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THE FOUNDATIONS OF WILLIAM BLAKE'S UNIVERSE.

by

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THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
OF DURHAM UNIVERSITY, OCTOBER 1972.

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Abstract.

The Foundations of William Blake's Universe.

The writings of William Blake are studied in an attempt to discover his views on various philosophical questions, and to show that underneath the esoteric symbolism and mythology lies a reasonably coherent philosophical system. By dealing with his works in roughly chronological order it is seen which problems concerned him most at each stage of his career.

The first chapter discusses Blake's "Doctrine of Contraries" (derived possibly from his interest in the works of Swedenborg), whereby he declares the essential duality of things - male and female, body and soul, imagination and reason, and, most important for his earlier works, Innocence and Experience, the two contrasting states of the human soul.

Chapter Two examines Blake's developing views on the nature of God and his relationship with man, involving inevitably the topics of predestination and free will. Although in his early works Blake condemns God the Father as the cruel, man-made Urizen, a caricature of the Old Testament's invisible Jehovah and contrast to the human Jesus, before his death he revered such a deity as the only true God and accepted the total predestination he earlier abhorred in the works of Swedenborg.

The third chapter deals with the relationship of man and the universe, noting Blake's ambivalent view of Nature and the world of material objects. Blake holds that different degrees of vision are

attainable by man, and these can be to some extent aligned with different levels of the universe attainable by man in his now fallen state. The nature of the Fall, which was also Creation, and of the Last Judgment, still in man's future, are also discussed.

In the final chapter Blake's last important work, The Ghost of Abel, is used to show Blake's philosophical position at the end of his life.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF  
WILLIAM BLAKE'S  
UNIVERSE

"...I rest not from my great task,  
To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes  
Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity  
Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination."

("Jerusalem")

## PREFACE

- a) The edition of Blake's works used throughout is The Complete Writings of William Blake with Variant Readings edited by Geoffrey Keynes, Oxford University Press, 1966. Punctuation and line numbering is taken from this edition.
- b) Unless otherwise stated, works are cited in the editions recorded in the Selected List of Works Consulted.
- c) List of abbreviations for works cited frequently.

Lav.	<u>Lavater's Aphorisms on Man</u>
Inn.	<u>Songs of Innocence</u>
MHH	<u>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</u>
VDA	<u>Visions of the Daughters of Albion</u>
Exp.	<u>Songs of Experience</u>
Inn. & Exp.	<u>Songs of Innocence and of Experience, shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul</u>
Ur.	<u>The First Book of Urizen</u>
FZ	<u>Vala, or the Four Zoas</u>
M	<u>Milton, a Poem in 2 Books</u>
VLJ	<u>A Vision of the Last Judgment</u>
J	<u>Jerusalem</u>
Ev.G.	<u>The Everlasting Gospel</u>

### Other abbreviations

N. "Night" in Vala, or the Four Zoas

- d) Acknowledgement

I am indebted to Mr. Peter Malekin, my supervisor, for the references to Jacob Boehme.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is well-known that William Blake was an opponent of the so-called Enlightenment and attacked fervently the empirical rationalism and sensationist psychology of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Not so well-known, however, are his actual grounds for doing so, and the fact that the alternative philosophy which he attempted to set up in the place of rationalism is by no means as confused and incoherent as its unorthodox method of presentation -- as an intrinsic part of his art -- might at first suggest.

For Blake, philosophy was a part of art and both were a part of life -- his fierce contempt for the abstract systems of his day was the result of a profound conviction that truth resists by its nature any abstract mode of presentation. Truth must be looked for in existence: it is not merely a part of life, but life itself, and thus cannot be abstracted -- abstract discussion of any truthful idea, excessive concentration on reason as opposed to existence and sympathetic experience, inevitably results in distortion. The only way to present truth to man is to encourage him to experience it in his everyday existence, and this can be achieved only by bringing into play man's imagination as well as his reason, stimulating all his faculties so that life may be lived to the full. Abstract philosophy cannot produce such a response, for it presents one

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1. See "William Blake Rejects the Enlightenment" by Jean Hagstrum, in Essays on Blake ed. Northrop Frye (Twentieth Century Views).

aspect of existence to the exclusion of the rest -- the best method of imparting philosophy to others is through art.<sup>1</sup>

Such a view of philosophy has much in common with modern existentialism, and indeed Blake has been hailed as one of its fore-runners. It was inevitable that he should despise the rationalism of his day and look on the Enlightenment as a thick fog of abstruse and irrelevant reasoning which could do nothing but harm to the mind and, by its influence on action, the body of man. His hatred of Locke, Bacon and Newton, his unholy trinity whom he considered the leading proponents of rationalism, appears continually in his work:

"Bacon, Locke and Newton are the three great teachers of Atheism or of Satan's doctrine. Everything is Atheism which assumes the reality of the natural and unspiritual world."<sup>2</sup>

Blake's philosophical outlook is so far removed from the main trends of eighteenth-century thought that he did not even, as perhaps might have been expected, sympathise with the philosophical views of Rousseau or Voltaire; heartily though he accorded with their republicanism, he was convinced that their ideals were derived from faulty thinking. He disliked too Locke's ideal of equality before the law: "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression."<sup>3</sup> His association with other would-be reformers such as Payne and Mary Wollstonecraft must

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1. See Blake's letter to Dr. Trusler, 23rd Aug. 1799, and his letter to William Hayley, 11th Dec. 1805.
  2. Crabb Robinson's Diary, 10th Dec. 1825.
  3. MHH

also have been an uneasy one from<sup>a</sup> philosophical point of view. The ultimate collapse of the original high aspirations of the French Revolution must have confirmed Blake finally in his conviction that social justice can never be founded on a basis of thought that is anything less than a sound and complete notion of existence and of man, and that his own outlook was the only true one.

Inevitably, Blake's standing in the eyes of his contemporaries was no higher than theirs in his:

"The sceptic and the rational believer, uniting their forces against the visionary, pursue and scare a warm and brilliant imagination, with the hue and cry of madness. Not contented with bringing down the reasoning of the mystical philosopher, as they well may, to this degraded level, they apply the test of cold calculation and mathematical proof to the departments of the mind, which are priveleged to appeal from so narrow and rigorous a tribunal. They criticise the representations of corporeal beauty, and the allegoric emblems of mental perfections; the image of the visible world, which appeals to the senses for a testimoney to its truth, or the type of futureity and the immortal soul, which identifies itself with our hopes and with our hearts, as if they were syllogisms or theorems, demonstrable propositions or consecutive corollaries."<sup>1</sup>

Crabb Robinson considered Blake to be a true visionary, but, not surprisingly, Blake's visions were highly suspect to many of his contemporaries, even those who were on the whole sympathetic towards him:

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1. Benjamin Heath Malkin, A Father's Memoirs of his Child, (Introductory epistle) 1806.

"I should have stated, that Blake was supereminently endowed with the power of disuniting all other thoughts from his mind, whenever he wished to indulge in thinking of any particular subject, and so firmly did he believe, by this abstracting power, that the objects of his compositions were before him in his mind and eye, that he frequently believed them to be speaking to him."<sup>1</sup>

Only with the acceptance of existentialism could such an artist be seriously considered as a philosopher, but if one traces throughout Blake's work the development of his views on the main philosophical questions, his ideas seem fairly consistent, and the result of a logical progression and careful thought. It has been suggested that Blake's works show "a gradual transition from social and political prophecy ... to a mystical psychology."<sup>2</sup> This is not strictly true - certain of his works may concentrate more on one aspect of his thought than another, but there is no real 'transition'. 'Mystical psychology' is Blake's main concern, and is ever-present.

Even a visionary and fierce opponent of materialism is forced to come to terms to some extent with the world around him, to explain the apparent existence of material objects and the part which they play in what he considers to be the

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1. Crabb Robinson's Diary, Dec. 10th 1825.  
Also Dec. 17th, 1825: "Of the faculty of Vision, he spoke as one he has had from early infancy. He thinks all men partake of it, but it is lost by not being cultivated."  
Also Crabb Robinson's letter to Dorothy Wordsworth, Feb. 1826: "He is not so much a disciple of Jacob Böhmen and Swedenborg as a fellow Visionary".
  2. F.W. Bateson, Introduction to Selected Poems of William Blake, pub, 1957.

organisation of the true universe. Throughout his works, Blake's 'mystical psychology' deals not only with the various aspects of the soul of man (though this is indeed his main consideration) but covers also the main topics which have concerned other philosophers from the beginning of time: the true nature of the material world, the purpose of earthly life, the existence (or otherwise) of an eternal life, immortality and reincarnation, the existence of a supreme being and other immortals, predestination and free will, and even a code of ethics for everyday living.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE ESSENTIAL DUALISM

Blake's early works - those written before Songs Of Innocence-are generally regarded as being on the whole experimental, the attempts of a young poet to discover what lay within his powers, but even these display signs of an underlying system of thought. The largely uninteresting Poetical Sketches, for example, make it clear that Blake thought naturally in symbols:

"How sweet I roam'd from field to field,  
And tasted all the summer's pride,  
'Till I the prince of love beheld,  
Who in the sunny beams did glide!

He shew'd me lilies for my hair,  
And blushing roses for my brow;  
He led me through his gardens fair,  
Where all his golden pleasures grow.

With sweet May dews my wings were wet,  
And Phoebus fir'd my vocal rage;  
He caught me in his silken net,  
And shut me in his golden cage.

He loves to sit and hear me sing,  
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;  
Then stretches out my golden wing,  
And mocks my loss of liberty."

The symbolism in this song, written 'before the age of fourteen', implies a corresponding mode of thought already existent, and it is the same thought and the same symbolism which appears in Songs of Innocence and Experience. The essays at the end of Poetical Sketches also foreshadow Innocence and Experience:

'Contemplation' and 'Then She Bore pale Desire' display the attitudes of speakers of both these states, while in the latter essay we see what is perhaps Blake's earliest mythological

system, displaying similarities to the last song of Visions of the Daughters of Albion. In the 'Couch of Death' there appears for the first time the Traveller, one of Blake's perennial symbolic figures.

'An Island in the Moon', the light-hearted satire on contemporary intellectual circles, comments here and there on current philosophical and metaphysical speculations in a manner which strongly suggests that Blake had by this time formed conclusions of his own upon these matters.

"In this Island dwells three Philosophers - Suction the Epicurean, Quid the Cynic, & Sipsop the Pythagorean. I call them by the names of those sects, tho' the sects are not ever mention'd there, as being quite out of date; however, the things still remain, and the vanities are the same. The three Philosophers sat together thinking of nothing."<sup>1</sup>

Rationalist philosophy was already anathema to him: "Voltaire was immersed in matter, & seems to have understood very little but what he saw before his eyes, like the Animal upon the Pythagorean's lap, always playing with its own tail."<sup>1</sup> and he had already read and disagreed with Newton and Locke:

"To be, or not to be  
Of great capacity,  
Like Sir Isaac Newton,  
Or Locke, or Doctor South,  
Or Sherlock upon death?<sup>2</sup>  
I'd rather be Sutton."<sup>2</sup>

N.P. → It is by examining in particular the extensive notes which Blake made about this time (1788) in a copy of Lavater's Aphorisms on Man that we can see the main trend of his thought. Such comments as these on a specifically Christian

1. See also Ch.8; "An Easy of Huming Understanding, by John Lookye [pantryman altered to] Gent".
2. Note the name of the singer - "Obtuse Angle".

work show the extent to which his ideas were already fixed and well-developed, and how far he had already departed from orthodox Christian thought while still counting himself a Christian. Blake always revered the figure of Christ as the ideal man and God, and made a sharp distinction between true Christian beliefs and ideals and on the other hand the ramifications of logic and reason which threatened their very existence:

The greatest of characters, no doubt, was he, who, free of all trifling accidental helps, could see objects through one grand<sup>m</sup> mutable medium, always at hand, and proof against illusion and time, reflected by every object, and invariably traced through all the fluctuation of things."<sup>1</sup>

Beside this aphorism Blake wrote: "This was Christ." and beside another aphorism<sup>2</sup> "This is true Christian philosophy far above all abstraction." Blake's current belief as to the nature of God is hinted at here:<sup>3</sup>

"He, who hates [altered to loves] the wisest and best of men, hates [altered to loves] the Father of men; for, where is the Father of men to be seen but in the most perfect of his children?

This is true worship. (Blake)"<sup>4</sup>

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1. Lav, 16.
  2. Lav, 2.
  3. Blake's views on this topic are discussed at length in Ch. II, "Man and God".
  4. Lav. 549.

"He, who adores an impersonal God, has none; and, without guide or rudder, launches on an immense abyss that first absorbs his powers, and next himself.

Most superlatively beautiful & most affectionately Holy and pure; would to God that all men would consider it." (Blake)<sup>1</sup>

His beliefs about the nature of man are shown to be likewise developing.

"Man is the ark of God; the mercy seat is above, upon the ark; cherubims guard it on either side, & in the midst is the holy law; man is either the ark of God or a phantom of the earth & of the water; if thou seekest by human policy to guide this ark, remember Uzzah, II Sam<sup>1</sup> vi ch: knaveries are not human nature; knaveries are knaveries.  
See N. 554; this aphorism seems to me to want discrimination."<sup>2</sup>

For Blake, even this early in his works, the ark of God, the "holy of holies", is man himself, and inherent in man is the holy law --in this sense a man-made law, not one revealed by a remote God to his human servant, carved in stone, and then imposed on the rest of humanity. It is above all a living law, and Blake shows a marked insistence on the importance of living life to the full:

"Who can act or perform as if each work or action were the first, the last, and only one in his life, is great in his sphere. (the last three words deleted)"<sup>3</sup>

"To hell till he behaves better ! mark that I do not believe there is such a thing literally, but hell is the being shut up in the possession of corporeal desires which shortly weary the man, for ALL LIFE IS HOLY."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Lav. 552.
  2. Note on Lav. 533.
  3. Lav. 272, underlined by Blake.
  4. Note on Lav. 309.

"And consider that LOVE IS LIFE."<sup>1</sup>

Besides this, Blake had already come to certain conclusions about the relationship of man with nature or the world of material objects; he underlines the following:

"Call him truly religious who believes in something higher, more powerful, more living, than visible nature; and who, clear as his own existence, feels his conformity to that superior being."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting of Blake's annotations are those which concern his unusual exultation of energy or passion. This receives an initial degree of support from Lavater:

"The most stormy ebullitions of passion, from blasphemy to murder, are less terrific than one single act of cool villainy: a still RABIES is more dangerous than the paroxysms of a fever - Fear the boisterous savage of passion less than the sedate grin of villainy."<sup>3</sup>

Blake comments: "Bravo!". This aphorism might almost have been taken from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell and Blake carefully notes others in the same vein:

"He alone has energy that cannot be deprived of it."<sup>4</sup>

"Active Evil is better than Passive Good."<sup>5</sup>

"He submits to be seen through a microscope, who suffers himself to be caught in a fit of passion."

and Blake comments here: "& such a one I dare love."<sup>6</sup>

Religion itself should be not passive, but active in every sense of the word:

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1. Note on Lav. 376.
  2. Lav. 341
  3. Lav. 63.
  4. Lav. 352.
  5. Note on Lav. 409.
  6. Lav. 608, and Blake's note.

"The purest religion is the most refined Epicurism. He, who in the smallest given time can enjoy most of what he never shall repent, and what furnishes enjoyments, still more unexhausted, still less changeable - is the most religious and the most voluptuous of men."

For Blake this is "true Christian philosophy".<sup>1</sup>

Blake's objections to Lavater also indicate the general trend of his thought and suggest that his conceptions of virtue and vice were already highly unorthodox:

"As I understand Vice it is a Negative. It does not signify what the laws of Kings & Priests have call'd Vice; we who are philosophers ought not to call the Staminial Virtues of Humanity by the same name that we call the omissions of intellect springing from poverty.

Every man's leading propensity ought to be call'd his leading Virtue & his good Angel. But the Philosophy of Causes & Consequences misled Lavater as it has all his Cotemporaries. Each thing is its own cause & its own effect. Accident is the omission of act in self & the hindering of act in another; This is Vice, but all Act is Virtue. To hinder another is not an act; it is the contrary; it is a restraint of action both in ourselves & in the person hinder'd, for he who hinders another omits his own duty at the same time.

Murder is Hindering Another.

Theft is Hindering Another.

Backbiting, Undermining, Circumventing, & whatever is Negative is Vice. But the origin of this mistake in Lavater & his cotemporaries is, They suppose that Woman's Love is Sin; in consequence all the Love's and Graces with them are Sin."<sup>2</sup>

It is also interesting to note that Blake appears by this time to have formed one of the points of view which go to make up his doctrine of contraries:

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1. Lav.366, and Blake's note.
  2. Blake's comments at end of Lav.

