions treat these figures as fundamentally *combinations*, as *hybrids* or *boundary crossers*.

For example, the German art historian Heinz Mode defines “monster” as “a new shape resulting from a combination—usually in visual form, but sometimes only in words—of characteristic components of properties of different kinds of living things or natural objects. It is therefore characteristic of the ‘monster’ that it does not occur in nature, but belongs solely to the realm of the human imagination, and also that its shape forms an organic entity, a new type capable of life in art and in the imagination.”⁶ In his notable book *The Philosophy of Horror*, Noël Carroll similarly invokes the idea of combination when he writes that “one structure for the composition of horrific beings is fusion. On the simplest physical level, this often entails the construction of creatures that transgress categorical distinctions such as inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine, and so on. . . . A fusion figure is a composite that unites attributes held to be categorically distinct and/or at odds in the cultural scheme of things in unambiguously one, spatio-temporally discrete entity.”⁷ Again invoking the monster in these terms, in the introduction to her new edited volume *The Bible and Posthumanism* Jennifer Koosed argues that, despite the fact that “the Bible begins as a speciesist manifesto—only humanity is created in the image of the divine, only humanity is given dominion over the rest of creation . . . the Bible also contains multiple moments of disruption, boundary crossing, and category confusion: animals speak, God becomes man, spirits haunt the living, and monsters confound at the end.” The categories serve not only to create new creaturely definitions, but also, as Koosed notes, such stories “destabilize the very category of the human.”⁸ The monster is therefore never an object of horror in isolation, and never self-contained, but always gesturing back toward the definition of the human, threatening human safety and thus defining the limits of the human.

⁵The following is drawn from the excellent review in David D. Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*, 1–22.

⁶Heinz A. Mode, *Fabulous Beasts and Demons*, 7 (with discussion in Gilmore, *Monsters*, 8).

⁷Noël Carroll, *A Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*, 43 (with discussion in Gilmore, *Monsters*, 9).

⁸Jennifer L. Koosed, “Humanity at Its Limits,” 3.

A GLANCE AT THE MONSTER IN JOB CHAPTERS 1-37

The book of Job opens with an iconic description of one man, Job, whose life is conspicuously un-haunted by monsters of any kind. Indeed, the creatures narrated there in the book's first chapter—sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys—are distinctly subservient, faceless, and nameless, very much on par in this respect with Job's children, slaves, and wife. On the terms of ambiguity of identity and boundary crossing, the figure of the *satan* (Hebrew *haśśāṭān*, traditionally translated "Satan" but clearly not the pitchfork-wielding king of hell in the Christian tradition), who enters the storyline to question the motives of Job's righteousness, has evaded a precise categorization as either human or divine—he is clearly not a human, but he functions and speaks like a human and he is not clearly a divine being on the same level as Job's antagonist God—with most interpreters resting content to call him an Adversary.

The effects of the infamous heavenly duel between the *satan* and the Lord certainly do turn Job into something other than his normal self; robbed of all possessions and losing his children, Job becomes bodily disfigured, pushing him beyond the boundary of his home and nearer a monstrous geographical domain—outside of domestic space. Through his curses, "Let the day on which I was born perish" (3:3) and "let there be darkness" (3:4), Job attempts to reverse or break the calendar insofar as his birth had introduced him into the cycle of life and time, hoping to throw nature's goodness as well as its brutality into an abyss. Gloom and clouds and dark days are the metaphors here (3:5); blackness is the void out of which no green plant will grow. The sun will not shine on the earth, for now there is no sun, and nurturing domestic animals will not creep about on that earth, grazing on its produce. No rejoicing can be found here, no joy-shouts (3:7). Though we are left without plants, what we are left with, in Job's cursed, dismal world, is an animal: Leviathan (*liwyātān*, 3:8). Indeed, two monsters already figure prominently in Job's initial lament. For the moment, let us be content to identify this first creature, Leviathan, as something chaotic and awful, to be considered on parallel with another sea monster, Yamm (Job 3:8–9):

May those who curse Yamm curse it [= the day of Job's birth],
those skilled to call up Leviathan . . .⁹

In the Ugaritic Baal epic, Yamm is a malevolent deity who stands in opposition to the warrior god Baal's attempts to establish an orderly house for

