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ABSTRACT

In Part I section A examines J. Pedersen's exposition of the Hebrew view of nature in the context of his ideas concerning Israelite modes of thought. It is argued that Pedersen brings to his interpretation of the biblical text notions about ancient Israelite psychology and linguistic usage which destroy the intelligibility of the Old Testament for a modern reader, and which involve Pedersen himself in obscurities and grave inconsistencies.

Section B examines W. Eichrodt's claim to have discovered two apparently mutually exclusive, but nevertheless reconcilable views of nature in the Old Testament. It is argued that this claim involves a contradiction. An extensive survey of biblical texts reveals the lack of evidence to support it.

Sections C and D concern the belief of G. von Rad and H. W. Robinson that ancient Israelites saw the natural world as pervaded by the direct activity of God. It is suggested that this belief arose out of a confused concept of causation and cannot be sustained by an appeal to the text.

Section E examines two volumes by E. C. Rust, which raise problems of philosophy as well as biblical interpretation.

Sections B, D and E also examine the problems raised by the concept of the miraculous for those scholars who see the divine preservation of the world as creatio continua.

Part II outlines and criticises scholarly interpretations of the Israelite classification of creatures into clean and unclean, followed by a consideration of the opinions of anthropologists concerning this and similar classifications in primitive societies and their symbolic significance.

The problems of interpreting anthropological evidence are considered; and the work of Durkheim and his influence on the thought of Mary Douglas are examined. Douglas's work suggests that a fresh approach to the Old Testament view of nature may be necessary in the light of anthropological research.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF NATURE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT:
AN INVESTIGATION OF SOME SCHOLARLY VIEWS.

P. ADDINALL

Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Letters

University of Durham
Department of Theology
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'There's glory for you!'

'I don't know what you mean by "glory"', Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. 'Of course you don't - till I tell you. I meant "there's a nice knock-down argument for you!"'

'But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knock-down argument"', Alice objected.

'When I use a word', Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less'.

'The question is', said Alice, 'whether you CAN make words mean different things'.

'The question is', said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master - that's all'.

Alice was too much puzzled to say anything.

PART I

Section A. J. Pedersen.

1. INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive critical account of Pedersen's 'Israel',¹ is beyond the scope of the present thesis, and would in any case be at least as long as Pedersen's own book. It is necessary, however, to give some account of Pedersen's whole argument since his exposition of the Israelite understanding of nature is set in the context of remarks about the very manner in which Israelites thought and expressed themselves; and for Pedersen this was very different from the way in which modern Europeans think and express themselves. If there is this profound difference in mentality between the ancient Israelites and, say, modern Britons, this must affect their understanding of nature; and if certain assertions of Pedersen's are to be believed there is a radical difference between the ancient Israelites and ourselves in this respect.

This in turn raises a further question: Did the ancient Israelites see truths which we have now lost or obscured? Or have we left behind a crude and primitive outlook through the extension of human perception by rational and experimental techniques unheard of in the ancient world? To put the question another way, does the Old Testament tell us truths we should otherwise miss or grasp only imperfectly, or does it express

¹ J. Pedersen. ISRAEL: ITS LIFE AND CULTURE, I-II London 1926; III-IV 1940 (1959 printing with additional material).

outmoded forms of thought which are of merely antiquarian interest?

'The object of the present work is to describe the conception of life in Israel as it was until the collapse of the nation. The fundamental psychological conception of the Israelites is the same throughout their history until their meeting with Hellenistic culture. In this respect Israel may therefore be described as a unity. But in other domains of psychic life its history makes itself felt, and here it is often possible to trace the two types ... the old Israelitic conception and its transformation under the influences of the different forces of Canaanite life - "Canaanite" here being a term used to designate the non-Israelitic population of Canaan 'as a whole, irrespective of such points of difference as it is impossible for us to trace'.²

It is important to note that Pedersen makes a distinction between the fundamental psychological conception and other domains of psychic life.

He goes on to speak of the books of the Old Testament as sources for an account of the mental history of Israel, and yielding material 'towards the understanding of the psychology of Israel'.³ Much later he states, 'The main part of the present volume ... treats the unique material offered by the Old Testament which gives us an insight in

² P1 pp. 25-26. ³ P1 p. 26.

(sic) the intimate mental life of the Israelites'.⁴

Pedersen also speaks of analysing the sources so as to separate old elements in the life of Israel from other elements belonging to later development. 'In this manner we are able to form an incomplete, but, nevertheless, vivid picture of the life in old Israel and the transformation it underwent within the historical period'.⁵

These general statements of purpose assume a distinct difference between Hebrew and Greek thought, and, indeed, between Semitic and Greek thought. Presumably Pedersen realises that the Hebrews had contact with such peoples as the Babylonians and Persians and assumes that these had no impact on Israel's thought. This is a highly questionable assumption, if he made it.

Furthermore, it is not clear what is the relationship between the fundamental psychological conception of life, the old Israelite conception of life, and the transformed conception of life. We might be tempted to equate the fundamental conception and the old conception, but whereas the latter changes during the period under review, the former does not. It must be concluded that there is a fundamental conception of life which remains the same, and a more superficial one which alters. Presumably Pedersen is going to describe both: but he

⁴ Pl 'Additional Remarks and Corrections to the Second Edition', between pp. 552-553.

⁵ Pl p. 29.

should at the same time make clear why it is that one conception is called fundamental and another conception is not. His failure to do this creates acute problems when we come to the second English volume of his work.

The second English volume of 'Israel' is in the main a collecting together of a great deal of biblical material under various headings such as war, monarchy, prophecy. Much of this volume, being a direct account of biblical material gathered together according to certain subjects or themes, could be read quite independently of the first volume. Not only is this true, however, but in this second English volume there is much emphasis on the changes which took place in Israelite thought, and this puts in question that unity of Israelite thought often assumed in the argument and generalisations of the first volume. Admittedly, Pedersen has acknowledged in the first volume that contact with Canaan and the development of the monarchy and priesthood in Jerusalem led to far-reaching differences of opinion among Israelites; but at the same time he wants to maintain that there was a fundamental unity of thought until the impact of Hellenistic culture on Israel. In the first volume it is this supposed unity which is taken for granted on the whole, and the tacit assumption on which sweeping generalisations are made. In the second volume there is a stronger tendency to describe differences and developments of outlook among the Israelites. What is never attempted is the reconciliation of the two approaches, so that Pedersen moves from one to the other without imposing

any consistency on the argument of the whole book.

What does Pedersen mean by 'fundamental psychological conception' as against 'other domains of psychic life'?⁶ His failure to define these terms is of crucial importance: generalisations about Israelite thought come under the first heading, and differences of thinking among Israelites come under the second, and the legitimacy of this procedure is simply assumed. In fact, the differences among Israelites in their thinking put a serious question mark against Pedersen's generalisations. If Israelites often thought very differently about the same subject, in what sense did they think the same? Did they think the same about some things all through their history up to their contact with Hellenistic culture, and differently about others? Or is it that they thought in certain ways, that they employed certain categories in all of their thinking, and that this is apparent even when they are disagreeing over a given subject? The latter explanation is suggested by the word 'fundamental', but Pedersen never stops to tell us; nor, one suspects, did he stop to tell himself. The sense of 'fundamental' should have been made quite clear, and we should then have been told exactly which aspects of Israelite thought were regarded as fundamental, and how they were related to others which varied according to changing circumstances.

Despite the sweeping assertions and inconsistencies,

⁶ See P1 pp. 21-29 for full context.

the general, somewhat vague picture which emerges from Pedersen's book is that the pre-settlement period made a profound and lasting impression on the Israelites. This impression remained with some Israelites through all ages and enabled them to distinguish between what ought to be assimilated from the Canaanites and what should be rejected. After centuries of tension between those who tended to accept too much Canaanite culture and those who tended to reject all of it, a syncretistic cult emerged which had absorbed only what one might call the permitted dosage of Canaanitism. When we find some Old Testament writers denouncing the whole of Canaanite culture as contrary to God's will we must tolerantly realise, from our vantage point in later history, that they did not know just how Canaanite they themselves had become.⁷

It does not help the clarity of this attempt to give an outline of Pedersen's view, however, that he has defined 'Canaanite' merely as 'a term used to designate the non-Israelitic population of Canaan as a whole, irrespective of such points of difference as it is impossible for us to trace'.⁸ We may compare with this the statement, 'it is indeed difficult to draw the line between what is Canaanite and what is strictly Israelite'.⁹

2. ISRAELITE MODES OF THOUGHT

Two notions which are of the utmost importance to

⁷ See P2 pp. 307-313, 346-347, 418-425, 466, 471-472, 616-618, 630-631, 641.

⁸ P1 p. 26. ⁹ P2 p. 317.

Pedersen in his detailed description of the Israelite way of thinking are 'totality' and 'soul'. He is also impressed by the considerable difference between ancient Israelite modes of thought and our own. Indeed, we might guess that his chief motive for writing his book is the desire to show just how different Israelite ideas were from ours, and to guard us against being misled by the assumption that words meant the same in Hebrew when used by the Israelites as the translated words do when used by us.

He opens his section on the soul with following statement:

'Israelitic psychology seems near and familiar to us, because such a great number of its forms of manifestation are part of our own mental capacity. We use biblical definitions, such as spirit and heart, when expressing states of mind, but it is not to be taken for granted that the words mean the same to us as to them. The words express a life determined by the totality-conception, but the Israelitic view of life is determined by other factors than ours. If we want to understand the mind of the Israelite, we must first of all examine what the psychic terms mean in their own context.'¹⁰

An extreme expression of the difference between Hebrew and modern languages, and therefore the difference between ancient Israelite thought and our own is as

¹⁰ P1 p. 99.

follows:

'That which interests the Israelite is not the strict limitation of the idea, but the determination of its peculiarity. This manifests itself in his language, and makes it practically impossible to translate a Hebrew account into any modern language. For us each word in its context has its definitely limited sense; but even though a special shade of meaning predominates, the Hebrew constantly feels the idea of totality acting through it'.¹¹

The statement about the near impossibility of translating a Hebrew account into a modern language is no mere passing hyperbole meant to emphasise a significant point. Pedersen insists on justifying it at some length. Israelitic thinking is compared with our modern ways of thought, and these two different ways of thinking are regarded as revealing their distinctive characters in the languages of ancient Israelites and modern Europeans respectively. Pedersen illustrates this point by giving examples of the literal translation of certain passages.

For example, Genesis 41:3 is given as 'septiad-cows others ascending after-them from-Nile poor-appearance and-thin-flesh'.¹² Or again, II Kings 22:19, '"Given" (Ya'an) thinness-heart-yours and-you-bent before-face-Yahweh by-hearing-thine "namely" ('asher) spoke-I against-place-this and-against-inhabitants-its for-to-be to-ruin and-to-curse and-thou-toarest clothes-thine and-thou-wepst

¹¹ Pl p. 111. ¹² Pl p. 114.

before-face-mine and-also hear-I saying-Yahweh'.¹³

We should next look at some illustrations of what Pedersen means by the expression of a life 'determined by the totality conception'.¹⁴ Let us see how it is applied to commonplace occurrences which are directly relevant to what Pedersen believed to be the Israelite perception of individuals and species in the natural world.

If, for example, we today think of a foreigner, say a Frenchman, Pedersen insists that we think of an individual who has various characteristics, among them that of being French. For us, the French are a body of individuals: the collective term indicates a collection of individuals, and we think of the individual as simply one of the collection and sharing with the others the characteristic of being from France. Pedersen does not use this particular illustration, but it is based on what he says about the Hebrew conception of a Moabite.¹⁵ Whereas we think in individual terms, Pedersen maintains that the Israelite thought first and foremost of the type, Moabite, and the individual Moabite was for him a manifestation of this type. All the characteristics which go to make up being Moabite are gathered together into a unity or totality, Moabithood, this unity having a common will.

For us, this is an artificial abstraction, a personification, because we think of the common character-

¹³ Pl p. 120. ¹⁴ Pl p. 99. ¹⁵ Pl pp. 109-110.

istics of a group of individuals which are first intellectually isolated and then combined in the imagination to form the idea of a type, a typical person who exists only in the mind. For the Israelite, however, this type not only really existed but 'is the starting point of thought'. The Israelite does not think in abstractions, but nevertheless 'his thought is ruled by the general idea'.¹⁶ The general idea, or totality, is not an abstraction, nor the sum of individual entities, but in itself real, the essential character to which the details are subordinate.

Similarly, if today we meet not a Frenchman but a cow or lion we think simply in terms of this individual cow or lion, respectively individual samples of a species which is itself an abstract term denoting a collection of individuals sharing certain common characteristics. The Israelite, however, confronted by cow or lion, felt himself to be encountering cowhood or lionness, the totality or species itself manifested in a particular instance. As Pedersen himself says, 'the individual cow is a fully qualified representation of "cowhood"'. And so it is also with trees, men and carriages.¹⁷

Pedersen goes on to say that one of the fundamental characteristics of the Semitic languages is the failure or refusal to make a sharp distinction between different classes of words. 'To the root *mlk* the signification of "kinghood" attaches itself, and according to the

¹⁶ Pl p. 109. ¹⁷ Pl p. 110.

modification of the word it may mean the king, the kingdom and the fact of acting as a king'.¹⁸ A little later he makes similar remarks about כָּתַב, write, and הָרַג, kill.¹⁹

It will be clear from these points that for Pedersen there is a sharp difference between the way in which the Israelites thought and therefore expressed themselves, and the way in which we think and express ourselves. But it must be emphasised that for Pedersen the Israelite did not think differently from the way we do merely in certain respects, or with respect to certain objects: for Pedersen the Israelite mind worked quite differently from, say, the modern English mind, and this was true all the time and could not be otherwise. Hence the statement that a piece of Hebrew narrative, which might look straightforward enough to us, is barely translatable into modern English or any other modern European language.²⁰

Furthermore, 'Hebrew, like other Semitic languages, has preserved its primitive character and gives an immediate expression of the processes of thought. The words that make the language call forth images, but the Israelite sees something more in them than something that is different from the actual matter. The matter lives in the word'.²¹

Pedersen asserts that for primitive peoples what is in the soul may be there without its presence being

¹⁸ P1 pp. 110-111. ¹⁹ P1 p. 113. ²⁰ P1 p. 111.

²¹ P1 p. 112. See pp. 108-124 for Pedersen's full argument.

known; and whatever is in a man's soul exercises power in the soul and controls his actions. When something is perceived or known, for primitive peoples the perception is not to be distinguished from the thing perceived. Perceptions are not just images, 'they^v contain the very matter'. The same is true of animals. 'If animals when conceiving see something streaked they have "streakedness" in them, and will throw streaked young'.²²

Once we have grasped the ancient Israelite way of thinking we are not surprised at the absence of any word for 'cause'. The kind of distinction we make between cause and effect was not possible for ancient Israelites. 'All that happens is to him a link in a comprehensive continuity, i.e. the character and capacity of the entire soul ... Thus the context between that which happens cannot simply be recognised externally. The events are not connected by mutual concatenation, but through the continuity of the soul in which they originate'.²³

Comment

Some comment is necessary on these views of Pedersen since if accepted they must have far-reaching effects on our interpretation of the Old Testament.

First, if we take seriously the statement about the near impossibility of translating from Hebrew into a modern European language it is surprising that Pedersen should so frequently use translations of the Hebrew text

²² P1 p. 132. ²³ P1 p. 133.

as the basis for his own commentary. Admittedly, he often refers to Hebrew words, and his aim is to show what the Hebrew text really means as against the sense in which we might take it if left simply with a modern European translation. Pedersen, of course, wrote his original work in Danish, but he was actively involved in the production of the English version and he makes very frequent use of the English biblical text, and it is quite clear from the way in which he uses it that he regards it as accurate to a considerable degree. His frequent references, for example, to the story of Saul, Jonathan and David, show that he assumes the main details to be readily accessible; and he distinguishes between such details and the very different matter of interpreting David's real feelings and motives for acting in the ways he did. Pedersen refers to 'a certain duplicity of motive, in David's relation to the house of Saul',²⁴ and later says of him, 'In his relation to Joab David shows the same lack of ethical consistency, the same duplicity which we constantly observe in him'.²⁵ Such judgements imply considerable confidence in the accuracy of the English text, which is what Pedersen quotes.

Using other copious quotations from the English text, Pedersen deals with the interpretation of the Book of Job, describes the exploits of Judges like Gideon and Jephthah, the rise and fall of Abimelech, the travels and adventures of the patriarchs, the small town community

²⁴ P1 p. 284. ²⁵ P1 p. 296.

reflected in the Book of Job, and makes frequent use of prophetic teaching and the sentiments of psalmists; not to speak of many other biblical subjects. This use of the English text is inconsistent with his statement that a translation is practically impossible, and this statement must be treated as an exaggeration of some possibly genuine character of the Hebrew text.

Furthermore, this exaggeration is all the more remarkable because in the preface which precedes the table of contents, Pedersen tells us that while translations have been made direct from the Hebrew text, the wording has been kept as close to the Authorised Version as possible.

Second, it must be readily admitted that if literal versions of the text of the type offered to us by Pedersen are the only accurate way of conveying the sense of the Hebrew, then translation into a modern language is indeed practically impossible. It must also be admitted, however, that precisely the same conclusion would follow if we were to put, say, German sentences into literal English. And if we go further afield, languages like Yoruba and Ibo would be completely inaccessible, and commercial communication with such countries as Japan would be completely impossible. The learning of a foreign language, especially one as remote from our native tongue as Hebrew, would require total immersion in the foreign culture and only the initiated would be able to engage in mutual enlightenment. One wonders if this is not what Pedersen is claiming for himself: to have gained some clue as to the working of the Israelite

intelligence denied to the rest of us. The remainder of his book frequently suggests this, but the supporting argument will by no means bear the weight of such a conclusion.

The fact of the matter is that a literal translation is not a proper translation at all. Every language has its idiomatic character, and the meaning idiomatically expressed in one language is translated, is carried over, into another when that other language employs its own idiomatic expressions to convey the same meaning. Pedersen must be perfectly well aware of this fact, and he and his colleague, Mrs. Aslaug Møller, could hardly have put hundreds of pages of Danish into English without such awareness; and, indeed, in his preface he refers to peculiar expressions which are 'not in strict accordance with the common *usus loquendi*'.

It is also ironic that his literal version of II Kings 22:19 is followed by a perfectly intelligible rendering of Genesis 29:1-14, Jacob's meeting with Rachel and Laban, upon which Pedersen comments, 'That which makes a description like this so clear and yet so comprehensive, is the author's genius in selecting the essential features'.²⁶

The most important point to note in this connection, however, is that this argument of Pedersen's might well reveal a tendency to read into the Hebrew text of the Old Testament marked differences from the modern European outlook which do not exist, or which only exist to a

²⁶ P1 p. 121.

lesser degree than Pedersen suggests. This tendency reveals itself in Wheeler Robinson and E. C. Rust; and it could lead to a caricature of the meaning of Old Testament texts even where Pedersen is prepared to use the English translation, as he very often is. This continual use of the English text might even disguise a tendency to present the meaning of the Hebrew as something very far removed from the sense conveyed by the English.

Third, Pedersen's assertions about Israelite expressions determined by the totality conception are justified by an appeal to linguistic usage, and one instance can be dismissed immediately. To say that 'Moab and Edom speak and act when their king negotiates with Israel, because what is Moabitic and Edomitic manifests itself entirely in their words and deeds',²⁷ is to assert a correct fact but give the wrong explanation for it. It is precisely because the individual who is king acts as king that he represents his whole nation; and it is significant that an ordinary individual Moabite or Edomite could not do this.²⁸ One wonders how an Israelite would distinguish between an ordinary Moabite or Edomite and his king in such negotiations if Pedersen's description of the Israelite mentality is correct. We must go on to ask if the Hebrew linguistic usage to which Pedersen refers is not simply the idiomatic Hebrew manner of expressing facts which are familiar enough in a multitude of cultures? How is it that Pedersen can draw his

²⁷ Pl p. 110. ²⁸ Cf. II Kings 3:27.

conclusions from Hebrew usage with such assurance, and is this not a mistake similar to that being made in the appeal to literal translations?

When David refers to the lion and the bear he is referring to repeated and commonly expected attacks by such animals on the flocks and herds. This type of animal makes that kind of attack; and David's manner of referring to the fact, his use of the definite article in each case, is readily intelligible in a straightforward translation. It might not be exactly the way we should refer to a similar situation today, but on the other hand there is nothing outlandish about it. There is therefore no justification for Pedersen's conclusion that the man milking the cow or being chased by the lion imagines himself confronted by the whole species manifested in a particular individual. Nor did any Israelite imagine himself milking or being devoured by the species, while the immediately present creature was merely incidental to the proceedings. Such a way of thinking is indeed far removed from our own, and if we are being asked to substitute for a perfectly intelligible concept one which is strange in the extreme, Pedersen should offer much clearer justification than he does. His argument is open to the strictures made by Barr on all such arguments from idiomatic expression to mental construction.²⁹ If David or any other Israelite really imagined himself facing the species, the totality, when a given individual

²⁹ J. Barr, THE SEMANTICS OF BIBLICAL LANGUAGE, London 1961. The whole of Barr's argument is relevant, but see e.g. pp. 39-43.

appeared on the horizon, the quoted uses of the definite article are not on their own evidence for it. We might also refer to the use of the definite article with names in New Testament Greek, or the absence of the definite article from Latin or Russian, and ask what inferences, according to Pedersen, could be made from these linguistic phenomena.³⁰

Fourth, the actual examples given of the supposed Semitic failure to distinguish different classes of words do not seem to justify the generalisation. If no sharp distinction were made between different classes of words, then why is the 'root' not simply used in different contexts, and why is it modified in various ways to indicate different meanings? If the Israelite SIMPLY seized on some fundamental idea and applied it to a given situation as he thought fit, there would be no need for the grammatical modification of words with which Hebrew is as well supplied as many other languages.

What totality is being conceived when $\chi\gamma\beta$ is used, bearing in mind that the Qal and Niphal mean shape or create, the Piel means cut out or cut down, and the Hiphil means be fat? How did the peculiar Hiphil of $\gamma\beta\delta$ arise? $\beta\chi\sim$ in the Niphal means to be foolish, but in the Hiphil be willing or pleased. $\delta\eta\zeta$ in its mainly Niphal uses means to fight, but there are uses of the Qal which mean to eat; and there are well known

³⁰ Cf. SBL pp. 31-33. See also Pedersen's remarks about the birds sent out of the Ark, Pl p. 110. This illustration of Pedersen's argument also depends on the oddness of the literal English rendering.

different forms of noun corresponding to each verb.

We might also try applying Pedersen's argument to our own tongue. Let us say that the root is KING, and the Englishman seizes on this fundamental idea which is then expressed in various ways as KINGship, KINGdom, KINGly. And so also with KILL: KILLer, KILLed, KILLing; or WRIT: WRITing, WRITer, WRITten. Is there, in this respect, any difference between Hebrew and English? And how much are we really entitled to conclude from the attaching or detaching of personal pronouns to or from the verb?