Man is a twofold being, one part capable of evil & the other capable of good; that which is capable of good is not also capable of evil, but that which is capable of evil is also capable of good. This aphorism seems to consider man as simple & yet capable of evil: now both evil & good cannot exist in a simple being, for thus 2 contraries would spring from one essence, which is impossible; but if man is consider'd as only evil & god only good, how then is regeneration effected which turns the evil to good? by casting out the evil by the good? See Matthew XII Ch., 26, 27, 28, 29 v. 1

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In the next year, 1789,<sup>in</sup> Songs of Innocence and The Book of Thel, Blake's comments on the state which he called Innocence are given in their mature form; colouring is added later by the contrasting Songs of Experience, and yet the evidence of these earlier works, especially perhaps Thel, makes it clear that Blake already had in mind Innocence as a distinct state to be contrasted with Experience. Certain of the annotations to Lavater's Aphorisms showed an already conceptualised idea of Innocence<sup>2</sup> and The Book of Thel depicts the lives and attitudes of the creatures of Innocence, and their reaction to the encroachment of that state of which Blake had also shown a clear awareness and which he was later to give the name of Experience. Here for the first time the two states are specifically contrasted in one work, and the inevitable - (though in the case of Thel uncompleted, since she refuses the challenge of adult life) - transition from one to the other is shown sensitively, if a trifle ambiguously.

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1. Note on Lav. 489
  2. See Lav. 328, and Blake's note.  
Also Lav. 633, and Blake's note.

The last plate of Thel<sup>1</sup> shows the language of Experience and the prophetic books, and Thel's attitude here, her reaction to life and the crucial challenge of passion, is that of several of Blake's later females (who are in turn also perhaps differing aspects of "the Female") - the Maiden Queen of Experience springs instantly to mind but one should also consider the resemblance to Enitharmon in certain of her aspects, and perhaps also Ahaniah. Blake had obviously already drawn certain conclusions not only about Innocence and Experience in general, but also about human sexuality and the contrasting behaviour of Innocence and Experience in this aspect of humanity. The reaction of the Female to sex, which ends the poem, the association of the flesh with sin, was clearly already exercising Blake's mind.<sup>2 & 3</sup>

- 
1. See l.11 - 20
  2. Contrast Pl.6 with Pl.3, l.7 - 16, where the Cloud tells of total Love in Innocence.
  3. In this work we find named for the first time (unless Thel is later than Tiriel) two characters from Blake's mythology who reappear later in a more substantial way - Har, whose main appearance is in another work of this same year, and, more interesting from the point of the development of Blake's thought, Luvah. This reference is a slight one, and it is impossible to tell from it what characteristics or attributes Blake had in mind for the character, apart from the fact that he is associated with Love and sex. It is indeed possible that he had as yet no specific character - "the daughters of Mne Seraphim", also referred to in this poem, never appear again, and it is possible that at this time Blake used both names merely as "colouring". However, here as later Luvah has a team of horses (which in "The Four Zoas" he steals or, as one version of the story goes, borrows or accepts as gifts from Urizen), and these horses drink at golden springs. (a) (Gold is always associated with love in Blake's imagery.) There is at any rate no contradiction between this Luvah and the later; however it could be argued that Luvah seems here to fulfil Urizen's unfallen role of Prince of Light, (b) which in the later books he usurps. (c) It is in fact impossible to decide whether or not this aspect of the myth is already in Blake's mind.

- (a) Apollo also drove a team of horses.
- (b) FZ, N. 1st, l.488.
- (c) FZ, N. 1st, l.264 and elsewhere.

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- (c) FZ, N. 1st, A.264 and elsewhere.

By this time Blake was well acquainted with the works of Swedenborg. Roundabout the year 1788 he had annotated The Wisdom of Angels concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom. He had then produced three short pamphlets which show clearly the effect of Swedenborgian thought on a mind already discontented with naturalistic philosophy:

Conclusion. If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again."<sup>1</sup>

Application. He who sees the Infinite in all things, sees God. He who sees the Ratio only, sees himself only, Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is."<sup>2</sup>

PRINCIPLE 7th. As all men are alike (the' infinitely various); So all Religions &, as all similars, have one source. The true Man is the source, he being the Poetic Genius."<sup>3</sup>

Such conclusions about poetic genius went into the production of the first of the Prophetic books - Tiriel (1789). Although this was obviously an experiment with which Blake was dissatisfied, for he never printed it, it exists in a very clear manuscript and has a series of illustrations which to a certain extent anticipate Blake's later method of 'illuminated printing'. That is, certain of the pictures complement rather than illustrate the story, depicting incidents not related in the text but which help to form a more rounded picture: such pictures as "Har and Heva bathing" fill out the characters,

- 
1. "There is no Natural Religion". 1st series.
  2. "There is no Natural Religion". 2nd series.
  3. "All Religions are One".

supplementing their part in the story and leaving a final impression that they are vastly more important for Blake than their comparatively restricted part in the text would seem to suggest.

The main characters of Tiriel seem also to be in a sense 'experimental' - Tiriel himself never again takes a major part in the myth,<sup>1</sup> and his attributes and functions are for the most part adopted by another character (a fate not suffered by the characters of The1 or the later Visions of the Daughters of Albion, which are also works standing to one side of the main body of myth). The minor characters of Tiriel vanish without further trace.

Tiriel, the senile tyrant with an iron law of reason, appears to be an early sketch for Urizen (whose name has not so far appeared). It is not difficult to see why Blake did not retain Tiriel as his symbol of oppression. Firstly, Tiriel's sons realise his tyranny for what it is and rebel against him in a way impossible for the deluded man of Experience to rebel against his overweening reason, which he has almost unwittingly exalted into a god. These sons are unsatisfactory for Blake's later myth - they are certainly not endowed with the character of Innocence, nor are they the regenerated men of Jerusalem who alone can overthrow the iron law. Finally, the story here is too concise and complete - little more can be said, while the action is restricted to an earthly rather than a cosmic level. It lacks the sense of grandeur, of all-encompassing time and space, which permeates

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1. He appears in Ur., Ch.VIII, Pl.23, l.11.

the later myths. It was also difficult, though perhaps not impossible, for Blake to retain the character of Tiriel alongside Urizen, as, for example, specifically earthly oppression - the two are altogether too similar.

Without Tiriel his sons and daughters, largely colourless, lose their point, and his brothers their relevance. Ijim and Zazel are too much of the earth and men for a cosmic myth: they are not aspects of man, but merely types (one could even say stereotypes) of men, and are as such psychologically superficial.<sup>1</sup> The senile Har and Heva, however, seem to have satisfied Blake; they are mentioned again and used as symbols of man's degeneration in body and in spirit. (It is this type of degeneration to which Thel must have eventually sunk - like her Har and Heva have rejected the challenge of Experience, but under such circumstances Innocence alone is insufficient, and cannot persist.) It is these two characters upon whom Blake chose to concentrate in the illustrations to the work, and perhaps they alone were judged suitable to be part of the main myth.<sup>2</sup>

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Blake has now given his picture of degenerate man, and from now onwards seeks to explain man's nature and portray the manner of his downfall and his possible means of resurrection. The first books in which he does this are the Songs of Innocence and Experience and The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,

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1. Blake discusses the various types of man in J, but his detailed descriptions of specific psychological types, as opposed to traits, are largely unsuccessful.
  2. In The Song of Los, for example, the Fall is described from their point of view, and mankind becomes "the sons of Har", Pl. 4, ll. 4-17.

and in these works Blake's thought is completely matured. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell and the joint Songs reveal Blake's ideas on the nature of man; in the shorter Prophetic books he explains this nature by means of a cosmic myth, expanding it and clarifying the characters in The Four Zoas to explain his later, more complex views as to man's nature, his potential, and the psychological reasons for the 'Fall'. The Prophetic books add ever more complicated detail to his psychological theories and try to explain the nature of man by filling the cosmos with Zoas, Spectres, Emanations and so forth, who personify gradually more subtle psychological phenomena. These later works are to be studied with regard to other aspects of Blake's philosophical system and can for the moment be noted in brief.

Milton and Jerusalem show a slight change of emphasis, a tendency to expound not only a cosmic myth but a somewhat esoteric version of Christianity. By this time the French Revolution had ended in disaster, and the overthrow of Urizen no longer seemed imminent. Perhaps Blake was forced to search for some doctrine of comfort whereby his ideals might eventually be realised, as he gradually lost hope that the Golden Age might be near at hand in the France of the future.

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It is impossible to understand Blake's work without realising that throughout it run certain themes and presuppositions - ideas which, like the meaning behind much of the symbolism, shift and change within no very definite limits as they are regarded from different viewpoints. The first,

and probably the most important, concept to be understood is what is usually referred to as Blake's "Doctrine of contraries". This is a very difficult doctrine, mainly because Blake himself applied the expression to several distinct yet allied concepts, and such contraries and dual aspects of objects and ideas are found throughout his work:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.<sup>1</sup>

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell presents a principle of contrary states which amounts almost to a serious parody of the mystical outlook of Swedenborg. In Heaven and Hell Swedenborg states:

"In order that anything may exist, there must be a universal state of equilibrium. Without equilibrium there is neither action nor reaction; for equilibrium exists between two forces, of which one acts and the other reacts, and the state of rest resulting from such action and reaction is called equilibrium... All existence, that is, every effect, is produced in equilibrium, and it is produced by active force on the one hand, and passive resistance on the other;... Spiritual equilibrium or freedom, exists and subsists between good action of the one part, and evil reaction on the other, or between evil<sup>2</sup> acting on the one part, and good reacting on the other."

In a marginal comment on Swedenborg's Divine Love Blake wrote: "Good & Evil are both here Good, & the two contraries Married!" Later in the Marriage Blake gives another version of his contraries:

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1. MHH.
  2. Heaven and Hell. 589.

Thus one portion of being is the Prolific, the other the Devouring: to the Devourer it seems as if the producer was in his chains; but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole.

But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer, as a sea, received the excess of his delights.

Some will say: "Is not God alone the Prolific?"  
I answer: "God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men."

These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies: whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence.

Religion is an endeavour to reconcile the two.

The Doctrine of Contraries, then, is not a single, specific doctrine which can be observed in the same form throughout Blake's work. It can involve two aspects of the same character or situation, two opposing forces, or two classes of men. The important point is that Blake always tends to observe the dual nature of things, and to point out or illustrate in his poetry contrasting or even contrary elements of a situation, holding that these are an inevitable factor of existence. Not only physical life but the entire cosmos is governed by the doctrine, which is necessary for very existence. The crime of 'religion' was its attempt 'to destroy existence' by ignoring the essential oppositions in human nature and failing to embrace and thus overcome them.

The other work in which the doctrine of contraries plays a major part is of course the Songs of Innocence and Experience, showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul. It is here obvious from the titles of both the whole book and the 'pairs' of poems that the contrast and opposition involved are meant to strike the reader with great force. The two contrary states of the human soul are not so much two aspects from which to view the same human soul (although this is involved in certain places in the conflict between reason and passion) as two types of soul, or the soul at two very different stages of existence.

The soul of Innocence is at peace with itself and the world; the soul of Experience is in conflict with itself and with everything around it. The two types of soul cannot co-exist - Experience destroys Innocence whenever it can, intentionally or unintentionally. When reason and passion are finally reconciled, they achieve not Innocence - which, once lost, is gone forever - but Jerusalem, a mystical state beyond both Innocence and Experience.

In the Songs Blake is above all concerned with contrast as such - with stating and describing contraries and the dual nature of things. In later works he goes into more detail about the actual nature of things. Such problems as the nature of God, of man, of the material world are here touched on, but discussed at greater length later with reference to works in which Blake himself goes into such detail. Here he presents the problems - later he offers his own solutions, both overt and implicit.

In the Songs as a whole Blake gives his view of the important aspects of the life which he sees around him - a life which might possibly have been a life of Innocence, if man had not come under the rule of a deity which he himself created. This deity, the God of Experience and This World, Blake calls Urizen, and in the First Book of Urizen he describes the separation of Urizen from eternity, a separation which brings chaos to eternal life. Another being, Los, man's "Divine Imagination", confines this chaos within finite limits, and similarly man is confined within mortality and his five senses:

Six days they shrunk up from existence,  
 And on the seventh day they rested,  
 And they bless'd the seventh day, in sick hope,  
 And forgot their eternal life." 1

The Fall is simultaneously Creation; Urizen lives "in the human brain" and forces mankind away from the state of Innocence.

This is the world upon which Blake comments.

The Songs of Innocence were written over several years, and fall into three groups, each of which lends meaning to the others, with an Introduction which sets the tone for the whole book:

"Piping down the valleys wild,  
 Piping songs of pleasant glee,  
 On a cloud I saw a child,  
 And he laughing said to me:  
 "Pipe a song about a Lamb!"  
 So I piped with merry chear."

This is a world of childhood, of laughter, of freedom, of sunlit green valleys. At first sight it might appear that Blake was naive when he wrote about Innocence, but this is obviously not true. The symbolism of Experience appears, as we have seen, in Poetical Sketches, and Blake had also written the satirical "Island on the Moon". The picture of total Innocence which he portrays here is thus all the more remarkable.

The first group of songs to be written were the moral poems for children of which the volume was originally intended to consist. But such poems as "The Little Black Boy" and "The Lamb"; which were derived from the popular eighteenth century genre, exclude completely the heavy moral righteousness one finds in Isaac Watt's Divine Songs for the use of Children. Such anthologies emphasise not the God of Innocence - the

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1. Ur. Pl. 27, ll. 39-42.

Jesus whom Blake always revered and never reviled - but the intrusive God created by man to make the conscience of childhood guilty: "There's not a place where we can flee but God is present there." Such 'moral' songs belong, as Blake realised, to Experience, with their insistence on moral guilt and the revenging wrath of a stern God, the emphasis on secrecy and the separation of body and soul (which Blake denied explicitly in the Marriage of Heaven and Hell<sup>1</sup> and implicitly in Songs of Innocence). The God of Innocence is Jesus, who "calls himself a Lamb", the God of the New Testament as opposed to the Urizen-figure of the Old Testament:

"Thinking as I do that the Creator of this World is a very Cruel Being, & being a Worshipper of Christ, I cannot help saying: 'The Son, O how unlike the Father !' First God Almighty comes with a Thump on the Head. Then Jesus Christ comes with a balm to heal it."<sup>2</sup>

Blake's moral songs may be at times didactic (at the cost of spoiling the end of such poems as "The Chimney Sweeper") but the overall intended emphasis is on joy and love, not punishment.

The second, and largest, group of poems, is related to another eighteenth century genre - that of the pastoral - but bears no signs of the usual sophisticated language and neo-classical setting. Blake's Innocence is self-revealing, not self-describing - the state which describes itself as Innocent is the false, self-deceptive consolation of the degenerate Har and Heva. True Innocence is unaware of itself: "The Good---Think not for themselves".<sup>3</sup> The children of

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1. MHH, Pl. 4
  2. VLJ. P.95
  3. "Motto to the Songs of Innocence & of Experience", from Notebook, 1793.

Innocence (for adults rarely appear) exist in unqualified happiness and in total union with nature:

"Little Boy,  
Full of joy;  
Little Girl,  
Sweet and small;  
Cock does crow,  
So do you;  
Merry voice,  
Infant noise,  
Merrily, Merrily, to welcome in the Year".

The unity of all creatures is the unfailing characteristic of Innocence - in "Laughing Song", "Spring", "The Echoing Green" and even "The Nurse's Song", where the children themselves insist on their essential affinity with other creatures:

"No, no, let us play, for it is yet day  
And we cannot go to sleep;  
Besides, in the sky the little birds fly  
And the hills are all cover'd with sheep."

Time also is unimportant - this is a world of eternity and infinity, while the world of Experience is dominated by ideas of time and space:

"Times on times he divided & measur'd        1  
Space by space in his ninefold darkness."