⁹Here I follow a common emendation, reading the MT's 'ōrrê yôm, "day cursers," as 'ōrrê yam, "Yamm cursers." Even the concept of a "day curser" would of course make sense here, since Job had been referring to the day of his birth in 3:1–7. All translations from Hebrew to English in this essay are my own.

himself. Cursing plays a role in Baal's engagement with Yamm, as the weapons forged for the warrior deity take their power from the oral incantation of their names: Yagrušu, "drive out," and 'Ayyamurru, "expel."¹⁰ Later in the story, a creature named Lôtan, etymologically and mythically equivalent to the biblical Leviathan,¹¹ appears in a context of battle:

When you [=Baal] smite Lôtan, the fleeing serpent,
finish off the twisting serpent,
the close-coiling one with seven heads . . .¹²

Job's imagery in 3:8–9 thus evokes sinister magic and violence. Through these creation-reversing curses, Job has journeyed deeply into the pre-creation desert—a place which Gen 1:2 calls *tôhû wābôhû*, "barren and unlivable"¹³—and, as we see later in the book, he can be reintroduced back only into a different kind of world.

Much later in the dialogue between Job and his friends, the speaker in Job 26 turns to a creation scene that invokes the monster as a creation foil. Though Job is explicitly made the speaker here in the traditional text, evidence of manuscript corruption in chapters 25–27 generally provides enough warrant for skepticism regarding the content of the words in chapter 26.¹⁴ Whatever the case, Job had been the only one so far to speak of monstrous animals, and Job the only one to invoke the word *tôhû*, a desert or void, to speak of God's moral universe (6:18, 12:24, and then again in 26:7, if this is Job). Thus, it would not be completely unreasonable on thematic grounds to see him as the speaker here again.¹⁵ Job 26:7–13 reads as follows:

¹⁰See the edition of Dennis Pardee, "The Ba'lu Myth," 248–249, and some comment on the role of the spoken curse as weapon in Seth L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, 51–52.

¹¹See, e.g., Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*, 36–37.

¹²Pardee, "Ba'lu Myth," 265.

¹³For *tôhû* as desert and uninhabitable land, see Deut 32:10; Isa 34:11; 45:18; Jer 4:23; Ps 107:40; and Job 12:24 (discussed below).

¹⁴In the traditional Jewish text of Job, the Masoretic Text, Job chapter 25 is a mere six verses, the shortest chapter in the book and very notably shorter than any other single speech in the book's speech-cycle. This, combined with the content of the speech (which may sound more like Eliphaz or another one of the friends), has led many interpreters to posit textual corruption here. A popular solution is to ascribe the chapter to a speaker other than Job. See extended comments and sources cited in Doak, *Consider Leviathan*, 159–166.

¹⁵Also Kathryn Schifferdecker, *Out of the Whirlwind: Creation Theology in the Book of Job*, 44–46. .

- (7) He stretches out Zaphon upon the void [*tōhû*]
he hangs the earth upon nothing;
- (8) he binds up the waters in his clouds,
and the cloud is not torn apart by them;
- (9) he obscures the face of the full moon,¹⁶
and spreads his cloud over it;
- (10) he decreed a circle upon the face of the waters,
at the limits of light and darkness;
- (11) the pillars of the heavens tremble,
they are astounded at his rebuke;
- (12) by his strength he stilled the Waters [*hayyām*],
and by his understanding he struck Rahab;
- (13) by his breath he made the heavens beautiful,
his hand pierced the Fleeing Serpent [*nāḥāš bārîaḥ*] . . .

Job invokes the monster as a curse, or to give voice to the immense, divine power marshaled against him—first in the form of a direct curse on his own self, and later to affirm a creation story very unlike Genesis 1 in which there is a narrative of ecological disorientation and violence against the monstrous Waters, Rahab, and Fleeing Serpent.

THE MONSTROUS ANIMAL IN THE DIVINE SPEECH (JOB 38–41)

An outburst of contemporary philosophical work has now challenged the “faceless,” subservient character of animals generally for contemporary audiences, a move prefigured by God’s own zoological outburst featuring powerful animals in Job 38–40.¹⁷ The animals of the divine speech are loaded with pathos, strength, independence, arrogance, failure, and beauty—features that place these creatures outside of human control, to be sure, but also features that identify nature’s drama with the predicament of human suffering. What is it about Job’s problem, exactly, which calls for a long zoologically oriented lecture from the deity? When Carl Jung refers to the animals of the Divine Speech as a “prehistoric menagerie” in his famous *Answer to Job*, he

¹⁶Following the common emendation here for *kissē* (“throne”), read as *kēse*’ (“full moon”; see Prov 7:20; Ps 81:4), as in Marvin Pope, *Job*, 165.