Pedersen claims that the Hebrews made no distinction between the abstract and the concrete. For example, 'tōbh is at the same time "goodness" ... and "a good person"'.³¹ Therefore, different kinds of going are represented in Hebrew by different verbs, whereas we use the word 'go' which represents an abstract idea and then supplement it with words like 'down', 'up', or 'out'. The Israelite, however, 'considers the totality-character of the action with its special stamp',³² and hence uses a separate word for each.

Pedersen goes on to say, however, that the word 'berith' may be translated in various ways, such as right, duty, law; but whereas for us each different translation conveys a new sense, for the Israelite it is always the same idea, but being presented in different forms.³³

³¹ Pl p. 110. ³² Pl p. 111. ³³ Pl pp. 111-112.

There is clearly a contradiction between Pedersen's assertions here. If it is true that the Israelite used different verbs for different kinds of going because he thought of the whole action with its given character, then he should also have seen right, duty and law in the same way and given them different names. If, on the other hand, the Israelite always had the same idea in his mind, then the idea of going, like that of berith, should always be expressed by the same Hebrew word, and it should be left to the modern reader to supply different modern words according to the different forms in which the idea is presented.

The contradictory nature of Pedersen's argument and his failure to take proper account of all relevant linguistic facts can also be brought out by applying it to English: we could argue that a modern Englishman speaks of going out, going in, going up, because he always sees the same idea, going, presented in different forms, as in the supposed case of an Israelite using berith. Or we could argue that different kinds of going are represented in English by different verbs such as enter, exit, advance, retire, depart, because the Englishman 'considers the totality-character of the action with its special stamp'.³⁴

It must be admitted also that a failure to distinguish between abstract and concrete is in itself astounding and it is difficult to imagine what it would be like for any

³⁴ Cf. SBL pp. 30-31.

human being to suffer this intellectual limitation.

No evidence is given from the text to support this assertion, and a glance at the text appears to contradict it. For example, Deut. 3:25.

אֶעֱבְרָה-נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת-הָאָרֶץ
הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה
הַטּוֹב הַזֶּה וְהַלְבָּנִין:

Moses wishes to cross the particular river, the Jordan, and see the particular good land on the other side, the goodness of this good land being expressed as a feminine adjective to go with the feminine noun ארץ. He also wishes to see the mountain, indeed this particular good one, goodness now becoming a masculine adjective to go with the masculine הר.

When things or persons are said to be good in someone's eyes, as is often stated in the text, it is necessarily some specific concrete object or collection of objects which is in mind. If the Israelites were solely aware of concrete objects, it is hard to see how generalisation could take place, and thought as we understand it would be totally impossible.

Pedersen, of course, does not mean that, but wishes to maintain that Israelites saw in all concrete objects the manifestation of what we regard as some abstract quality, for example 'goodness in all its manifestations'; but this depends upon precisely the distinction which Pedersen denies. The only alternative to this inherent contradiction is the absurdity of supposing that the Israelites outdid Plato and spent the whole of their

existence in the spontaneous contemplation of a world of Forms.

Fifth, if in the Bible perceptions are not to be distinguished from the thing perceived it is perhaps not surprising that the doctrine 'esse is percipi' *est* was produced by a bishop. Pedersen quotes in support of his assertion the story of Laban's flocks in Genesis 30:25-43 and the way in which Jacob placed streaked rods in front of the breeding animals thereby injecting them as it were, with a streakedness which would be inherited by the newly conceived young. But why should this particular perception be isolated from other perceptions?

Suppose the breeding animals saw the shepherd approaching, what would be the consequence then if the perception is not to be distinguished from the thing perceived, and if the thing perceived were to have this intriguing genetic effect on the unborn young? And why should perception be confined to sight? If the breeding sheep heard the call of birds or the lowing of cattle or felt the warmth of sunshine or the wetness of rain, would this not affect the nature of the young, and that, indeed, in ways at which the mind boggles?

Pedersen might reply that he was not describing what actually happened but what the Israelites thought; but it is not credible that there should be such a striking divorce between what the Israelite farmer thought and the way his creatures actually behaved, or, for that matter, his neighbours. Even making allowances for old wives' tales and popular misconceptions which can last for generations, such a degree of sheer illusion and

stupidity is not believable. It would surely be nearer the mark to see in such details features of a folk-tale in which the aim is to show that ancestor Jacob was more crafty than related ancestor Laban, and that this superiority had been handed down to contemporary Israelites over against their Syrian neighbours.

Sixth, the extensive examination of secondary causes carried out by natural scientists was not known in ancient Israel and the modern world. When, however, Pedersen asserts that Israelites were unable to make the distinction between cause and effect and that this explains the absence of a Hebrew word for 'cause', we are confronted by a suggested mode of thought so far removed from our own as to be barely imaginable.

Admittedly, Pedersen does acknowledge that Israelites recognised connections between events, but these connections were apparently thought to come about through the continuity of the soul.³⁵ This explanation is hard to understand.

It is equally hard to believe that Pedersen is asking us to suppose that Israelites were unaware of the effects of such elements as rain, wind and sunshine, or that they failed to appreciate the efficient causation of cooking utensils, farm implements or weapons; and there is ample evidence throughout the whole Old Testament that they were perfectly well aware of such causation, and in many ways were far better equipped than we are to make

³⁵ Pl p. 133.

use of it. The nature miracles of the Old Testament assume a natural chain of cause and effect which is being disrupted, as when water burns on Mount Carmel,³⁶ meal stops the poisonous or upsetting effect of wild gourds³⁷ (certainly regarded as a miracle in the Old Testament), or a corpse suddenly becomes a living man again on touching the bones of Elisha.³⁸

Another way of looking at many of the miracles is to recognise that in them some unusual cause has been introduced or something has been given a causal power it does not usually possess, as when the river water cures leprosy³⁹ or laying a poultice of figs on a boil cures a fatal illness.⁴⁰ Whether such stories were true or not, they could never have been told without the recognition of natural causation, and this fact must always be remembered even though the extremely detailed analysis of causal chains practised in modern times was unheard of in ancient Israel.⁴¹

³⁶ I Kings 18:38. ³⁷ II Kings 4:38-41. ³⁸ II Kings 13:20-21.

³⁹ II Kings 5:14. ⁴⁰ Isaiah 38:21. Cf. II Kings 20:7.

⁴¹ Cf. A. Malamat, DOCTRINES OF CAUSALITY IN HITTITE AND BIBLICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY: A PARALLEL. VT 5, 1955, pp. 1-12. A plague is passed on from Egyptian prisoners to Hattians; but the plague only appeared because the Hattian storm god was offended. This shows that both natural and super-natural causation were regarded as operative in the world. Malamat compares this with the famine which afflicted Israel in the days of David. (II Samuel 21:1-3). 'But the most notable parallel between the two sources lies in the phenomenological structure of cause and effect as revealed in the sequence: conclusion of treaty, violation of treaty and consequent national catastrophe'. (p. 12). See also D. Daube, DIRECT AND INDIRECT CAUSATION IN BIBLICAL LAW, VT 1961, pp. 246-269. 'Daube's principal point is that 'however far back in time we go, we find a full understanding of the most lengthy and complicated chain of events linking cause and effect. The opposite view is founded on a naive belief (which captured the world of anthropology, ancient history and classics in the nineteenth century) in a progress of mankind from childishness to intelligence'. (p. 246).

Pedersen mentions the absence of a word for 'cause' in classical Hebrew, but he ignores the Hiphil and other forms of the Hebrew verb which express the concept. The Hiphil of אָזַח ,⁴² for example, is used in the following ways:

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-כֵן הַחֲרֻטִּים בְּלִטְיָם־הֵם
לְחֹזֶץ־אֶת־הַכִּנָּם

'And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice',⁴³ (RV)

The Egyptian magicians endeavour to produce lice by miraculous means after Aaron has succeeded in doing so by striking the dust with his rod. This involves supernatural power, but expresses cause all the same, and flatly contradicts Pedersen's statement concerning the Israelite, 'He does not consider an action as something isolated, directly determined by the immediately preceding; he does not judge "post hoc, ergo propter hoc"'.⁴⁴

הֵן אֲנִי־בִרְאֵתִי חֲרָשׁ נֹפֵחַ בְּאֵשׁ
פָּחַם וּמוֹצֵא כֹל־לִמְעָשֶׂהוּ

'Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the fire of coals, and bringeth forth a weapon for his work'.⁴⁵ (RV)

The production of the weapon is obviously the result of understanding the properties of natural elements and the correct manipulation of them. This is also suggested by the אָזַח of the following verse. It is also

⁴² See BDB p. 425, the hiphil of אָזַח , 4 j.

⁴³ Exodus 8:14 (RV 18). ⁴⁴ Pl p. 133. ⁴⁵ Isaiah 54:16.

worth noting in passing that in both of these examples there is a clear distinction implied between intention and result.

כִּי מִיָּץ חֹלֵב יוֹצֵא חֶמְצָה וּמִיָּץ אֲרָף
יוֹצֵא דָם וּמִיָּץ אַפַּיִם יוֹצֵא רִיב :

'For the churning of milk bringeth forth butter,
And the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: So
the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife'. (RV)⁴⁶
Post hoc, ergo propter hoc!

וַתּוֹצֵא הָאֲרֶץ דֶּשֶׁא

'And the earth brought forth grass'. (RV)⁴⁷

This may be compared with Isaiah 61:11.

כִּי כִּפְאָרָץ תּוֹצֵא אֶמְקָהּ וּכְגִנָּה
יִרְוּעֶיהָ תִּצְמַח

'For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as
the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to
spring forth ...' (RV)

And also Haggai 1:11.

וְאָקַמְתִּי חֶרֶב עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְעַל-הַהָרִים
וְעַל-הַדָּגָן וְעַל-הַתִּירוֹשׁ וְעַל-הַצִּקְוֹר
וְעַל אֲשֶׁר תּוֹצֵא הָאֲדָמָה

'And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon
the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the wine, and
upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth ..
..' (RV)

The earth produces vegetation in a natural way, and

⁴⁶ Proverbs 30:33. ⁴⁷ Genesis 1:12.

water is essential for the process. The budding of Aaron's rod is thought of by analogy with the natural process: a dead stick buds as if it were a live branch because of the intervention of God.

In Genesis 1:24 we read that God commanded the earth to bring forth living creatures. Whether or not we are to imagine the earth actively participating in the production of the living creatures, we must assume that the chief aim of the writer in using $\chi\psi\iota\sigma$ was to emphasise the dependence of all creatures on the earth. Without the life-giving power of the earth nothing exists.

Psalm 104:14 will receive comment in the chapter on biblical texts.

These few illustrations of the use of $\chi\psi$ in the Hiphil are a random indication of much in the Old Testament which reflects a knowledge of causes, and it is impossible to see how any Israelite could have existed without it. Nevertheless, Pedersen might reply that he did not mean that Israelites had no conception of causation at all, but rather that the connection of things has to be expressed differently since the modern English word 'cause' implies an over-all view of nature which is significantly different from that which was possible for ancient Israelites. Pedersen, after all, uses the words 'link' and 'continuity' in describing the Israelite view of the world, and his aim seems to be to deny that the distinction between cause and effect was part of that view, although it is an essential part of ours. He also unites this assertion with the importance of the soul

in Israelite thinking.

Now, it is perfectly true that we often distinguish causes from effects with a sharpness which is perhaps not justified, or which at least might fail to do justice to the interaction of several elements in a given situation. Is Pedersen asserting that over against this the ancient Israelite always had a grasp of the total situation and held together what modern analysis has tended to split apart?

The philosopher William Kneale⁴⁸ has made the following remarks about our way of thinking about causes:

'In ordinary speech we often say that one particular event is the cause of another particular event.

Thus, I may say that it was the dropping of a smouldering match by someone which caused a fire in a warehouse on a certain day. This seems to be the most primitive use of the word "cause" in application to events. In this sense a cause is some happening earlier than the effect on hearing of which we find the occurrence of the effect intelligible. Reflection shows, however, that in such cases we find the occurrence of the effect intelligible only because we have taken a great deal for granted. Thus, in the example of the fire at the warehouse I take for granted a great many singular facts such as that the warehouse contained

⁴⁸ See W. Kneale, PROBABILITY AND INDUCTION, Oxford, 1949. Part II, section 15, Limits to the Use of the Notion of Cause in Natural Science, pp. 60-65.

dry wood-shavings and was normally well ventilated, but I take for granted also a universal proposition that if a red-hot body falls on dry wood-shavings in the presence of oxygen a fire will follow shortly after. When I put all this clearly to myself I can see that my only reason for speaking of the dropping of the match as the cause of the fire was that this striking or unexpected circumstance completed a certain set of conditions from which fires usually follow. If I had approached the problem from a different point of view ... I might have said that the cause of the fire was the placing of the wood-shavings in the warehouse or the opening of a window through which a draught of air came.'⁴⁹

The designation of a particular event as a cause involves selection from a number of interrelated factors making up a given situation; and we might interpret Pedersen's argument as meaning that Israelites did not make this kind of selection but always viewed factors as interrelated parts of a whole.

Kneale goes on to point out that analysis reveals a problem about how to decide where the cause stops and the effect begins; and that there is also a problem about what degree of similarity events must have to be regarded as the same causes producing the same effects. Without going further into an intricate problem it is clear that Kneale's remarks on causation could be taken to strengthen Pedersen's view at least to the extent that

⁴⁹ P1 pp. 61-62.

they make us realise that there is another point of view about causation than that which we normally take for granted.

Nevertheless, when we place Kneale's remarks in the context of his argument we must feel serious doubt about looking in this direction for an elucidation and support of Pedersen's view. Kneale is, in fact, criticising Hume and other philosophers for taking the common notion of cause for granted in their discussions, and is asserting that the notion is far too vague to be regarded as 'the fundamental category of all explanation in natural science'.⁵⁰

In his later comments on the common notion of antecedent causation he states,

'It is useful only so long as we are content to stop our analysis at some point and say that the events with which we propose to deal are processes of a certain duration and a certain degree of generality. Now this is a common situation in everyday life, for the custom of language and the needs of practice fix the types of events to which we ordinarily attend. We think of some processes, for example, explosions, breakages, and actions like the pressing of a bell-button, as natural units because it is psychologically impossible for us to detect parts within them. But this is not the only reason why we select processes for special attention,

⁵⁰ P1 p. 61.

for we speak also of storms and battles as single events. All that is necessary to secure our attention is that a process as a whole should have some character which we can easily recognise as recurring in various instances'.⁵¹

But this description of how we see causation in everyday life also exactly fits the way in which causes are referred to in the Old Testament; and the view of causation which Kneale describes as a replacement for it, and the problems which he mentions as inherent in it, are the consequence of philosophical reflection. If such reflection on the notion of antecedent causation took place in ancient Israel it has found no place in the Old Testament. One wonders if it is not rather that some such philosophical discussion has influenced Pedersen and led him to read it back into the ancient Hebrew literature. It is perfectly evident from an unbiased reading of the Old Testament that Israelites regarded 'processes of a certain duration and a certain degree of generality' as causes, and that they spontaneously and naturally identified these causes according to the standpoint they had adopted with respect to a given situation, just as we do.

The writer of Exodus envisaged war as a cause of the Israelites' failure to take the obvious route out of Egypt into Palestine.⁵² When Moses reviewed the history of the people from the stay at Horeb to their

⁵¹ Pl p. 64. ⁵² Exodus 13:17.

arrival east of the Jordan he likewise referred to battles as the causes of certain results, such as retreat or the acquisition of territory; and this remains true even though the term 'cause' is not used, and even though all of these events are regarded as under the ultimate control of God. The sailors on Jonah's ship knew that a storm could cause a ship to break up,⁵³ and the author of 'Daniel' was acquainted with the fact that fire and hungry lions can cause death, each in their own peculiar way.⁵⁴ Sometimes ancient Israelites believed that certain causes operated which today we should not accept; or causes are referred to in the text which are miraculous and which were perhaps not even accepted as facts by Israelites themselves; but it does not follow from this that Israelites had no concept of causation such as we do. Nor does this conclusion follow from the fact that some people in modern times, or for that matter in ancient Greece, have analysed the concept of causation through philosophical reflection and scientific experiment.

There is further discussion in an Appended Note of Pedersen's assertions about Israelite mentality which are not directly related to the Old Testament understanding of nature.

3. THE SOUL

The importance of the soul in Pedersen's argument will be readily apparent to any reader of 'Israel', and it is also directly related to what Pedersen believes to

⁵³ Jonah 1:4. ⁵⁴ Daniel 3:22; 6:24.

have been the Israelite view of the natural world. What, then, is the concept of the soul in the Old Testament according to Pedersen?

For the Israelite, when Yahweh puts his breath into the clay he has moulded, it becomes a soul. Unlike modern ways of thinking, therefore, body and soul are not two distinct entities: the whole man is a soul.

'When in the story of creation it is told that God breathed the spirit of life into the man of clay he had moulded, it must not be construed in the manner that the clay is the body, the spirit of God the soul, which is seated and acts within the body. The man of clay was a dead thing, but by the breath of God he was entirely changed and became a living soul'.⁵⁵

For Pedersen it is therefore not surprising that various activities of the soul are sometimes described as activities or sensations of parts of the body: heart, blood, bones, bowels, reins, liver, head, eyes, nose, face.⁵⁶ Breath is especially important. 'Therefore the breath is the soul ... The Hebrews consistently maintain that the breath is the soul entirely. It is the breath that thinks'.⁵⁷ 'The soul manifests itself in the body ... The strength of the limbs, the harmoniously built stature bear witness to the nobility of the soul'.⁵⁸

The soul is the whole man, with that stamp or

⁵⁵ P1 p. 171. ⁵⁶ P1 pp. 172-176. ⁵⁷ P1 p. 171.

⁵⁸ P1 p. 226.

character peculiar to himself which makes him what he is; and it is this totality which is the soul, which wills, desires, acts and is known.⁵⁹

'The Israelite has no independent term for will as we understand the word. He does not recognise the will as an independent feature or force of the soul. The soul is a totality; its sensations penetrate it entirely and determine its direction; the will is the whole of the tendency of the soul'.⁶⁰

The concept of will must nevertheless be used in understanding Israelite thought, and when Pedersen comes to describe what is meant by living in a community, he states, 'Soul is will. A community of souls must therefore mean that one will more or less prevails among the souls'.⁶¹

According to Pedersen, in European culture we are apt to think of body and soul in spatial terms, but the Israelite did not think in this way at all. For the Israelite the soul is a force which acts through all the parts of the body, and, indeed may act apart from the body which must not be thought of as a kind of spatial limit to the soul.⁶² Prophetic visions, or even a message sent by a man to another place, bear witness to the fact that the soul, or part of the soul may act quite apart from the body.⁶³

Pedersen goes on to say that all souls, even God,

⁵⁹ P1 pp. 100-102. ⁶⁰ P1 p. 103. ⁶¹ P1 p. 264.

⁶² P1 p. 179. ⁶³ P1 pp. 162-165.

must have a body; the body being the form in which the soul lives. But divine souls do not have bodies which are made of flesh, which is a fragile substance. Indeed, flesh is only a weak kind of soul. If we think of life as a graduated scale, soul is at one extreme and flesh at the other, soul representing strength and flesh weakness.⁶⁴

Comment

In commenting on this interpretation of what soul means in the Old Testament we may first briefly note certain inconsistencies in Pedersen's exposition. Will is explained, or explained away in terms of soul; but a community of souls can only be understood in terms of will.

We are told that the soul can act apart from the body; and yet we are not to think of soul and body as two distinct entities.

There are, however, two more serious problems which arise out of the supposed Israelite view of soul and body and these require more detailed comment. First we must consider the relationship of this view to that of the grave and Sheol in the Old Testament; and second, we must consider the problems which arise from Pedersen's use of 'soul' in his argument.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ P1 p. 176.

⁶⁵ Cf. Geo. Widengren, review of, THE MEANING OF נַפְשׁ
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, by Miriam Seligson, STUDIA ORIENT-
ALIA XVI: 2, Helsinki 1951. VT 1954, pp. 97-102.
Widengren criticises Seligson for saying that 'soul' as
a translation of נַפְשׁ must not be taken in its modern
sense, and he claims that reliable information on נַפְשׁ
can be found in Pedersen's 'Israel'. 'Unfortunately she
does not offer any definition of what the "modern sense"
of the word "soul" is. Such a definition would certainly

First, Pedersen's ideas about the body-soul relationship in the Old Testament lead him into insuperable difficulties concerning the relationship of grave and Sheol. If, after all, we are not to make a distinction between soul and body, what happens at death? Whatever may be said in answer to this question, we cannot assert or imply a distinction between soul and body since, according to Pedersen, no such distinction existed for the ancient Israelite; at least not such as to suggest two distinct entities. There are admittedly different ways of speaking about persons in the Old Testament and these naturally suggest to us different ways of speaking today, and so we sometimes translate by speaking of soul or spirit, and at other times by speaking of body or flesh or bodily parts. For Pedersen this is misleading since the Hebrew text is always referring to one whole person, be it a man or woman, an angel or God, and what we might call soul-language refers to the person in his stronger aspects, while body-language refers to the person in his weaker aspects. Pedersen must regard this as precisely one of those cases where we believe we understand the Old Testament, but where the vocabulary of a modern language is quite inadequate to convey the real meaning of the text.

What, then, happens at death? In theory the whole person might begin to disappear completely until he no longer exists at all. The process of disintegration might take place gradually, beginning as we grow old and continuing until the body turns to dust and finally vanishes.

65 (Contd.) have been very welcome in view of the fact that there are lots of definitions of the notion of the soul'. Ironically, as a criticism of Pedersen this could scarcely be bettered.

Or it might start more abruptly or earlier in life through accident, or disease or death in battle. In the case of the completely gradual process we might find it surprising that the stronger aspects of personal existence should vanish first while the weaker linger perhaps for many years afterwards, but a detail like this is hardly fatal to the theory, and the main point is that whether sudden or gradual it is the whole being which is involved.

On the other hand, we might think of the whole person surviving death, or simply passing by means of death from life in this world to life in another. Assuming that this other life or world is not normally accessible to us while we are still in this one, the person will in this case vanish completely, just as Piglet believed he had been transported to the moon after falling on Eeyore's balloon. The whole person will be invisible to us, not because he has vanished into nothingness but because he has passed beyond our means of perception.

Or death might be the beginning of an intermediate state between this world and some other condition yet to be brought about, and the whole person will be looked upon after the analogy of one who is asleep.

The second of these three views obviously did not characterise the Israelite outlook since corpses and graves were there for everyone to see.

It is also clear, however, that the first view did not characterise the Israelite outlook either. There are texts which clearly indicate a distinction between

the body in the grave and the shade or spirit or ghost which existed in Sheol; and these texts are also inconsistent with the third view. It would be rash, however, to assume that all Israelites always thought in the same way about death throughout the whole of the Old Testament period: all that is being maintained here is that those who combined a belief in Sheol with common sense recognition of the grave as an empirical fact cannot have looked upon the human being as an indivisible unity. Graves lie at the surface of the earth while Sheol is deep beneath it. Graves are occupied by corpses or bones, while Sheol is inhabited by ghosts.