On the whole Innocence belongs to sunshine and day, though even the night of Innocence is gentle and kind, in complete contrast to the horrors of the night of Experience.<sup>2</sup>

When compared with the second group of poems, the moral songs take on new meanings. "The Lamb" becomes the culmination of the emphasis on the overall unity of creation: the Lamb itself is identified not only with the child, but with Christ - God and man are one. (In both Innocence and Experience man is made in God's image, and God also, as we have seen, made in man's; and since man has a twofold nature, God must also

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1. Ur. Pl. 3, ll. 8-9  
2. Contrast "Night" with "Introduction" and last verse of "London" in Exp.

be made in two images. Typically the God of Innocence is "a little child" and "a lamb", while the God of Experience is abstract, silent and invisible - he does not exist in any objective way.)<sup>1</sup>

In "The Chimney Sweeper" and "Holy Thursday" we now see Innocence, but Innocence existing despite a setting of social cruelty and moral righteousness. This Innocence is flowering despite all society's attempts to kill it. The setting, too, is not the hills and fields appropriate to Innocence, but London, later described as the city of "chartered streets". Blake is only one step away from an admission that Innocence is by no means inviolable - the conditions under which man is forced to live (and Blake shows later that man himself is the source of compulsion) must in fact destroy it. Soon he shows that "disguise" is taught to children from birth and visible even in the cradle.<sup>2</sup> Even in Songs of Innocence Blake implies (in "On Another's Sorrow", "Night" and "The Little Boy Lost") that a state of complete Innocence is impossible for mankind. We have seen how, in The Book of Thel, which was etched in the same year, Thel shrinks from the active participation in life characteristic of Innocence - once man fears life, a conflict appears, and conflict involves Experience. In this book sensual life is proposed as a solution, but almost immediately Blake admits that this is not enough. The mind as well as the body must be accounted for. Innocence is unrealisable in a coldly reasonable society where even

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1. See "To Nobodaddy" in Notebook, 1793

2. See "Nurse's Song" and "Infant Sorrow" in Exp.

charity is remote:

"Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?  
Or Love in a golden bowl?"<sup>1</sup>

The third group of the original Songs of Innocence were eventually transferred to Songs of Experience, although properly they describe neither Innocence nor Experience, but the state which Blake later called Jerusalem. These are best discussed after Songs of Experience.

The Songs of Experience were never issued separately from Songs of Innocence and must therefore always be read in contrast to them. We have seen, even while discussing Innocence, how a knowledge of the contrary state is vital for an understanding of Blake's implications. Now, having read of Innocence, the contrast of Experience shows itself in every line. In Innocence there is no room for conventional moral attitudes, or judgement and condemnation - all is worship and acquiescence. But the world of Innocence we recognise as wishful thinking - the world before the Fall (the Fall which was itself creation)<sup>2</sup> - and the world which Blake saw around him was very different. Much of eighteenth century London was filthy and squalid, a place of cruelty, injustice and oppression - a "terrible desert". Social reformers recognised this and despaired: "Perhaps," said William Mason, "it be beyond the wisdom of human legislation to apply an effectual remedy". Blake saw the evils around him - especially the hopeless plight of the poor - with open eyes, but instead of regarding them as God's just dispensation denounced them as

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1. Motto to TheL
  2. See Chapter III, "The Relationship between Man and the Universe".

man-made and caused by human greed. Poverty, squalor, brutality were rooted in man's attitude towards man, a misconception of man's needs and duties:

"There souls of men are bought and sold,  
And milk fed infancy for gold;  
And youth to slaughter houses led,  
And beauty for a bit of bread."<sup>1</sup>

But Blake saw farther than this - that the evils were on more levels than a mere social and economic one. The God worshipped in Experience is a false, man-made deity, whose iron law binds the imagination as well as the senses, and converts to misery all the natural joys of existence. Urizen, "being called God", compels men "to serve him in moral gratitude and submission", "in their inmost brains, feeling the crushing wheels". While in Innocence there is no law but joy, in Experience man is bound by "the firey joy that Urizen perverted to ten commands". Morals and society are formed by man-Urizen to destroy Innocence in the name of religion:

"The Priest sat by and heard the child,  
In trembling zeal he seiz'd his hair:  
He led him by his little coat,  
And all admir'd the Priestly care.

And standing on the altar high,  
"Lo! what a fiend is here!" said he,  
"One who sets reason up for judge  
"Of our most holy Mystery."

The whole philosophy of church, monarchy and society is dedicated to corrupting and perverting the nature of man:

These were the Churches, Hospitals, Castles, Palaces,  
Like nets and gins and traps to catch the joys of Eternity  
And all the rest a desert;  
Till, like a dream, Eternity was obliterated and erased."<sup>2</sup>

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1. "The Human Image", Notebook, 1793
  2. The Song of Los, Pl. 4, ll. 1-4.

The first two poems, "Introduction" and "Earth's Answer", set the reader firmly in the world of Experience and the realm of Urizen, described later in the prophetic books - "the starry floor, the wat'ry shore" where the 'Holy Word' weeps hypocritically and makes false promises of Heaven, "the break of day". Earth lies under the burden of darkness and chains, "prison'd on wat'ry shore". There can be no greater contrast than that between the Piper of Innocence and the Bard of Experience. Innocence cannot exist here:

Can delight,  
Chain'd in night,  
The virgins of youth and morning bear?

Does spring hide its joy  
When buds and Blossoms grow?  
Does the sower  
Sow by night,  
Or the plowman in darkness plow?

Blake makes the contrast with Innocence more explicit by writing "contrary" poems for Experience. The second "Chimney Sweeper" and "Holy Thursday" take the same situation as in Songs of Innocence - the existence of Innocence in a setting of Experience - but the emphasis is now on condemnation of the setting rather than joy and wonder at the persistence of Innocence:

"Is this a holy thing to see  
In a rich and fruitful land,  
Babes reduc'd to misery,  
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?  
Can it be a song of joy?  
And so many children poor?  
It is a land of poverty!

The whole land is infected by the misery it tacitly condones:  
"it is eternal winter there".

Now the "Nurse's Song" is no longer a willing acquiescence in the general happiness, but a cry of terror at the thought of the inevitable corruption which must overtake the children - or perhaps has already overtaken them:

"When the voices of children are heard on the green  
And whisp'rings are in the dale,  
The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,  
My face turns green and pale."

No longer may the children "play till the light fades away"; now they are remorselessly told of their fate:

"Your spring & your day are wasted in play,  
And your winter and night in disguise."

In contrast with the joyful mingling on the "Echoing Green" the adult is divided from the child. The unity of nature is irretrievably broken. Even the child is no longer necessarily innocent:

"Helpless, naked, piping loud:  
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my father's hands,  
Striving against my swadling bands,  
Bound and weary I thought best  
To sulk upon my mother's breast."

In the second "Cradle Song" (which was in fact never engraved) Blake uses the word 'beguiles' in a new sense applicacable only to Experience to show how the childhood of Experience differs from that of Innocence. In Innocence:

"Infant smiles are his own smiles,  
Heaven & earth to peace beguiles."

In Experience, where God never "became a little child":

"Infant wiles & infant smiles  
Heaven & Earth of peace beguiles."

Experience presents its contrasting version of "The Divine Image", the God which is man. In Innocence,

Mercy has a human heart,  
 Pity a human face,  
 And Love the human form divine,  
 And Peace the human dress."

In Experience, the virtues of Innocence are replaced by Cruelty, Jealousy, Terror, and Secrecy - the attributes of Urizen, the God of the "Satanic Mills":

"The Human Dress is forged Iron,  
 The Human Form a fiery Forge,  
 The Human Face a Furnace seal'd  
 The Human Heart its hungry Gorge."

The virtues of Innocence - mercy, pity, meekness, humility - must inevitably be vicious in a world which contains cruelty and suffering; love and joy must not be asked to exist in the face of misery:

"Pity would be no more  
 If we did not make somebody Poor;  
 And Mercy no more could be  
 If all were as happy as we.

And mutual fear brings peace,  
 Till the selfish loves increase."

Here Blake denounces an argument which was, and is, put forward in all seriousness by some thinkers. Mankind is tricked into believing in these virtues and into accepting a world of such misery by being offered a false promise of heaven:

"that sweet golden clime  
 Where the traveller's journey is done:

Where the Youth pined away with desire,  
 And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow  
 Arise from their graves, and aspire  
 Where my Sun-flower wishes to go."

The realm of Innocence is in Songs of Innocence mainly that of childhood, but no discussion of Innocence and Experience would be complete without a consideration of sexual love, which is treated at length in Songs of Experience. Experience

remembers with longing the free, unbounded love of Innocence:

While the Lilly white shall in Love delight,  
Nor a thorn, nor a threat, stain her beauty bright.

Shame, first born in Thel, was unknown to Innocence:

Are not the joys of morning sweeter  
Than the joys of night?  
And are the vigorous joys of youth  
Ashamed of the light? 1

Now, in Experience, love is chained and thwarted by the  
"mind-forged manacles" of legal marriage and conventional  
morality, which must stifle an existing love and thwart all  
hope for a new one:

Why should I be bound to thee,  
O my lovely myrtle tree? 2

I went to the Garden of Love,  
And saw what I never had seen:  
A Chapel was built in the midst,  
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,  
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;  
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,  
That so many sweet flowers bore;

And I saw it was filled with graves,  
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;  
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,  
And binding with briars my joys & desires.

Natural desires, if not deliberately thwarted by society and  
religion (for Urizen is the sterile Nobodaddy), are rejected  
by Experience out of the same fear first felt by Thel:

Then the morn blushed rosy red;  
I dried my tears, & arm'd my fears  
With ten thousand shields and spears.

Love in Experience, the garden bred rose, is bound to perish:

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1. Notebook, 1793
  2. Notebook, 1793

"O Rose, thou art sick!  
 The invisible worm  
 That flies in the night,  
 In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed  
 Of crimson joy:  
 And his dark secret love  
 Does thy life destroy."

Having seen so many contrasts and contraries between the states of Innocence and Experience, what are we to understand of the relationship between them? Does Blake mean us to accept that Innocence is wholly good, and Experience wholly bad, and that man would have been happier, had it been possible, existing forever in the green valleys of Innocence rather than in the walled gardens and midnight streets of Experience?

A casual glance would accept this interpretation, but if one examines Blake's other works and the final group of the Songs of Experience a different view seems nearer the truth.

Although it is difficult to decide whether Blake always carried his opinions over unchanged from one book to the next, it is significant that in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Blake maintains that both the opposing classes of men are necessary for existence, and so are the opposing attributes of reason and passion, love and hate, good and evil. Does he mean the "Two Contrary States of the Human Soul" to be likewise both necessary? In Vala Blake classes Experience and Wisdom together (Innocence, however delightful, is admittedly connected with ignorance, since Blake does not make the distinction that Swedenborg did between the naive innocence of children and the wise innocence of adults) and Wisdom is surely desirable, even though the cost of it may be high:

What is the price of Experience? do men buy it for a song?  
 Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No, it is bought with  
 the price  
 Of all that a man hath, his house, his wife, his children.<sup>1</sup>

In Vala also Urizen and Luvah are reconciled - (Luvah, here "the Prince of Love", wears a crown of thorns, while the Lamb of God wears Luvah's robe) - both were to blame for the separation of reason and passion. Urizen, as we shall see later, appears to have been moved to evil less by will than by compulsion. Is Experience then to be considered a necessary, although unhappy, stage of man's development?

Taking into consideration the later works, and from a study of the songs which were transferred from Innocence to Experience, it appears that this was indeed Blake's belief. "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found", for example, describe a mystical state unlike either Experience or Innocence. It is a state of joy and universal love, but the conflict and misery which have preceded the joy preclude Innocence, which is destroyed by conflict. Now the conflict has been resolved and the evils overcome; Blake here imagines that the transcendent state of Jerusalem can be achieved. In "Night," which was transferred to Songs of Experience for a short time, Blake describes the means by which this state is to be brought about:

Wrath, by his meekness,  
 And by his health, sickness  
 Is driven away  
 From our immortal day<sup>1</sup>.

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1. FZ, N.2nd, ll.37-39.

This is reminiscent of the Proverbs of Hell, which are almost a prose version of Songs of Experience: "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom". This idea is expanded in The Book of Los:

"But Covet was poured full,  
 Envy fed with fat of lambs,  
 Wrath with lion's gore,  
 Wantonness lull'd to sleep  
 With the virgin's lute  
 Or sated with her love;

Till Covet broke his locks & bars  
 And slept with open doors;  
 Envy sung at the rich man's feast;  
 Wrath was follow'd up and down  
 By a little ewe lamb,  
 And Wantonness on his own true love  
 Begot a giant race."

"Excess" is essentially passion - more especially the type of passion condemned by reason - and it is passion which must drive out the evils of Experience; the meekness of Innocence is not only ineffectual but itself positively evil under such circumstances. Only by excess can the cold sterility of Experience be overcome: "The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction".

In "The Tiger" Blake illustrates the passion which is to reconcile the two contraries. The tremendous anvil-like beat of the verse leaves no doubt as to the strength of the passion - the tiger is indeed a tiger of wrath, he is energy itself. And the tiger is vital for Jerusalem, along with its contrary, the lamb:

"When the stars threw down their spears,  
 And water'd heaven with their tears,  
 Did he smile his work to see?  
 Did he who made the Lamb make thee?"

← This, with other of the songs, also recalls another prophesy of Jerusalem, the heavenly city on earth:  
 "the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them".<sup>1</sup>

(Such a reference helps to make it clear that Blake, even before his so-called conversion to Christianity, condemned only man's interpretation of Christ's teaching, not the teaching itself.)

"The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" and perhaps also "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" offer the same vision, the two companion poems showing the renewal of that unity in nature which was characteristic of Innocence and destroyed by Experience;

"Then they followed  
 Where the vision led,  
 And saw their sleeping child  
 Among tygers wild.

To this day they dwell  
 In a lonely dell;  
 Nor fear the wolfish howl  
 Nor the lions' growl."

"The Voice of the Ancient Bard" is a general greeting to the new world.

The final poem of Songs of Experience - "To Tirzah" - was written several years later than the other songs and this means that it may be permissible to regard it as Blake's summing up of the two contrary states. It is a difficult poem to understand, but it seems to imply a new, regenerate world where:

"Whate'er is Born of Mortal Birth  
 Must be consumed with the Earth  
 To rise from Generation free:"

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1. Isaiah, ch. XI, v.

Tirzah is the entity, sometimes city, which Blake later uses as an antithesis to Jerusalem, and one of its symbolic meanings, which seems to apply here, is repression. This is a part of the world of Experience, which must be overthrown, but which is a necessary part of existence before redemption is possible:

"Thou, Mother of my Mortal part,  
With cruelty didst mould my Heart,  
And with false self-deceiving tears,  
Didst bind my Nostrils, Eyes, & Ears:

Didst close my Tongue in senseless clay,  
And me to Mortal Life betray.  
The Death of Jesus set me free:  
Then what have I to do with thee?"

## CHAPTER II

### MAN AND GOD

'In future I am the determined advocate of Religion & Humility, the two bands of Society .

(Letter to Thomas Butts. 2nd October 1800).

..Tho' I have been very unhappy, I am so no longer.  
I am again Emerged into the light of day; I still  
& shall to Eternity Embrace Christianity and Adore him  
who is the Express image of God.

(Letter to Thomas Butts. 22nd November 1802).

God, formerly derided and abused as Nobodaddy and the creation of man's own warped mind, had become by the early 1800s an object of Blake's reverence. Does this indeed indicate a conversion (after great internal struggle)<sup>1</sup> to orthodox Christianity and the abandonment of the position taken up in Songs of Innocence and Experience and the early prophetic books, where God exists for man rather than man for God?

To assess the extent of any such conversion, one must trace through Blake's writings his views on the subject of a supreme being, and on those allied topics so important to any assessment of Christian thought—predestination, here taken to mean the fore-ordaining (for a Christian, almost inevitably by an omnipotence) of all that comes to pass, and free will,

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1. Blake's letter to Thomas Butts, Nov. 22nd 1802, mentions this struggle and the misery which it caused him to rethink his image of God.

man's power to direct his own actions without constraint by necessity or force. These topics are interrelated for Blake, and any conclusion which he may come to on one of them affects his position on the others.

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If we look first at Blake's comments on other authors, we can see very clearly his position around 1798. Lavater's Aphorisms on Man declare that man is a responsible agent, and Blake agrees with this, underlining part of Aphorism 44, which states:

"You can depend on no man, on no friend, but him who can depend on himself. He only who acts consequentially toward himself will act so toward others, and VICE VERSA."

It goes on to say that man has in some measure a freedom of action:

"Man is for ever the same; the same under every form, in all situations and relations that admit of free and unrestrained exertion. The same regard which you have for yourself, you have for others, for nature, for the invisible NUMEN, which you call God --- Who has witnessed one free and unconstrained act of yours, has witnessed all."

Not only has man freedom of action, but, says Lavater, with Blake in agreement, he can act in accordance with a purpose formed by himself and with the belief that his behaviour in this world will have some bearing on the next:

"Who can act or perform as if each work or action were the first, the last, and only one in his life, is great in his sphere." (Last three words deleted by Blake.)<sup>1</sup>

"Who becomes every day more sagacious, in observing his own faults, and the perfections of another, without either envying him or despairing of himself, is ready to mount the ladder on which angels ascend and descend."<sup>2</sup>

("Noble!" commented Blake in the margin.)

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1. Lav. 272

2. Lav. 279

He, who can at all times sacrifice pleasure to duty, approaches sublimity. 1

Man has it in his power to do good or evil, and an obligation to judge his own actions:

"There is none so bad to do the twentieth part of the evil he might, nor any so good as to do the tenth part of the good it is in his power to do. Judge of yourself by the good you might do and neglect --- and of others by the evil they might do and omit---- and your judgment will be poised between too much indulgence for yourself and too much severity on others." 2  
("Most Excellent!" wrote Blake.)