¹⁷See, e.g., Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, esp. concerning the question of “gaze” and animal anonymity; along similar lines, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*; Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Derrida to Heidegger*.

does so with some bewilderment at the divine tactic.¹⁸ The term “menagerie” is really quite appropriate, however, invoking as it does eighteenth-century notions of animal collections as a category of exotic prestige, a collective practice already known within the ancient Mesopotamian world.¹⁹ The focus on the curious, the uncontrollable, and the abnormal is prominent; the speech takes its readers into a reverse creation story, where, instead of chaos moving toward order, God begins with order and measured space and presses outward or downward into chaos and the monstrous.²⁰

This movement has a corollary elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, where the movement from city to wasteland is a trope of punishment (Ps 107:33–38; Isa 34:8–15; Hos 2:5, 14; Lam 2:8, 4:3); “characteristically eerie and uncanny animals” live in these wastelands (Isa 13:19–21; 34:8–15; Jer 50:39–40; Zeph 2:13–15), dallying in places distant from home.²¹ In a discussion of “domesticated” animals versus “monsters” as they are associated with deities in theriomorphic union, Mark Smith maps out an expected but insightful set of correlations: “benevolent deities” are anthropomorphic, associated with the domestic sphere, and take on emblems of bull, calf, bird, or cow, while “destructive divinities” are themselves “animal gods” who inhabit undomesticated space (desert, wasteland). Proper deities inhabit “near places,” while monsters and demons stand outside (note Azazel in Lev 16:8).²² In the Ugaritic Baal cycle mentioned earlier, Baal’s climactic battles with Death (*Mot*) occur in the wilderness; as Smith points out, “the outback [Ugaritic *dbr*; compare with Hebrew *midbār*] marks a marginal or transitional zone and the site of human activities such as grazing and hunting . . . here begins the area of dangerous forces.”²³

The danger associated with wild animals presents the heroic, benevolent deity with an enemy to overcome. In a very widely known set of iconographic examples from the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds, the “master of animals” motif (for both male and female deities) indicates divine domination over wildness.²⁴ These depictions have a central figure

¹⁸Carl Jung, *Answer to Job*, 19.

¹⁹See Karen P. Foster, “The Earliest Zoos and Gardens,” 64–71 and Allison K. Thomson, *Luxury and Legitimation: Royal Collecting in Ancient Mesopotamia*.

²⁰William P. Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder*, 126.

²¹Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, 245.

²²Smith, *Origins*, 28–33; see also John B. Geyer, “Desolation and Cosmos,” 58–59.

²³Smith, *Origins*, 29.

²⁴See ample images and discussion in Othmar Keel, *Jawhes Entgegnung an Ijob. Eine Deutung von Ijob 38–41 vor dem Hintergrund der zeitgenössischen Bildkunst*, 86–101.

grasping the throats or tails of animals on either side—typically a caprid (wild goat-antelope), horse, scorpion, lion, or steppeland bird such as an ostrich.²⁵ In some examples, it is unclear as to whether the anthropomorphic figure is “mastering” the animals or reaching out to them in some gesture of veneration.²⁶ In at least some cases, though, we know that this motif displayed a deity in association with a particular kind of animal—presumably the animal served as a symbolic token of that deity’s presence (which could be signaled even without the anthropomorphic figure in the depiction), or the deity comes to conquer that which is wild in the animal itself (such as cases with lions, crocodiles, or the ostrich). Either way, in this iconography (whether visual or evoked by text) the deity and the animal cannot be separated; the deity’s association with the animal is a picture of the cosmos, that is, of the ongoing status of divine control and the divine attributes needed to achieve this control.²⁷

God’s hymn to the “Leviathan” (*liwyātān*) and the “Behemoth” (*bēhēmôt*) constitute the crowning poetic achievement of the book of Job. The creatures have received a massive amount of attention in the secondary literature, so much that any adequate review in this space is, fortunately, impossible.²⁸ Text critical and philological problems beyond the boundaries of what I can address here abound as well.²⁹ The last few decades of the twentieth century

²⁵See Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 141–152, 182–194.