When Sarah died Abraham bought land in which to bury her;⁶⁶ and Jacob's body was buried in the same place.⁶⁷ The fearful Israelites contrast the graves of Egypt with burial in the desert, or perhaps with lack of burial in the desert and exposure to the elements and wild beasts.⁶⁸ Ahijah the prophet speaks of the ravaging of the corpses of Jeroboam's family, contrasted with the honourable burial of Abijah.⁶⁹ Men throw a corpse into the grave of Elisha in order to escape unimpeded from the Moabites, with startling consequences for all present when the body touches the remains of the prophet.⁷⁰ The prophet Jeremiah had a vision of bones being brought out of graves and spread out on the ground;⁷¹ while the body of Uriah was cast into the graves of the common people.⁷²

⁶⁶ Genesis 23, especially vv. 9, 17, 19 and 20.

⁶⁷ Genesis 49:33-50:13. ⁶⁸ Exodus 14:11.

⁶⁹ I Kings 14:11-13. ⁷⁰ II Kings 13:21.

⁷¹ Jeremiah 8:1-3. ⁷² Jeremiah 26:23.

Nehemiah complained to Artaxerxes of the ruined and neglected state of 'the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres', and gained permission to restore it.⁷³

In these texts, and others which could be quoted, it is perfectly clear that קברות meant to the Israelites what 'graves' means to us: readily accessible places at the surface of the earth in which corpses are placed.

Sheol, on the other hand, is always in the singular; and while it occupies some place in the physical universe it is not what might be called a geographical location. It is indeed interesting to note in passing that there is no mention of Sheol in Genesis 1, although this in no way justifies Pedersen's characterisation of it.

Amos contrasts Sheol, into which men might try to dig, with heaven up to which they might try to climb; and the author of Psalm 139 likewise contrasts in a poetic figure heaven and Sheol with the same purpose of emphasising the impossibility of escaping God.⁷⁴ Jonah felt that he had sunk down to Sheol when he sank far down into the deep, 'to the bottoms of the mountains'.⁷⁵ Zophar, in trying to impress Job with the mystery of God's nature makes poetic use of the contrasting height and depth of heaven and Sheol;⁷⁶ while a later text locates Sheol beneath the waters.⁷⁷ Proverbs 9:18 refers to 'the depths of Sheol'. Apart from the obvious meaning of these texts,

⁷³ Nehemiah 2:3. ⁷⁴ Amos 9:2; Psalm 139:8.

⁷⁵ Jonah 2:6. ⁷⁶ Job 11:8. ⁷⁷ Job 26:5-6.

the contrast between heaven and Sheol would not be very impressive if it were merely another designation for graves.

Isaiah's vision of the descent of the King of Babylon into Sheol assumes the same distinction. The ghosts in Sheol rise up to meet the new arrival, contrasting his present abysmal journey with his former aspirations to emulate God in heaven; and at the same time making allusions to the shameful treatment of his corpse.⁷⁸

Ezekiel speaks of Sheol being in 'the nether parts of the earth' in his warning to Pharaoh;⁷⁹ and Korah's descent into Sheol suggests a fearful burial in the depths of the earth.⁸⁰

Samuel was buried at Ramah; but when Saul wished to consult the spirit of the prophet he went to Endor, and it was there that the ghostly Samuel appeared, coming up out of the earth. The body and the spirit are clearly differentiated.⁸¹

Pedersen, of course, knows that a distinction exists between the grave and Sheol, but he cannot accept the simple explanation that the grave is where the body rests and that Sheol is the abode of the shades or spirits of the dead. He therefore invents an explanation for which no justification is offered, and which is nothing other than a sophisticated rationalisation of his own

⁷⁸ Isaiah 14:9-20, especially vv. 9, 12-15, 18-20.

⁷⁹ Ezekiel 31:14,16,18. ⁸⁰ Numbers 16:29-33.

⁸¹ I Samuel 28:3, 7-8, 11, 13-15.

position with respect to body and soul, coupled with the unavoidable recognition of the distinction frequently made in the Old Testament between graves and Sheol.

Pedersen asserts that the realm of death is referred to both as the grave and as Sheol. For Pedersen, we make a distinction which the Israelite did not make, between the grave and Sheol, but our spatial conception is completely misleading when we try to understand the Israelite view. For us, graves are near the surface of the earth, whereas we learn from the Old Testament that Sheol is deep beneath its surface. How, then, can a person who dies be in both the grave and Sheol? Pedersen answers that the problem did not exist for the Israelite because Sheol is what is manifested in every single grave; it is what gives the grave its characteristics and nature, just as Moab is to be seen in every individual Moabite.⁸²

This means that for Pedersen Sheol is, in effect, a Platonic Idea giving every grave its characteristic reality; but it is ironic that we should have to turn to fourth century Greek philosophy to explain what is supposed to be peculiarly Hebrew thought untarnished by Hellenistic culture, and the comfort of this appeal must be short-lived since it is fatal to Pedersen's approach to Old Testament interpretation. Pedersen is right in saying that the location of a person in both the grave and Sheol posed no problem for the Israelite, but the reason for this is not that ancient Israelites thought like Plato

⁸² P1 p. 462.

but that they did not think like Pedersen.

One must also add that the mode of thought attributed to them is remarkable for a race supposed to be incapable of abstraction and generalisation.

We must also recognise that the phraseology used in speaking of such matters as of many others, is not to be taken with absolute literalness. Today in England we speak of John Smith's grave or Mary Brown's burial. We point to a place in the earth and speak of it as the resting place of the named individual; but we do not mean by this that the person himself is actually lying there. Nor did the ancient Israelites, who were just as capable as we are of distinguishing a live person and a dead body. The appalling fate of Korah and his associates lay in the fact that they went alive into the earth, and indeed right into Sheol, rather than having their dead bodies placed in normal graves.

Likewise, we must not be misled by the poetic association of grave and Sheol into ignoring the real distinction between them; and we must also remember that Sheol offered scope to the poetic imagination in ancient times as in modern because it is unobservable and mysterious. The grave is an observable phenomenon; Sheol is, indeed, the product of the imagination.

In Psalm 141:7 we read of bones being scattered at the mouth of Sheol, and it may be that the grave is here thought of as the entrance to Sheol. In Ezekiel 32 graves are depicted as being in Sheol, the emphasis being on the total destruction of those who once wielded great power

in the world, and perhaps implying the lack of an honourable tomb: the mighty kings have disappeared completely with all who supported them, leaving no memorial for friends and descendants to venerate.

The same idea seems to be expressed in Isaiah 14. In verse 11 the King of Babylon is spoken of as both rotting in the grave and being in Sheol, but this does not imply any denial of the distinction between body and spirit or shade. In cases like these the prophet or poet clearly wishes to emphasise the contrast between the arrogant wielding of power in this world and the total eclipse of all such power at the inevitable intervention of death; and texts like these cannot destroy the force of those which indicate an obvious distinction between graves produced by human effort and the mysterious underworld inhabited by the vaguely conceived remnants of human personality.

Second, this way of interpreting Israelite thought concerning soul and body as it is presented to us in the Old Testament is confirmed by the story of man's creation in Genesis 2. The material body is enlivened by the breath of God;⁸³ and it is then perfectly true to say that

⁸³ Cf. T.C. Mitchell, THE OLD TESTAMENT USAGE OF נְשָׁמָה. VT 1961, pp. 177-187. Mitchell argues that נְשָׁמָה has a more restricted usage than נֶפֶשׁ or רוּחַ, and after examining its 26 occurrences in the Old Testament concludes that in 18 cases 'the word refers to the breath of God, or of man received from God' (p. 186). Elsewhere he says that נְשָׁמָה 'describes the "breath" of God, which he breathed into man at his creation, and which forms a vital element in the life of man'. (p. 181). Mitchell maintains that נְשָׁמָה probably refers to an element in man which distinguishes him from the animals.

there is an intimate union between body and soul or personality, and it may also be true to say that this is an important fact which has been obscured by medical research in modern times. This has come about partly through the great interest which has been shown in the workings of the body and consequent enlightenment as to how chemical elements and physical structure can determine feelings, temperament and so on; and also partly through the separation of psychology as a scientific discipline from those sciences concerned with the physical aspects of human life. Gilbert Ryle's attack on the concept of the 'ghost in the machine',⁸⁴ was a justifiably sharp reminder that we could all too easily assume a clear distinction between soul or mind or personality and body which does not correspond to the facts.

But even so, Pedersen goes too far in claiming that for the Israelite no distinction could be made between soul and body, and that the body is soul in its outward form.⁸⁵ When the breath or spirit disappears the body is left, a lifeless piece of bones and flesh, just as it was before the breath of God was put into it. The same picture of human life underlies Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones,⁸⁶ and is surely reflected in Hebrew vocabulary for such items as bones and flesh, soul and spirit.

Pedersen's equation of breath and soul, נְפֹשׁ וְרוּחַ:

⁸⁴ G. Ryle, THE CONCEPT OF MIND, London 1949. See Chapter 1, DESCARTES' MYTH, pp. 11-24.

⁸⁵ Pl p. 171. ⁸⁶ Cf. Psalm 104:29.

and נְפִשׁ⁸⁷ is at first sight more plausible since there is clearly a close relationship between the two. The living individual is a creature that breathes, and when the breath disappears, so does the soul; and this often happens gradually: as the breathing becomes shallower, the person gets feebler; and it is when God breathes into the model he has made that it becomes a living soul. Linguistically, נְשָׁמָה can be used as a synonym for נְפִשׁ.⁸⁸

Yet even here Pedersen has overstated his case in the interests of maintaining his argument for the dominating influence in Israelite thought of the concept of totality, the result being that he not merely asserts an intimate relationship between breath and soul, but their identity. It is true that the two words could often be exchanged without any essential change of meaning in the contexts in which they appear, but even so Pedersen's contention is not thereby proved. We are, after all, dealing with two different words, and a text such as Genesis 2:7 is reduced to tautological nonsense if they are simply synonymous.

וַיִּנְפֹּחַ בְּאַף־וְנִשְׁמַת בְּחַיָּה וְאָדָם
 הָיָה לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה׃

'And he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living breath'. Or, 'And he breathed into his nostrils the soul of life and man became a living soul'.

⁸⁷ Pl p. 171. ⁸⁸ BDB p. 675, נְשָׁמָה 3.

By confining his remarks to the English words 'breath' and 'soul' and by choosing his texts carefully Pedersen can make it look as though the Israelites believed in some mystical identity between the two entities, although it is very hard to grasp what such identity means. If 'the breath is the soul entirely', does this mean that what we refer to as soul is really only our breath? It is doubtful that Pedersen meant to ascribe such a view to the Israelites.

The very mysteriousness of this identity, however, serves Pedersen's purpose since it strengthens his contention that Israelite thought and ours are very different and that our attempt to understand the Bible properly will indeed involve the penetration of a mysterious world quite unlike our own.

Pedersen can only create this illusion, however, by using the two English words whose meanings we naturally distinguish, by ignoring texts in which the substitution of one word for the other creates absurdities, and by ignoring the idiomatic nature of language.

In Exodus 1:5 for example, the substitution of 'breaths' for 'souls' would make the text absurd.

וְהָיָה כָּל-נְפֹשׁ אֲצִיאָה יֶרֶךְ-יִצְחָק שְׁבַע-נַפְשׁוֹת

'And all the breaths that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy breaths'.

In this context נֶפֶשׁ simply means people.

In Deuteronomy 12:23, 24 we read:

כִּי חֵזֶק לְבַבְךָ אֲכַל הַדָּם כִּי הַדָּם הֵדֵם

הוא הנפש ולא תאכל הנפש עם
הנפטר : לא תאכלנו על הארץ
תשפכנו כמים :

'Only be sure not to eat the blood because the blood is the breath, and you are not to eat the breath with the flesh. You shall not eat it, but pour it out on the earth like water'.

Once again, the identity of breath and soul leads to absurdity.

When we remember that according to Pedersen the body is only a weak form of soul, and that the soul is breath and the breath soul, and the soul is the blood, and therefore blood is breath, and the breath thinks, we might be forgiven for concluding that Israelite thought was not so much governed by the concept of totality as characterized by the perception of the external world as a buzzing, blooming confusion.

The substitution of 'soul' for 'breath' in such texts as Psalm 18:16 or Job 4:9 or Job 37:10 is less than felicitous. 'At the blast of the soul of thy nostrils'. 'By the soul of God they perish, And by the blast of his anger they are consumed'. 'By the soul of God ice is given'.

Nor do the cases in which BDB assert that נשמה is a synonym of נפש support Pedersen's argument. In six cases we have texts which lay emphasis upon what is

being asserted, five of them⁸⁹ having to do with the killing of a specified group the members of which, it is implied, were not protected, or ought not to be protected by youth or age or anything else which might elicit mercy in the killers: nothing breathing should be left, annihilation of the group was alone sufficient.

In the sixth case⁹⁰ every living creature owes praise to God. All of these texts express what is readily intelligible to any modern Englishman, and it is only by ignoring Hebrew idiom and depending on a literal English translation that Pedersen can infer what no one would dream of inferring from precisely similar statements in normal modern English. The RV translation illustrates this clearly.

In Isaiah 57:16 נַפְשֹׁתַי is translated 'souls' by the RV and this makes perfect sense; but the passage is poetic in character whether or not it is in metre, emphasising God's mercy, and the frailty of his creatures, and נַפְשֹׁתַי is well suited to emphasising that frailty and total dependence on God.

כִּי לֹא לְעוֹלָם אֶרְבּ וְלֹא לְנֶצַח אֶקְצוּף
כִּי רוּחַ מִלְפָּנַי יִשָּׁטוּף וְנַפְשֹׁתַי אֲנִי
עֹשֶׂה תַּחֲתַי :

'For I will not contend for ever, neither will be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made'. (RV)

⁸⁹ Deuteronomy 20:16; Joshua 11:11, 14; I Kings 15:29; Joshua 10:40.

⁹⁰ Psalm 150:6.

It is worth noting that the translation 'souls' is not demanded by the text, and the parallel term is not נַפְשׁ but רוּחַ. A phrase such as 'and those in whom I put the breath of life' would convey the sense of

וְנַשְׁמוֹת אֲנִי עָשִׂיתִי

Proverbs 20:27 is poetic, emphasising the penetrating nature of God's insight into human life, and no doubt implying the penetrating nature of his judgement upon it: everything is searched out. RV translates, 'The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD',⁹¹ but it is hard to see why we should not translate, 'The lamp of Yahweh is man's (very) breath'.

Job 26:4 is also poetic, and it is again hard to see why 'spirit' is preferred to 'breath' as a translation of נַשְׁמָה, the latter being given in RVm. Also, the meaning of this text is far from clear.

אֵת-כִּי הִגַּדְתָּ כִּלְכִּיל וְנִשְׁמַת-כִּי
זָצָאָה כִּמְהָרָה

'To whom hast thou uttered words? And whose spirit came forth from thee?'

These last three passages offer no support to Pedersen's wild generalisations, and the notion of thinking breath is precisely one which requires something rather more unambiguous by way of evidence to support its acceptance as a typically Israelite concept.

It is still logically possible for Pedersen to

⁹¹ Cf. RSV and Jerusalem Bible. NEB: 'a man's very soul'.

maintain his interpretation, of course. In such texts as Joshua 11:11 and I Kings 15:29 the literal translation 'breath' can be insisted on, and we shall then have statements to the effect that not a single breath was left after the respective massacres; and in Joshua 11:11 the explicit parallel is שָׁנָה.

וַיָּכּוּ אֶת-כָּל-הַנְּפֹשׁ אֲשֶׁר-בָּהּ לִפְנֵי-חֶרֶב
הַחֶרֶם לֹא נֹתַר כָּל-נִשְׁמָה

'And they smote all the souls that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them: there was none left that breathed'. (RV)

וַיָּהֲרֹקְמָלְכוּ הָכָה אֶת-כָּל-בֵּית
דָּרְבָעִים לֹא-הָשָׂא רַךְ כָּל-נִשְׁמָה לְדָרְבָעִים
עַד-הַשְׁמִדוֹ

'And it came to pass that, as soon as he was king, he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him'. (RV)

If, however, such a defence is adopted, the implications for biblical interpretation are considerable: linguistic idiom and figurative speech can be ignored at will, sense and nonsense will become merely relative terms indicative of cultural inheritance, and the field will be wide open for many other views of Israelite thought than Pedersen's. It is hard to see how any other limit could be set to the variety of interpretations proffered for our consideration than the number of participants in the game of Old Testament scholarship.

Similar remarks apply to Pedersen's claim that Israelites attributed various activities or sensations to

particular parts of the body because they saw the body/soul as a whole and did not think of it as made up of different parts. But why should we accept the idea that the Israelites thought any differently from ourselves in this respect? It is perfectly natural for us to associate certain feelings with certain parts of the body, so that the eyes flash with anger or the heart beats faster at the sight of the beloved; and it is also perfectly natural to think of this as an expression of the whole person's feeling: it is this or that individual whose sensations of anger or love are expressed in the look or felt in the quickened pulse. We don't think of the eye of itself flashing anger like some beacon, or the heart of itself pounding in admiration of the opposite sex. Why should we accept any essential difference between ourselves and the Israelites in this respect? And therefore why should we read the relevant Old Testament texts in any other way than is naturally suggested to common sense?

Finally, Pedersen's concentration on the word 'soul' as the translation of **נֶפֶשׁ** is seriously misleading, not least because the implications of his statements are often tacit rather than explicit. BDB give the various meanings of **נֶפֶשׁ** as 'soul, living being, life, self, person, desire, appetite, emotion, and passion'. Later they give as meanings, 'that which breathes, the breathing substance or being = **ψυχή**, anima, the soul, the inner being of man'. It is to be distinguished from, **בָּשָׂר**, flesh and **גִּבּוֹרִים**, body.⁹²

⁹² BDB p. 659.

Later, BDB assert, 'שֶׁמַי' is used for life itself 171 t.,' and this includes animal life in at least one text.⁹³ שֶׁמַי was also used as a paraphrase for the personal pronoun;⁹⁴ and it often meant the seat of the appetites, or emotions and passions.⁹⁵

When we turn to the Concise OED⁹⁶ we find nine meanings given for 'soul', and most of them show how appropriate the word is as a translation of שֶׁמַי; but the variety of meanings in both cases shows how important it is in any discussion of the subject to make it clear which meaning of 'soul' is held to be the appropriate equivalent of שֶׁמַי in any given context. This is all the more true because, if the word 'soul' is used without any further implicit or explicit qualification it is the first meaning which we usually assume to be indicated: 'Spiritual or immaterial part of man, held to survive death'.

Pedersen therefore often appears to be saying something weighty, and initiating us into the mysteries of Israelite thought, and therefore revealed truth, when what he is really doing is ignoring necessary distinctions and propagating confusion.

At the very beginning of his section on the soul⁹⁷ Pedersen refers to the making of man as this is described in Genesis 2. His conclusion from the short biblical narrative is this: 'It is not said that man was supplied

⁹³ BDB p. 659, 3c. ⁹⁴ BDB p. 660, 4.

⁹⁵ BDB pp. 660-661, 5 & 6.

⁹⁶ CONCISE, 6th ed. 1976. ⁹⁷ Pl p. 99.

with a nephesh, and so the relation between body and soul is quite different from what it is to us. Such as he is, man, in his total essence, is a soul'.

The correct interpretation of נִפְשׁוֹ הָאָדָם לִנְפֶשׁ חָדָשׁ however, is not that the clay man became a living soul, but that the clay man became a living person, rather as Pinocchio was transformed, after many vicissitudes, from a wooden doll into a real boy. Pedersen's statement that the text does not say that man was supplied with a nephesh is perfectly correct: the text says that man was supplied with the breath of life, this being blown by Yahweh into the nostrils of the earthen model. The picture is clearly given of a lifeless model being transformed into a living person by the infusion of God's breath, and the rest of Pedersen's conclusions do not follow. We are not supposed to conclude that human beings are souls in OED sense one, and that bodies are just weak forms of soul, and so on; we are to conclude that נִפְשׁ in this context must be translated by 'soul' in OED sense eight, 'Person (not a soul to speak to for miles around; ship went down with 200 souls) ...' This is also the translation we must use in the texts referred to by Pedersen immediately after his quoted conclusion from the Genesis 2 narrative.⁹⁸

Most astounding of all, however, we read Pedersen's own comment, 'In these and in numerous other places we may substitute persons for souls'.

⁹⁸ Genesis 12:5; 14:21; 46:27; Exodus 1:5.

If Pedersen had only gone back to the Hebrew text and re-translated in this way he must surely have seen that the Old Testament statements under consideration convey neither more nor less than we do today when talking about people, persons; and far from being barely translatable, express statements which are quite readily intelligible to us. Unfortunately, having glimpsed a crucial fact of translation Pedersen then forgets it and falls back on the traditional translation of **נֶפֶשׁ** as 'soul', assuming that every instance of it refers to man's immortal spirit, imprisoned within the body and waiting to escape from it at death. He then insists, quite rightly, that many Old Testament texts do not mean this by the word **נֶפֶשׁ**, but instead of revising his translation of the word, he then tries to modify the concept of soul in such a way as to reveal what the Israelites really thought about it. In the Genesis 2 narrative, for example, we are to find the expression of the Israelite belief that soul really included body, that the amalgam of divine breath and earth produces a soul.

It is not possible to know why Pedersen adopted this confusing and misleading procedure, but the impression is created that he wished to demonstrate that the traditional belief in the immortality of the soul, OED sense one, had no basis in the Old Testament, and if he could show that the soul is referred to in the Old Testament in ways quite inconsistent with the traditional belief this aim would be fulfilled. It may be, of course, that such a purpose was only vaguely felt by Pedersen rather than consciously formulated, but some such motivation seems

to be necessary to explain his approach to the Old Testament since he was clearly not moved by any determination to get as near as possible to objective accuracy.

And at this point we are forced to face the question, 'Is objective accuracy possible in the translation of the Old Testament?'

Pedersen and the RV translate וְהָיָה אָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה 'and the man became a living soul'. Others translate, 'became a living being, creature, person'.⁹⁹ What are the criteria by which we decide that one translation is better than another, that in this context one modern word for נֶפֶשׁ conveys what the ancient writer meant more accurately than another? Why should we prefer OED sense eight to OED sense one? If the translation 'person' suits Pedersen's critics and the translation 'soul' suits Pedersen, must we conclude that either translation is acceptable and that we shall simply choose whichever supports the wider interpretation of the Old Testament we prefer? In the present case we can find other texts in the Old Testament to support either translation.

This question has been raised not in order to attempt a thoroughgoing answer to it, but to draw attention to the fact that in any such investigation we make an assumption the truth of which cannot be demonstrated, and that is that what other people have said and written makes sense. This statement itself requires careful qualification to take account such common human failings as forgetfulness,

⁹⁹ Knox, 'living person'; NEB, 'living creature'; JB, RSV and Moffatt, 'living being'.

vagueness, emotional stress, prejudice and even sheer stupidity; but in our dealings with one another we assume that any reasonable person will recognise a contradiction and adjust his thinking accordingly. We go on assuming this when we meet strangers, no matter how remote their own culture and language may be from our own. In a foreign culture we may have to revise our notions of what constitutes the normal, but we shall go on assuming that the talk and behaviour of other people, however strange, are intelligible, even if in practice we never attain to an understanding of them ourselves. Our assumption of intelligibility will be confirmed by the fact that the talk and behaviour with which we are confronted reveal patterns, and any element which does not appear to fit the usual patterns we shall seek to 'explain'.¹⁰⁰

This kind of assumption is similar to that of natural scientists who have to assume, although they cannot prove beyond any possibility of doubt, the existence of universal causation. Whatever new or strange situations may be investigated, the law of causation is expected to be exemplified once more, and the new system of causes to be not unrelated to those many patterns of causation already observed.