However, when Lavater makes his assessment of the power of God Blake is in total disagreement. Lavater believes that while man is responsible for himself, he may on occasion be subject to the saving grace of God:

"Him, who arrays malignity in good nature and treachery in familiarity, a miracle of Omnipotence alone can make an honest man." 3

In his marginal note Blake emphatically denies the possibility of such a miracle --- God also is subject to the laws of cause and effect:

"No Omnipotence can act against order."

If God acts, he does so in accordance with his own rules:

"God is in the lowest effects as well as in the highest causes; for he is become a worm that he may nourish the weak. For let it be remember'd that creation is God descending according to the weakness of man, for our Lord is the word of God & every thing on earth is the word of God & in its essence is God." 4

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Blake has more to say on the subject of cause and effect in a long passage at the end of Lavater's book --- a passage which is very hard to understand. He seems to disagree not

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1. Lav. 285
  2. Lav. 377
  3. Lav. 426.
  4. Blake's note on Lav. 630

only with Lavater but with most philosophers who state that events on the mental as well as the material plane are subject to the laws of cause and effect. Blake seems to be stating, among other things, that very often what appears to be a causal sequence is in fact only a semblance of such, and that the sole true cause of events connected with any particular man is that man's "leading propensity". Only actions can have causes, and only events brought about in accordance with a man's "leading propensity" are true actions: an omission of or restraint of an action (whether pertaining to oneself or to another) is not an action, and does not have a true cause on any level above the material, even though at superficial consideration it may not only seem to have a cause, but may indeed have what is normally considered to be an obvious material cause.

Certainly this passage is very incomplete as an account of Blake's ideas on the subject,<sup>1</sup> but it is worth quoting again as a comparison with the works of Swedenborg which Blake annotated in the next year or two:

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1. For further comments on the topic of cause and effect, see the notes which Blake made on Bacon's essay "Of Atheism" in about 1798:
- Bacon: "I had rather believe all the fables and the legend, and the Talmud, and the Alcoran than that this universal frame is without a mind: and, therefore, God never wrought miracle to convince atheism, because his ordinary works convince it.
- Blake: "The devil is the Mind of the Natural ~~Frame~~".  
 "There is no Such Thing as a Second Cause nor as a Natural Cause for any Thing in any Way. He who says there are Second Causes has already denied a First. The Word Cause is a foolish Word".
- See also M. Bk. 1st, PL.26. L.44-6:  
 "And every Natural Effect has a Spiritual Cause, and Not  
 A Natural; for a Natural Cause only seems; it is a Delusion  
 Of Ulro & a ratio of the perishing Vegetable Memory".

There is a strong objection to Lavater's principles (as I understand them) & that is He makes every thing originate in its accident; he makes the vicious propensity not only a leading feature of the man, but the stamina on which all his virtues grow. But as I understand Vice it is a Negative. It does not signify what the laws of Kings & Priests have call'd Vice; we who are philosophers ought not to call the Staminial Virtues of Humanity by the same name that we call the omissions of intellect springing from poverty.

Every man's leading propensity ought to be call'd his leading Virtue & his good Angel. But the Philosophy of Causes & Consequences misled Lavater as it has all his Coteremporaries. Each thing is its own cause & its own effect. Accident is the omission of act in self & the hindering of act in another; this is Vice, but all Act is Virtue. To hinder another is not an act; it is the contrary; it is a restraint on action both in ourselves & in the person hinder'd, for he who hinders another omits his own duty at the same time.

Murder is Hindering Another.

Theft is Hindering Another.

Backbiting, Undermining, Circumventing, & whatever is Negative is vice. But the origin of this mistake in Lavater & his coteremporaries is, They suppose that Woman's Love is Sin; in consequence all the Loves & Graces with them are Sin.

Unfortunately, it is in The True Christian Religion that Swedenborg deals in detail with the question of free will, and the allied topics of divine omnipotence and the origin of evil; and if Blake did possess and annotate a copy of this work it is no longer extant. However, Blake must have been

acquainted with Swedenborg's views on these matters, which are touched on in places in The Wisdom of Angels concerning Divine Providence, annotated by Blake in about 1790, and to a lesser extent in The Wisdom of Angels concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom.

Briefly, Swedenborg's views are as follows. There is no contradiction involved in the existence of both an omnipotent being and man in possession of a free will. Without free will man would be on a level no higher than the animals. God is omnipotent and possessed of foreknowledge but nevertheless cannot act in an arbitrary fashion: his actions are, by his own will, governed by his own divine law which controls all planes of existence - celestial, spiritual and material. Thus, on the material level, the law of cause and effect ensures man's freedom, protecting him from arbitrary interference by a higher power. Divine law makes man responsible for his own actions.

The next part of Swedenborg's doctrine may be compared with the passage by Blake quoted above. Swedenborg holds that matters or events on a spiritual plane correspond to matters on the natural or material plane as cause corresponds to effect. In spiritual matters man is held in equilibrium between the forces of good and evil, and may choose between them; since God alone is responsible for good, man's ability to choose to do good comes from God: however, for free will to exist it is necessary that man should believe that the ability comes from himself. The ability to choose evil, on the other hand, comes from man himself - God can have nothing to do with evil. When it comes to an ultimate salvation,

man has in himself no power to achieve this, and yet it is impossible for man to be saved without his voluntary co-operation. Thus man "reciprocally conjoins himself with the Lord", out of love for him, and thus all freedom comes from love:

All freedom is of love, for what man loves, this he does freely, hence also all freedom is of the will, for what man loves, this he also wills; and because love and the will make the life of man, so also does freedom." 1

Events normally ascribed to chance are all part of the divine will in its everyday manifestation:

There is no such thing as chance; and apparent accident or fortune is Providence in the ultimate of order, in which all things are relatively inconstant." 2

As might be expected when dealing with this very difficult doctrine, Swedenborg is not entirely consistent, and there occur many passages which imply that man's freedom of choice is a mere illusion:

"The Divine Providence is universal, universal because it is in the very least things, so that not even a hair falls from the head, that is, that there is nothing so minute, that it is not foreseen and provided for accordingly." 3

This is unmistakably a doctrine of predestination, and Blake marks several such passages and comments on them in The Wisdom of Angels concerning Divine Providence. When Swedenborg talks of man being enrolled in either Heaven or Hell according to whether or not he submits to being led by God, Blake asks, "What is Enrolling but Predestination?"

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1. New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine, par.85
  2. Arcana Caelestia, par. 6493.
  3. Arcana Caelestia, par. 2694

When Swedenborg talks of men who "manifestly see the Divine Providence, and from it their final Portion, which is that they are to be in Hell", Blake remarks, "What could Calvin say more than is Said in this Number? Final Portion is Predestination." Later still, after a passage in which Swedenborg explains that death is a continuation of life "with this Difference, that then Man cannot be reformed," Blake makes quite clear his abhorrence of the Calvinist doctrine and Swedenborg's modified version:

"Predestination after this life is more Abominable than Calvin's, & Swedenborg is Such a Spiritual Predestinarian. ---- Cursed Folly!"

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So much for Blake's comments on the thoughts of other writers concerning an omnipotent being and man's freedom of action. If we turn now to his own writings we can see how Blake gradually changes, from cursing Swedenborg for ascribing to man a predictable future, to himself describing in detail an all-powerful and despotic God and a humanity predestined from before birth till after the Last Judgment.

The debate on the nature of eternal life starts in Visions of the Daughters of Albion when the tyrannous Bromion asks,

"And is there not one law for both the lion and the ox?  
And is there not eternal fire and eternal chains  
To bind the phantoms of existence from eternal life?"

Oothoon denies this view of existence: man, she replies, is not formed in the image of Urizen, and is not destined for Hell:

Does not the worm erect a pillar in the mouldering  
 church yard  
 And a palace of eternity in the jaws of the hungry grave?  
 Over his porch these words are written: 'Take thy bliss,  
 O Man!  
 And sweet shall be thy taste, & sweet thy infant joys,  
 renew!'

But Oothoon's words are at variance with her own miserable state: does Blake mean to imply that man is responsible for his own destiny or merely that God may be merciful? Or is he at this point undecided on the matter?

In Tiriell God is "he that leadeth all", a being obviously superior to Tiriell (the Ur-Urizen), and the phrase is a conventional one implying a fairly conventional God as a figure of destiny.

In Songs of Innocence & Experience there are two Gods. The true Supreme Being ("he that leadeth all" in Tiriell) is called God by the poet or Piper and is easily distinguished from the being whom fallen man also calls God, the being later given by Blake the name of Urizen. The true God, undoubtedly not Urizen, appears "like his father in white" to lead home the little boy lost; he is the creator of the lamb and the tiger; he is the maker and protector of man, "his child and care". This is very like God the Father in orthodox Christianity, the benevolent protector of man and the lord of creation.

But God in Songs of Innocence and Experience, besides being the benevolent creator and protector, is also a sternly moral figure, rewarding the good and, by implication, punishing the wicked (even among little boys):

And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
 He'd have God for his father, & never want joy.  
 And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,  
 And got with our bags & our brushes to work.  
 Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;  
 So if all do their duty they need not fear harm."

The reward of heaven in the after-life is promised, this time without condition, in "The Little Black Boy" - the same fairly conventional afterlife promised also in "Night" and reminiscent, as we have seen, of Isaiah's prophecy of heaven-on-earth at the birth of Messiah. Blake seems still to believe in a future heaven for man, in spite of the misleading promises of Urizen and his priests of a false heaven "where existence shall never come". It becomes clear that although Urizen has on occasions usurped many of the functions and attributes of God, God still exists and still fulfills these same functions by means of the same attributes. The false God exists side by side with the true God, and man must distinguish between the two.

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But in Blake's early works this God, though present, remains in the background, the main framework for thought being the Doctrine of Contraries, in which the prominent consideration is the dual character of man himself in a world of dualities. (Perhaps, having adopted this framework, it was inevitable that Blake would portray two Gods, but it is possible that he did not consciously realise that he was doing so.) It is through a development of the Doctrine of Contraries, in considering an aspect of the theory of Spectre

and Emanation, that Blake comes to discuss explicitly the existence of a <sup>supreme</sup> being. For eventually he must have realised that God, as a being in some way separate from and superior to man, is present in the most vehemently anti-orthodox parts of the world of Innocence and Experience. Urizen may be derived from man and exalted as God, but he is a usurper throughout and even when reason is reduced to its proper significance among man's several attributes (or Urizen takes his true place among the Zoas), a supreme being remains - and it is not Man. God is not identical with Man, nor is he derived from him.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell has established the necessary existence of two classes of men, while such poems as "The Mental Traveller", "My Spectre around me night and day", "The Crystal Cabinet" and many of the Songs of Experience deal also with duality in discussing the inevitability of the war of the sexes. In "The Mental Traveller" this conflict is not only inevitable but in some way cyclic, setting the pattern for life in the characters' future or even, after regeneration or reincarnation, for a future lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Men and women seem compelled or destined to play allotted parts: from birth onwards their lives progress on courses already indicated by their essential nature, whether they are male or female, prolific or devouring. This inevitability,

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1. In Europe and The Song of Los the cyclic theme recurs in the history of the world. Also Orc, the dying god, leads a cyclic existence reminiscent of Dionysus and other deities symbolic of seasonal birth and rebirth.

this suggestion of destiny, introduces openly the age-old question of predestination and free will, which for Blake involves (in turn) the concept of fate and the existence of a supreme deity. As stated earlier, these topics are intertwined in Blake's work, and any comment on one of them affects his position on the others.

Thel, with its portrayal of the being in Innocence required in due course to pass on to the life of Experience, questions primarily the purpose of existence. All life, even the lowliest, has a purpose: "we live not for ourselves". This purpose is ordained by "he, that loves the lowly", the God of Innocence, but it is apparently a purpose which can on occasion be evaded. Thel rejects the challenge of Experience and flees back to the vale of Har, the realm of Innocence which has persisted against the normal course of events to become ignorance. In behaving thus, Thel presumably avoids her destiny: if Thel can do this, can Man? We do not know Thel's ultimate fate, and thus another question is left open for the moment.<sup>1</sup>

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1. This question is answered in FZ. See Ch.III, "The Relationship between Man and the Universe". Compare Thel's lament with that of the Daughters of Beulah in FZ, N.4th, ll.258-262:

Behold  
We perish & shall not be found unless thou grant a place  
In which we may be hidden under the shadow of wings.  
For if we, who are but for a time & who pass away in winter,  
Behold these wonders of Eternity, we shall consume.

In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell the Angel lets Blake view his "eternal lot", "which will soon appear when the darkness passes away", but Blake reveals it to be a mere "phantasy" caused by "metaphysics". He may not at this state know what man's fate is, but he is certain that it does not involve the Heaven and Hell of conventional religion, nor even that described by Swedenborg, and the attainment of one or the other does not depend on the extent to which man conforms to conventional morality - namely, the ten commandments, which Swedenborg insisted on as vital<sup>1</sup> - for "Jesus was all virtue, & acted from impulse, not from rules".

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Having posed the questions, Blake, in his next stage of thought, attempts to answer them. God exists, but Blake decides that man is responsible for himself. In America Washington speaks of generations of men destined for sorrow - by other men. In Songs of Experience too it is man himself who moulds his own fate, and that of his fellow man. In "London", the infant is doomed to misery from birth, but it is man who dooms him - perhaps unnecessarily, for the manacles are "mind-forg'd".

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infant's cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

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1. In The True Christian Religion and The Doctrine of Life for the New Jerusalem Swedenborg goes into immense detail as to the exact "external and internal senses" of the Decalogue, explaining each Law in its natural, spiritual and celestial senses.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry  
 Every black'ning Church appalls;  
 And the hapless Soldier's sigh  
 Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
 How the youthful Harlot's curse  
 Blasts the new born Infant's tear,  
 And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse."

The child of "Infant Sorrow" is born "like a fiend hid in a cloud", and is rebellious from birth. The world of Experience is a necessary part of man's existence, but under the domination of Urizen man has perverted it to force children into a life of unnatural misery. There is, at this point in Blake's work, no suggestion that God is responsible.

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In Vala or The Four Zoas, however, Blake starts to comment more directly on the subject of predestination, and comes to a different conclusion. God is ever-present in this work and not as the background figure of most of the Songs ("The Little Boy Lost" is a notable exception) but one who now affects directly the actions of immortals and man. In Blake's later revisions of the original manuscript the appearances of this God becomes more frequent and his personality more rigidly defined. Urizen is led by "the Divine Hand"<sup>1</sup> and is, according to the Shadowy Female,

"From dark abysses of the times remote fated to be  
 The Sorrower of Eternity."<sup>2</sup>

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1. FZ, N.6th, A.176 & 282.
  2. FZ, N.8th, A.150-1.

He is predestined - Blake does not use Swedenborg's argument that God has foreknowledge but not the power to shape events: the characters in Vala are predestined and even on occasion directly manipulated by God in his aspect of "The Saviour", a benevolent miracle worker. Los and Enitharmon "Wondering with love and Awe" "felt the divine hand upon them".<sup>1</sup>

"Then wondrously the Starry Wheels felt the divine hand. Limit Was put to Eternal Death."<sup>2</sup>

The Daughters of Beulah, (lesser Immortals), believe that without the direct intervention of the Saviour they cannot survive,<sup>3</sup> and man himself is in a similar position: the body of the Eternal Man "was redeem'd to be permanent thro' Mercy Divine".<sup>4</sup>

Blake is very explicit on this point: without the action of God in his aspect of "The Saviour" or "Providence Divine" Albion or Man would have been dead for ever. Urizen, too, is guided by God working through Urizen's own will for his own good:

"And now he came-----  
By Providence Divine conducted, not bent from his  
own will  
Lest Death Eternal should be the result, for the  
Will cannot be violated."<sup>5</sup>

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1. FZ, N.8th, ll.23.
  2. FZ, N.4th, ll.275-6.
  3. FZ, N.4th, ll.259-262.
  4. FZ, N.9th, ll.357.
  5. FZ, N.6th, ll.281-283.