²⁶Moreover, it is not always clear whether the anthropomorphic figure is a human or deity (or something hybrid); see Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods*, 182, 184.

²⁷Keel, *Jawhes Entgegnung an Ijob*, 125.

²⁸For short and helpful overviews with bibliography on Leviathan, see Christoph Uehlinger, “Leviathan,” 511–515; Edward Lipiński, “*liwyātān*,” 504–509; on Behemoth, see, e.g., Bernard Couroyer, “Behemoth = hippopotamus ou buffle,” 214–222; Bernard Batto, “Behemoth,” 165–169. One of the better summaries of opinions over the past few centuries (up to 1975) is J. V. Kinnier Wilson, “A Return to the Problems of Behemoth and Leviathan,” 1–24; other useful treatments include Norman Habel, *The Book of Job*, 548–561; David J. A. Clines, *Job 38–42*, 1141–1203; Keel, *Jawhes Entgegnung an Ijob*, 127–156, with ample iconographic comparisons; Michael V. Fox, “Behemoth and Leviathan,” 261–267; Abigail Pelham, *Contested Creations in the Book of Job*, 127–137; David Wolfers, “The Lord’s Second Speech in the Book of Job,” 474–499; John Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament*, 75–84; Robert Gordis, “Job and Ecology (and the Significance of Job 40:15),” 196–198; Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies*, 467–490; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 132–138; Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 234–258.

²⁹On this, see especially Wolfers, “The Lord’s Second Speech”; Gordis, *Book of Job*, 467–490; Pope, *Job*, 265–287; Édouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*,

in particular saw an explosion of articles bent on identifying these creatures as either “real” (a hippopotamus and crocodile, usually) or “mythological,” as in the “Leviathan” Job invokes in 3:8 or the allusion to a creature like the Ugaritic Lotan, smote by Baal.³⁰ Indeed, the fact that Leviathan has already appeared in Job in a mythological context means that readers of Job can hardly first think of Leviathan as anything but a wild sea monster beyond the bounds of anything that we would call a “real” animal today.³¹ However, the fact that it is *Job* who spoke of Leviathan, combined with the fact that much of the Divine Speech seems slanted against Job’s and/or the Friends’ arguments in sum, might suggest that we are to seek a subversive identity for Leviathan in Job 41.

Almost every interpreter on the topic of these animals’ identities is now quick to point out that ancient audiences would not have distinguished between “real” and “mythical” animals,³² though it is not clear whether we mean that ancient people did not know or suspect that some creatures did not in fact exist. Perhaps more accurately, ancient audiences had no resources with which to know one way or the other whether remote, strange animals did truly exist, and thus they were willing to engage in speculation about non-obvious beings beyond what readers today could tolerate.³³ Even the iconic King James Bible—in its original 1611 version as well as updates in the nineteenth century and in all (Old) King James Bibles today—mentions unicorns about a dozen times, apparently prompted in at least some instances by the Greek translation of *rē’ēm* (“wild ox”) by *monókerōs* (“single-horn”; the Latin Vulgate has *rinoceros*), thus preserving the spirit of ancient animal thinking (even if by erroneous translation).³⁴ Other translations actively delete “mythological” animal thinking where it may exist in the text, such as the NIV 2011, which translates *śārāp mē’ôpēp*, “flying serpent,” twice as “fiery serpent” (Isa 14:29; 30:6; compare with Isa 6:2). Other animals, such as

616–644.

³⁰See Pardee, “Ba‘lu Myth,” 265.

³¹A point also made by Habel, *Book of Job*, 560.

³²E.g., Rebecca S. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of “Chaos” in the Hebrew Bible*, 333; Fox, “Behemoth and Leviathan”; Alter, *Art*, 132.

³³Then again, a 2012 Angus Reid public opinion poll found that around one-third of Americans believe in the existence of “Bigfoot,” a fact that would complicate an overly strong dichotomy between ancient and modern humans on this front (<http://www.angus-reidglobal.com/polls/44419/americans-more-likely-to-believe-in-bigfoot-than-canadians/> [accessed 5 January 2014]).

³⁴In the KJV, see Num 23:22; 24:8; Deut 33:17; Job 39:9–10; Pss 22:21; 29:6; 92:10; Isa 34:7.