It is perhaps not surprising that those who are prepared to surrender the notion of causation are equally

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Colin Cherry, ON HUMAN COMMUNICATION, London & New York, 1957. pp. 10-14; chapter 7, 'On Cognition and Recognition', esp. pp. 273-280.

happy to jettison intelligibility. For Pedersen and others the ancient Israelites had no notion of natural cause, and it seems that they also had no interest in relating together the various elements of their experience in a rational manner. To return to the text under discussion: the interpretation of this text to mean that the earthy body of Adam became a soul, OED sense one, is unintelligible. We are not being presented with a statement which is elsewhere contradicted by the writer; we are not being presented with a statement at all, but merely gibberish masquerading as a statement.

It is possible, of course, to use 'soul' simply to mean 'person'; but Pedersen does not do this, and if he did, as we have seen, his other conclusions would then have to be surrendered. And confusion is made all the easier by this ambiguity of the word 'soul' which means that Pedersen can slip his unintelligible translation passed our intellectual guard under the guise of a traditional and sensible meaning.

Pedersen himself provides us with a perfect illustration of this confusion.

'The Israelites are quite able to distinguish between soul and body, as when Isaiah says: He shall consume both soul and flesh (10:18). But no distinction is made between them as two fundamental forms of existence. The flesh is the weaker ... the soul is the stronger. The soul is more than the body, but the body is a perfectly valid manifestation of the soul'.

Pedersen then goes on to comment on the story in Genesis 2:7:

'The man of clay was a dead thing, but by the breath of God he was entirely changed and became a living soul. Soul and body are so intimately united that a distinction cannot be made between them. They are more than "united": the body is the soul in its outward form'.¹⁰¹

And we are thus led to believe that an Israelite like Isaiah of Jerusalem at one and the same time believed that soul and body are distinct, that they are so intimately united that they cannot be distinguished, that they are not distinct, that body is the outward expression of soul. At this point the concept of 'fundamental forms of existence' spreads its healing wings over our fractured thoughts, but unfortunately the application of the inexplicable to the self contradictory does not effect a cure.

Once we grant the assumption of intelligibility, sensible translation and interpretation become possible; but if we are not prepared to grant this assumption there is little point in attempting the interpretation of a body of ancient literature like the Old Testament. Pedersen does attempt this interpretation, as the two considerable volumes of the English edition of his work bear witness; but for someone who cannot accept the necessary basic assumption of such inquiry, and who regards Hebrew narrative as barely translatable, this is the most fundamental inconsistency of all.

¹⁰¹ P1 pp. 170-171.

4. THE ISRAELITE VIEW OF THE NATURAL WORLD

Pedersen considers the Israelite view of the natural world in the light of what he considers to be the Israelite way of thinking.

As we should expect, he believes the world to have been viewed by the Israelites as a totality, and distinctions which we take for granted were not made by the Israelites, or were of only secondary importance. The difference between fertile land and desert is obvious, but the Israelite saw the first as essentially land which was blessed, whereas the desert was cursed. The desert can appear in the fertile land if the blessing is withdrawn and replaced by a curse, and this will happen if men lapse into sin. The consequence of sin is that a curse falls upon the land since, once again, the Israelites saw a close connexion where we make a clear distinction. For the Israelite, 'there is an intimate connection between the nature of the land and the men who dwell in it'.¹⁰² Therefore, where sin prevails the land has already become a wilderness, even if this is not immediately apparent. The kind of geographical distinction we make was perfectly well known to the Israelites, but it was not really very important for them because the desert land 'sends its offshoots far into the land of man; for the land of the desert is to be found wherever the curse abides'.¹⁰³ There is no distinct frontier between the land of man and the desert, and habitable land can only remain such

¹⁰² Pl p. 458. ¹⁰³ Pl p. 456.

by the preservation of the blessing.

Linked with the desert and Sheol is the ocean which lies under the earth; but the fact that both ocean and Sheol lie below the earth's surface does not in itself convey the intimacy of the relationship they had in the thought of the Israelite. 'The natures of the two worlds are so related that they merge entirely into one another'. 'Sheol is identical with the grave'. 'He who is in Sheol is also in the ocean'. 'Sheol and the ocean are fused in a unity as the source of all that is evil'.¹⁰⁴

Common to the desert, Sheol and the ocean is darkness and darkness is evil in all its forms, including sickness and misery; whereas light belongs to the world of man, and light is life, and identical with blessing and peace, righteousness and truth.¹⁰⁵

Therefore the sinner not merely goes to Sheol; by virtue of his sin he is already in Sheol, in the darkness, just as the wilderness is in the land of man wherever evil exists, even though it be not apparent. To escape from Sheol and darkness is to enter or re-enter the realm of light and life.¹⁰⁶

The Israelite's conception of the universe is an expression of the fight for life against death; and the contrast between life and death is identical with the contrast between law and chaos. Chaos is nothingness, and the Israelite was continually afraid that evil would lead to the disintegration of the ordered world into chaos.

¹⁰⁴ Pl p. 463. ¹⁰⁵ Pl pp. 464-465. ¹⁰⁶ Pl pp. 466-470.

This can only be prevented by the renewal of the blessing, and the victory of life and blessing is seen in the myth of God's victory over the dragon; a myth which expresses not only what took place at creation but what is continually occurring. The defeated dragon is the same as the waters of chaos which God subdues and turns into a means of blessing mankind, the rain from above, and the springs which well up from beneath. The victory over chaos is identical with the production of rains and springs.¹⁰⁷

The land and man belong together, but some parts are closer than others. 'The landed property of the family belongs to the psychic totality of the family and cannot be divided from it'.¹⁰⁸ In a similar way the whole nation is linked with the land of inheritance; and through family and nation blessing and curse act on the land.

When Israelites called Canaan the land of the fathers, the title conveyed more to them than to us because their conception of history was different. The people is not just a collection of individuals, but a psychic whole with a common soul into which all common experiences are merged. Later generations inherit what the ancestors have handed down, while the experiences of the later generations 'act in the fathers'.¹⁰⁹ The ancestor is therefore not a remote figure, long since disappeared, but someone who constantly shares in the history of the people. And therefore if the land was given to the fathers 'it is indissolubly bound up with the soul of the Israelites and fused with it'.¹¹⁰ Indeed, the link between people and land is so

¹⁰⁷ P1 pp. 470-474. ¹⁰⁸ P1 p. 474. ¹⁰⁹ P1 p. 475.

¹¹⁰ P1 p. 476

close that their creation coincides, taking place at the Exodus.¹¹¹

If there is a close relationship between land and people, this is only possible because the earth is alive. This means that the earth must be respected, and at regular intervals be left unworked, free from subjection to the will of man.¹¹²

Just as man has a covenant with the earth, so also he has with the cattle; while over against these are the wild beasts with whom man does not have a covenant. The wild beasts, however, are entitled to life: they were rescued from the Flood and are within the covenant of God.¹¹³

Another distinction between the animals is that between clean and unclean. If the unclean animal is eaten its soul is taken into a man, and it bursts his soul because it cannot be assimilated. 'Clean is what belongs to the psychic totality, unclean that which counteracts it'.¹¹⁴

The blood of an animal must not be consumed since this would be to take its soul. Consumption of the blood would mean that too much of the nature of the animal was taken into a man's soul, and also to encroach on the central life of the animal. By giving blood to the holy place, the soul is returned to life and not destroyed.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ P1 pp. 476-477. ¹¹² P1 pp. 479-480.

¹¹³ P1 pp. 481-482. ¹¹⁴ P1 p. 482. ¹¹⁵ P1 pp. 483-484.

Animals exist for the sake of man, who rules over them. The wild beasts must either cease to be wild and come to serve man, or else lose their right to live. Also, every animal belongs to its type or kind, which forms a firm unity. It is the kind which reveals itself in the individual specimen, and it is the kind rather than the individual which must be maintained in existence. Nor can there be any mixing of kinds, a strict rule applied to the smallest details.¹¹⁶

The sun, moon and stars are living beings which belong to the totality of man's world. They rule the forces of light, and are therefore upholders of the blessing and life. Sun and moon govern time; but this does not mean that they measure distances in time. 'For the Israelite time is not merely a form or a frame. Time is charged with substance or, rather, it is identical with its substance'.¹¹⁷ Therefore the Israelite can say, for example, that time IS rain.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, since all events originate in souls and are directed against souls, they all move round centres; and the events which centre round a man are his time. 'Thus there are as many times as there are souls'.¹¹⁹

This means that the different divisions of the day have nothing to do with length of time, but the different character of the various periods. The same applies to the divisions of the year, particularly the months, each

¹¹⁶ P1 pp. 479-486. ¹¹⁷ P1 p. 487. ¹¹⁸ Ezra 10:13.

¹¹⁹ P1 p. 488.

of which represents an entire moon-life. A whole, whether in time or space, is determined by its character, and a generation is a time marked by some special characteristics.¹²⁰

History is made up of generations; and the concentrated time into which all generations are fused is called עוֹלָם, eternity. Primeval time contains the substance of all time, and is the beginning of all time. Adam is thus the whole genus of man, every human being, and also the first man.

Because every type has its root in primeval time no individual in the great intermixture of lives in the world can become something else. The individual expresses the type, and the type is rooted in primeval time.¹²¹

Comment

Pedersen's understanding of the way in which Israelites thought is open to serious objection, and therefore his argument concerning the Israelite view of the natural world, which is based on this, is correspondingly weakened.

¹²⁰ Pl p. 489.

¹²¹ Pl pp. 490-491. Cf. E. L. Allen, THE HEBREW VIEW OF NATURE, JJS Vol II, no. 2. 1951 pp 100-104. Allen is concerned to make a protest against the modern exploitation of nature on the one hand, and mere vapid pseudo-nature-mysticism on the other (p. 100). He apparently believes that many people today suffer from an urban mentality which is blind to important truths about nature, and that the Old Testament can help us regain our sight. (p. 104) Unfortunately, Allen uncritically equates the teaching of the Old Testament on this subject with Pedersen's talk of the earth having its own rights and being in a covenant relationship with man; but we must beware of seizing on interpretations of the Old Testament which seem to provide striking evidence in favour of a view which otherwise has much to commend it and might command ready sympathy.

His specific remarks about the Israelite view of the natural world are also in many cases untenable or misleading and this will be the subject of the comments which follow. After this, it will be necessary to consider assertions in Volume II of the English edition and their relationship to the arguments of Volume I.

1) Pedersen's ideas about Sheol have already been commented on, and his further remarks, emphasising the close association and even identity of the ocean and Sheol, merely add to the confusion. Bodies in graves are not in the ocean, nor are the ghosts of Sheol. Furthermore, some of Pedersen's statements about history, time and the generations are so vague as to be unintelligible and beyond comment.

2) Men may sin in the midst of fertile land, but it does not thereby cease to be fertile. God may punish the wicked by sending war, but the devastation which follows war is not what Pedersen is thinking of; and in any case does not destroy the actual fertility of the soil, any more than the presence of saints in the desert makes it blossom like the rose. It is simply nonsensical to say that where sin prevails the land has already become a wilderness.

We must also note that even in the wilderness narratives where the people's rebellion is emphasised, it is not stated that this brought a curse on the land and made it a wilderness; it was a wilderness before the people entered it. The land of Canaan, on the other hand, was a land flowing with milk and honey even though it was occupied by human beings who were only fit for destruction.

Nor does the making of the golden calf have any noticeable effect on the surrounding landscape. Further comment will be made on this subject in the examination of Vol. II.

3) The relationship between the Israelites and their land is perfectly intelligible without any recourse to the concept of psychic totality. Ancient Israel was a largely agricultural and pastoral people, and where land is of such obvious importance it is not surprising that families held to it tenaciously. Nor is a strong feeling of attachment to a particular piece of land unknown today, and modern Naboths are encountered by property developers now, just as the ancient Naboth hindered Ahab then. Furthermore, the ancient Israelites' close relationship with the land did not prevent them being dispossessed of it by wealthier neighbours, and what strikes us in reading such prophets as Amos and Isaiah is the remarkable similarity between their times and ours.

We today also feel a connection with the past, and the nation, county, village or town is no more regarded as merely a collection of individuals than similar groups were looked upon by the Israelites. A glance at the volumes in any well stocked bookshop reveals interests of this kind, including the achievements, characters and personalities of our forefathers. This is not to deny differences, but differences would have to be described and explained in terms of social and political development and by reference to a considerable number of facts; while Pedersen's talk of soul and psychic totality is not merely uninformative but gives an exaggerated and misleading impression of differences between modern society and that of ancient Israel.

4) Pedersen's assertion that the creation of the land as well as the people took place at the Exodus is merely another *reductio ad absurdum* of his exaggerated view of the closeness of relationship between land and people, and his method of interpreting the Old Testament. It is quite true that the Exodus is sometimes described in the language used to describe creation, and this conveys the profound conviction that Israel was a new creation, brought into existence by the special act of God who alone could achieve it; but when Pedersen offers prosaic literal interpretations of a miscellany of texts, many of which are poetic, it is not surprising that he should find identity instead of figurative analogy. And so he tells us, 'The crossing of the Sea of Rushes is identical with the splitting of the dragon of primeval times. Therefore Egypt is identical with the dragon, Rahab'.¹²²

The land of Canaan unquestionably existed before Israel occupied it or even existed as a people; even the command to annihilate the inhabitants seems to have been a later theological interpretation of Israelite history, or have been more in the nature of a prophetic exhortation than an indication of what the Israelites believed and felt at the time of the conquest and settlement.

When Pedersen asserts, 'The country of man and the people are so closely linked that their creation coincides',¹²³

¹²² P1 p. 476. ¹²³ P1 p. 476.

we can only suppose that he has been carried away by his own ideas; and it is perhaps not without significance that accounts of the creation of the world and man in Genesis 1-2 find no mention in this section of his work.

5) The sensible measure of allowing exhausted land to recover by leaving it alone at regular intervals does not imply any more than normal empirical observation. Texts relevant to this point will be examined later.

6) There is no statement in the Old Testament which justifies the assertion that the consumption of an unclean animal will burst the soul of the eater, and Pedersen's 'explanation' of the difference between clean and unclean in terms of psychic totality is just as mysterious as the original distinction.

The explanation he offers for the refusal to consume blood is equally something read into the text, and whatever the ultimate origins of the avoidance of blood, the repeated reason given in the Old Testament is that the blood is, or contains the life; and it is not unreasonable to infer from this that reverence for the life is involved in reverence for God to whom all life belongs.¹²⁴ When people in Saul's army eat the blood of animals, it is not said that they are in danger of bursting their souls, but that they have sinned against Yahweh, and Saul's solution is immediately to set up an altar on which the blood can be poured out before God.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Genesis 9:4-5; Leviticus 17:10-14; Deuteronomy 12:23-27.

¹²⁵ I Samuel 14:32-34.

Pedersen also contradicts himself in asserting on the one hand that wild beasts are entitled to life and form part of the covenant with God and are therefore entitled to the prey which keeps them alive; and on the other hand asserting that wild beasts lose their right to live unless they cease to be wild and submit to the will of man. It may be, of course, that the contradiction existed in ancient Israel in that different people held different views of various wild animals in various places; but Pedersen does not say this, and even if it were so, this would be just another illustration of the way in which the Old Testament material cannot be forced into the kind of generalisation favoured by Pedersen.

Pedersen's ideas about types or species have already been commented on.

7) Pedersen's remarks about the Israelite conception of time once again suggest an attempt to propound the unintelligible. Referring to Ezra 10:13 Pedersen claims that an Israelite could say that time IS rain. Pedersen makes no attempt to explain how this extraordinary statement can be fitted into its context, whereas the usual idiomatic translation, such as the RV 'it is a time of much rain', makes perfect sense. Once Ezra's accusations had been accepted there was no point in a great crowd of people standing outside in the pouring rain; the matter could scarcely be dealt with under those circumstances and responsibility for organisation would have to fall on a much smaller number of leaders and be spread over a number of months. The assertion, time is rain, neither makes sense in itself nor can it be seen as in any way a meaningful contribution to the matter in hand.

One wonders what some future Pedersen, looking back at European culture preserved for him in a fragmentary literary state, would make of such phrases as *coup de temps*, or *le temps est à la pluie*, when he already 'knows' that 'temps' means 'time'. What would he make of the phrase, killing time, paralleled by the French, *tuer le temps*? What would he understand by hard times, serving time or moving with the times? How would he interpret such mottoes or proverbs as, time is money, or, every dog has its day? Would he think that reference to a rainy day meant the attribution of wetness to daytime?

It is no doubt true that ancient Israelites attached a particular character to given periods of time, but in this respect they are no different from ourselves. When Tennyson tells us that in the land of the lotus eaters it was always afternoon we spontaneously appreciate the impression he wants to create. 'Bedtime' conveys something more than an hour of the clock to reluctant children or grateful parents, and names of the months conjure up feelings and images related to communal experience of the seasons, family holidays, walks, gardening, springcleaning and so on.

Volume II

When we come to examine Pedersen's exposition of the Israelite understanding of the natural world in Volume II we find grave inconsistencies with the argument of the earlier volume. This will be illustrated by reference to three subjects.

- 1) We have been told that the wilderness was

regarded as the expression of the curse and therefore closely associated with darkness, death and Sheol. We now learn that Amos and Hosea resented 'the whole refined way of living involved by (sic) city culture' and 'demanded the reintroduction of the old manner of life in Israel'. A comparison with the Wahhabi of Islam makes it clear that the old manner of life was that of the desert.¹²⁶

There is not necessarily a contradiction between these two views: it could be held that in the midst of an accursed land the people held fast to Yahweh who rewarded them by guiding them through it to the Promised Land. This reconciliation is not possible for Pedersen, however, because he has clearly asserted that the curse is related to the ill behaviour of men, and if the Israelites behaved well during their journey through the desert then it should have been transformed into a land of blessing, much as Deutero-Isaiah described such a change, real or hoped for, during the return from the Exile.

Also, a reconciliation based on the staunch faith of the Israelites would have to account for those texts in which they are depicted as anything but faithful and Moses has a colossal struggle to get them through to Canaan at all.

Furthermore, Pedersen says that Amos and Hosea formed 'a cultural type within the people' who 'claimed to

¹²⁶ P2 p. 134.

represent Israel proper'.¹²⁷ We must infer from this that the prophets represent the fundamental conception, whereas other Israelites have surrendered the fundamental view under the influence of the cultural blandishments of Canaanite city life. In what sense, in that case, is the prophetic view 'fundamental'? In this case it cannot mean one of the categories in which all Israelites of necessity thought, since it is very evident that many Israelites did not think like this, and that is why the prophets had to make their protest.

Are we to suppose, then, that the desert period was looked upon as ideal by all Israelites, at least up to the Hellenistic period, and that this is what they always felt deep down, as it were, even though they were tempted to betray what they really knew to be true? This appears to be what Pedersen means; but if so, we are left with the question as to how we can reconcile this with the belief that the desert expresses the curse and a perpetual threat to the land of blessing.

Later in Vol. II Pedersen gives ample recognition to the fact that the desert period was often idealised by Israelites, but he never tells us how these same Israelites explained the fact that during this ideal period the land remained under the curse instead of being transformed into a land of blessing. In writing of the Rechabites he states,

¹²⁷ P2 p. 134. Cf. p. 541, however, where we learn that 'Hosea has the Canaanite view of the desert. It is the "land of drought"'.

'The Rechabites throw light on the history of Israel, because they realise in its purest form the tendency with which we continually meet in Israel, the attraction towards the past and towards pre-Canaanite life. It is this tendency which makes the wilderness period the ideal time in which all Israelite law came into existence; it is this that inspires the prophets' fight against the Canaanite practices; it is this we feel is the representation given in the patriarchal stories of the life of the forefathers as nomadic or semi-nomadic.'¹²⁸

This view is referred to more briefly elsewhere.¹²⁹

Perhaps we should see the desert period as ideal primarily in the sense that Yahweh remained faithful to his people and revealed himself to them in various ways despite their failure and backsliding; but if we do we must also recognise in Yahweh a personal deity who had become too transcendent for his curse or blessing to be triggered off, as it were, by good or bad behaviour. The notion of the world as a psychic whole with blessing and curse pulsating through it on the analogy of physical energy would have to be surrendered as a characterisation of Israelite thought in general, even though some Israelites sometimes may have thought in this way.¹³⁰

Curiously enough, Pedersen recognises this, and attributes the new view of Yahweh and his relationship to

¹²⁸ P2 pp. 522-523. ¹²⁹ P2 pp. 541, 546, 551, 555, and 581.

¹³⁰ See e.g. Stories about the Ark, I Samuel 5 & 6; II Samuel 6:1-15.

to nature to developments in the cultus at Jerusalem. This subject is introduced by Pedersen in the following significant words, which are a continuation of the passage just quoted.

'The Rechabites show that all varieties were represented in Israel from the people that detested all Canaanite forms of life to those who became entirely Canaanite. At what point of this extensive scale Elijah and his circle were to be found we cannot say with certainty, but they tended towards the ideal represented by the Rechabites, it was the ancestral God they wanted to maintain in Israel. The conflicts of the period of Elijah were superseded by other struggles to keep Israel free from a cult that would estrange it from its traditions. A decisive factor in the struggle was the cultus founded by David's royal house at Jerusalem'.¹³¹

Had Pedersen fully recognised such wide variety of thought and such far-reaching change in Israel from the beginning, he could hardly have proposed the sweeping generalisations concerning Israelite thought which characterize Vol. I. For example, in Vol. I we read about 'The Israelitic conception of the nature of habitable land' and we are told that 'For the Israelite "the land" is the country where blessing abides' and that 'the Israelite' thinks of the man who has been driven out of the country of blessing 'with horror'. The Israelites call the desert

¹³¹ p2 p. 523.

"terrible"; and 'For the Israelite the wilderness is the home of the curse'. There is brief recognition that once upon a time the Israelite must have regarded the desert as the Bedouin did, as 'free, unbounded expanses', and 'traces of this view are to be found even at a very late period' as well as in the beliefs of the Rechabites: 'But for the average Israelite the desert only appears as the direct opposite; he merely knows its terror'.¹³²

This is a far cry from the opinion already quoted from Vol. II that the attraction towards the desert period is one 'with which we continually meet in Israel'.¹³³ In Vol. I¹³⁴ Pedersen stresses the Israelite notion of the world as a psychic whole, and the 'intimate connection between the nature of the land and the men who dwell in it'.¹³⁵ Such, according to Vol. I is the outlook of the Israelites settled in Canaan; but Vol. II leads us to think otherwise.

The attempt to characterize the ancient Israelite's fundamental conception of the desert has as much chance of success as would a modern attempt to characterize the average Englishman's fundamental conception of the sea.