This is reminiscent of Swedenborg's view (already stated) that man's ability to choose to do good comes from God, but it is necessary for free will that man should believe this ability comes from himself: free will is for Swedenborg not an actuality but a mere explanation of psychological processes derived from man's distorted methods of observation. Now, in Vala, God intends man to achieve eternal life, and he acts to bring about this intention:

Thy pity is from the foundation of the World, & thy  
Redemption  
Begun Already in Eternity."<sup>1</sup>

"Life Eternal  
Depends alone upon the Universal hand, & not in us  
Is aught but death In individual weakness, sorrow  
& pain".<sup>2</sup>

The Saviour works to re-unite fallen man into one body and soul. All actions are part of the divine plan<sup>3</sup>, and any which seem about to conflict with it are subtly altered by the Divine being himself in one of his personae:

"For the Divine Lamb, Even Jesus who is the Divine Vision,  
Permitted all, lest Man should fall into Eternal Death;  
For when Luvah sunk down, himself put on the robes of  
blood  
Lest the state call'd Luvah should cease; & the Divine  
Vision  
Walked in robes of blood till he who slept should awake".

This is a curious idea - that God's plan had somehow gone wrong, and that he intervened directly in his persona of Jesus to put

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1. FZ, N.8th, N.243-4.
  2. FZ, N.8th, N.197-9.
  3. See Blake's letter to Thomas Butts, 11th Sept.1801:  
"All Distress inflicted by Heaven is a Mercy."  
Also letter to Butts, 16th Aug.1803, when Blake concludes that the incident leading to his famous indictment for sedition "was suffer'd to Clear up some doubts, & to give opportunity to those whom I doubted to clear themselves of all imputation,----- I must now express to you my conviction that all is come from the spiritual World for Good, & not for Evil".

things right; Blake says that he acquired it from the Bible, but does not say where.<sup>1</sup>

The God of "Vala", then, is a benevolent despot. He predestines man for good, but the predestination is perhaps not total, for if necessary God intervenes on a spiritual level to prevent man from damning himself. (This is, I believe, the interpretation on a human level of Blake's cosmic myth: the misdeeds of Luvah or Urizen—(Man's passion or reason, and the wrongdoings of the other cosmic beings, which are less easy to interpret as aspects of human psychology, are prevented from reaching their conclusions when God inclines man in the right direction.)

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In Milton Blake reassesses the situation and the picture becomes quite different. Instead of the two contrary states of the soul, and hence the two classes of men that Blake has accepted up to this point, he now divides the human race into three: "the Two Contraries & the Reasoning Negative".<sup>2</sup> Los describes their distinctions and their fate at the Last Vintage:

"The Elect is one Class: You  
Shall bind them separate: they cannot Believe in Eternal Life  
Except by Miracle & a New Birth. The other two Classes,  
The Reprobate who never cease to Believe, and the Redeem'd  
Who live in doubts & fears perpetually tormented by the Elect,  
These you shall bind in a twin-bundle for the Consummation:  
But the Elect must be saved (from) fires of Eternal Death,

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1. See Blake's notes on Watson's Apology for the Bible, p.9: "The Bible tells me that the plan of Providence was Subverted at the Fall of Adam & that it was not restored till Christ". Blake knew the works of Jacob Boehme, and a similar idea is found in Of the Incarnation, trans. J. Sparrow, 1659, Vol. i, Chs. 3,5,11, and in Of Christs Testament, trans. Sparrow. 1652, Vol.i, Ch.1.
  2. M, Bk. 1st., Pl. 5, ll. 14.

To be formed into the Churches of Beulah that they  
 destroy not the Earth.  
 For in every Nation & every Family the Three Classes  
 are born,  
 And in every Species of Earth, Metal, Tree, Fish,  
 Bird & Beast. <sup>1</sup>

These three classes of man, divided according to their beliefs  
 as to Eternal life, exist everywhere and, like the earlier  
 two contrary classes, cannot be reconciled on this plane of  
 existence. These states are "fix'd"<sup>2</sup> and can never be altered  
 until the Last Vintage is past.

And it is God's decree, rather than man's folly, which  
 Blake now holds to be responsible for creating the classes of  
 the Elect and the Reprobate. The Elect, those in the state  
 of Satan,<sup>3</sup> are "Elect from before the foundation of the World"<sup>4</sup>  
 and the Reprobate are "form'd To destruction from the mother's  
 womb"<sup>4</sup>. This is very like the predestination which Blake  
 earlier abhorred in the works of Swedenborg. In fact, it  
 goes further: Swedenborg did his best to argue the case for  
 God's mere foreknowledge of events rather than man's predest-  
 ination from birth. Now Blake declares in favour of predest-  
 ination "from before the foundation of the World."

To what fate are these classes of men predestined?  
 Blake is not dealing with their fate on a material level:

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1. M, Bk. 1st, Pl. 25, ll. 32-41
  2. M, Bk. 1st. Pl. 5, ll. 13
  3. M, Bk. 1st, Pl. 11, ll. 18-21.  
 See also Bk. 1st, Pl. 7, ll. 6-18 for a description of  
 the characteristics of Satan.  
 Also J, Ch. 2, Pl. 42, ll. 29-31; Pl. 51, ll. 67, and Pl. 52  
 throughout.
  4. M, Bk. 1st, Pl. 7, ll. 2-4.

Every Class is determinate:  
 But not by Natural, but by Spiritual power alone, Because  
 The Natural power continually seeks & tends to Destruction,  
 Ending in Death, which would of itself be Eternal Death,<sup>1</sup>  
 And all are Class'd by Spiritual & not by Natural power.

Spiritual power must surely deal with spiritual life,  
 before and after death. It is on a spiritual level that  
 the Elect, at the awakening of Albion, the regeneration of  
 Man, shall realise the fate which in some sense they have  
 brought upon themselves by their beliefs and yet to which they  
 have always been fated.

"And the Elect shall say to the Redeem'd: 'We behold  
 it is of Divine  
 Mercy alone, of Free Gift and Election that we live:  
 Our Virtues & Cruel Goodnesses have deserv'd Eternal  
 Death!"<sup>2</sup>

Thus God, having ordained their fate, lets them live, and  
 even reforms them.<sup>3</sup>

Blake's Last Judgment or Consummation is not the  
 traditional, final assignation of souls to their ultimate  
 destinations. The Reprobate "who never cease to believe"  
 and the Redeem'd are destined for burning, but no-one is  
 destined for hell, even if it exists.<sup>4</sup> The "destruction"  
 is in some way a temporary one through which all men must  
 pass: even the Elect are created continually<sup>5</sup> and, though  
 Blake does not say how, are eventually able to be punished  
 for their spiritual sins and achieve Eternal life. Everyone  
 has a chance of Heaven-Milton (perhaps surprisingly) is one  
 of the Elect<sup>6</sup> but comes from Eden where he lives with the

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1. M, Bk. 1st, Pl. 26, ll. 39-43.
  2. M, Bk. 1st, Pl. 13, ll. 32-4.
  3. See M, Bk. 1st, Pl. 25, ll. 38:  
 "the Elect must be saved (from) fires of Eternal Death".
  4. See Blake's letter to John Linnell, 7th June 1825:  
 "Every death is an improvement of the State of the Departed".
  5. See M, Bk. 1st, Pl. 5, ll. 11-12.
  6. See M, Bk. 1st, Pl. 23, ll. 56-7.

hosts of heaven. It is only during one phase of existence that this mysterious predestined categorisation of men has any importance. Ultimately, God has his way, but he is a benevolent despot.

It is curious to note that Blake's God in "Milton" resembles closely Milton's God in "Paradise Lost", a tyrannical ruler of heaven with a Son to do his more mundane work, surrounded by hordes of lesser heavenly beings who spend their time feasting and singing. As Milton's God, so Blake's is defied by Satan and his laws perverted,<sup>1</sup> but Blake, like Milton, one of his most notable poetic influences, cannot make such a God a sympathetic character.

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By the time that Blake came to write Jerusalem, the last of the Prophetic Books, in which he incorporated much earlier material, he had, in Milton, accepted the conclusion that man's ultimate fate is predestined by God, and the problem which now concerns him most deeply is that of punishment for sin. Sin, in the view of most people, is an offence against God, but if God ultimately controls man's destiny how can any particular deed be an offence against God? In a letter of 1807 Blake writes? "We are all subject to Error: Who shall say, Except the Natural Religionists, that we are not all subject to Crime?" Blake's answer to the problem is to look on sin in a new way. Since material existence is fairly unimportant, man's behaviour on earth has very little to do with his spiritual state:

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1. See M, Bk. 1st, Pl. 9, ll. 21-25.

By this it will<sup>be</sup> seen that I do not consider either the Just or the Wicked to be in a Supreme State, but to be every one of them States of the Sleep which the Soul may fall into<sup>n</sup> its deadly dreams of Good & Evil when it leaves Paradise following the Serpent.<sup>1</sup>

The only aspect of man's behaviour on earth which is a true sin is when man himself punishes another for the supposed sin of offence against earthly rules. Vengeance is the only real sin, and the only one which cannot be forgiven:

"Injury the Lord heals, but Vengeance cannot be healed.<sup>2</sup>  
 "And the appearance of a Man was seen in the Furnaces Saving those who have sinned from the punishment of the Law  
 (In pity of the punisher whose state is eternal death)  
 And keeping them from Sin by the mild counsels of his love."<sup>3</sup>

In Jerusalem Albion or Man regains Jerusalem, which is, among other things, the state of mercy and forgiveness:

"Jerusalem then stretch'd her hand toward the Moon & spoke:  
 "Why should Punishment Weave the Veil with Iron Wheels of War  
 When Forgiveness might it Weave with Wings of Cherubim?"<sup>4</sup>

God now appears mainly in his persona of Jesus or the Lamb, the Divine Humanity, loving and merciful,<sup>5</sup> reminiscent of the being portrayed in Songs of Innocence:

"That One Man  
 We call Jesus the Christ; and he in us, and we in him  
 Live in perfect harmony in Eden, the land of life,  
 Giving, receiving, and forgiving each other's trespasses.  
 He is the Good shepherd, he is the Lord and master,  
 He is the Shepherd of Albion, he is all in all,  
 In Eden, in the garden of God, and in heavenly Jerusalem."<sup>6</sup>

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1. VLJ, p.92.
  2. J, Ch.1, Pl.25, l.5.
  3. J, Ch.2, Pl.35, l.5-7.
  4. J, Ch.1, Pl.22, l.33-5.
  5. However, the Spectre of Los still looks on God as a tyrant. J, Ch.1, Pl.10, l.46-9.
  6. J, Ch.2, Pl.38, l.19-25.

Los - man as poet - prophet and hence agent of reform -  
realises that punishment is no way to deal with evil:

"What shall I do? what could I do if I could find  
these Criminals?  
I could not dare to take vengeance, for all things  
are so constructed  
And builded by the Divine hand that the sinner shall  
always escape,  
And he who takes vengeance alone is the criminal of  
Providence.  
If I should dare to lay my finger on a grain of sand  
In way of vengeance, I punish the already punish'd. O whom  
Should I pity if I pity not the sinner who is gone astray?  
O Albion, if thou takest vengeance, if thou revengest  
thy wrongs,  
Thou art for ever lost! What can I do to hinder the Sons  
Of Albion from taking vengeance? or how shall I them  
perswade?" 1

When dealing with sin Los, as regenerate man, learns to take  
on the attributes of God:

"The blow of his Hammer is Justice, the swing of his  
Hammer Mercy,  
The forces of Los's Hammer is eternal Forgiveness;" 2

This is the attitude towards vengeance which Blake was  
to hold for the rest of his life, and reassertment of his  
conviction plays a very large part in his later writings.

"If you forgive one another your Trespases, so shall  
Jehovah forgive you, That he himself may dwell among  
you; but if you Avenge, you Murder the Divine Image,  
& he cannot dwell among you; because you Murder him  
he arises again, & you deny that he is Arisen, & are  
blind to Spirit." 3

The Christian trumpets loud proclaim  
Thro' all the World in Jesus' name  
Mutual forgiveness of each Vice,  
And oped the Gates of Paradise. 4

Whatever Book is for Vengeance for Sin & whatever Book  
is Against the Forgiveness of Sins is not of the Father,  
but of Satan the Accuser & Father of Hell." 5

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1. J, Ch.2, Pl. 31, ll.29-38.
  2. J, Ch.4, Pl. 88, ll.49-50.
  3. Supplementary passage to Ev. G.
  4. Supplementary passage to Ev.G.  
See also For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise, Prologue.
  5. Note on Illustrations to Dante.

Does Blake's final assessment of God amount to a tyrant? Does he, by separating God from man, and making him all powerful and thereby ultimately responsible for man's deeds, recant his earlier denunciations of the "Accuser, who is God of this World"? In the notes which he made, shortly before his death in 1827, on Dr. Thornton's translation of the Lord's Prayer, Blake, while making it clear that he is still firmly convinced that God is almighty, reaffirms his earlier rebellious stand against orthodox Christianity.

(Thornton) "What is the Will of God we are ordered to obey?.. Let us consider whose Will it is....It is the Will of our Maker....It is finally the Will of Him, who is uncontrollably powerful....."

(Blake) "So you See That God is just such a Tyrant as Augustus Ceasar; & is not this Good & Learned & Wise & Classical?" 1

An almighty God, in Blake's opinion at any rate, does not misuse his authority. Blake may have become reconciled to the concept of a supreme God, but he is still on his guard against the workings of Urizen.

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1. See also Blake's version of the Lord's Prayer:  
 "Jesus, our Father, who art in thy heaven call'd by thy Name the Holy Ghost, Thy Kingdom on Earth is Not, nor thy Will done, but Satan's, who is God of this World, the Accuser. Let his Judgment be Forgiveness that he may be consum'd in his own shame.  
 Give us This Eternal Day our own right Bread by taking away Money or debtor Tax & Value or Price, as have all the Common among us. Every thing has as much right to Eternal Life as God, who is the Servant of Man. His Judgment shall be Forgiveness that he may be consum'd in his own shame.  
 Leave us not in Parsimoney, Satan's Kingdom; liberate us from the Natural Man & Kingdom.  
 For thine is the Kingdom & the Power & the Glory & not Ceasar's or Satan's. Amen."

### CHAPTER III

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND THE UNIVERSE.

Many suppose that before the Creation All was Solitude & Chaos. This is the most pernicious Idea that can enter the Mind, as it takes away all sublimity from the Bible & Limits All Existence to Creation & to Chaos, To the Time & Space fixed by the Corporeal Vegetative Eye, & leaves the Man who entertains such an Idea the habitation of Unbelieving demons. Eternity Exists, and All things in Eternity, Independent of Creation which was an act of Mercy. 1

Too much is often read into Blake's comment on Wordsworth's poetry:

"Natural Objects always did & now do weaken, deaden & obliterate Imagination in Me." 2

This does not mean that Blake did not observe and write about natural objects - for he did, at length and in great detail, and by no means only in his earliest poetry where he is influenced by and imitating Shakespeare and Spenser. His Prophetic Books, in which he summarises his beliefs and spiritual experiences for the benefit of mankind, are made more readable by their constant references to the real world.

For example, a passage such as the exuberant description of the ecstasy of the bound but youthful Orc in Vala, or the Four Zoas contains among the more symbolic imagery of gold, stars and eagles a more mundane description of

'summertime when bees sing round the heath  
Where the herds low after the shadow & after the  
water spring.' 3

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1. VLJ. P.91.
  2. Notes on Wordsworth's Poems, P.44
  3. FZ, N.5th, A.136-7.

Even Jerusalem, which contains fewest such references and is perhaps for this reason the least readable of the Prophetic Books, comes near to earth on occasions, as when the dogs of Leutha "lap the water of the trembling Thames"<sup>1</sup> or Urizen's horses "snuff up the winds of desolation."<sup>2 3</sup>

The two short works entitled "There is no Natural Religion" show Blake's attitude towards the material world before he wrote the Prophetic Books; for him at this stage of early maturity in his poetry the material world does exist in some way independent of man: it may be defined perhaps as "that which can be perceived by means of the senses" - however, man is not a creature limited to sense.

"lv. None could have other than natural or organic thoughts if he had none but organic perceptions.

v. Man's desires are limited by his perceptions, none can desire what he has not perciev'd.

vl. The desires & perceptions of man, untaught by any thing but organs of sense, must be limited to objects of sense.-----

1. Man's perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception; he percieves more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover."<sup>4</sup>

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1. J, Ch.4, Pl. 83, l.83

2. J, Ch.3, Pl. 65, l.48

3. Blake's letters also comment frequently and approvingly on nature. See letters to Thomas Butts, 23rd Sept., 1800 and to John Linnell, 21st. Sept.1800, on the delights of sea-bathing.

Also letter to Butts, 22nd. Nov.1802:

"A Piece of Sea Weed serves for a Barometer; at (it) gets wet & dry as the weather gets so."

Also letter to Butts, 11th Sept.1801:

"I have now discover'd that without Nature before the painter's Eye, he can never produce anything in the walks of Natural Painting."

4. "There is no Natural Religion".