Jonah's "large fish," dwell at some borderline between what, for an ancient Israelite, is biologically feasible and a mysterious unknown realm of sea creatures or desert predators.

Nothing about the Behemoth (40:15–24) needs to be read as particularly non-realistic for a biological animal, leading most interpreters to identify the creature as a hippopotamus, though the Leviathan (40:25–41:26)³⁵ pushes boundaries in at least two respects. First, Leviathan poses a threat to the divine world. Pending a common emendation in 41:1(41:9), the text would read "the gods were thrown down (or: dismayed) at its appearance,"³⁶ though, as it stands, the Hebrew *'el mar'āw yūtāl* could be translated "at its appearance he was/will be thrown down," the "he" being the fisherman alluded to in 40:31–32(41:7–8). However, in 41:17(41:25) the *'ēlīm* clearly react in terror at the Leviathan: "at his majesty the deities (*'ēlīm*) are in fear, at his crashing (*mišēbārīm*) they are thrown amiss (*yithaṭṭā'ū*)." In either or both cases, Leviathan would be best imagined as a Sea Monster in opposition to the divine world, such as in the *Baal Epic*, *Enuma Elish*, or any number of references to the *Chaoskampf* in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ps 74:14; Isa 27:1).³⁷ Second, Leviathan breathes fire in 41:11–13(41:19–21). Combined with the characterization discussed above, the fire breathing pushes the animal still further into a more monstrous realm.

One could excuse either of these references within the bounds of poetic hyperbole, as the rest of the description fits reasonably with the common assertion that Leviathan here is a crocodile, or even a whale.³⁸ Othmar Keel's iconographic analysis demonstrates the common occurrence of both hippopotamus and crocodile hunt scenes on Egyptian seals and tomb art, which itself makes a reasonable suggestion that the poet saw these two animals as at least inspiration for the grand examples in Job 40–41.³⁹ The overall presentation

³⁵Hebrew and English verse numberings diverge at the Leviathan; Heb. continues the chapter 40 verse numbering through 40:32, while the Engl. language tradition begins with Leviathan in 41:1 (Heb. 40:25); each time I cite a Hebrew verse here, I give the English reference in parentheses.

³⁶See the reasonable explanation of Pope, *Job*, 282.

³⁷Most interpreters (e.g., Newsom, *Book of Job*, 248) speak of these creatures in terms of "chaos," though cf. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated*, 366, who disputes this connection.

³⁸For the crocodile interpretation, see Keel, *Jawhes Entgegnung an Ijob*, 141–156, and for the whale, see Fox, "Behemoth and Leviathan."

³⁹Keel, *Jawhes Entgegnung an Ijob*, 127–141 on the hippo and 141–156 on the crocodile. See also Trygve N. D. Mettinger, "The God of Job: Avenger, Tyrant, or Victor?" in *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job*, 46, who compares the Joban animals to animals and animal-deities in Egyptian mythology.

of these creatures reminds us that Israelites did not think in Linnaean terms,⁴⁰ and thus words like “biology,” “myth,” and so on may prove unhelpful.

Perhaps the most productive approach to these animals, then, is to view them as “monsters,” a type of non-human-animal in many cultures both ancient and modern. Biblical scholars have already made helpful forays into the interpretation of these creatures as monsters, though usually not in any closely defined sense. In a perceptive essay, Rebecca Raphael argues that the monsters of Job show Job something about himself; monsters metaphorize the torn human body, and reveal to Job what an invincible body would truly look like (in response to what Job wished his body could be—strong as stones or bronze [Job 6:11–12]).⁴¹ Timothy Beal injects his reading of monsters in his *Religion and Its Monsters* with a range of comparative and theoretical sophistication, and takes up a consideration of Behemoth and Leviathan on these terms. Beal asserts that the Joban creatures here are “dangerous otherness within creation,” as God eventually “out-monsters” Job.⁴²

Though etymologies of words are not always particularly relevant for ongoing function, “monsters” live out their etymology in revealing ways: “monster” apparently comes through the Old French *monstre*, from the Latin *montrer*, “to show, reveal.”⁴³ The monster *demonstrates*. The monster points to otherness or fear of the viewer through its own body; zombies in film, e.g., are never only about a quick scare, but rather always gesture toward contemporary cultural notions of that which is perceived as foreign or invasive.⁴⁴ This is not to say that the monstrous demonstration is straightforward. As Marie Hélène Huet shows, monsters are “doubly deceptive,” in that their odd appearance can be “a misleading likeness to another species.” Monsters can present “similarities to categories of beings to which they are not related,” but this can be “a *false* resemblance.”⁴⁵

Few descriptions of this false resemblance would be better than William Blake’s famous engraving of Behemoth and Leviathan in 1826 (first in black

⁴⁰As Scott C. Jones cogently argues with regard to lion and serpent imagery in “Lions, Serpents, and Lion-Serpents in Job 28 and Beyond,” 663–686.