2) In Vol. I we are told that the Israelites regarded the earth as alive, and this is meant in some kind of personal sense which would generally be regarded as strange and improbable today.

¹³² P1 pp. 454-455. ¹³³ P2 p. 522.

¹³⁴ P1 pp. 456-460. ¹³⁵ P1 p. 458.

'We know that the Israelites do not acknowledge the distinction between the psychic and the corporeal. Earth and stones are alive, imbued with a soul, and therefore able to receive mental subject-matter and bear the impress of it. The relation between the earth and its owner ... is a covenant-relation, a psychic community, and the owner does not solely prevail in the relation. The earth has its nature, which makes itself felt, and demands respect'.¹³⁶

Whether or not the texts quoted support this representation of Israelite thought is a question to which we must return; but at the moment we must find out how this idea fares in Vol. II of 'Israel'.

Frequently it is repeated as the Israelite view of nature, and sacrifice and other religious beliefs and practices are explained in terms of it. Holy energy is active in wells and trees and ancestral power is often embodied in tombstones. Stones have the power to absorb and embody 'a psychic content'; stone has a soul and can receive communications, and there is especially concentrated vitality in sacred stones.¹³⁷

The force which unites the energy displayed in all spheres of life is holiness. Holiness is at the root of all other kinds of energy, and this means that 'The force felt by the Israelite in the sacred stone is not dissimilar

¹³⁶ P1 p. 479.

¹³⁷ P2 p. 214. See pp. 214-216, & 262.

in its essence from that which he feels in his own soul'.¹³⁸
Holiness may vary in strength, but it is to be found
everywhere.

Not only does the strength of holiness vary, but it
can be gained or lost. If, of course, holiness vanished
then life would cease. Men can maintain life, however,
by renewing holiness through the practices of the cult,
and supreme among these is sacrifice.¹³⁹ Pedersen deals
in some detail with the various sacrifices offered in
Israel, in order to show how holiness was looked upon as
being renewed in them. For example,

'The first ancestor of the Israelites, for instance,
the first Israelite, is the archetype, in whom the
whole Israelitish nature is inherent; the same applies
to the progenitor of an animal species, the archetypal
animal, and the first day of a period embodies in
itself the whole character of the period, so that the
following days unfold from it. Every totality is
concentrated in its first origin. This is what
gives the first-fruits their importance. They are
not the best in the sense that the best developed
part of the fruits has been selected; but as the
first of the produce they represent the whole;
the entire power and blessedness of the harvest are
concentrated in them. Hence the first-fruits have
special possibility of being holy and acting by

¹³⁸ P2 p. 264. See also pp. 286-292, where sacred times
are also alluded to; and the summary statement, p. 295.

¹³⁹ P2 p. 299.

their holiness on the growth of the rest of the produce'.¹⁴⁰

By bringing the first-fruits to the temple the whole harvest is sanctified, that is, holiness is renewed and strength and life given to the crops. It is also worth noting that this passage incidentally strengthens the impression that for Pedersen there is such a thing as the typical Israelite, that all Israelites share a common nature, and therefore think in the same way.

This impression, however, is elsewhere shattered. As we have seen, Pedersen believes the Davidic monarchy to have had a decisive effect on the cultus, and this is the specific object dealt with in the chapter, Yahweh on Zion.¹⁴¹ David's idea of Yahweh was very different from that which had hitherto prevailed, and David's idea influenced the whole future development of the cultus and the beliefs that went with it. For David, Yahweh was a personal being separate from both man and nature. According to the old view there was an organic connection between divine holiness and the energies of nature, and the operating of cultic practices meant a spontaneous flow of this holiness into the natural world, and, indeed, into the life of man. David's idea of Yahweh, however, meant that the personal deity might or might not bestow his blessing. This transcendent being possesses all power and his favour can only be won by the acknowledgment

¹⁴⁰ P2 p. 301. ¹⁴¹ P2 pp. 524-534.

of his absolute power over all things, which will or will not be exercised simply by the exercise of his own choice.¹⁴²

Therefore, according to Pedersen, although belief in the immediate sanctification of nature through the cult remained, it became weaker and weaker, and 'the cult became more and more detached from the life of nature'.¹⁴³ Sacrifices, therefore, no longer set in motion or released the movement of holiness in nature; they became acts which were designed to please God and persuade him to act in ways which are desirable for men. What is of supreme importance in the new Davidic type outlook is that God should know that men are really willing to submit to his will, and the doing of cultic acts comes to be of secondary importance.

In writing of Hosea's teaching Pedersen states,

'Right conduct meant a knowledge of God, because it was subordination to Yahweh's will, and everything turned on that ... this puts the cult in the second place'.¹⁴⁴

Pedersen goes on to say that in Hosea's teaching Yahweh has complete control of the land, animals and elements, and will use this power for Israel's good if they obey him; but in all this

'there is not the least psychic relation to nature.

The Israelites ... have no covenant with its life.

¹⁴² See esp. P2 pp. 530-531. ¹⁴³ P2 p. 533.

¹⁴⁴ P2 p. 541. Cf. Hosea 6:6.

Yahweh is outside and above nature, and Israel shall receive the gifts of nature from his hand'.¹⁴⁵

'It is not difficult to see that the Yahweh whom Hosea preaches is closely related to David's God. Man's relation to Yahweh is the same in both cases as well as the relation to nature. The living relation to nature is outside the horizon of both, but man derives benefit from nature. Therefore sacrifice is not a sanctification of the growth of the soil, but merely a tribute to Yahweh, and when Hosea says frankly that Yahweh does not care for sacrifice, he merely draws the conclusion from presuppositions already present in David's faith'.¹⁴⁶

We must conclude from these references to Pedersen that he first of all creates the firm impression that Israelites thought in a given way about nature and that this manner of thought is very different from our own way of looking at nature today. He then contradicts this view of Israelite thinking by asserting that David, followed by many other Israelites down the ages thought in a quite different way about nature; and although Pedersen does not say so, it is quite evident that this way of thinking is much more like that of many modern religious believers and altogether more readily intelligible than the first manner of thought attributed to the Israelites. If we accept Pedersen's earlier assertions about Israelites viewing the world as a psychic whole and so on, we shall have to approach the task of Old Testament interpretation very differently from the approach we must adopt if we accept Pedersen's later assertions about the Davidic type

¹⁴⁵ P2 p. 542.

¹⁴⁶ P2 p. 543.

outlook implied in many texts.

Also, the first approach will be allied to Pedersen's often expressed belief that the world revealed in the Hebrew scriptures is a far-away world, bearing little similarity to the world as we know it and described in a strange tongue far removed from any modern linguistic idiom.

The second approach, while not minimising problems of interpretation will be prepared to find, indeed will expect to find, many statements which are intelligible to us, which generally make sense even where we cannot accept them as true, or cannot be sure of the full or precise meaning to be attributed to them.

In this case Pedersen has made a sweeping generalisation about Hebrew thought, but when he has stopped generalising and examined Old Testament texts to see what they actually say he has found many assertions at variance with his generalisation. The proper course at this point would have been to drop the generalisation and proceed on the basis of a careful analysis of the relevant texts; but Pedersen has not undertaken this admittedly drastic revision of his work, but has tried to explain away the difficulty in terms of temporal development. The temporal development is in itself theoretically possible, but Pedersen offers no textual evidence to support his contention that an actual change such as he describes took place with the advent of the Davidic monarchy. The only evidence which could support Pedersen's contention would be a series of plausibly dated texts revealing a plausibly dated series of Hebrew conceptions, and it is perhaps not

surprising that no such evidence is offered.

In any case, the suggested temporal development is still in conflict with Pedersen's earlier generalisations about the Israelite view of nature, holiness, sacrifice and so on, and we must conclude that the idea of a specifically Israelite outlook in this connection is simply wrong.

Also, two other points must be made:

i) As we have seen, Pedersen distinguishes between a fundamental Israelite conception, which remains unchanged until the impact of Hellenistic culture; and other psychic conditions which vary from time to time. In the present case we must assign the view of nature to the second category since it is variable; but quite apart from the way in which Pedersen has expressed himself it is hard not to see in the difference between the two views of nature he describes a fundamental cleavage of outlook. If these two views are not fundamentally different, what meaning are we to attach to the word 'fundamental'? Either Pedersen is saying far too little or he is saying far too much in his ascription of a fundamental unity to Israelite thought. If he is merely telling us that there was a distinguishable people in the ancient world called Israelites and that, had we lived then we should have recognised an Israelite when we met one, the assertion is true but will inevitably be regarded as somewhat vacuous. On the other hand, if he is claiming that Israelites were only merely superficially affected by contact with the Canaanites, but radically transformed by meeting Greeks so that there is no continuity between pre-Greek Israel and

post-Greek Israel, he is claiming far too much, and also contradicting his own statement that 'David's view of life points directly towards the form of spiritual life which is designated late Judaism'.¹⁴⁷

ii) Pedersen himself clearly recognises from time to time that there is no such thing as a simple Israelite outlook characterising all members of the people, and a passage has already been quoted acknowledging this fact. In speaking of Hosea's prophecy Pedersen makes the following admission:

'Of course there must be some uncertainty as to what should be recognised as Israelitish custom, if the Israelites do not, like the Rechabites, reject everything that is Canaanite. It could, therefore, become a matter of controversy, and the various communities acquired what was Canaanite in different measure, as is, indeed, shown by the extant laws. Unfortunately we do not know the written laws Hosea mentions, and which were rejected by people as foreign. Hosea's mention of them shows us that laws were written to express the view of certain circles as to what was the proper custom, without having any external authoritative character. That even those laws which the prophet regarded as Israelite bore the impress of the people's life in Canaan through centuries is a matter of course, although the prophet could not know anything about it'.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ P2 p. 534. ¹⁴⁸ P2 p. 542.

A little later we read of the transformation of the people, and the constant reaction of certain circles against it.¹⁴⁹ And all this goes to show that generalisations about the ancient Israelite are just as possible and just as dangerous as generalisations about the modern Englishman, Irishman and Scotsman.

3) In Vol. I we have learnt that the grave, Sheol, is the place of death, the curse, utter weakness.¹⁵⁰ Admittedly, there is the brief admission that 'The grave is both good and bad', its goodness being revealed by the fact that it is the resting place of the fathers, whom the family like to have near them.¹⁵¹ But the conclusion of this section of Vol. I sums up Pedersen's main and repeatedly emphasised point: 'slackness, sorrow, exhaustion, curses belong to the realm of the dead'.¹⁵²

We are therefore surprised to learn in Vol. II that 'Through the tombs the strength and blessing of the ancestors are present'.¹⁵³

This real or apparent contradiction is further recognised,¹⁵⁴ so that while the horrors of death are still referred to, we also find such statements as, 'if death is normal, it does not mean that the blessing is lost'. When a man dies in the midst of his family in ripe old age, 'he passes precisely to those forefathers who are the upholders of the blessing'.¹⁵⁵

149 P2 p. 543. 150 P1 pp. 460-470. 151 P1 p. 462.
152 P1 p. 470. 153 P2 p. 214. 154 P2 pp. 477-486.
155 P2 p. 478.

'The dead are unclean, and yet as fathers they are maintainers of the blessing; they are without strength, and yet strength flows from them to the survivors'.¹⁵⁶

'The dead had passed over into another form of existence, they were 'Elohim, divine beings, and men benefited by their power by invoking them and strengthening the connection with them ... The dead passed into the great holiness and became participators in the divine world; and there can be no doubt about this as to the earlier period'.¹⁵⁷

'The early Israelite relation to the dead shows that in older times there was no gulf between the divine and the human'.¹⁵⁸

Pedersen acknowledges that both views existed in Israel and once again points to the influence of Canaan and reaction against it within Israel: but should not the existence of the favourable view of death have been far more fully recognised in Vol. I? And do we not have here striking evidence for a diversity of views at least as wide as those to be found among Englishmen today, and the suggestion that experience might lead any given individual to change his beliefs in quite radical fashion? The 'psychic-whole' generalisations of Vol. I are once again shown to be seriously misleading.

These three cases, concerning the wilderness, the cultus and nature, and death, demonstrate confusion in

¹⁵⁶ P2 p. 481. ¹⁵⁷ P2 p. 485. ¹⁵⁸ P2 p. 486.

Pedersen's thought and the impossibility of knowing what he meant by his early assertion of a fundamental psychological conception over against variable domains of psychic life.

bya

It only remains to comment on one point. In a short section of Vol. II Pedersen writes about the Canaanite deity, Baal.¹⁵⁹ He says of the term bya that 'in its real sense' it was not the proper name of a definite god, and did not necessarily indicate anything divine since it was not the proper name of a definite god, and did not necessarily indicate anything divine since it was used in the human world. According to Pedersen the real sense of bya is that it 'denotes the dominant will in a psychic whole', and this is how it comes to be applied to the master of the house who is both owner and husband.¹⁶⁰

How, then, does the term come to be used of divine beings? This, says Pedersen, 'is connected with the Semitic conception of nature'.¹⁶¹ According to this conception everything is alive; that is to say, it has a soul, and the soul is its ba'al. A palm tree, for example, is a psychic whole, and the ba'al of the palm is the dominant will in it and the upholder of its life. This means that nature is full of ba'alim since every plant has one.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ P2 pp. 506-509. ¹⁶⁰ P2 p. 506. ¹⁶¹ P2 p. 506.

¹⁶² P2 p. 507.

In order to achieve a life of happiness and security men must enter into a right relationship with the ba'alim. The life of nature must be strengthened and so must man's covenant with nature, and this takes place through the cult. Man then benefits from the renewed life of nature.¹⁶³

Pedersen in effect acknowledges that there is some difficulty in supposing that men had to sanctify nature by appealing to every single ba'al there was. 'Man had to sanctify the whole of his world, but this did not mean that he was obliged to appeal to a special Baal for each species of plant or animal.'¹⁶⁴ In fact, the life and strength of all creatures 'could be concentrated in some few gods'.¹⁶⁵ And so we find in the ancient Near East a few really important Baals, symbolised in various ways, along with a multitude of lesser baals representing single cities or districts.

Pedersen does not tell us what he means by the 'real sense' of בַּעַל . If he simply means that this was its earliest meaning, his assertion is open to Barr's objection; but he appears to believe that the actual sense of the word in the Old Testament is 'dominant will in a psychic whole', and that translations use different words according to the particular psychic whole referred to. If this is what Pedersen is saying, however, he does not make it clear.

¹⁶³ P2 p. 508. ¹⁶⁴ P2 pp. 508-509. ¹⁶⁵ P2 p. 509.

Nor does he offer any justification for this meaning of $\text{by} \text{a}$. BDB give the meanings 'owner, lord', and translate the closely related verb, $\text{by} \text{a}$, 'marry, rule over'. All further meanings are clearly derived from the notion of ownership. G. R. Driver in his Ugaritic Glossary gives the meanings of b'l as 'became lord of, mastered', 'owner, master, lord'.¹⁶⁶ These authorities may, of course, be wrong, but we should at least be given a reason for surrendering their definitions which have been commonly accepted.

Dealing with baals in plants and so on does not mean treating them as gods. If we believe that a palm tree is a living being with a soul, it does not follow that we must treat it as a god. In his argument, Pedersen surreptitiously imports the divine sense of baal, but this is the sense he is supposed to be explaining.

No explanation is offered for the worship of a few gods, or the failure to worship every single plant, stone and so on. According to Pedersen every single thing has its soul, that is, its baal, and this is divine and men must have a right relationship with it. Nor is this merely a matter of acknowledging baals which represent species: every individual object has its baal according

¹⁶⁶ G. R. Driver, CANAANITE MYTHS AND LEGENDS, Edinburgh 1956, p. 164. Cf. J. Barr, COMPARATIVE PHILOLOGY AND THE TEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, Oxford 1968, pp. 100-101. Barr comments on Dahood's suggestion that $\text{by} \text{a}$ sometimes means 'do, make', being a dialectal variation of $\text{by} \text{a}$ on analogy with Canaanite dialects. Barr clearly regards 'master, owner' as the usual and most likely sense.

to Pedersen's description of the Semitic view of nature. Barr's comment on Dahood's interpretation of **byj** is also appropriate here: there is a large difference between the possible and the actual. Pedersen's proffered translations are no doubt possible, but he offers no evidence to support his contention that these are the actual meanings of the texts.

ADDITIONAL NOTE i)

Some of Pedersen's arguments in support of what he considers the Israelite way of thinking are not directly relevant to a consideration of the Israelite view of the natural world. On the other hand, our approach to Old Testament interpretation, including those texts concerning the natural world, will be greatly affected by whether or not we accept Pedersen's explanation of Israelite modes of thought. Some further consideration must therefore be given to this matter. In each case Pedersen's argument will be given first, and then followed by comment.

1) When we today speak of a man going from one town to another, we think of the towns as simply points of departure and arrival. The Hebrew idea, however, is that the man ceases to be part of one totality, and becomes part of the other. The word 'min' characterises something as part of a totality, and therefore the translation 'from' is inadequate and sometimes we must translate it by 'in', 'at' or 'towards'.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Pl p. 111.

Comment

It is quite true that the word מן sometimes indicates the fact that someone or a group has not merely moved from one location to another, but has ceased to belong to one situation and entered another. For example, Ezekiel 36:24.

וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם מִן־הַגּוֹיִם וְקִבַּצְתִּי
אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל־הָאֲרָצוֹת וְהֵבֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם
אֶל־אֲדֹמַתְכֶם:

'And I will take you from the peoples and gather you from all the lands and I will bring you to your own country'.

Unquestionably the idea here is that the people will not merely move from one point to another, but out of one situation into another. This, however, is suggested by the whole context of the statement and does not depend on the use of the word מן which can be simply translated 'from' without any distortion of the meaning of the statement. The meaning is perfectly clear in English.

Similar remarks apply to such texts as Genesis 3:23.

וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ " אל " מִגֶּן־עֵדֶן

Or Amos 3:12.

כַּאֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִן־הָאֶרֶץ שְׂתִי כְרֻעִים

When Adam was sent from the Garden of Eden, of course he went out of it, and into a very different situation; and similarly the legs still in the lion are not in quite the same situation as those rescued out of the beast's mouth by the shepherd. Again, however, the translation of מן as 'from' is perfectly accurate, and if we prefer 'out of' it is because of the obvious meaning of the whole text.

Exactly the same considerations apply to לִּפְנֵי as to 'from' in similar English sentences. If we say, We moved from London to live in Oxford, it is quite clear, to use Pedersen's phraseology that we have moved out of one totality into another; we are no longer part of the one, but of the other. This would not justify us, however, in saying that 'from' must be taken at times to mean 'in' or 'at' or even 'towards'.

Moreover, if we accept Pedersen's account of the matter what are we to make of texts which apparently express a simple movement from one location to another? For example, Genesis 25:29.

$\text{וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵלָיו מִן הַשָּׂדֶה יַעֲקֹב וְשָׂרָי וְרָחֵל וְלֵוָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל$

We may compare this passage with such others as Genesis 36:16; 34:7; I Samuel 11:5. When we read that Esau or Jacob or Jacob's sons or Saul came from the field, why should we take this to mean anything other than the simple sense conveyed by the English translation? And what sense is supposed to be conveyed by the idea that these gentlemen have ceased to be part of the totality of the field? If an Israelite really thought that Esau or Jacob or Saul was for a time a part of the totality of the field or open country, what did he mean by this which is not meant today by an Englishman who refers to the same kind of situation? Pedersen never explains this, nor does he offer evidence to support his interpretation of the text. When in Exodus 16:4 God tells Moses he will rain bread from heaven; or in 19:17 we read that Moses brought the people from the camp to meet God; or in I Samuel 7:11 that the Israelites went from Mizpah to chase the Philistines; or in 13:15 that Samuel went from Gilgal to Gibeah of

Benjamin, we are learning neither more nor less than that bread will fall from the sky like rain; that the Israelites would meet God at the mountain and must therefore leave the camp; that you cannot pursue an enemy while sitting at home; and that Samuel moved from A to B.

If the ancient Israelite wished to use the preposition to emphasise that someone or something was being drawn out of a situation in which he, she or it had existed he used some such term as **בְּיָמָיו, בְּיָמֶיהָ**
בְּיָמָיו.¹⁶⁸

2) According to Pedersen, the Israelite was well able to characterize something by mentioning the outstanding features, but he could not analyse into constituent elements, and therefore descriptions of such things as Noah's Ark or Solomon's Temple are quite inadequate for us to form a proper picture. The writer could visualise the totality image and therefore only presented what seemed to him to be the most important details.¹⁶⁹

Comment

It is quite true that someone may form a very good impression of an object, and readily identify the object when they perceive it, without being able to give an accurate description of the object in all its parts. We readily identify a given species of bird, or type of aircraft without being able to give a detailed description of the object in question. In the same way we hear a tune

¹⁶⁸ Cf. SBL pp. 104-105. ¹⁶⁹ Pl p. 112.

and recognise it; but this does not guarantee an accurate reproduction or the ability to characterise the intervals accurately.¹⁷⁰

It is therefore easy to see what Pedersen means by his assertion; but by the same token we must hesitate before believing that ancient Israelites and modern Englishmen are so very different in this respect.

It is, of course, the case that some people can describe or draw the building, bird or aircraft very accurately; and perhaps we, who at first gain only a general impression, can be trained to do the same. And it may be that no Israelite was ever capable of such detailed analysis and description. If so, we must admit that the Israelite mind was indeed very different from our own, and we must prepare ourselves for some other surprising conclusions, too.

Solomon, who was an Israelite, had the Temple built, and also his own palace, and they were presumably not erected with the careless abandon of sand-castles. Solomon and his craftsmen, not to speak of priests and people connected with the court, must have taken an active interest in the construction of these buildings; and certain Israelites must have had a very clear idea indeed of the details of these structures or they would never have remained standing, their construction would have remained an architectural impossibility.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. HC. p. 297. Cherry refers to the ability of the caricaturist to pick out information-bearing elements which are recognised by all of us, only a few lines being used.

Furthermore, the temple is described in some detail in I Kings 6:2-10, 20-36, and there is also a description in II Chronicles 3:3-4:22. There is also a description of certain of its contents and parts in Jeremiah 52:17-23. These descriptions are quite lengthy in proportion to the length of the books of which they form a part, and the amount of historical material contained in them. Even more detailed is the description of Solomon's palace, I Kings 7:2-50.

These accounts do not convey the vague impression which Pedersen suggests, and if we today are unable to form a perfectly clear picture of these buildings on the basis of them, we are nevertheless not entitled to draw a conclusion about the mentality of the Israelites which is both incredible to common sense and contradicted by such information as is provided.

It is also necessary to bear in mind the purpose for which the accounts were written. The authors were anxious to impress their contemporaries, and generations to come with the grandeur of both temple and palace, an architectural reflection of the piety and wisdom of Solomon's reign; this reign itself being the fruit of the blessing of David. They betray no intention of leaving to posterity a detailed plan which would enable even unheard of Gentiles in remote generations to reconstruct such buildings with absolute fidelity.