The world which Blake pictures in Songs of Innocence is the world which he could see around him, or at any rate its best aspects. The features which Blake chooses to describe are those which can be employed as symbols, but while the symbolic aspects are important, they are not quite all-important: the reader is just as conscious of the material aspect of the image and its existence as an earthly object. The Lamb may be Christ, but he is also recognisably a lamb such as Blake saw in the fields round London. The Sparrow, the Robin, the huntsmen of "The Schoolboy" impress the reader as being real creatures. The Echoing Green, the green woods, the schoolhouse, the sheep-covered hills where the children play, the "southern wild" of "The Little Black Boy", London - all are real places in a material world.

And Blake treats this material work in a fairly conventional Christian manner: that is, the world undeniably exists, but it is far less important than the world which is to come, the heaven which is man's reward for existing in a material form. "The Chimney Sweeper", "Night", "A Cradle Song", "The Little Black Boy" - all these poems talk of a recognisably Christian heaven, where

"angels, most heedful,  
Recieve each mild spirit,<sup>1</sup>  
New worlds to inherit."

From this realm the Heavenly Father on occasion descends to share or mourn over the experiences of his children, taking the form of earthly father or "infant small", as appropriate. In its attitude towards Heaven and Earth, Songs of Innocence, if considered separately from Songs of Experience (and it was at first published separately), is not unlike a conventional

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1. "Night", from Inn.

hymn book of the time: Earth has an undoubted reality, but is in every respect vastly inferior to Heaven.

Tiriel and Thel portray symbolic landscapes, but once again these are allied to the material world. Tiriel's kingdom is easily mapped and its geographical features are those of a perfectly credible landscape. Even Thel's valley has the features of actual existence, though now the symbolic aspect is more prominent than the material. But these are still recognisable features of a world such as we know - unlike the later Prophetic Books, where faithfully depicted details of the material universe are interspersed in a strange, impossible universe of entity, non-entity and apocalypse, a world more fantastic than that of any other mythology.

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It is in Songs of Experience that the material landscape yields to the symbolic. The second "Holy Thursday" and "London" no longer picture in words scenes in late eighteenth century London, but comprise a collection of images chosen purely for their value as symbolism, and far removed from the material actuality of the place. The gardens and flowers of Experience, the forests and shores, are no longer part of the "real" world but part of the mind of the man of Experience, who has adopted an indirect way of looking at "reality". His imagination connects aspects of the material world and rearranges them in a new, but still in its own way coherent, form - thus, priests become caterpillars, the Soldier's sigh becomes visible as blood, and Mystery with its evil attributes grows into a heavily-branched tree. This is

the way in which Blake (from now on) uses the world around him. Only the words of the sad children in the world of Experience show a direct relationship with a material universe of importance to them but apart from them.

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For aid in interpreting Blake's viewpoint at this time, we can look at The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, where Blake seems to be adopting some kind of solipsist view, at least with regard to the world around him:

Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that  
call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the  
five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age. <sup>1</sup>

It is not the usual solipsist position, for he admits the actual existence of others: however, it is the first trace of the viewpoint of the later Prophetic Books, where Blake insists that mankind in its natural state is a unity, and the present apparent separation of one man from another is caused by an unnecessary distortion of man's whole being. At the present time, regrettably perhaps, men in Experience differ so completely that "A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees".<sup>2</sup>

From now onwards the images from the material world are symbolic:

How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,  
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses  
five? <sup>3</sup>

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1. MHH, Pl. 4.
  2. MHH, Pl. 7.
  3. MHH, Pl. 6.

The imagination takes over from the senses: in the world of Experience this is man's only hope. Innocence may look at the world, but Experience must look through it. At this stage of existence, he who looks with the eye rather than through it is to be despised: "single vision", as Blake called this way of looking at the world, is permitted only to the Innocent.

"We are led to Believe a Lie  
When we see not Thro' the Eye  
Which was Born in a Night to perish in a Night  
When the Soul Slept in Beams of Light". 1

Blake's self-appointed task in writing his cosmic myth is to woo men from materialism,

"to open the immortal Eyes  
Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity 2  
Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination".

"This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body. This World of Imagination is Infinite & Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite & Temporal. There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. All Things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination, who appear'd to Me as Coming to Judgment among his Saints & throwing off the Temporal that the Eternal might be Establish'd; around him were seen the Images of Existences according to a certain order Suited to my Imaginative Eye." 3

Materialists, typified for Blake by Newton<sup>4</sup>, are confined to the world of the senses by their failure to make proper use of imagination. This causes them to make completely mistaken

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1. "Auguries of Innocence".

2. J, Ch.1, Pl. 5, ll.17-20.

3. VLJ, P.69.

4. See letter to Thomas Butts, 11th Sept.1801

"I, so far from being bound down, take the world with me in my flights, & often it seems lighter than a ball of wool rolled by the wind. Bacon & Newton would prescribe ways of making the world heavier to me."

judgments as to what is "real". For the materialist, the only reality is that which can be observed by means of the senses; he is, according to Blake, limited to "single vision", and is unable or unwilling to benefit by imagination, which is the source of the "double vision" experienced by Blake and the cause of his allying various aspects of the world in his typical symbolic fashion:

'before my way  
 A frowning Thistle implores my stay.  
 What to others a trifle appears  
 Fills me full of smiles or tears;  
 For double the vision my Eyes do see,  
 And a double vision is always with me.  
 With my inward Eye 'tis an old Man grey;  
 With my outward, a Thistle across my way ---  
 Then Los appear'd in all his power:  
 In the Sun he appear'd, descending before  
 My face in fierce flames; in my double sight 1  
 'Twas outward a Sun: inward Los in his might".

Later on in the same letter of 1802 Blake further complicates his theory on the degrees of observation:

'Now I a fourfold vision see,  
 And a fourfold vision is given to me;  
 'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight  
 And threefold in soft Beulah's night  
 And twofold Always. May God us keep  
 From Single vision & Newton's sleep!"

This "fourfold vision" - the single vision common to all men and the only one possible for materialists such as Newton, together with the double vision of the imaginative man and the loftier threefold and fourfold visions, as yet unexplained - seems to be allied to the four Universes mentioned in The Four Zoas:

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1. Letter to Thomas Butts, 22nd Nov., 1802.

"If we unite in one, another better world will be  
 Open'd within your heart & loins & wondrous brain,  
 Threefold, as it was in Eternity, & this, the fourth  
 Universe,  
 Will be Renew'd by the three & consummated in Mental  
 fires;" 1

It is possible to understand to a certain extent what Blake had in mind when he wrote of these four types of vision, and to assign certain aspects of perception to each level. The single vision already discussed obviously corresponds to the "fourth Universe", the material world, which "Will be Renew'd by the three & consummated in Mental fires". This straightforward, everyday vision common to all men is obtained by consulting only the senses; it is, as we have seen, a natural and proper vision for childhood and Innocence, but is however a sign of stubborn ignorance in the adult of Experience when it persists to the exclusion of the imagination. It then becomes the typical vision of Ulro, the perverted material world of strife and misery!

"Ulro, Seat of Satan  
 Which is the False Tongue beneath Beulah: it is the  
 Sense of Touch." 2

Double vision is that granted to the man of Experience who uses his "Divine Imagination" to observe the inner realities of things. "Divine" seems to have both the sense of "Godlike" and "Godgiven" - above all this is the attribute of the artist, poet or prophet, in whom it is imperative to use his talent for the guidance and enlightenment of others.

It is the threefold and fourfold visions which are difficult to understand properly. The three higher forms of vision seem to correspond to the three views of the "better

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1. FZ, N.7th, ll.353-6.
  2. M, Bk. 1st, Pl.27, ll.45-6.

world" "as it was in Eternity"; however, threefold and fourfold vision are obviously not confined to man in Eternity, for Blake himself can experience them. Blake never accedes to the orthodox Christian dichotomy between that which is perceived by sense and that which is utterly "beyond" sense and viewed by some mystical means divorced from sense altogether.<sup>1</sup> He distinguishes between types of perception - the limited and <sup>the</sup> expanded, which becomes eventually, in fourfold vision, unlimited.

Threefold vision is that which belongs to "soft Beulah's night", and Beulah is the "place where contrarieties are equally True". This can be interpreted as follows. In Blake's mythological system Beulah has the characteristics of a physical place, as his Zoas have the characteristics of physical beings, but as the Zoas also correspond to states and attributes of the human soul, so does Beulah, in Blake's psychology, become a state which man may achieve - the mental state in which the ordinary man, as opposed to the rare visionary, approaches closest to Heaven-on-Earth and communes with "Eternals".

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1. See, however, Blake's notes on Boyd's Dante, P.56-7; "Nature Teaches nothing of Spiritual Life but only of Natural Life".  
Also letter to Thomas Butts, 6th July 1803:  
"Nature & Fancy are Two Things & can Never be joined; neither ought any one to attempt it, for it is Idolatry & destroys the Soul."

Beulah is evermore Created around Eternity, appearing  
 To the Inhabitants of Eden around them on all sides.  
 But Beulah to its Inhabitants appears within each district  
 As the beloved infant in his mother's bosom round incircled  
 With arms of love & pity & sweet compassion. But to  
 The Sons of Eden the moony habitations of Beulah  
 Are from Great Eternity a mild & pleasant Rest.

And it is thus Created. Lo, the Eternal Great Humanity,  
 To whom be Glory & Dominion Evermore, Amen,  
 Walks among all his awful Family seen in every face:  
 As the breath of the Almighty such are the words of man to man  
 In the great Wars of Eternity, in fury of Poetic Inspiration,  
 To build the Universe stupendous, Mental forms Creating.

But the Emanations trembled exceedingly, nor could they  
 Live, because the life of Man was too exceeding unbounded.  
 His joy became terrible to them; they trembled & wept,  
 Crying with one voice: "Give us a habitation & a place  
 "In which we may be hidden under the shadow of wings:  
 "For if we, who are but for a time & who pass away in winter  
 "Behold these wonders of Eternity we shall consume:  
 "But you, O our Fathers & Brothers, remain in Eternity.

"But grant us a Temporal Habitation, do you speak  
 "To us; we will obey your words as you obey Jesus  
 "The Eternal who is blessed for ever & ever. Amen."

So spake the lovely Emanations, & there appear'd a pleasant  
 Mild Shadow above, beneath, & on all sides round.

Into this pleasant Shadow all the weak & weary  
 Like Women & Children were taken away as on wings  
 Of dovelike softness, & shadowy habitations prepared for them.  
 But every Man return'd & went still going forward thro'  
 The Bosom of the Father in Eternity on Eternity,  
 Neither did any lack or fall into Error without<sup>1</sup>  
 A shadow to repose in all the Days of Happy Eternity.

For man, then, Beulah is the state in which he approaches  
 nearest Heaven while still in his material body, the state  
 especially achieved by the sexual fulfillment which reunites,  
 temporarily at least, man divided into male and female.

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1. M, Bk.2nd, Pl.30, ll.8—Pl.31, ll.7.

Beulah is very clearly a state dependent on sexuality and idealized Nature, a place of "soft female charms".<sup>1</sup> In the cosmic myth it is the place where Vala (in her aspect as the material world) is ultimately at peace. It is thus the realm of Peace, the condition necessary for Man to practice the Mercy, Pity and Love impossible to achieve in a state of "mutual fears".<sup>2</sup> Besides being attainable by man on Earth, it is also, for the weak and those who try but "lack or fall into Error", an undemanding Heaven one stage removed from true Eternity, which is achieved only by strong souls. Even the strong, the "Sons of Eden", need to rest periodically from the great mental effort required in Eternity, and enter the less demanding state of Beulah. In Beulah, all types and degrees of soul can be found, but it is not clear whether they can commune with each other. Probably Blake held this to be so - Beulah would seem to be the state in which he "talked" with lesser Angels and prophets.<sup>3</sup>

Fourfold vision would seem to be the highest that men can accomplish, certainly the highest here on earth, and probably also in Eternity, since Blake mentions no more complicated form. Blake experiences this kind of vision in his "supreme delight"; for those on earth it would thus

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1. Compare with Blake's descriptions of Felpham in letters to John Flaxman, 21st Spt. 1800, and Thomas Butts, 2nd Oct., 1800.
  2. "The Human Abstract" from Exp.
  3. Beulah is obviously based on the land of Beulah in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. It also has connections with Swedenborg's concepts of Heaven, See M, Bk. 1st., Pl. 22, ¶.46-54.

seem to be some kind of ecstatic state achieved comparatively rarely and granted probably only to a select few, the visionaries who can utterly transcend worldly bounds, including those of sexuality, and pass into Eternity. Such a state was Blake in while experiencing the events related in Milton, when he became "One Man" with Los and Los entered into his soul. This is the kind of communion enjoyed by Eternals and - as discussed later - by unfallen man.

These two higher forms of vision - threefold and fourfold - are an attempt by Blake to explain something necessarily (by reason of its nature) quite clear in his own mind: that is, the difference between the visionary man of this "fallen" world and unfallen man, who had (or has) no need to look through the eye at all. For unfallen man, the material universe did not exist distinct from man. What is the Fall which brought about such a change, and how does Blake explain the fact that man now commonly believes in a material world existing outside and apart from his own body?

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The Fall was the event which concerned Blake most deeply when writing his cosmic myth. He tackled it first, and then returned to it over and over again, looking at it from different viewpoints and adding earlier and later stages of the story.

Blake tells and retells the story of the Fall with the emphasis at first on Urizen, but later laid on Los, on the four Zoas together, on their Emanations as well, on Albion, on the future generations of men, even on the Eternals left

behind in Eden. However it is probably clearer to look at the whole myth in its final chronological order, rather than in the order Blake tackled it and, apparently, conceived of it. Admittedly, when treated in this way the story does not fit together entirely logically: often the various characters differ considerably not only in their viewpoint of what happened but also as to what actually did happen. The Fall is not a single, simple chain of events; it is multiple and complex. It is not only cosmological but from some points of view historical and from others psychological.

Before the Fall man (or Albion in one of his personae - that of Man rather than England) was an "Eternal", at one with the other Eternals, including Christ, in the "Eternal Family", and separated from them only from one point of view and according to his own wish:

Then those in Great Eternity met in the Council of God  
 As one Man, for contracting their Exalted Senses  
 They behold Multitude, or Expanding they behold as one,  
 As One Man all the Universal family; & that One Man  
 They call Jesus the Christ, & they in him & he in them  
 Live in Perfect harmony, in Eden the land of life. 1

The universe was at man's will either part of or else exterior to his own body; it was at once both universe and mankind-akin to Swedenborg's "Grand Man, who is heaven", and the Adam Kadmon of the Cabala. The Eternals called the part of the universe which related most closely to them, or perhaps the whole universe from their point of view, Eden. Eden did not have the same attributes as the orthodox Christian heaven, for Albion in some sense was Eden, and Eden was the universe. All this was before the material universe

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1. FZ, N.1st, ll.469-473.

existed: mind and matter were one.

Then came the Fall. Man left Eden. Blake gives various explanations as to what happened, and presumably all the explanations are to be regarded as equally valid and important. Blake first tells of the rise of Urizen or reason and the consequent disruption of order among the Eternals, but later he elaborates this story by relating the conflict between the various aspects of Man's personality - on a cosmological level, the struggles of the four Zoas and eventually their Emanations as well. The struggles involve also the male and female aspects of Man, one of the major types of "Contraries", up till now undivided. In the later prophetic books, when Blake was endeavouring a sophisticated psychological explanation for Man's nature and woes, the Zoas with their spectres and Emanations and so forth become more and more various specific traits of personality, while Albion becomes the central unifying figure. The emphasis is then on his Fall and regeneration, and his separation from his female counterpart, who is at different times Vala or Jerusalem, material or spiritual, according to the point of view.

From the point of view of Albion, the Eternal Man, the Fall is a descent into the world of matter and sexuality, and in some ways an assumption of this world. Eventually, Albion becomes part of the material world.

The creation of this world Blake relates over and over again. At first it is Urizen who creates the world of matter - man, persuaded by his reason, comes to view the universe as something exterior to himself. Creation and

Fall are one and the same event. In the early part of the myth Urizen is aided (or bound or confined) at his task by Los - the imagination struggling to come to the best terms possible with the horrors evolved by reason. In later versions it is Christ, God as saviour, who comes to man's aid by limiting the Fall within certain bounds: these bounds are Satan and Adam, dual aspects of man's blindness and limitations, but signs of ultimate resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

"The Divine hand found the Two Limits, first of Opacity, then of Contraction.

Opacity was named Satan, Contraction was named Adam.<sup>2</sup>

'Albion hath enter'd the State Satan! Be permanent,  
O State!

And be thou for ever accursed! that Albion may rise  
again.

And be thou created into a State! I go forth to Create  
States, to deliver Individuals evermore! Amen. 3

Thus the Eternals (Urizen and Los as creatures of the myth), man himself (Albion as Man, and man as possessor of the traits portrayed by the Zoas and their relatives) and God (as Christ) all combine to produce the Fall. Seemingly, Blake considered it not only factual but inevitable and perhaps necessary, brought about by the "Fate" discussed in the previous chapter.