⁴¹Rebecca Raphael, “Things Too Wonderful: A Disabled Reading of Job,” 415–421, and also Alec Basson, “Just Skin and Bones: The Longing for Wholeness of the Body in the Book of Job,” 287–299.

⁴²Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*; quotes here from 50 and 48, 55, respectively.

⁴³See Robert Burch, “Frames of Visibility: Si(gh)ting the Monstrous,” 87–88; Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 6; Gilmore, *Monsters*, 9–10.

⁴⁴See the analysis in Bellin, *Framing Monsters*.

⁴⁵Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 4 (her italics).

and white, but then colored by Blake himself).⁴⁶ God directs Job and Friends downward, to a revelation of a cosmos-in-miniature, as if to say: *this* is the true nature of things. The Behemoth creature at the middle of Blake's cosmos certainly does resemble a biologically real hippopotamus, but something of the face (especially the eyes, ears, and fangs), the back, and the coloring is suggestively amiss—this is no ordinary animal, though it stands on human ground, among the reeds mentioned in Job 40:21–22. On the lowest tier, the coiling Leviathan comes forth as straightly mythological, representing watery depth as opposed to land. Blake's image of the Behemoth in particular takes us deeply into the feeling of the passage, and, I would argue, represents what the poet of Job 40–41 attempted to do in textual form with these animals. Behemoth is a hippopotamus, and takes its point of departure from the hippopotamus, but it is also more than a species that could be controlled by definition. So too, Leviathan is a scaly, toothy reptile, a crocodile, but then evokes more terror and dominance than a crocodile could show—even demonstrating the power of chaos control and creative power that the Lord God lords over Job.

MONSTERS IN THE CULT OF THE LITTLE COMMUNITY

Job had already considered his experience to be “monstrous” when he raised the specter of Leviathan, Yamm, and others in his initial lament (Job 3). Why does the Joban deity proceed to double-down on the power and violence of the monster in the book's climactic scene? I conclude the essay here with a suggestion that involves appeal to Job's socio-historical circumstances of authorship and a cognitive-anthropological theory of religion championed recently by Harvey Whitehouse. As far as I am aware, no one has yet attempted to apply Whitehouse's ideas in this respect to a *text* as opposed to a human community directly, and thus my effort to do so here is a preliminary gesture toward what such an application might look like.⁴⁷

First, the historical circumstance: Job was likely written or at least finalized as a book in the sixth century BCE, perhaps even in the immediate aftermath of Israel's return from exile under the direction of the Persian empire.⁴⁸ This return was likely a difficult affair on a number of levels—the ecological dimensions of the resettlement of land during this time period is particularly

⁴⁶See William Blake, *Illustrations to the Book of Job*, online at <http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/work.xq?workid=but550> (accessed 6 January 2014).

⁴⁷I attempted this same application (in an extended manner) for these same materials in Doak, *Consider Leviathan*, 277–286.

⁴⁸I argue for this point in detail elsewhere; see Doak, *Consider Leviathan*, 236–240, and sources cited there.

intriguing, since archaeology tells us that the Babylonian destruction of Israel/Palestine was truly devastating and recent excavation has begun to suggest that what remained of Judah in the latter half of the sixth century was small and impoverished.⁴⁹ The history of Israel's religion, so the scholarly consensus goes, underwent great changes in this particular period, leading to sometimes radically reconfigured understandings of the older, standard ideas of covenant, the divine involvement in the Temple specifically, and the entire religio-political system of the nation generally.