How many other documents from the ancient world provide us with the kind of information given in the Bible about such buildings as temple and palace? Are we to conclude from the purely fragmentary references in

the New Testament to Herod's temple and such vague references to it as the ejaculations of wonder at the beginning of Mark 13, that the Jews of the Roman Empire, including the priests and Pharisees, only had some generalised impression of the centre of their whole life and religion?¹⁷¹

There are other references in the Old Testament to constructions of various kinds. No one would compare Ezekiel's visions with the blueprints and prototypes of modern architects and designers, but his directions about the new temple were surely intended seriously, and it was expected that these details would be both understood and obeyed when the people got back to Palestine. The pattern of the tabernacle does not lack detail on account of its divine origin and its Semitic receiver. The Torah itself is made up of a multitude of regulations and instructions, and the application of such rules and instructions to the shifting situations of everyday life must have occupied the Jewish mind for many centuries before Christ. This is hardly an occupation for those who are only capable of grasping main features and general impressions and the general tendency seems in fact to have been to lose the wood for the trees.

If the Israelite mentality was as Pedersen designates it, how did Israelites come to use numbers, weights and

¹⁷¹ Cf. H. Danby, THE MISHNAH, London, 1st ed. 1933 (1967 Printing). 'MIDDOTH', pp. 589-598; and Yigael Yadin, M^EGILLAT HA MIQDASH, Jerusalem, 1977. Temple Scroll, Cols. 6-10. Hasmonean period according to Yadin.

measurements at all? How did they make tools and weapons?

The example of Noah's Ark is absurd. Even for the writers of Genesis this vessel belonged to the stories of remote antiquity, and we cannot be sure that they took the story, as some among us today are inclined to do, with poker-faced literalism. The precise dimensions of this long vanished cattle-boat were not of interest, any more than was the precise number of creatures taken into it, or the actual length of the Flood. The details of the Ark's dimensions are brief in the extreme, and not to be compared with descriptions of temple or palace.

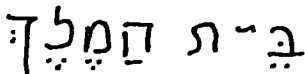
Finally, mention has already been made of the intentions of the biblical authors. Overall, these intentions were religious. There must surely have been many detailed plans for constructing this or that, but such matters were of no more relevance to the purpose of a biblical writer than political details of the achievements of Omri or Jeroboam II. Writers who could ignore the battle of Karkar, the equivalent in the ancient world of such battles as Waterloo and the Battle of Britain in the modern, were not going to waste valuable space on architectural or any other details which did not serve the immediate purpose of conveying the nature of God and his will for man.

On the other hand, we have sufficient information in the Old Testament to infer the truth about the broader aspects of Israelite life and culture, and Solomon, whose knowledge, administrative ambitions and architectural designs suggest that he was not primarily moved by vague

generalities, is likely to be a safer guide than Pedersen. The nature and purpose of the biblical documents mean that Pedersen is not entitled to make the inferences from them that he does concerning Israelite thought and life in general; while a careful reading of them implies a very different picture which is at the same time far more intelligible.

3) Pedersen claims that the construct state results from the coalescing of two nouns into one conception. A unity is formed by the less important idea becoming part of the totality of the more important. The situation, for example, which we designate as 'the house of the man', is so expressed in Hebrew as to show that the house has become part of the totality of the man.¹⁷²

Comment

James Barr raises the question as to how far the construct state can be taken as evidence of a mental tendency to see things as totalities. He points out that while the first word in such a construct relationship as  is modified, that such modification is not essential to the construct relation. The placing of the noun in such a combination led to vowel reduction through loss of accent, and sometimes there is no such modification at all. 'The modification of the first word of a construct group is not, then, essential to the structure and it thus becomes very difficult to maintain

¹⁷² Pl p. 113.

Pedersen's conception of a psychological process in which "house" is presented in a modified form to enrich it by associating it to other images. It becomes indeed difficult to argue from the construct state to any peculiar mental attitudes at all'.¹⁷³

Barr also points out that while it is also true in general that the word order in a construct state is fixed, the argument from this grammatical fact to a special way of perceiving the facts is precarious. The permissible order of words in ordinary English usage is limited; and what are we to make of the Greek *οἰκοδεσποτής*, from *οἶκος*, and *δεσποτής*?¹⁷⁴

Elsewhere in his book Barr rightly criticises the argument from the construct relation to some supposedly corresponding mode of thought.¹⁷⁵

4) When the members of a community live in harmony with one another this harmony is called shalom. The word is usually translated 'peace' but 'Its fundamental meaning is totality ... There is "totality" in a community when there is harmony'.¹⁷⁶

Comment

If the 'fundamental meaning' of *כול* is 'totality', then we ought to be able to substitute 'totality' or some such word for 'peace' in the English translations. Indeed,

¹⁷³ SBL p. 91.

¹⁷⁴ SBL pp. 91-92. See whole of pp. 89-92; and cf. Gk Section 89, pp. 247-248.

¹⁷⁵ SBL pp. 29, 39, 265-266, 276; and remarks on Davidson's 'GRAMMAR', pp. 92-96.

¹⁷⁶ P1 pp. 263-264.

we ought to do so in the interests of accuracy. The consequences of this procedure are interesting. In II Kings 9:31 we read the words of Jezebel,

וַתֹּאמֶר הַשָּׁלוֹם זִמְרִי

Our new and more perceptive translation must be, 'Is it totality, Zimri ...?' See also verse 22, 'Is it totality, Jehu?' To which the energetic commander replies, 'What totality can there be ...?' Or we may turn to Jeremiah 8:11.

וַיִּרְפוּ אֶת-שַׁבָּר בֵּת-עַמִּי עַל-נִקְלָהּ
לֵאמֹר שָׁלוֹם שָׁלוֹם וְאֵין שָׁלוֹם:

'And they have lightly healed the wound of my people saying, Totality, totality, but there is no totality'.

One recalls Pedersen's own warning that Hebrew narrative is virtually untranslatable into English; but if so, perhaps the attempt must be given up. If these short examples are a fair example of what happens when a correct translation is attempted, it must be admitted that the best that could be hoped for would be a paraphrase.

In fact, Pedersen seems to depend on the usual translation, in this case 'peace' for שָׁלוֹם, but he insists that the English word 'peace' does not convey the full sense; although he gives no grounds for saying why we should believe that there is this fuller meaning. The alternatives seem to be to accept Pedersen's interpretation and be left with an absurd translation and the possibility of having to surrender the attempt at translation altogether; or else see in Pedersen's view nothing more than an unwarranted extension of the meaning of the Hebrew שָׁלוֹם. Pedersen presents what might at a glance appear to be a plausible argument by ignoring the difference

between meaning and connotation: all that Pedersen says about harmony, integration and so on being implied by the Hebrew **שָׁלוֹם** could just as well be said of the English 'peace'.

5) We can only properly understand the attitude of David when we see it in the light of the Israelite conception of the family. This conception is dominated by the notion of totality: 'No other peace relation has such an intimate character as that of the family'. When a son like Absalom rebels against his father 'then he is as a diseased member of a body, and the father who, by the acts of the son, is forced to remove him, is as a man who cuts his own flesh. This is not only a symbol'.¹⁷⁷ And this is because the different members of the family have bodies all made from the same substance. 'They have the same flesh, bones and blood'.¹⁷⁸

It must also be noted that the Israelite belongs to other wholes, such as the town and the nation.

'Apart from the family the totality which has strongest hold upon the Israelites is that of the people. The unity of the people rests upon a common being and a common history, or in other words, upon a psychic community. In point of fact the unity of the people may be just as strong as the unity of the family. The prophets speak to the people as one being with a common respon-

¹⁷⁷ P1 p. 267.

¹⁷⁸ P1 p. 267. See whole argument, pp. 265-275.

sibility. It may be called a stricken man, covered with wounds (Is. 1:5-6) or a woman, who commits adultery (Ezek. 16; Hos. 2:4)',¹⁷⁹

And, ' ... just as the house is centred in the father, so the soul of the people is centred in the king'.¹⁸⁰

Comment

The assertion that family relationships were more intimate in Old Testament times than they are now is not justified. David's relationship with Absalom is perfectly intelligible to a modern reader, and this fact is merely obscured by Pedersen's vague talk of totality. It may even be that a father's relationship with his children in a modern society where monogamy is the rule is more intimate than that generally experienced by fathers in the polygamous households of Old Testament times. In his anxiety to emphasise a completely unjustified assertion Pedersen is led to treat figurative language as if it were literal, and a moment's reflection is sufficient to reveal the absurdity of the exercise. David no more regarded Absalom as literally an extension of his own body than any English father today ~~so~~ regards his own offspring.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Pl p. 275. ¹⁸⁰ Pl p. 275.

¹⁸¹ Cf. D. Daube and R. Yaron, JACOB'S RECEPTION BY LABAN, JSS Vol. I, 1956, pp. 60-62. It is argued that the phrase 'my bone and my flesh' might indicate the recognition of ties of kinship and consequent legal obligations, which Laban repudiated a month later. (Genesis 29:14,15). Other texts referred to are Judges 9:2, where Abimelech reminds the people of Shechem that he is their bone and flesh; II Samuel 5:1, I Chronicles 11:1, where tribes willing to accept David say they are his bone and his flesh; and II Samuel 19:13(RV12), where David tells the elders of Judah they are his bone and his flesh; and II Samuel 19:14(RV13), when David addresses Amasa as his bone and flesh. Whether or not the main thesis of the paper is correct, the texts referred to show how wide of the mark is Pedersen's literal understanding of the phrase. Nor
(Contd. P.T.O.)

One cannot avoid the impression that Pedersen has brought to the text a determination to see in it something unusual and foreign to modern ways of thinking; that he knows the text to be perfectly intelligible to ordinary readers; and that therefore an outlandish interpretation must be put on the text to show how scholarly knowledge is required to disclose what is hidden from mere common sense.

His remarks about the ancient sense of the unity of town or nation might seem more plausible. Today there is much that is impersonal in the modern state, and the loneliness of many individuals in our vast cities is commonplace. Even so, Pedersen's view is surely an over-simplification and exaggeration of the facts. The tragic circumstances of twentieth century wars and the happier events of a Jubilee year spring to mind as obvious modern expressions of national unity; and if the modern nation is vastly larger than ancient Israel, modern means of communication in radio, television and newspapers are vastly more sophisticated.

England or Britain has often featured as a personification in popular songs and political speeches and it could be maintained that Olivier's Henry V is a more impressive symbol of national unity than Isaiah's stricken man. The loneliness of the city dweller, the isolation of the young housewife in a high rise flat, the resentment felt against bureaucratic methods,¹⁸² even these and other

¹⁸¹ (Contd.) was the relationship it expressed so close that nothing could break it, as the relationship between Jacob and Laban shows and as is implied in David's rebuke to the elders of Judah.

¹⁸² Cf. II Samuel 15:2ff!

features of modern life bear dismal witness to the fact that individuals now as always need friendship and stable acquaintance with other persons; and this need is generally met by membership of various groups, large and small, despite the problems that are met with in all cultures, whether ancient or modern.

Nor was a sense of unity in ancient Israel sufficient to prevent tensions and divisions among the groups which formed the whole. There was more than one point of view about the kingship, as is revealed in the account of its inauguration through Samuel. Even David was hard put to it to hold the people together, and it is arguable that the division which took place after Solomon was never healed in ancient times. Old Testament texts express a close relationship between king and people, and this is scarcely surprising in any kingdom where the royal ruler has the final word in all major political decisions, but this did not prevent the occurrence of serious opposition to the king or queen, and outbreaks of rebellion and civil war. Perhaps the religious texts of the Old Testament at times express hopes and aspirations rather than political realities, just as our own liturgies have always done, starting in Westminster Abbey and echoing through every parish church in the realm. In any case, a proper comparison of ancient thinking and our own in respect of national unity and political rule requires an appreciation and thorough-going analysis of many facts and is not to be settled by vague talk of totality, psychic community and souls centring on kings.

- 6) 'The soul can not, as long as it is a soul, desist from being a connected whole, characterized by volition and action. Therefore the Israelitic manner of THINKING is of a different kind from ours. What we call objective, that is to say inactive, theoretical thinking without further implications, does not exist in the case of the Israelite'.¹⁸³

'For the Israelite THINKING was not the solving of abstract problems. He does not add link to link, nor does he set up major and minor premises from which conclusions are drawn. To him thinking is to grasp a totality. He directs his soul towards the principal matter, that which determines the totality, and receives it into his soul, the soul thus being immediately stirred and led in a certain direction. In the Hebrew dictionary we look in vain for a word which quite corresponds to our "to think"'.¹⁸⁴

This means that the Israelite does not think in abstractions nor does he put together details to form an idea; but he apprehends immediately the whole idea.¹⁸⁵

'The nominal phrases proper are static; they picture situations. The Israelite does not know the logical progress which leads us from

¹⁸³ P1 p. 106. ¹⁸⁴ P1 pp. 108-109.

¹⁸⁵ P1 p. 109.

one idea to another. That which stirs his mind-images is the action, the event. Therefore Hebrew descriptions are dominated by the verbal phrases. The vividness of the description is created by the verbs, which constantly succeed each other and form the stages of the progressive narrative'.¹⁸⁶

'We arrive at a conclusion by setting up two premises, a major and a minor, each of which is a complete unity; as their logical consequence we set up a new phrase which makes a third unity. We DRAW a conclusion from what is given and thus carry the thought further. The Israelite does not argue by means of conclusions and logical progress. His argumentation consists in showing that one statement associates itself with another, as belonging to its totality'.¹⁸⁷

'Thus Hebrew thinking, as expressed in the language, does not distinguish between the various manners of connecting sentences, whether the thing to be expressed is a temporal or causal connection or only the adding of supplementary qualities. The thinking process of the Hebrew consists in forming wholes round certain centres. Thus he builds up his sentences and connects them, arranging them as primary and secondary parts of a whole'.¹⁸⁸

'We try to persuade by means of abstract reasoning,

¹⁸⁶ Pl p. 114. ¹⁸⁷ Pl p. 115. ¹⁸⁸ Pl pp. 119-120.

the Hebrew by directly influencing the will.

In expressing a thought he makes the souls of his listeners receive his mind-image, and thus the matter itself'.¹⁸⁹

'When modern logicians have characterized the correct manner of thinking as an interplay of simple, i.e. essentially empty but sharply defined space images, then we see at once the contrast between this and the Israelite ideal of thinking. The Israelite does not occupy himself with empty nor with sharply defined space images. His logic is not the logic of abstraction, but of immediate perception'.¹⁹⁰

Pedersen goes on to point out that the problems dealt with in the Old Testament are practical problems that we face in life, and that what is sought and offered is a practical solution, rather than the logical solution to an intellectual problem.¹⁹¹

Comment

Not everything which Pedersen says on the subject of totality and the soul and the fundamental difference between ancient Israelite thinking and our own is readily intelligible, perhaps the inevitable consequence of attempting to give a scholarly exposition in modern terms of a thought-world supposedly so far removed from our own.

¹⁸⁹ Pl p. 123. ¹⁹⁰ Pl p. 124. ¹⁹¹ Pl pp. 124-125.

What is meant by saying that when an Israelite was thinking about something he was forming a whole round a certain centre? Assuming, of course, that this was not the same as the way in which an Englishman thinks about a given subject now. If Pedersen means that all the sentences on the subject display some kind of unity, this is scarcely surprising if they are all on the same subject. If the assertion that the sentences are arranged as primary and secondary parts of a whole means that certain sentences stand in relation to other sentences rather as subordinate clauses stand in relation to main, this again is hardly to be wondered at, and is bound to be true in modern English if the subject is anything other than extremely simple.

What does Pedersen mean by 'inactive theoretical thinking without further implications'? This is supposed to be characteristic of modern European over against ancient Israelite thought, but how often do we come across thinking which could be so characterized, and can we even imagine what such thinking would be like?

What does Pedersen mean by his extraordinary statement that the Hebrew language is principally made up of nouns and verbs,¹⁹² if this is meant to indicate a significant difference between classical Hebrew and any modern European tongue? If we pick up any modern newspaper or novel and strike out the nouns and verbs, what does Pedersen imagine we shall have left? If we compare a piece of modern narrative with a piece of Hebrew narrative,

¹⁹² Pl p. 112.

waiving for the moment the slight problem caused by the supposed untranslatable nature of the Hebrew, is it not just as true of the modern as of the ancient that 'descriptions are dominated by the verbal phrases' and that successive verbs 'form the stages of the progressive narrative'?

What does Pedersen mean by 'essentially empty but sharply defined space images'? It comes as no surprise to be told that the Israelite did not occupy himself with these images since the phrase is mere verbiage and perhaps its own best illustration of what it is supposed to convey.

What does Pedersen mean by saying that when an Israelite thought, he directed his mind towards the principal matter and received it into his soul? And what does he mean by saying that matter lives in words? This kind of talk suggests the literal intellectual absorption of the object of thought so that if we think about a meal we digest it intellectually before physically consuming it. Comment on such a view appears to be neither possible nor necessary.

The one intelligible point which emerges from this part of Pedersen's discussion is that modern thinkers aim to reach the truth by valid argument, using generalisations and abstractions, whereas the Israelites fixed their attention on hard facts and aimed at practical solutions. The modern European is a metaphysician, the ancient Israelite a strict empiricist.

When Pedersen is trying to characterize modern European thinking he takes as his model logical argument of the type examined by Aristotle and which forms the

subject matter of modern text books on logic, designed to meet the needs of students of philosophy. As he points out, in this type of argument one premise succeeds another, implications are exhibited and inferences made, and the whole argument proceeds according to canons of validity whose truth is revealed to the intellect in much the same way as the principles of correct mathematical calculation. When Pedersen goes on to point out that this kind of argument is not to be found in the Old Testament he is quite correct, but it is equally true that it will not be found in the bulk of European literature produced in the twentieth century. This kind of logic will be found in certain types of learned literature and discussion, but it does not characterize most of what is written and spoken in modern Europe. It is not a feature distinguishing modern thought from that of the Old Testament. One might as well compare Euclid with the Book of Genesis and conclude from their differences that the ancient Greeks thought in a quite different way from the ancient Israelites. Such a mode of procedure is obviously nonsensical, and the conclusion would raise some awkward problems concerning Jews who perfectly well understood Greeks, and Greeks who were impressed by Judaism and its offspring Christianity. The only profitable comparison of the kind Pedersen wants to make must be between like and like. It is when there is some genuine similarity of aim and method or style that differences as well as similarities of a literary or religious nature can become illuminating.

Admittedly, if modern Englishmen went about continually expressing themselves in syllogisms they would

indeed be thinking in a manner foreign to that of the Israelites, as revealed in the Old Testament; but modern Englishmen do not do this, not because they are incapable of such sustained thought, but because for most purposes this type of reasoning is inappropriate. Whether we are watching the antics of James Bond or reading Wordsworth, preparing a meal or playing tennis, mending the car or listening to Beethoven, we are not engaging in the kind of logical argument Pedersen has in mind, even though each of these activities does display a logic of its own, whether it be well or badly exhibited. And the same must have been true of the ancient Israelites.

The recognition of this simple fact is important, since it would be fatal to an understanding of the Old Testament to suppose that modern Europeans are 'logical' whereas ancient Israelites were not. If logic depends not merely on mental tendencies in the person doing the thinking but on the nature of the object of thought we shall find plenty of examples of valid or reasonable thought in the Old Testament, and we shall not be surprised if Israelites thought differently from ourselves in situations which display cultural features not to be found, in say, modern England. The relationship between Laban and Jacob, and Rachel's theft of the teraphim will not find a precise parallel in modern Britain, and we shall therefore not find reproduced in modern times the conversations and attitudes attributed to these individuals in Genesis; yet it would be a mistake to assert that their actions, statements and attitudes are

unintelligible or illogical, especially in view of what the latter term implies of self contradiction and blatant inconsistency. If it be accepted that the Nuzu tablets shed light on these narratives in Genesis,¹⁹³ it is not at all difficult to understand the reasonable or 'logical' nature of what is described; and if the direct relevance of Nuzu be denied, information about life in that ancient city must at least make us hesitate before attributing obscure details in the narrative to the so-called illogicality of the Israelites rather than our own ignorance of all the facts relevant to a proper understanding of the situation.

The story of David's rise to power hardly gives the impression of some primitive pragmatist who merely seized opportunities as they arose and just happened to become king over a small empire. The cleverly engineered dispute between Hushai and Ahithophel reflects no mean intelligence and no lack of analytical power in the participants;¹⁹⁴ and Solomon's organisation of his realm, however ill advised in certain respects, did not fail through lack of logic, or, for that matter, lack of knowledge. When we come to the work of the prophets, it is not difficult to appreciate the viewpoint of men overwhelmed by a sense of the reality of God; nor is it difficult to understand the standpoint of those who were

¹⁹³ See C. H. Gordon, BIBLICAL CUSTOMS AND THE NUZU TABLETS, in THE BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGIST READER, Vol. 2, ed. D. N. FREEDMAN & E. F. CAMPBELL. New York, 1964. pp. 21-33. (Original article in the BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGIST, February 1940).

¹⁹⁴ II Samuel 17:1-13.

more impressed by the reality of military power, economic agreements, nationalist fervour, and the like. Without a notable ability to generalise it is hard to see how books like Ecclesiastes and Proverbs could ever have come into existence. Even Job could not complain about the intelligence of his comforters. Their argument could be summarised as follows: God is just. If you had not sinned you would not be punished. You have been punished. Therefore you must have sinned.¹⁹⁵

Pedersen sets over against the modern logical solution of intellectual problems the Old Testament offer of practical solutions to practical problems. In this connection let us think, for example, of the problem of suffering. It is true that a modern theologian will write about this problem in a work of systematic theology in a quite different way from that of the author of the Book of Job. The Old Testament does not contain discussions of the problem such as will be found in certain modern theological works. Against this, however, it must be admitted that it is not uncommon for modern thinkers to approach the problem by the use of fiction and the presentation of dramatic situations, and through poetry; and, on the other hand, a book like 'Job' could not have been produced without an intellectual appreciation of the problem such as gives rise to modern discussions. Once again Pedersen is thinking of a certain genuine distinction between Old Testament times and ours, but he has greatly exaggerated it.

¹⁹⁵ See e.g. Job 4:1-5:27, esp. 4:7-8.

Furthermore, the opposition of logical and practical can be seriously misleading. It can be readily appreciated that an intellectual discussion of the problem is not likely to be of much immediate help to someone in their actual suffering. But in what sense is the Book of Job a practical answer? The opposition of modern logical and ancient practical suggests a modern approach which is only concerned with intellectual consistency, a rationality which excludes sympathy and passion; and an ancient practical concern which showed no interest in rational consistency but involved real sympathy with the sufferer and the attempt to provide real comfort in the time of need. This is simply false, and while it is true that some modern thinkers might not be sufficiently sensitive to the feelings of actual sufferers nor sufficiently imaginative in their approach to the problem, can we be sure that this was never true in ancient times? Were Job's comforters purely fictitious?

While there is inevitably some tension between intellectual reflection on the problem and the kind of comfort and help needed by an actual sufferer, this tension, far from being merely typical of modern times is a major theme of the Book of Job itself.

Finally, if we are thinking in terms of practical answers to needs, the modern world might fairly claim to have more to offer a modern Job than the ancient Israelites could. Job himself would not be preached at by comforters, but treated by doctors and nurses, settled in an intensive care unit and filled with antibiotics, while loss of life and property would be covered by his Golden Key Policy.