Once the Fall has been halted, man must establish himself in a world which is now separate from him; he must compose the disparate aspects of his personality and come to terms with a material universe.

In some places Blake looks on the Fall as having several stages. For Los and Enithamon, in their aspect as represent-

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1. See "Laocoon" : "Adam is only the Natural Man & not the Soul or Imagination".

See also M, Bk. 1st, Pl. 9, ll. 30-35.

J, Ch. 3, Pl. 73, ll. 26-8.

2. M, Bk. 1st, Pl. 13, ll. 20-21.

3. J, Ch. 2, Pl. 35, ll. 13-16.

atives of man, the Fall is a long drawn out event. At first they may expand or contract their senses at will, as the Eternals did in Eden. This is the primeval Golden Age of the material world, lamented by all, even Urizen:

'in vain the voice  
Of Urizen, in vain the Eloquent tongue. A Rock,  
a Cloud, a Mountain,  
Were now not Vocal as in Climes of happy Eternity  
Where the lamb replies to the infant voice, & the  
lion to the man of years  
Giving them sweet instructions; where the Cloud,  
the River & the Field  
Talk with the husbandman & shepherd. 1

This was the age of universal Innocence.<sup>2</sup> But the Fall  
continues:

'Enitharmon stretched on the dreary earth,  
Felt her immortal limbs freeze, stiffening, pale,  
inflexible.  
His feet shrunk with'ring from the deep, shrinking  
& withering,  
And Enitharmon shrunk up, all their fibres with'ring  
beneath,  
As plants wither'd by winter, leaves & stems & roots  
decaying  
Melt into thin air, while the seeds, driv'n by the  
furious wind,  
Rests on the distant Mountain's top. So Los &  
Enitharmon,  
Shrunk into fixed space, stood trembling on a Rocky cliff,  
Yet mighty bulk & majesty & beauty remain'd, but  
unexpansive. 3

In some senses the Fall is recurrent or continuous: each incident of oppression by a nation is expressed by Blake as a new Fall:

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1. FZ, N.6th, ll.133-8
  2. See also the ending of The Book of Ahania.
  3. FZ, N.5th, ll.5-13.

Stiff shudderings shook the heav'nly thrones!  
 France, Spain & Italy  
 In terror view'd the bands of Albion, and the  
 ancient Guardians,  
 Fainting upon the elements, smitten with their  
 own plagues.  
 They slow advance to shut the five gates of their  
 law-built heaven." 1

The Fall is present in every man, in every relationship between men, in every nation. Every age of human existence has in it the possibility of a new Fall, and in all recorded history this possibility has been realized.<sup>2</sup>

At some indefinite time in the future man is to reascend and become reunited with the Eternals in Eden, the world of matter will once more become part of man, and all men will become one. Blake describes this happening in the later prophetic books, when in the cosmic myth Albion is reunited with Jerusalem (now one with Vala). As of old,

"Man is adjoin'd to Man by his Emanative portion  
 Who is Jerusalem in every individual Man, and her  
 Shadow is Vala, builded by the Reasoning power in Man.  
 O search & see: turn your eyes inward: open, O thou World  
 Of Love & Harmony in Man: expand thy ever lovely Gates!" 3

This is the proper state for man and the one which is to be again achieved. In Blake's vision of this future male and female deny their selfhood, and are reunited as in Eternity;<sup>4</sup> simultaneously the various conflicting aspects of personality - the Zoas, Spectres, Emanations, and their sons and daughters - are reconciled and the true imaginative vision is reached:

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1. America, Pl. 16, l. 16-19.
  2. See Europe, the Argument to MHH, "The Grey Monk", and especially Ahania, where Fuzon rebels, but eventually adopts Urizen's role.
  3. J, Ch. 2, Pl. 44, l. 38-42.
  4. See VLJ, P. 85; "In Eternity Woman is the Emanation of Man; she has no will of her own. There is no such thing in Eternity as a Female Will."

"Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists, Really & Unchangeably. Fable or Allegory is Form'd by the daughters of Memory. Imagination is surrounded by the daughters of Inspiration, who in the aggregate are call'd Jerusalem." 1

This is the occasion of the Last Vintage - Blake's somewhat confused version of the Last Judgment. Here the descent and resurrection of Christ to save man becomes one with his return in triumph to judge man - a judgment already discussed in the last chapter. Earth becomes one with heaven, in the state foretold in the last group of Songs of Innocence. It is, of course, an inner, psychological event also.<sup>2</sup> Man comes to terms with the material universe, recognising it for what it is - a way of looking at things, not reality itself:

"The furrow'd field replies to the grave. I hear her  
 reply to me:  
 'Behold the time approaches fast that thou shalt be  
 as a thing  
 'Forgotten; when one speaks of thee he will not be  
 believ'd.  
 'When the man gently fades away in his immortality,  
 'When the mortal disappears in improved knowledge,  
 cast away  
 'The former things, so shall the Mortal gently fade away  
 'And so become invisible to those who still remain ---  
 'Man looks out in tree & herb & fish & bird & beast  
 'Collecting up the scatter'd portions of his immortal  
 body  
 'Into the Elemental forms of everything that grows."<sup>3</sup>

But the Last Vintage of Blake's myth is, from the point of view of the present world, an event yet to come. In the myth, modern man is situated between Fall and Judgment, divided by sex, in a universe subject to the laws of time and space. Blake usually considers time and space to be attributes of Los and Enitharmon, but also at times, especially in the later

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1. VLJ, P.68

2. Blake probably got the idea from Swedenborg.  
 See True Christian Religion, 768-779.

3. FZ, N.8th, 1.548-563.

prophetic books, suggests that the laws of time and space are the work of Urizen or else Christ, who, as a means to limit man's fall and prevent utter annihilation and chaos, created Adam, who is man in the material world subject to natural law. Time and space are certainly consequences of the Fall, and do more than anything else to make man realise his present limitations.

The way in which Blake's men most often consider the Fall is as a contrast between what man is and what he was once or perhaps might have been. Over and over again characters lament their wasted or unrealised potential:

"They told me that the night & day were all that I  
could see;  
They told me that I had five senses to inclose me up,  
And they inclos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle,  
And sunk my heart into the Abyss, a red, round globe,  
hot burning,  
Till all from life I was obliterated and erased."<sup>1</sup>

"Thou, Mother of my Mortal part,  
With cruelty didst mould my Heart,  
And with false self-deceiving tears  
Didst bind my Nostrils, Eyes, & Ears:  
Didst close my Tongue in senseless clay,  
And me to Mortal Life betray."<sup>2</sup>

"The five senses whelm'd  
In deluge o'er the earth-born man; then turn'd the  
fluxile eyes  
Into two stationary orbs, concentrating all things:  
The ever-varying spiral ascents to the heavens of heavens  
Were bended downward, and the nostrils' golden gates  
shut,  
Turn'd outward, barr'd and petrify'd against the infinite."<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. VDA, Pl. 2, ll. 30-34.
  2. "To Tirzah", from Exp.
  3. Europe, Pl. 10., ll. 10-15.

'That the pride of the heart may fail,  
 That the lust of the eyes may be quench'd,  
 That the delicate ear in its infancy  
 May be dull'd, and the nostrils clos'd up,  
 To teach mortal worms the path  
 That leads from the gates of the Grave." 1

"all that I behold  
 Within my soul has lost its splendor, & a brooding Fear<sup>2</sup>  
 Shadows me o'er & drives me outward to a world of Woe."

But man is not entirely helpless in his material world. He has within himself the possibility not only of further Fall (as discussed in the last chapter) but also of regeneration - by means of his imaginative vision, the two-fold, three-fold and four-fold vision discussed earlier. The world is, to a large extent, what Man the beholder causes it to be:

"If Perceptive Organs vary, Objects of Perception seem to vary:  
 If the Perceptive Organs close, their Objects seem to close also." 3

"Every Eye sees differently. As the Eye, such the Object." 4

"The Prophets describe what they saw in Vision as real and existing men, whom they saw with their imaginative and immortal organs; the Apostles the same; the clearer the organ the more distinct the object----- The painter of this work asserts that all his imaginations appear to him infinitely more perfect and more minutely organised than any thing seen by his mortal eye." 5

"What seems to Be, Is, To those to whom  
 It seems to Be." 6

"The Sun's Light when he unfolds it  
 Depends on the Organ that beholds it." 7

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1. The Song of Los, Pl. 7, ll. 3-8
  2. FZ, N.1st, ll. 115-7
  3. J, Ch.2, Pl. 34, ll. 55-6.
  4. Notes on Reynold's Discourses, P.34.
  5. "A Descriptive Catalogue", No.4.
  6. J, Ch.2., Pl. 36, ll. 51-2.
  7. "For the Sexes: the Gates of Paradise". Frontispiece.

I feel that a Man may be happy in This World,  
 And I know that This World Is a World of imagination  
 & Vision. I see Every thing I paint In This World,  
 but Every body does not see alike.-----To the Eyes of  
 the Man of Imagination, Nature Is Imagination itself.  
 As a man is, So he Sees. As the Eye is formed, such  
 are its Powers.<sup>1</sup>

The world, to the imaginative beholder, can be a wonderful  
 and beautiful place: Orc, as the passions of youth,  
 experiences life to the full.<sup>2</sup>

But most men are blind, either wilfully, or else because  
 they are dominated by their evil brethren and the laws of  
 Urizen:

Five windows light the cavern'd Man: thro' one  
 he breathes the air;  
 Thro' one hears music of the spheres; thro' one  
 the eternal vine  
 Flourishes, that he may recieve the grapes; thro'  
 one can lock  
 And see small portions of the eternal world that  
 ever groweth;  
 Thro' one himself pass out what time he please;  
 but he will not,  
 For stolen joys are sweet & bread eaten in secret  
 pleasant.<sup>3</sup>

Wheel without wheel,  
 To perplex youth in their outgoings & to bind to labours  
 Of day & night the myriads of Eternity, that they might  
 file  
 And polish brass & iron hour after hour, laborious  
 workmanship,  
 Kept ignorant of the use that they might spend the  
 days of wisdom  
 In sorrowful drudgery to obtain a scanty pittance of  
 bread,  
 In ignorance to view a small portion & think that All,  
 And call it demonstration, blind to all the simple  
 rules of life.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Letter to Dr, Truster, 23rd Aug.1799.
  2. See FZ, N.5th, l.114-142.
  3. Europe, Pl.1, l.1-6.
  4. FZ, N.7th(l) l.179-186.

While stressing that the world of nature is not the only reality, Blake shows that it is by no means entirely unreal. In eternity itself it exists in some sense, where it is Man, and Man is nature. Even during material existence the imaginative soul may unite with the world around it (as in the rejoicings of Orc) and Man become one with nature:

"Each grain of Sand,  
Every Stone on the Land,  
Each rock & each hill,  
Each fountain & rill,  
Each herb & each tree,  
Mountain, hill, earth & sea,  
Cloud, Meteor & Star,  
Are Men Seen Afar."<sup>1</sup>

"For all are Men in Eternity, Rivers, Mountains,  
Cities, Villages,  
All are Human, & when you enter into their Bosoms  
you walk  
In Heavens & Earths, as in your own Bosom you bear  
your Heaven  
And Earth & all you behold; tho' it appears Without,  
it is Within,  
In your Imagination, of which this World of Mortality  
is but a Shadow".<sup>2</sup>

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As well as considering man in relationship to matter, Blake's own considerable delight in the beauty of nature encouraged him to examine closely the concept of Nature itself. If the Fall was in itself creation, then Nature appeared in its present form, as matter separate from Man, during the Fall, yet Blake seems to feel instinctively that Nature, even as a fallen entity, is not evil. Blake always trusts his own instincts, and thus feels obliged to explain

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1. Letter to Thomas Butts, 2nd. Oct. 1800.  
2. J, Ch.3, Pl. 71, ll. 15-19.

the ambivalence of "the Goddess Nature" and her influence in the present state of the universe - her undoubted beauties (and thus implied goodness) and yet her vicious cruelties, and above all the insidious luring of Man from Eternity to the Mundane Shell.

Vala, the original title of The Four Zoas, conveys Blake's problem in one word. Vala, in her usual aspect of Nature, is always described as beautiful, but she is a veil between man and Eternity. A veil hides, distorts, deceives; it is a female garment, thus associated with Blake's perennial attribution to femininity of softness and deceit<sup>1</sup> (for Vala is one of the female counterparts of Albion, the Eternal Man) - but it is above all, Blake concludes, transitory. Once the veil is removed, true Nature will be revealed, and Blake in Vala declares that the reality beneath is in her best aspects very similar to the illusion.

Why has this veil been interposed? One point of view that Blake offers is that it is both a punishment to and a protection of fallen Man:

Man is a Worm; wearied with joy, he seeks the  
caves of sleep  
Among the Flowers of Beulah, in his selfish cold repose  
Forsaking Brotherhood & Universal love, in selfish clay  
Folding the pure wings of his mind, seeking the places  
dark  
Abstracted from the roots of Science; then inclos'd  
around  
In walls of Gold we cast him like a Seed into the Earth  
Till times & spaces have pass'd over him; duly every  
morn

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1. See FZ, N.3rd, ll.113-9.  
See also N.7th, ll.184-197, Note here the "silken veil", and the "lillies" that "Hid in the Vales, faintly lament".

We visit him, covering with a Veil the immortal seed;  
 With windows from the inclement sky we cover him, &  
 with walls  
 And hearths protect the selfish terror, till divided  
 all  
 In families we see our shadows born, & thence we know  
 That Man subsists by Brotherhood & Universal Love." 1

This is yet another description of the Fall, when Nature  
 becomes:

"the lovely form  
 That drew the body of Man from Heaven into this  
 dark Abyss." 2

But Blake does not attribute the Fall to Nature, but  
 rather, as we have seen, to the divided soul of Man. The  
 part that Vala herself plays in the work named after her was  
 so comparatively small that Blake eventually retitled the  
 book The Four Zoas, and throughout shows how the warring  
 Zoas brought about with the downfall of Man the degradation  
 also of Nature.

Once Vala and Luvah "walk'd in bliss in times of  
 innocence & youth".<sup>3</sup> But then Luvah, as Passion, became  
 obsessed with the beauties of Vala and committed the sin  
 of secrecy:

"I carried her in my bosom as a man carries a lamb,  
 I loved her, I gave her all my soul & my delight,  
 I hid her in soft gardens & in secret bowers of summer,  
 Weaving mazes of delight along the sunny paradise,  
 Inextricable labyrinths." 4

Los and Enritharmon are also at fault when they rejoice  
 in the down fall of Luvah and Vala:

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1. I. FZ, N. 9th, ll. 627-638
  2. FZ, N. 5th, ll. 46-7.
  3. FZ, N. 2nd, ll. 79.
  4. FZ, N. 2nd, ll. 93-97.

'Los joy'd, & Encitharmon laugh'd, saying, "Let us go down  
And see this labour & sorrow." They went down to see the woes  
Of Vala & the woes of Luvah, to draw in their delights." 1

Even the enigmatic Tharmas, the original unifying factor among man's so varied attributes, is deceived as to the cause of discord, and thus also at fault:

"Tharmas replied: "Vala, thy sins have lost us heaven & bliss.  
Thou art our Curse, and till I can bring love into the light  
I never will depart from my great wrath." 2

Nature, for all of these reasons (for with Blake numerous explanations of the same event are equally true), falls:

"I saw that Luvah & Vala  
Went down the Human Heart, where Paradise & its joys abounded,  
In jealous fears, in fury & rage, & flames roll'd round their fervid feet,  
And the vast form of Nature like a Serpent play'd before them;  
And as they went, in folding fires & thunders of the deep  
Vala shrunk in like the dark sea that leaves its slimy banks,  
And from her bosom Luvah fell far as the east & west  
And the vast form of Nature, like a Serpent, roll'd between." 3

Once fallen, Vala is at first generally associated with Luvah, and both are cruel:

"Luvah & Vala ride  
Triumphant in the bloody sky, & the Human form is no more." 4

However, Nature gradually becomes associated more and more with materialism, and even Passion is repressed by her:

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1. FZ, N.2nd, ll.211-213.
  2. FZ, N.7th (b), ll.256-8.
  3. FZ, N.3rd, ll.94-101.  
For other versions of the Fall of Vala, see N.7th, ll.244-266. Also J. Ch.1, Plates 20-23.
  4. FZ, N.1st, ll.408-9.

He saw  
 Vala incircle round the furnaces where Luvah was clos'd.  
 In joy she heard his howlings & forgot he was her Luvah,  
 With whom she walk'd in bliss in times of innocence &  
 youth.'<sup>1</sup>

She is now completely under the domination of Urizen  
 - "Urizen's harlot", obviously a reference to the Scarlet  
 Woman of "Revelations"<sup>2</sup> - and becomes in one of her aspects  
 the Mystery of Songs of Experience.