It is within this sketch of a context, then, that I wonder how the Joban monsters might act as a foil to a certain kind of "natural religion" under terms set out by recent neuro-scientific and anthropological research. In a recent study, the psychologist Justin Barrett devotes quite a bit of attention to the question of what he calls "natural theology," dividing the concept into two categories: universal natural theology, and confessional natural theology. Natural theology of the so-called "universal" type relies on information that "all rational people *universally* would be inclined to accept," whereas "confessional" natural theology begins by assuming a particular confessional starting point.⁵⁰ This confessional version does not start from the ground up, but rather seeks to "augment, disambiguate, and amplify" previous convictions by appeal to science or nature directly.⁵¹

Drawing on his study of "content-specific cognitive systems," that is, those cognitive systems "responsible for [among other things] reasoning about the properties and movement of physical objects" and "living things," Barrett suggests a tentative list of "assumptions" or "nonreflective beliefs" characteristic of "natural religion": "Elements of the natural world such as rocks, trees, mountains, and animals are purposefully and intentionally designed by someone(s)"; "Things happen in the world that unseen agents cause. These agents are not human or animal"; "Humans have internal components (such as a mind, soul, and/or spirit) that are distinguishable from the body"; "Moral norms are unchangeable (even by gods)"; "Immoral behavior leads to misfortune; moral behavior to fortune"; "Gods can and do interact with the natural world and people"; "Gods generally know things that humans do not"; "Gods . . . may be responsible for instances of fortune or misfortune;

⁴⁹See, e.g., Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period, Volume 1, Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah, 197–207* on the economy, population, and archaeology of the period in question.

⁵⁰Justin L. Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds*, 147–148, 160.

⁵¹Barrett, *Cognitive Science*, 160.

they can reward or punish human actions”; “Because of their superhuman power, when gods act, they act permanently.”⁵²

Such views may be described as “cognitively optimal”;⁵³ they work together, and make sense as a system. Notably, however, various actors in Job (particularly Job himself, and even God) pointedly resist some of these core assumptions of “natural religion”; they are heretics, out of step with key components of natural religion. These characters are theologically incorrect, to adapt the title D. Jason Sloan’s book *Theological Incorrectness: Why Religious People Believe What They Shouldn’t*.⁵⁴ In Job, the natural world is certainly designed by God, and unseen agents drive events, but it is not clear that anyone in Job believes that humans have a mind/soul/spirit apart from their bodies; moral norms seem malleable; and, most strikingly, behavior does not straightforwardly predict outcome in the book’s central case study. Indeed, as Barrett points out, “natural religion” can become “specified, amplified, or even contradicted in particular cultural settings—what we often call theology—not unlike how we learn the particulars of our native language.” Even so, intense effort is required for those who wish to affirm theology outside the bounds of this construct of “natural religion.” “Cultural scaffolding” must appear, to buttress and reinforce counterintuitive ideas.⁵⁵

The anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse has discussed the varying ways a religious group can inculcate and reinforce “cognitively costly religion,” that is, religion that runs hard against the grain of the types of beliefs Barrett described as “natural religion.”⁵⁶ Whitehouse contends that many religions have within them two distinct (and even openly competing) “modes” of religious expression: the “doctrinal” and “imagistic” modes of religiosity.⁵⁷ In the

⁵²Barrett, *Cognitive Science*, 130–133. In what follows, I have abridged Barrett’s list of beliefs included under the category of “natural religion” at 132–133.

⁵³See Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission*, 29–47.

⁵⁴Barrett, *Cognitive Science*, 138; D. Jason Sloan, *Theological Incorrectness: Why Religious People Believe What They Shouldn’t*. Interestingly, Barrett (*Cognitive Science*, 136–38) describes a series of experiments he and others have conducted which show that individuals will consistently mis-remember, distort, omit, or invent elements of a religious story so as to skew ambiguous elements in that story toward a “theologically correct” (i.e., in accordance with “natural religion”) understanding.

⁵⁵Barrett, *Cognitive Science*, 133, 143.

⁵⁶Whitehouse has discussed the “doctrinal” versus “imagistic” mode concepts in several works, including: *Inside the Cult: Religious Innovation and Transmission in Papua New Guinea*; *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity*; and *Modes of Religiosity*.