Can the Old Testament rival that?

It would be absurd to pretend that there is no important difference between ancient Israelites and modern Englishmen, but it is equally absurd to suppose that ancient Israelites had one kind of brain in their heads while we have a different kind. The modes of thought revealed in the Old Testament are in general recognisably similar to our own, and it is equally clear that important differences are related to differences in the circumstances of life; and these differences in turn can often be readily recognised in the information given by the Old Testament itself and in other information which has come down to us from Israel's contemporaries. Emotion and will, motives, temperament and the pressure of circumstances influence thought and expression at all times, and, we may reasonably suppose, in all cultures.

Pedersen's caricature of the differences between ancient Israel and modern Europe leads him into a fundamental contradiction: Hebrew thought and language is not intelligible to us; but we depend on the Hebrew literature of the Old Testament for information about Israelite mentality. As we have seen, Pedersen assumes in fact that the Hebrew text is substantially intelligible, but that there are some significant differences between Israelite modes of thought and ours; but if that is so we can perhaps learn something about more reliable methodology from anthropologists who work in a similar situation, but who have a present, living relationship with those whom they seek to understand.

7) Whereas we distinguish between various mental

and emotional states and acts of will, and make a clear distinction between intention and action, the Israelites, like other primitive peoples, thought of all mental processes being united, since it is always the whole soul which acts. Also, action and the result of action were not distinguished, nor were they distinguished from mental activity:

'they are implied in the actual mental process.

This is to be attributed to the fact that the soul is wholly present in all its works. The actions are not sent away from the soul, they are the outer manifestations of the whole of the soul ... The action and its accomplishment are a matter of course, once the thought is there'.¹⁹⁶

As soon as an idea has assumed permanent character, the action has begun.¹⁹⁷

'The consequence is that the man is responsible for his acts and their results, not only for his intentions. A distinction is impossible because there is no such thing as "good intentions". The intention or will is identical with the totality of the soul which creates action'.¹⁹⁸

'The Israelite does not distinguish between the power, as it acts in the soul, and as it manifests itself outwardly. For him the capacity and result is the same'.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ P1 pp. 127-128. ¹⁹⁷ P1 p. 131.
¹⁹⁸ P1 p. 132. ¹⁹⁹ P1 p. 182.

Comment

In the Old Testament there are perfectly clear distinctions made between different mental and emotional states and acts of will. If it is one person experiencing these various states this naturally gives them a certain unity, taken for granted by common sense, and today, if the variety of thought, feeling and will becomes very great we regard the person concerned as ill, a disintegrating personality, and we talk of schizophrenia or the like. Someone whose thoughts, feelings and motives move within certain bounds we regard as integrated. The ancient Israelites thought very much as we do in this respect, although they explained abnormality in ways which would often or generally be rejected today. Saul sane was different from Saul mad, Elisha normal was different from Elisha ecstatic, and Gideon the farmer was unlike Gideon the possessed.

The assertion that for the Israelites thought and action, or actions and the consequences of actions, could not be distinguished is equally absurd. A clear distinction was made between deliberate and accidental homicide, and the distinction between intention and action, or the capacity to act and the act itself, is one without which law becomes senseless, and the laws of ancient Israel are no exception.²⁰⁰ It is commonplace to find these distinctions asserted or assumed in the Old Testament, and it is very hard to imagine what the world would have to be like in order that anyone should

²⁰⁰ Cf. Daube's article referred to above p. 24, note 41.

form such a conception of it as Pedersen attributes to the Israelites. Intention and motive are essential to the meaning of the story of Judah and Tamar. The death of Uriah or the death of Naboth gain significance solely from the intentions of David on the one hand and Jezebel on the other; whereas Ahab's death gains its significance precisely from the fact that his human killer was not achieving a deliberately purposed end.

No doubt there are to be found in the Old Testament incidents which, taken by themselves, appear to justify Pedersen's view. When Isaac's blessing is uttered or the prophetic forecast made, the outcome is apparently regarded as certain; the utterance and its accomplishment seem to be bound together in an unbreakable unity. Even so, the fulfilment of prophecies was not always regarded as certain even by the prophets themselves: the unspoken assumption seems to be that in the future God will act in such and such a way, granted such and such a human response or lack of response. The adventures of Jonah strikingly illustrate the fact.

Furthermore, these cases are of an unusual nature, they are not the kind of utterance which one hears every day in the street. Instead of being classified in the Israelite mind with ordinary utterances or ideas and intentions they are rather classified by themselves on an analogy with the causes and effects to be found in nature. These utterances, like oaths and the brandishing of Aaron's rod, took on their peculiar character because they were intimately related to the power and activity of God. It is quite clear that the Israelite belief

was that the ordinary wielding of a stick or making of a promise might or might not reveal the real intentions of the subject, might or might not achieve the object of his will; but once utterance or action were linked with the will and power of God uncertainty was banished; although one wonders if experience did not give rise to scepticism even in these cases.

Pedersen appears to have looked deliberately for peculiar features of Israelite culture as a clue to what distinguished Israelite life and thought from our own. This aspect of his enterprise seems reasonable enough; but his next step was to generalise from these features to the whole of Israelite life and then compare the resulting picture with modern life and thought, whereas he should have seen these features in their relation to all the other facts presented to us about the Israelites, and, indeed, their neighbours. Only in this way could a balanced appreciation of life in ancient Israel emerge, and only after this picture had been drawn as accurately as possible could a fruitful comparison then be made with modern times.^{200a}

^{200a} Cf. J. R. Porter, JOHS. PEDERSEN: ISRAEL, (Biblical Classics series), E.T. November 1978, pp. 36-40.

Porter's article appeared too late to be used in the preparation of this thesis, but as an important evaluation of Pedersen's work it must receive some comment, however brief.

Porter gives a clear description of Pedersen's 'Israel', bringing out its main features and indicating criticisms which some later scholars have made of Pedersen's approach. Porter's judgement is one of qualified approval, and he speaks sympathetically of students who felt that reading 'Israel' enabled them to understand the Old Testament for the first time; and he concludes his article: 'Of course, his work is not the last word, but many of his insights are still of profound significance and point the way towards the recovery of a somewhat neglected area of biblical research'. (See last para., p. 40).

(Contd. P.T.O.)

ADDITIONAL NOTE ii)

James Barr states, 'For the understanding of Pedersen's "Israel" in general one should not omit a comparison with V. Grönbech's "The Culture of the Teutons"'.²⁰¹

In the context of this thesis a detailed comparison is impossible; but since Grönbech's book²⁰² is not

200a (Contd.)

Porter has endeavoured, in a short space, to give a fair and balanced assessment of both Pedersen's work and the arguments of his critics; but he has underestimated the far-reaching significance of the charges brought against Pedersen.

1) It seems that the kind of anthropology which influenced Pedersen, far from providing 'new insight' into primitive societies and therefore, supposedly, into ancient cultures like that of Israel, was in fact seriously misleading.

2) The contrast between the thought-processes of primitive and modern man was not merely over emphasised by Pedersen, but characterised in such a way as to make the Old Testament unintelligible for all or most modern readers. That Pedersen contradicted himself in this respect, not least by the actual publication of 'Israel', does not invalidate the point.

3) Pedersen's comments on the Hebrew language and its reflection of Israelite thinking are not merely peripheral to his main argument, but essential to it. Porter rightly insists that Pedersen's contentions stand or fall through examination of the biblical texts to which he appeals, but it is precisely when we carry out such an examination that we find Pedersen's judgements concerning the Hebrew language and Israelite thinking so considerably wide of the mark.

4) Porter sees the second English volume of 'Israel' as a necessary and helpful complement to the first, but he overlooks the contradictions which it contains of the far-reaching generalisations of the earlier volume.

5) Porter also overlooks Pedersen's failure to define the 'fundamental psychological conception' of the Israelites, and the consequent vagueness and confusion which afflicted his work from start to finish.

201 SBL p. 184. footnote, Porter op. cit.

202 V. Grönbech, THE CULTURE OF THE TEUTONS Vols I-III, London and Copenhagen, 1931. Translated by W. Worster. First published as, VOR FOLKEAET I OLDTIDEN, I-IV, Copenhagen, 1909-1912.

readily available, substantial quotations from it are given in order to indicate the probable influence of this author on Pedersen's thinking.

Grönbech was Professor of the History of Religion in the University of Copenhagen, and published his book in 1909-1912. The following important similarities between Grönbech's approach to the culture of the Teutons and Pedersen's approach to the culture of ancient Israel will be apparent:

- 1) The profound difficulty moderns have in properly interpreting the old texts and understanding the culture of which they form a part.
- 2) The dominating importance of the soul in the older culture.
- 3) The extreme intimacy of the individual's link with kin, past, present and future.
- 4) The inadequacy of the term 'peace' as the translation of an older term.
- 5) The importance of 'luck' in Grönbech's work, corresponding to 'blessing' in Pedersen's.
- 6) The power of words for good or ill.
- 7) The members of the ancient culture were primitive men whose experience of nature, and therefore mode of thought and expression, were quite different from ours, and whose language therefore conveys far more than is readily apparent to us.
- 8) The ancients thought in terms of concrete wholes whereas we think far more in abstractions.
- 9) Everything in the ancient culture has its own soul.
- 10) What appear to us to be figures of speech were

really intended to convey some deeper, more literal meaning.

11) There is an intimate relation between man and nature.

12) The whole species is manifested in the individual.

13) The body is a part or aspect of the soul.

14) Holiness is power and life.

Grönbech opens by describing the Teutons as they were seen through Roman eyes, and by pointing out that Roman observations were accurate, but their understanding of the German peoples very slight because they could only attempt to understand Teutonic culture in the light of their own.²⁰³

We may compare with this his later remarks about the Roman inability to understand the apparent Germanic attitude to their king.²⁰⁴ 'It is another matter, that the observer only saw the outward movements, and by his very culture was prevented from perceiving the nervous system that produced them'.²⁰⁵

In speaking of what the Northmen learnt from Celtic civilisation, Grönbech states, 'He has that firmness that depends upon a structure in the soul, and that elasticity which comes from the structure's perfect harmony with its surroundings, enabling him spiritually to conform to the need of his environment. He is master

²⁰³ CT I pp. 5-10, 15-16. ²⁰⁴ CT I pp. 159-161.

²⁰⁵ CT I p. 159.

of the world about him, by virtue of a self-control more deeply rooted even than the will, identical with the soul structure itself'.²⁰⁶

'These men are not each but an inspired moment, fading vaguely away into past and future; they are present, future and past in one. A man fixes himself in the past, by firm attachment to past generations'.²⁰⁷ This attachment must be regarded as a much closer one than that found in other peoples. We judge the Teutons too much in terms of our own civilisation, but we are challenged by them to see the world from a new point of view.

Grönbech concludes his Introduction with the following paragraph:

'To appreciate the strength and the beauty of the culture of the ancient Teutons we must realise that their harmony is fundamentally unlike all that we possess or strive for, and consequently that all our immediate praising and blaming are futile. All things considered, we have little grounds for counting ourselves better judges than the classical onlookers. In our sentimental moments we lose ourselves in admiration of the heroism and splendid passion of our forefathers, but in our moments of historical analysis we pride ourselves on styling them barbarians, and this vacillation is in itself sufficient to show that in our appreciation we have not reached the centre whence the Teuton's thoughts and actions drew their life and strength. If we would enter into the minds of other peoples

²⁰⁶ CT I p. 13. ²⁰⁷ CT I p. 13.

we must consent to discard our preconceived ideas as to what the world and man ought to be. It is not enough to admit a set of ideas as possible or even plausible: we must strive to reach a point of view from which these strange thoughts become natural; we must put off our own humanity as far as it is possible and put on another humanity for the time. We need, then, to begin quietly and modestly from the foundation, as knowing nothing at all, if we would understand what it was that held the souls of these men together, and made them personalities.'²⁰⁸

Grönbech goes on to emphasise the absolute claims of kinship which cannot be understood in terms of our notions of right and wrong, and he illustrates this at length in the chapter on Frith.

'Frith constitutes what we call the base of the soul. It is not a mighty feeling among other feelings in these people, but the very core of the soul, that gives birth to all thoughts and feelings, and provides them with the energy of life - or it is that centre in the self where thoughts and feelings receive the stamp of their humanity, and are inspired with will and direction'.²⁰⁹

'Through the channel of the soul, the action and the suffering of the individual flow on, spreading out to all who belong to the same stock, so that in

²⁰⁸ CT I p. 22. ²⁰⁹ CT I p. 53.

the truest sense they are the doers of one another's acts'.²¹⁰

'Thus the kinsmen proclaim their oneness of soul and body, and this reciprocal identity is the foundation on which society and the laws of society must be based'.²¹¹

'Frith' itself means 'peace', but since its old meaning was so intimately linked with the sense of bond-ship between kinsmen it was much richer and more positive in meaning than our word 'peace'.²¹² Grönbech refers to the use of the word 'frith' in the Anglo-Saxon version of Genesis: the promise of God to Abraham, the state of the angels in relation to God before their fall, the relationship of Cain and Abel;²¹³ and in the New Testament the relationship of Mary and Joseph. God's words to Noah are, "'Be fruitful and increase; live in honour and in frith with pleasure"'.²¹⁴

Vengeance was not the outcome of a sense of justice, or of the desire to restore a balance in the sense of the *lex talionis*. Nor was the mere death of the offender sufficient, nor his death at the hands of slaves or a third party. His death must be accomplished by the one offended: and a better man among the offender's kin might be preferred as victim, even though he had nothing to do with the original offence.²¹⁵

²¹⁰ CT I p. 54. ²¹¹ CT I p. 55.

²¹² CT I pp. 32-33, 58-63. ²¹³ CT I p. 59.

²¹⁴ CT I p. 64. ²¹⁵ CT I pp. 70-71.

To gain revenge was to regain or increase honour, and honour, along with frith, was what gave a man life and strength.²¹⁶

It is worth noting, however, that Grönbech himself points out that kings and others in authority tried to replace this kind of vengeance with something more like reparation in accordance with the demands of justice as we should understand it, and one chieftain even voluntarily surrendered his right of vengeance to bring otherwise endless fighting to a close, with the approval of all concerned.²¹⁷

'Ancestral ways, ancestral measures constitute the standard'. 'Family tradition constitutes the entire ethical standard'. 'Each circle has its own honour, an heirloom, that must be preserved in the very state in which it is handed down, and maintained according to its nature'.²¹⁸

'Honour is so far from being something ideal and indeterminate, that it can be actually reckoned up and felt. Honour is the property of the family, its influence; it is the history of the race, composed of actual traditions from the nearest generations and of legends of the forefathers.

'Honour is the cattle and the ancestors of the clan,

²¹⁶ CT I pp. 64, 66.

²¹⁷ CT I p. 73. Cf. Story of Thorkel Krafli, pp. 136-137. See chapter on Honour, pp. 64-104.

²¹⁸ CT I p. 120.

because both live just as much in the kinsmen as outside them. Livestock, like weapons and jewels, exists in the kinsman's soul not merely as an item of this or that value; it does not hang on externally by a sense of proprietary interest, but lies embedded in feelings of a far more intense character. The ancestors fill the living; their history is not sensed as a series of events following one on the heels of another; all history lay unfolded in its breadth as a present Now, so that all that had once happened was happening again and again. Every kinsman felt himself as living all that one of his kin had once lived into the world, and he did not merely feel himself as possessing the deeds of old, "he renewed them actually in his own doings".²¹⁹ An insult against one's ancestors therefore 'is a cut into the man himself ... By an injury a piece of the soul is torn out'.²²⁰

All this meant that there was no life outside the clan, although a modern man would not be unable to exist just because he was cut off from his family or a section of society.²²¹ The Teuton's horror of loneliness is reflected in the Anglo-Saxon version of Cain's despairing words.²²²

'The kinsmen were identical, as surely as the single

²¹⁹ CT I pp. 121-122. ²²⁰ CT I p. 122. Cf. pp. 286-287.

²²¹ CT I p. 123. ²²² CT I p. 124.

deer leaping across the path was identical with all its fellow deer, and bore in itself the whole nature of deer, the whole great deer-soul'.²²³

'The old community allows the personality no importance whatever in itself. A man thinking and acting alone is a modern conception. In former times, the solitary had no possibilities. His ideas, even though amounting to genius, would perish; just as he himself perished, leaving no trace'.²²⁴

'By striking up friendships, men are vitally associated, more or less strongly, with their fellow men; as the brethren of the clan are not only one soul but one bone, one flesh, in a literal sense that escapes modern brains, so the soul of the clan is really knit with the souls of its neighbours and friends, to quote an expression from the Old Testament, which has now lost the force it originally carried among the Israelites as well as among the Teutons'.²²⁵

²²⁶
The chapter on luck reminds us of what Pedersen says about blessing and curse. The king is especially gifted with 'luck' which strengthens his friends and destroys his enemies. Men would often be too afraid to attack the king's luck; but as Grönbech himself admits, the king's luck had to be seen in the fruits it bore, and

223 CT I p. 271. 224 CT I p. 273. Cf. pp. 340-341.

225 CT I p. 284, the close of chapter X, The Soul of Man is the Soul of the Clan.

226 CT I pp. 127-154.

chiefs could also impose severe checks on a king.²²⁷

Luck also finds expression in words, and words uttered by a man of good luck would have their effect like a weapon wielded by a victorious fighter.²²⁸

'There was a great difference between what a king said and what a peasant said, even though they meant more or less the same thing ... Words were dangerous. They could bite through luck and fix themselves in a man ... For they had life in them, they would creep about inside the victim, hollowing him out till there was no strength left in him, or they would change him and mould him according to their own nature'.²²⁹

This is why the king of Northumbria, when engaging in battle with the Britons, first slew the monks they had brought with them to offer prayers during the battle.²³⁰

'The power of words is such that they can transform a man when they enter into him, and make a craven or a niding of a brave man'.²³¹

x 'But words can of course equally well carry a blessing with them. A good word at parting is a gift of strength to the traveller. When the king said "Good luck go with you, my friend", the man set out carrying a piece of the king's power in him ... Orðheill, word-luck, is an Icelandic term for a wish thus charged with power, either for good or evil,

227 CT I pp. 161-169. 228 CT I p. 145.

229 CT I pp. 145-146. 230 CT I p. 146. 231 CT I p. 147.

according as the speaker put his good will into his words and made them a blessing, or inspired them with his hate so that they acted as a curse ... Thoughts and words are simply detached portions of the human soul and thus in full earnest to be regarded as living things.²³²

Luck, of course, belongs to the clan and not merely to the individual, since the individual can exist only as a member of the clan.²³³

'In honour, we have distinctly that which luck can and must be able to effect in order to maintain itself. The family has derived its renown from its ancestors, from them it has its ideals, the standard of all behaviour: how bold, active, firm, noble, irreconcilable, generous, how lucky in cattle, in crops, in sailing, the kinsmen are to be. From them also, the family has inherited that part of luck which is called friendship and enmity. Honour, and therewith luck, constitutes, as we have said, an image of the world of the family. In the quality of esteem and social position, it contains symbols of the family's surroundings, seen as personifications of the kinsmen's friendship and hate, their condescension and dependence. But these personifications are not characterless types, they resemble to the last degree the enemies and friends of the family. The luck reproduces the sharply defined

232 CT I pp. 147-148.

233 CT I, chapter V, Luck is the Life of the Clan. See pp. 155-156; p. 163, where Grönbech speaks of the king's luck as 'that family luck from which his influence wells up'; and p. 172.

features of its environment.

'The sentence, that kinship is identical with humanity, which at first sight seemed a helpful metaphor, has now revealed itself as nothing but the literal truth. All that we find in a human being bears the stamp of kinship. In mere externals, a man can find no place in the world save as a kinsman, as member of some family - only the nidings are free and solitary beings. And the very innermost core of a man, his conscience, his moral judgement, as well as his wisdom and prudence, his talents and will, have a certain family stamp. As soon as the man steps out of the frith and disassociates himself from the circle into which he was born, he has no morality, neither any consciousness of right, nor any guidance for his thoughts. Outside the family, or in the intervals between families, all is empty. Luck, or as we perhaps might say, vitality, is not a form of energy evenly distributed; it is associated with certain centres, and fills existence as emanations from these vital points, the families.

'The power to live comes from within, pouring out from a central spring in the little circle, and thence absorbing the world. In order to fill his place as a man, the Germanic individual must first of all be a kinsman. The morality, sense of right and sense of law that holds him in his place as member of a state community, as one of a band of warriors, or of a religious society, is dependent

upon his feelings as a kinsman; the greater his clannishness, the firmer will be his feeling of community, for his loyalty cannot be other than the sense of frith applied to a wider circle.

'A comparison at this point between ancient culture and the civilisation of our time will bring out the nature of luck, making for expansion as well as for concentration. We, on our part, must always be human beings before we can be kinsmen. Our happiness in the narrowest circle depends on a wider life outside, and we have to go out into the world to find food for our home life. We cannot get on in the world at all, neither pursue our occupation nor cultivate our egoism nor our family prejudices so as not to come into conflict with the rest of mankind, unless we assimilate ourselves to a certain extent with what we call humanity. Among us, a life of kinship is only possible when the individual drags home the riches of humanity and sets the family stamp upon them, and it is the mark of an egoistical nature to collect thoughts and ideals in the larger field of society and hurry home to transform them into family blessings. In our culture, the one-sided family life involves a limitation and a consistent lowering of every spiritual value; it cannot but lead to poverty of ideas and dulness in all feelings. Thus family egoism is a vice, for the simple reason that it is impossible in itself; it can only lead a parasite existence. Its doom lies within itself; for a

logical carrying out of its principles leads to suicide, in the same way as a state of amazons or a state of chaste men would annihilate itself.

'For the ancient clansman, the course lies in an opposite direction. It is frith that shapes his character, and an intensifying of frith means a deepening of his character. A strengthening of the personal maintenance of honour and family involves a greater depth and greater tension in moral feelings and moral will, because it means an enrichment of the conscience. The more self-centred and sui generis a kinsman is, the stronger his personality and the greater his worth as a man.

'Clan-feeling is the base of all spiritual life, and the sole means of getting into touch with a larger world'.²³⁴

Grönbech rightly insists on the so-called primitive man's knowledge of nature;²³⁵ but he also asserts that primitive men's experience of the world is different from ours, and this difference is revealed in a different mode of thought and therefore expression. What follows is a lengthy quotation from the chapter, 'The World'.²³⁶ Grönbech is speaking of the depth of knowledge and insight which primitive men must have.

'It must be so; primitive men - in the sense of people daily at grips with nature, not in the

²³⁴ CT I pp. 172-173. ²³⁵ CT I pp. 183-186.