'A False Feminine Counterpart, of Lovely Delusive  
 Beauty  
 Dividing & Uniting at will in the Cruelties of  
 Holiness,  
 Vala, drawn down into a Vegetated body, now triumphant.  
 The Synagogue of Satan Clothed her with Scarlet robes  
 & Gems,  
 And on her forehead was her name written in blood,  
 "Mystery".'

'The Synagogue Created her from Fruit of Urizen's tree  
 By devilish arts, abominable, unlawful, unutterable,  
 Perpetually vegetating in detestable births  
 Of female forms, beautiful thro' poisons hidden in  
 secret  
 Which give a tincture to false beauty; then was  
 hidden within  
 The bosom of Satan The false Female, as in an ark &  
 Veil  
 Which Christ must rend & her reveal. Her daughters  
 are call'd Tirzah; She is named Rahab.'<sup>3</sup>

But Blake is throughout the book convinced that all is  
 not lost. At this point of Eternity, poised between the  
 Fall and the Last Vintage, both Albion and Vala realise the  
 distortions that have taken place; the Zoas describe Vala  
 as "the Wanderer"<sup>4</sup> - though fallen, they are no longer  
 completely self-deceiving, (even though Vala - see below -  
 does not yet recognise Luvah) and are thus on the way to  
 redemption:

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1. FZ, N.2nd, l.76-9.
  2. FZ, N7th, (b) l.137.
  3. FZ, N.8th. l.278-282, 287-294.  
 See also VLJ, pp. 80-81.
  4. FZ, N.2nd, l.110, and N.3rd, l.85.

Idie not, Enitharmon, tho' thou sing'st thy song  
 of Death,  
 Nor shalt thou me torment; For I behold the Fallen  
 Man  
 Seeking to comfort Vala: she will not be comforted.  
 She rises from his throne and seeks the shadows of  
 her garden  
 Weeping for Luvah lost in bloody beams of your false  
 morning; 1

And Vala like a shadow oft appear'd to Urizen.  
 The King of Light beheld her mourning among the  
 Brick kilns, compell'd  
 To labour night & day among the fires; her  
 lamenting voice  
 Is heard when silent night returns & the labourers  
 take their rest.

'O Lord, wilt thou not look upon our sore afflictions  
 Among these flames incessant labouring? our hard  
 masters laugh  
 At all our sorrow. We are made to turn the wheel  
 for water,  
 To carry the heavy basket on our scorched shoulders,  
 to sift  
 The sand & ashes, & to mix the clay with tears &  
 repentance.  
 The times are now return'd upon us; we have given  
 ourselves  
 To scorn, and now are scorned by the slaves of our  
 enemies.  
 Our beauty is cover'd over with clay & ashes, &  
 our backs  
 Furrow'd with whips, & our flesh bruised with the  
 heavy basket.  
 Forgive us, O thou piteous one whom we have offended!  
 forgive  
 The weak remaining shadow of Vala that returns in  
 sorrow to thee.

I see not Luvah as of old, I only see his feet  
 Like pillars of fire travelling thro' darkness &  
 non entity."

Thus she lamented day & night, compell'd to labour  
 & sorrow.  
 Luvah in vain her lamentations heard: in vain his  
 love  
 Brought him in various forms before her, still she  
 knew him not,  
 Still she despis'd him, calling on his name & knowing  
 him not,  
 Still hating, still professing love, still labouring  
 in the smoke. 2

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1. FZ, N.1st, 1.283-287.
  2. FZ, N.2nd, 1.214-235.

This passage shows that Luvah also is striving towards reconciliation.

And Blake never doubts that reconciliation is at hand, and that Nature has her proper place in Eternity:

The Regenerate Man stoop'd his head over the  
 Universe & in  
 His holy hands reciev'd the flaming Demon & Demoneſs  
 of ſmoke  
 And gave them to Urizen's hands; the Immortal frown'd  
 ſaying,  
 'Luvah & Vala, henceforth you are Servants; obey & live.  
 You ſhall forget your former ſtate; return, & Love  
 in peace,  
 Into your place, the place of ſeed, not in the brain  
 or heart.'<sup>1</sup>

'Luvah & Vala ſaw the Light; their ſpirits were exhal'd  
 In all their ancient innocence'.<sup>2</sup>

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Having now deſcribed the renaiffance of the univerſe, Blake can answer the queſtions left unrefolved in Thel: what is the purpoſe of exiſtence, and what is the fate of the being who paſſes from Innocence to Experience? The answer that Blake gives at the concluſion of Vala, or the Four Zoas is very ſimple. Vala has paſſed through the gates of Death ſo feared by Thel and is now regenerated in the ſtate which Blake called Jeruſalem; now the whole of Nature exiſts in total joy and unity, and ſuch an exiſtence is ſufficient purpoſe in itſelf. Nature is no longer a veil between man and Eternity, but a true extension of man on this plane of exiſtence. Vala's ultimate hymn to the beauties of Nature is now alſo, legitimately, Blake's.

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1. FZ, N.9th, 1.360-365.  
 2. FZ, N.9th, 1.571-2.

Where dost thou flee, O fair one? where doest thou  
 seek thy happy place?  
 'To yonder brightness, there I haste, for sure I came  
 from thence  
 Or I must have slept eternally, nor have felt the dew  
 of morning.'

'Eternally thou must have slept, nor have felt the  
 morning dew,  
 But for yon nourishing sun; 'tis that by which thou  
 art arisen.  
 The birds adore the sun: the beasts rise up & play  
 in his beams,  
 And every flower & every leaf rejoices in his light.  
 Then, O thou fair one, sit thee down, for thou art  
 as the grass,  
 Thou risest in the dew of morning & at night art folded  
 up.'

'Alas! am I but as a flower? then will I sit me down,  
 Then will I weep, then I'll complain & sigh for  
 immortality,  
 And chide my maker, thee O Sun, that raisedst me to  
 fall.'

So saying she sat down & wept beneath the apple trees.

'O be thou blotted out, thou Sun! that raisedst me  
 to trouble,  
 That gavest me a heart to crave, & raisedst me, thy  
 phantom,  
 To feel thy heat & see thy light & wander here alone,  
 Hopeless, If I am like the grass & so shall pass away.'

'Rise, sluggish Soul, why sit'st thou here? why dost  
 thou sit & weep?  
 Yon sun shall wax old & decay, but thou shalt ever  
 flourish.  
 The fruit shall ripen & fall down, & the flowers consume  
 away,  
 But thou shalt still survive; arise, O dry thy dewy tears.'

'Hah! shall I still survive? whence came that sweet  
 & comforting voice?  
 And whence that voice of sorrow? O sun! thou art  
 nothing now to me.  
 Go on thy course rejoicing, & let us both rejoice  
 together.  
 I walk among his flocks & hear the bleating of his lamb.  
 O that I could behold his face & follow his pure feet!  
 I walk by the footsteps of his flocks; come hither,  
 tender flocks.  
 Can you converse with a pure soul that seeketh for  
 her maker?  
 You answer not: then am I set your mistress in this  
 garden.  
 I'll watch you & attend your footsteps; you are not  
 like the birds

That sing & fly in the bright air; but you do lick my feet  
 And let me touch your woolly backs; follow me as I sing,  
 For in my bosom a new song arises to my Lord:

Rise up, O sun, most glorious minister & light of day.  
 Flow on, ye gentle airs, & bear the voice of my rejoicing.  
 Wave freshly, clear waters flowing around the tender grass;  
 And thou, sweet smelling ground, put forth thy life in  
 fruits & flowers.

Follow me, O my flocks, & hear me sing my rapturous song.  
 I will cause my voice to be heard on the clouds that glitter  
 in the sun.

I will call; & who shall answer me? I will sing; who shall  
 reply?

For from my pleasant hills behold the living, living springs,  
 Running among my green pastures, delighting among my trees.

I am not here alone: my flocks, you are my brethren;  
 And you birds that sing & adorn the sky, you are my sisters.  
 I sing, & you reply to my song; I rejoice, & you are glad.  
 Follow me, O my flocks; we will now descend into the valley.

O how delicious are the grapes, flourishing in the sun!  
 How clear the spring of the rock, running among the golden  
 sand!

How cool the breezes of the valley, & the arms of the branching  
 trees!

Cover us from the sun; come & let us sit in the shade.  
 My Luvah here hath plac'd me in a sweet & pleasant land,  
 And given me fruits & pleasant waters, & warm hills & cool  
 valleys.

Here will I build myself a house, & here I'll call on his  
 name,  
 Here I'll return when I am weary & take my pleasant rest. <sup>1</sup>

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 For a final look at Blake's opinions on the inter-  
 relationship between man, matter and spirit or imagination,  
 one can turn to the annotations which he made towards the  
 end of his life, around 1820, on Berkeley's Siris, and  
 compare them with the earlier works already discussed .  
 It becomes clear that his thoughts remained substantially  
 the same throughout:

(Berkeley<sup>e</sup>) Natural phaenomena are only natural appearances..

They and the phantomes that result from those appearances.

the children of imagination [underlined by Blake]

grafted upon sense, such for example as pure space, are  
 thought by many the very first in existence and stability,  
 and to embrace and comprehend all beings.

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1. FZ, N.9th, ll.401-453.

(Blake)           'The All in Man.   The Divine Image or Imagination.   The Four Senses are the Four Faces of Man & the Four Rivers of the Water of Life.'

(Berkeley)       'Plato and Aristotle considered God as abstracted or distinct from the natural world. But the Aegyptians considered God and nature as making one whole, or all things together as making one universe.'

(Blake)           'They also consider'd God as abstracted or distinct from the Imaginative World, but Jesus, as also Abraham & David, consider'd God as a Man in the Spiritual or Imaginative Vision.   Jesus consider'd Imagination to be the Real Man.'

(Berkeley)       '....Whence, according to Themistius,.... it may be inferred that all beings are in the soul. For, saith he, the forms are the beings. By the form every thing is what it is. And, he adds, it is the soul that imparteth forms to matter....'

(Blake)           'This is my Opinion, but Forms must be apprehended by Sense or the Eye of Imagination. Man is All Imagination.   God is Man & exists in us & we in him.'

(Blake)           'What Jesus came to Remove was the Heathen or Platonic Philosophy, which blinds the Eye of Imagination, The Real Man.'

As far as his views on materialism are concerned, in contrast to his views on God, Blake's end was his beginning.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FINAL VIEWPOINT

The last major work of Blake's life was The Ghost of Abel, written in 1822.<sup>1</sup> Though very brief, every phrase of this "Revelation" is important, and the whole, while curiously evocative of Blake's early works, serves to summarise Blake's final position on several of the topics already discussed.

It is above all a work of the Imagination as the first statement shows:

'Can a Poet doubt the Visions of Jehovah? Nature has no Outline, but Imagination has. Nature has no Tune, but Imagination has. Nature has no Supernatural & dissolves: Imagination is Eternity.'

The Doctrine of Contraries is upheld throughout by the contrast between Nature and Imagination, death and life, murderer and victim, Jehovah and Satan, and, most strikingly of all, Adam and Eve - Blake's final stereotypes of the upright, active Man and the prone, passive, fainting Woman.

The opening of the work recalls Blake's early rebellion against the traditional God of the Old Testament (here even called Jehovah). Adam and Eve denounce him as the giver of

1. See Keynes, notes on The Ghost of Abel; "The additional date, 1788, in the colophon has been supposed to indicate that The Ghost of Abel was first executed in that year. Sampson pointed out, however, in 1905 that this date evidently referred to Blake's use of the 'stereotype', or relief - etching process, and not to an earlier issue of The Ghost of Abel". If, however, the work is indeed an early one, Blake was evidently satisfied enough with the idea behind it to etch it as late as 1822.

false promises and vain delusions, in other words, as the cruel Urizen. Adam, like the young Blake, believes in the power of the "all creative Imagination", but is here unwilling, like the fallen Albion, to trust this Imagination and assumes that "It is all a Vain delusion". The Ghost of Abel too (who in his bitterness resembles the Spectre of Los), in the voice of the young Blake, denounces Jehovah as "the Accuser".

But Adam and Eve, like Blake, eventually realise that they have misinterpreted the nature of God. Eve sees Jehovah with her "Mind's Eye", thus admitting the truth of instinct or Imagination by looking through, not with, the eye, and sees also "Abel living" - the Abel over whose dead body she had wept. His appearance to his sorrowing parents emphasises both the essential unity of all mankind in Eternity (as he himself directly affirms his unity with the Immortals)<sup>1</sup> and the loving-kindness of God. God is here, as in Songs of Innocence not only God the Father of true Christianity but also Jesus the Lamb<sup>who</sup>, as in Jerusalem, offers himself "for an Atonement". He is also "Human" - even this late, Blake holds that God and man are in some sense one.

Blake's final position on predestination is still rigid:

"As thou hast said, so is it come to pass."

But Abel is mistaken in thinking that predestination implies

1. The Elohim (used by Blake as a plural noun) recall Blake's theories as to the creation of the Universe. See Crabb Robinson's Diary, Feb. 28th, 1852. "Whoever believes in Nature, said Blake, disbelieves in God. For Nature is the work of the Devil. On my obtaining from him the declaration that the Bible was the Word of God, I referred to the commencement of Genesis - In the beginning God created the Heavens and Earth,. But I gained nothing by this, for I was triumphantly told that this God was not Jehovah, but the Elohim; and the doctrine of the Ghostics repeated with sufficient consistency to silence one so unlearned as myself."

cruelty or implacability on the part of God. Like man, as Albion or one of the Zoas, Abel passes through the stage of demanding vengeance, and Blake reasserts his horror of the avenger:

(Jehovah) What Vengeance dost thou require?  
 (Abel) Life for Life! Life for Life!  
 (Jehovah) He who shall take Cain's life must also  
 Die, O Abel!"

Even Satan is eventually to be redeemed, for God is not the ultimate avenger:

"(Jehovah) Such is My Will  
 that Thou Thyself go to Eternal Death  
 In Self Annihilation, even till Satan,  
 Self-subdu'd, Put off Satan  
 Into the Bottomless Abyss."

The God of Blake's old age is the benevolent despot we have seen before, but this God, unlike the God of Jerusalem, is now strongly identified as the Poetic Imagination, and man can at last trust himself without reservation to his Lord and Maker:

"(Eve) were it not better to believe Vision  
 With all our might & strength, tho' we are  
 fallen & lost?  
 (Adam) Eve, thou hast spoken truly: let us kneel  
 before his feet.  
 (They Kneel before Jehovah)"

## Appendix

### Chronological Table of Blake's Works

(After Keynes).

<u>Poetical Sketches.</u>	1769-1778
"Then she bore pale desire"	ante 1777
<u>An Island in the Moon</u>	circa 1784-5
<u>Annotations to Lavater's Aphorisms</u>	circa 1788
<u>Annotations to Swedenborg's Divine Love and Divine Wisdom</u>	circa 1788
"There is no Natural Religion".	circa 1788
"All Religions are One".	circa 1788
<u>Tiriel</u>	circa 1789
<u>Songs of Innocence</u>	1789
<u>The Book of Thel</u>	1789
<u>Annotations to Swedenborg's Divine Providence</u>	circa 1790
<u>The French Revolution</u>	1791
<u>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</u>	circa 1790-3
<u>Poems from Note-book</u>	circa 1793
<u>Visions of the Daughters of Albion</u>	1793
<u>America, a Prophecy</u>	1793
<u>Songs of Experience</u>	1789-94
<u>The First Book of Urizen</u>	1794
<u>Europe, a Prophecy</u>	1794
<u>The Song of Los</u>	1795
<u>The Book of Ahania</u>	1795
<u>The Book of Los</u>	1795
<u>Vala, or the Four Zoas</u>	1795-1804
<u>Annotations to Watson's Apology for the Bible</u>	1798
<u>Annotations to Bacon's Essays</u>	circa 1798
<u>Poems from the Note-Book</u>	1800-03
<u>Poems from the Pickering Manuscript</u>	circa 1803
<u>Annotations to Reynold's Discourses</u>	circa 1808
<u>Milton, a Poem in 2 Books</u>	1804-8
"A Descriptive Catalogue".	1809
<u>A Vision of The Last Judgment</u>	1810
<u>Jerusalem</u>	1804-20
"The Everlasting Gospel"	circa 1818
<u>For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise</u>	circa 1818
<u>Annotations to Berkeley's Siris</u>	circa 1820
<u>The Ghost of Abel</u>	1822
<u>Annotations to Wordsworth's Poems</u>	1826
<u>Notes on the illustrations to Dante</u>	1825-27
<u>Annotations to Dr. Thornton's New Translation of the Lord's Prayer</u>	1827
<u>Letters</u>	1791-1827.

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