⁵⁷As Whitehouse himself points out, previous investigations have revealed partly overlapping categories: Weber’s “routinized” and “charismatic” religions; Ruth Benedict’s

“doctrinal mode,” often associated with “literati” and “social élites,” religious knowledge is “codified as a body of doctrines,” expressed through routine worship, accepted as “general knowledge,” and meant to produce “anonymous communities.”⁵⁸ Doctrinal mode communities are diffuse, and persuasion in this mode comes through the forms of universal, verbalized creeds, intellectual persuasion, and through highlighting ideas linked by implicational logic.⁵⁹

The “imagistic mode,” on the other hand, represents “little traditions,” or “cults of the little community.”⁶⁰ Imagistic messages rely on terror, pain, and initiation; they evoke “multivocal iconic imagery” meant to produce “cognitive shocks.”⁶¹ In extreme (and ethnographically documented) cases, imagistic rituals can involve extended trance states, cannibalism, and ritual murder. Emotions run very high; imagistic ritual produces intense arousal and expressions are infrequent (as opposed to the constant, measured nature of doctrinal mode expression). The sum effect of such a system is a body of what Whitehouse characterizes as “elaborate, if idiosyncratic, exegetical knowledge,” and its attendant images “evoke abundant inferences, producing a sense of multivalence and multivocality of religious imagery, experienced as personal and unmediated inspiration.”⁶² The style of religion acquired through the imagistic approach is “cognitively costly religion,” unintuitive, flouting the cognitively optimal views passed on through human biology and straightforward, everyday observation of the world.

This basic distinction between *doctrinal* and *imagistic* modes of religious communication should be familiar to readers of the book of Job: Job’s friends infamously rely on doctrinal strategies, such as the righteousness and reward scheme encoded in Proverbs and elsewhere to convince Job of his guilt (e.g., Prov 1:32–33; 10:3–4; 11:31; 12:11; 26:27; compare with Exod 23:22–26;

“Apollonian” and “Dionysian” modes; Jack Goody’s split between “literate” and “nonliterate” religions; etc. See *Modes of Religiosity*, 63.

⁵⁸Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 1.

⁵⁹The language here is drawn directly from Whitehouse’s first major discussion of the doctrinal/imagistic split, *Inside the Cult*, 197; see the more recent and comprehensive explication in Whitehouse’s *Modes of Religiosity*, 63–82.

⁶⁰For the concepts of “little traditions” and “cults of the little community,” Whitehouse refers to Robert Redfield, *The Little Community: Viewpoints for the Study of a Human Whole* and Richard P. Werbner, ed., *Regional Cults*.

⁶¹Whitehouse, *Inside the Cult*, 198; *Arguments and Icons*, 1.

⁶²Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 70, 72, 77. Whitehouse avers that this imagistic mode takes historical precedent over the doctrinal, based partly on “archaeological and historical evidence,” though he seems not to consider the question of preservation bias—extreme, elaborate, or bizarre rituals may appear more prominently in material culture as well as in historical recollection, as opposed to frequent, routinized, verbal interactions.

Deut 28:1–4, 15–19, etc.), while the Divine response to Job (in tandem with hints earlier in the book) suggests something more along the lines of the imagistic mode. Thus, Whitehouse’s research could be used to breathe new terminological life into the framing of the Joban monster drama. The Joban monsters form an intricate textual icon of terror, a bold, imagistic attempt to freeze a moment in time where memory should remain fixated. They attempt to teach their audience through trauma—an audience watches Job as a participant in an imagistic textual ritual, where the monster marks a moment of historical change for a struggling community, pointing them toward a new future, away from traditional (doctrinal) modes of retribution thinking and into other, more “counterintuitive” worlds.⁶³

What might this new future entail? In brief, it is a future in which the restructured Judahite “little community” had to carve out a new place amid other small regional groups in the shadow of the Persian empire during the sixth–fourth centuries BCE. Taking a cue from David Wolfers,⁶⁴ we can read creatures like Behemoth and Leviathan as ciphers for Empire—the monster embodies a new conqueror, more powerful and strange than any other before. Job, too, must carve out his own place among these monsters, and indeed he does, receiving back what had been lost by the end of the book (Job 42). The empire is amoral, like Behemoth in Job 40, and represents raw power and indifference to human concerns in the local community. By casting Israel’s God as “zookeeper” of these monsters, the author of Job still asserts divine control over the historical situation and over the empire, even as the monster, in all its power, leaves readers with a threatening and ultimately ambiguous image.

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⁶³For further exploration of this “new direction”—its historical, religious, and ecological contexts—see Doak, *Consider Leviathan*, esp. 233–287.

⁶⁴Wolfers, “The Lord’s Second Speech,” 499.

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