²³⁶ CT I pp. 186-204.

mythical sense accorded to the word in modern science - primitive men must know their surroundings thoroughly. Such people are not to be judged solely by their literary expressions of natural science. No doubt their familiarity with nature is clearly indicated by their stories and explanatory myths; as to whence the various birds have their particular cries, why one sort of creature brings forth a whole brood of young at a birth or lays a nest full of eggs, while another struts about with its one ugly offspring; in their riddles, as for instance that of the Northmen about the spider: a marvel with eight feet, four eyes, and knees higher than its belly, or of the ptarmigan: play-sisters that sweep across the land; white shield in winter time, but black in summer. But such myths and riddles float after all but on the surface of men's knowledge, and only exceptionally give any indication of the depth to bottom; they hint here and there at what was seen but give no clear showing of how men saw it. The hunting implements and hunting methods of a people, their sense of locality and their protective measures for game are evidence of their intimacy with the most secret ways of nature. Perhaps also their games. If we would realise the infinite sensitiveness of the "wild man's" brain, and how faithfully it can hold this medley of memory pictures clear and alive, the best way is to see him at play, giving mimic exhibitions of his surroundings; the gestures of bird and beast, their gait, their fear, their prudence, their

parental cares - these he can reproduce with the highest art, or the highest degree of naturalness.

'It is a cause of wonder to European observers that the intimacy of primitive man with nature's ways seldom, if ever, embodies itself in impressionistic description or representation. It seems as if the art of realistic narrative is rather an exception among the unlettered peoples of the earth whose songs and stories have been gathered up by the missionaries and ethnologists of modern times. And our supposition that man has been slow in acquiring the skill of painting things as they are seen, is confirmed by the epic poetry of races who, like the Greeks and the Teutons, have been able to turn their folk-poetry into literature before their thoughts were drawn into philosophical or theological channels. Judging from Homer, the Beowulf and the Edda we can, apparently, with perfect right declare our forefathers lacking in realistic spontaneity.

'In folk-poetry we find no reflection of the changing and many-shaded life without; here, all is art, style. Earth may be called perhaps the broad, the far-pathed, and these epithets are then repeated with wearying zeal as often as earth is mentioned in the verse; day invariably dawns with the dawn-red spreading its rosy fingers out from the horizon. When our forefather set about to describe their battles, they can find nothing better to say than that the wolf stood howling in anticipation

toward the approaching warrior, the feaster of the grey beast; the raven fluttered in the air and screamed down to his grey brother, and at last came the hour when the bird of carrion swooped down upon its prey and the grey beast ran splashing about in blood. This schematic description is used without regard to the character or outcome of the fight. Wolf and raven stand for battle and slaughter, whether we have armies in collision and their leaders filling the beasts with food, or a couple of men descending upon a third "giving him to the wolves"; "there you can hear the ravens croak, eagles croak glad in their food: hear you the wolves howling over your husband", - thus the poet announces the murder of Sigurd by his brothers-in-law. Folk-poetry exists upon regular, as it were coined formulae for the various actions of life, hunting and battle, feasting and going to bed. Persons, animals, things are distinguished by standing epithets bearing the stamp of their qualities once and for all.

'Oxen invariably come "dragging their feet", whether the spectator have or have not any occasion to notice their gait - nay, they must drag their feet, even when they appear in a situation where it is impossible for them to move their legs; did not the suitors of Penelope waste the property of her husband by daily slaughtering his sheep and his foot-dragging cows? When a man rises in an assembly to speak, he stands there as the swift-footed, or

the chariot-guiding hero. A man's ship is swift-sailing, seafaring, as well as curved, straight-built, many-thwarted; and he can, indeed, when he has drawn up his vessel on land, sit down beside the moorings of the sea-cleaving craft, and here receive the strangers who come walking down to his swift-sailing ship. It is as natural for Beowulf to fit out his sea-traversing ship as in Icelandic poetry for the horses of the rollers or props to gallop over the sea. The vessel that carried Seyld's dead body out to sea is called ice-clad, but if a modern reader should thence infer that this event occurred during wintry weather he would pretend to more knowledge than the poet of the Beowulf was possessed of.

'An Old English poem gives a picturesque description of warriors hurrying to battle as follows: "The warriors hastened forward, the high-minded ones, they bore banners, the shields clanged. The slender wolf in the forest rejoiced, and the black raven greedy of slaughter; both knew that the fighting men had in mind to bid them to a feast of those doomed to death; at their heels flew, greedy of food, the dew-feathered, dirt-coloured eagle". On closer examination, we find convention apparent in every single connection: thus and no otherwise is a poet required to describe the setting out of an army. The anticipations of bird and beast set forth at such length do not indicate that the battle is to be fiercer, the number of the slain greater than in other battles, - no, wolf and

"eagle are always looking forward to the coming feast. The eagle here is not "dew-feathered" because this particular battle opens in the early morning, it comes sweeping on dewy wings in the hottest noon; dew forms part of the picture where an eagle is concerned.

'In the icelandic, the "pine-perched watcher", to wit, an eagle, can despite his lofty situation still tear the bodies of the slain if need be. Shaker of branches, or branch-scather, is the epithet aptly given to the wind in Gudrun's plaint over her loneliness, when she says: "Lonely I am left as an aspen in the grove, bereft of kin as fir of twigs, stripped of joy as the tree of leaves when the scather of branches comes on a sun-warm day". But in the old days, there was nothing incongruous in referring the wind by that same name of branch-scather, when it came tearing over the waters and raising the waves.

'Among the Germanic people, the king is called ring-breaker, strewer of treasure or furtherer of battle, feeder of wolves; the men are ale-drinkers and receivers of rings, wearers of armour, and they are mailclad whether they happen to be wearing armour at the time or not. Thus we may find the "war-famous, treasure-giving king listening with delight" to Beowulf's offer to fight with Grendel, and another time we watch the "battle-urging lord" going to bed.

'As the valkyrie says to Helgi: "Methinks I

have other work to do than drink ale with buckle-breaking prince", - so Helgi cries to his brother: "It ill behoves the ring-breaking princes to quarrel in words, even though they be at feud". After the slaying of Fafnir, the tits in the bushes make remarks about Sigurd and Regin, and one says: "If he were wise, the clasp-wasting king, he would eat the serpent's heart". And Gudrun, after the dreadful deed that she has wrought upon her sons, addresses the ill-fated Atli thus: "Thou, sword-giving king, hast chewed the bloody hearts of thy sons in honey ... never more shalt thou see them, the gold-giving princes, setting shafts to their spears, clipping the manes of their horses and bounding away". And the same poet who makes Gudrun utter these words, praises the coolness of Gunnar in the serpents' den, when he refuses to disclose the hiding place of the Niblung treasure, for "thus should a ring-spreading chieftain keep firm hold of his gold".

'No wonder readers of the present day glance round ironically with lifted brows and say: "Where is the much-lauded simplicity, the natural innocence we heard tell of once, and after which folk-poetry was named in contrast to the poetry of art? If there be anything of nature at all in these poems, then the qualities by which we generally recognise natural innocence must have been sadly crushed out of it".

'Style, or rather, convention, is the proper word for these poets and their technique. How,

indeed, should one translate into any modern tongue the description in the Beowulf of the warriors returning to the king's hall? "They went thither, where they learned that the guardian of heroes, Ongentheow's bane, the young, the good warrior-chief, meted out rings in the midst of the burgh". The reader must not draw from these words the coldly logical conclusion that an Anglo-Saxon chieftain sat all day in his high seat like a sower, in such wise that a stranger might find his way in by listening for the ceaseless tinkle of gold. Nor can the passage serve as basis for the hypothesis that Hygelac had recently returned from an expedition and was now distributing orders of merit, or that it was payday. On the other hand, the lines contain more than a poetic indication of the place where he was wont to exercise his generosity; they do actually imply that Hygelac is at the moment seated in his high seat in the hall. The sentence cannot be rendered in any other tongue than that in which it is written. The king is he who metes out rings, and the hall is the place where he binds men to him by gifts and hospitality.

'And yet, looking long at the conventional in this old poetic speech, we cannot but perceive that there is something astir beneath it. Closer acquaintance gives one a strong impression that behind this conventional art there lies a rich experience fraught with life. These poems cannot be classed with the work of epigon schools living on a tongue

in which literary acceptance takes the place of sense and force. We feel that the men who wrote thus had their eyes full of memory pictures. They possessed a wealth of imagination, but an imagination rooted in the senses. Their vocabulary shows signs that the users of the words lived their lives in experience at first hand. But neither do these men speak as artists, choosing and rejecting with conscious delicacy of taste from among the expressions of the language; they choose without knowing, being themselves in the power of their images of memory.

'Anyone coming to Homer from Xenophon, and to the Edda from the sagas, will probably always remember his first feeling of wonder - unless indeed he had the misfortune to make the transition upon a rather low school seat, where all Greek seems very much the same, as an arbitrary pattern of vocabulary words, whether the lines run out full length and are called prose, or break off short and become poetry. The moment he closed one book and opened the other, he crossed a mysterious boundary line, entering into a world altogether differently lit. The sagas and the works of the historians deal with kings and peasants and warriors; and they tell of these personages with just that familiarity and just that degree of strangeness we should expect from the length of time that lies between them and ourselves. But the others? Where shall we find the key that unites these scattered notes into a tonic system? It is not the contents that we find difficult,

the soul of Homer is familiar enough to us, but the words have often something strange, almost mystical about them, as if they belonged to another age. Does not the novice feel that these rare words, some of unknown meaning, are merely the wreckage of a foundered tongue? He will hardly be aware that what leaves him at a loss is a feeling of heterogeneity: these archaic words call for an altogether different environment than that of the common and general Hellenic or Scandinavian out of which they rise; they point back to a time when they did not stand alone in an alien world, but had about them a circle of known and knowing kin, all bearing the stamp of that same ancient dignity and power. - The youthful reader goes about for a while with a feeling of internal schism, until habit eases the mind, and relieves him of his painful craving for an interpretation which should go beyond the ordinary limits of exegesis.

'The young student did not know what his unrest meant, he could not translate it into questions, still less into thoughts. But none the less he was right when he felt the presence of spirits where his teacher apparently saw and heard nothing. Many of the words which checked him in wonder are actually relics of an age when speech was coined after another wise than now. With all respect for the majesty of accidental circumstance, we may safely assert, for instance, that the Anglo-Saxons would not have hit upon such an army of words for

"sea" if they had not needed them. There is something imposing in such a series as: brim, egor, flod, flot, geofon, häf, härn, holm, lago, mere, stream, sund, sae. Often enough, the poets are accused of creating a meretricious wealth by half illegal means, a craving for variety leading them to take words of poor content and make them stand for more than they properly mean. We may try to thin out the impressive phalanx by taking, let us say, "stream", and saying, this is really a current, and only in a looser sense applied to sea; or we may say of "brim", that it means, strictly speaking, breakers, and is only applicable as a last resource to sea. But such comfort is false. Each of the words had undoubtedly a meaning of its own, but only in the sense that it served to indicate a whole by emphasising some particular quality therein, or the whole viewed in the light of one such quality. The poets are not always as guilty as we make them, for their method can, even though it may degenerate into arbitrary aesthetic trick-work, yet claim the support of ancient tradition, and justification in the original character of the language. The old words invariably had a deep background. What we understand as the meaning proper has arisen by specialisation, a certain quality or side of a thing being torn away from the original whole, and set up as an abstract idea in itself. Roughly expressed in our differently attuned manner of speech, we may say that stream, for instance, did not stand for a current, but for

the sea as moved by a current; the abstract idea of motion without a thing moved would not occur to the minds of the ancients.

'This wealth of expression is evidence, *inter alia*, of the fact that in the old days, men had clear and precise ideas of the world and things therein, and could not speak of them save in sharply definitive words. Similarly, the characterising epithets in Homer bear witness to a definite and dominant mental imagery. He calls the oxen "foot-dragging" or rather, "the oxen, they who in walking press one leg in against the other"; and such an expression would hardly be used unless one were forced to use it, unless by the pressure of an idea within which shapes the words of itself. Like realism can be traced in the poetic vocabulary of the Northmen, and indeed of the Germanic peoples generally. Here in the North, there is a preference for substantive expressions, where the Southerners are lavish of adjectives: here we find mention of "the branch-scather, the ring-breaker, the battle-wager", whereas in the south, the prince would be referred to by name, and the quality given in an adjective. However significant this difference may possibly be as indicating the character of the language, and thus indirectly of the people concerned, it reveals at any rate no great dissimilarity in the mode of thought. In the foregoing, I translated purposely with adjectives, in order to call up something of that sensitiveness to the

value of combinations which has been dulled by over-literal re-shaping of old Icelandic poems. Ring-breaker, ranger of hosts, for instance, are not titles, as we are led to believe. These words, like all the rest, degenerated under the abuse to which they were subjected by the scalds, but there is no reason to suppose that they stand in the Edda, or indeed in the works of the earlier court poets, without force of meaning. The variations themselves contradict such an idea; when we find, for instance, now hringbroti, "ring-breaker", now hringdrifi, "he who scatters rings abroad", now again other combinations, we have no right to accuse the poet of having an eye to prosody. And in any case, the words must once have had suggestive power.

'With regard to the Germanic writers' poetic vocabulary, we can gather but an approximate idea. Its original wealth and force, its character generally, do not appear to the full in the somewhat late second-hand versions which now stand as sole representatives of the great poetic culture of northern Europe. Here in the North, we have often to search for the old word-pictures among a host of half misunderstood and altogether uncomprehended terms which have been included in some scaldic handbook or other, when the poems in which the words were living things have disappeared. Many an epical expression was only saved from oblivion by cleaving as a name to some mythical being. In Snorri's manual for courtly poets we find, for instance, the abrupt hint that the mode of referring to a buck

may be varied by calling the animal hornumskvali, "the one that clashes its horns", or "the one with backward-curving horns". In the same way, a bear may be hinted at as iugtanni, which must imply some quality or other in the brute's teeth, or "blue-toothed"; another of his names is "step-widener", which must be designed to indicate his characteristic gait, or his footmarks, in somewhat similar fashion as when he is spoken of as "wide-way". We find the raven called "dew-feathered" and "early-flyer", the hawk "weather-bleacher" - bleacher taken passively, or rather in a neutral sense, as with "step-widener" above. The same suggestive power is inherent in the name duneyrr applied to deer, meaning probably "the one who scuttles over pebbles with rattling hoofs".

'The keenness of characterisation which lay in these old epithets is something we can only partially appreciate nowadays. The vocables of our dictionary are always too wide in scope of meaning, compared with the verbs and substantives which our forefathers had at their disposal. We have no word precise enough to fit that skvali which was used to denote a collision of horns, and this one instance may serve to show how loosely all our translations cover the original form of speech. Etymology is too clumsy an expedient to render any help as soon as the quest is extended beyond the dead vocables into the living thought and feeling that once inspired the language and filled the words with subtle associations. We

may lay down by analysis that the word *slithherde* - applied to boar in Anglo-Saxon - can be rendered "ferocious", but the etymologist knows as much and as little of its real life as the man who merely hears the word pronounced. Our examples, then, cannot be more than vague indications of a world rich in things seen and heard and tasted, which is now closed for ever.

'Homer is not folk-poetry, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* bear sufficiently evident marks of having passed through a complex civilization. The *Edda* and the *Beowulf* are by no means primeval Germanic poetry; we find in them both over-refinement and decadence. Undoubtedly there is in the former as in the latter a certain, not inconsiderable conventionality discernible, a necessary consequence of the fact that the form belongs to an earlier age than the contents. The style of the scalds, whether Anglo-Saxon or Icelandic, cannot be acquitted of mannerism, but their stiffness is nothing but the ancient poetical language carried to its utmost consequences, and thus exhibiting in high relief the natural tendencies of primitive thought. The rigour of style is an inheritance from earliest times, and the inner hetero-geneity which we feel in Homer, and to a lesser degree in the *Beowulf* and some of the Eddic poems, is due to the interference of a later culture more realistic and impressionistic in its mode of experience. We should be greatly in the wrong were we to blame the rhapsodes of a later day for the contradictions in these images; the poetry

which lies behind Homer and the Edda, that which created these expressions as its form, was not an iota more natural. It is questionable whether the poet of the Lay of Atli, who praises the "ring-spreader" for "keeping firm hold of his gold", and calls Hogni "the bold rider" at the moment when he lies bound hand and foot, should be assigned to the epigon host for these lines.

'As this poetry speaks, so spoke the people out of whose midst epic arose. The poetic images in which keen observation and the tendency to association of ideas are peculiarly combined, are not a product of style, but the inevitable expression of these distant men's mode of thought, mirroring the people's estimate of its heroes and of itself. Men's outward appearance, their dress, their way of moving, as well as their manner of expressing themselves, are, in heroic poetry, determined by a certain poetic decorum; a hero who does not utter forth his feelings in the traditional style, a hero who suffers himself to be named without the title of armed or bold, or long-haired - all attributes which any free man must claim if he have any self-respect - such an one may be likened to a king sitting on his throne in his nightshirt. The Germanic prince must be glad-minded, cheerful and gentle whatever the actual circumstances; when Grendel harries Heorot, Hrothgar is all the same the glad-minded Hrothgar, the good king, who in all his sorrow had nothing to reproach himself. A man must be eadig, steadfast in his luck; and when Hrethel dies of grief at his son's craven deed, the

poet cannot divest him of the title of eadig, any more than Noah can cease to be the lucky man, when he lies besotted with wine and shamed before his son. It lies in the nature of healthy men to be victorious, and no peril can deprive them of their human characteristics. When the heroes of Israel are seated on the wall in fear of what the morrow is to bring, staring out at the threatening camp of the Assyrians, the Anglo-Saxon poet cannot but picture Judith as giving "the victor-folk good greeting", and later calling out to them: "Ye heroes of victory, behold the head of Holofernes". The decorum goes far deeper than all poetic or social etiquette. It is related to the massiveness of the persons themselves, which makes it impossible for them to adapt their behaviour to what a single situation may demand.

'Modern poetry takes as its starting point the fragmentary in human manifestation; whatever men may be occupied with one towards another, whether discussing the deepest affairs of heart and passion, or carrying on an everyday conversation, whether they are fighting or making love, they show but a small illumined segment of the soul to each other; the greater part of their soul life lies in darkness, only divined, or lit in occasional glimpses by a fleeting light. But the heroes of old are invariably presented in the round. They are like those well-known figures in primitive paintings, standing side-on to the beholder, and yet looking at him with both eyes. They cannot trust us to understand a

thing by implication only, because they are incapable of doing so themselves; the consciousness of their whole previous life, the obligations and privileges of their position, even of the whole past of their race, is ever in the foreground of their mind. When their speech one with another touches such disproportionate depths, reaching back to family relationships and family history, going beyond all bounds of the situation which has brought them into converse, this is but one among many expressions of their sense of wholeness. When the king's retainers lead their lord's bride to the bridal chamber, they feel themselves as shield-bearing, even though their shields of linden wood are hung above their places in the hall. When men lay stone on stone and see the wall gradually rising, they feel none the less the grip of the sword-hilt in their hands; it is the sword-bearers who are building. When they sit down to eat and drink, they cannot for a moment lay aside their valour and renown, even in this common occupation of all mankind. Even though they take off all their armour and get into bed, it must still be the mail-clad, sword-wielding, horse-taming hero who snuggles down under the blanket. And whenever they strike a blow, the listeners must understand that there lies in that blow all the tradition of a race, the impetuosity of a hero, the untamable thirst for vengeance of a son, or more correctly, this weight in the blow forces the whole of the hero's title, with father and forefather, into the verse.

'It is not the men alone who thrust their entire personality upon the spectators at every step. Homer knows that the queen resting with her husband on the nuptial couch is sweeping-robed. When Judith leaves the Assyrians' camp bearing the head of her enemy, she strides forth in all her queenly dignity, as the wise, the strong in action, the white-cheeked, as the ring-bedecked; but neither she nor any other Germanic lady of high birth would ever appear otherwise, whatever her aim or errand. Wealhtheow, queen of the Danes, walks gold-bedecked down the hall, greeting the men; the noble dame hands first the cup to the king, at last she comes, the ring-bedecked queen, the strong-souled, to the place where Beowulf sits, and greets the prince of the Geats wise in words.

'And as men and women are, so is the world in and with which they live. The same massiveness is apparent in all that presents itself to thought or sense. The horse champing at its bonds stands there as the swift runner, and the horse that dashes across the plain runs as the fair-maned, single-hoofed as it always is. Coming from afar, one sees not merely the door and front of a house, but at the same time the whole of its appointments, its splendour, and the life within. The castle which travellers approach is not only high-roofed - so that those seated on the benches need not feel the ceiling close above their heads -, it is not only wide - with bench room for a great host -; but it is alight with the glitter and reflection of weapons, and filled with

gold and treasure. The wanderer espies from the road afar the high-walled burgh, sees - from the road in the distance - halls towering over treasures, sees houses vaulted over the red gold. It is not otherwise, we may take it, with the hills that stand as banks of blue upon the horizon; to one who knows them from having often wandered there, they would be, even when lost in mist, the many-sloped hills, the hills of shady paths. When thinking of his far-off country, the Northman would probably shape his words much as those of the Homeric hero: "between Troy and Phtia there are both shady mountains and a roaring sea". When a man leaps down to the ground, or falls on his back, the spot his body covers is still: the earth of the many roads, the corn-bearing, the many-feeding, or the broad. So speak the Hellenes, and the Northmen say of the serpent that it be-creeps on its belly the broad earth.

'This fulness and comprehensiveness of the idea does not belong exclusively to poetic speech; it is inherent in the language and leaves its mark on legal phraseology far into the Middle Ages. The lawyer who says turf must add green; murderers, thieves and such like folk shall be buried on the beach "where the sea meets the green turf", as the Norwegian lawbook decrees. He cannot name gold without styling it red or shining, nor silver without adding white; in the precise language of law, day is bright day and night is darksome or murky night.

'There are in Homer two strata, easily distinguishable one from the other. On the one hand, that represented by comparisons, the elaborate pictures introduced with a "like to ...": "As East and South in rivalry shake the dense woods in the clefts of the mountain, and beech and ash and slender-barked cornel lash one another in fearsome noise with their projecting branches, while clamour of splintering trunks arises, so stormed the Trojans and Achaeans together, and smote each other; none thought of flight". The man who speaks thus has his mind full of a situation, a momentary picture; the scene before his inward eye expands to every side, and opens vistas round about to other visions again. The poet welcomes all associations of ideas, and pursues in calm enjoyment the broadest of those roads the situation opens to him. This is the modern spirit of experience. It is otherwise with the images contained in such expressions as "the foot-dragging oxen", "the many-pathed earth", "the blue wave"; these are not creatures of the moment, but on the contrary, a product of years of experience. Here, it is not the poet who pursues, but the idea which draws and compels him, being rooted far down in the depth of his soul. The metaphor is more ancient than the simile. It speaks of a time when the soul never lived on individual sense impressions, when it might perhaps, as wakefully as now, accept all that presented itself to the senses, yet without stopping at the isolated impression, rather churning its experiences together into a comprehensive idea.

The man of metaphor may be said to remember with all his senses. But all his experiences of any given object exercise a mutual attraction one towards the other, and enter into an indissoluble unity. Each new observation is drawn up by those previously made and forms with them a unit, so that the images which live in the soul, with all their natural truth, their precision and strength, are not individual ideas, but universal ideals, as rich in content, as weighty and insistent as the heroes of poetry are.

'This mode of thinking calls men to account at every moment for their actions and their being, recognising no distinction between different official and private selves, - such as we now enjoy. The figures we meet with in ancient poetry, and in ancient history, cannot be divided into the public and the private personality, the man of ordinary and the man of special occasion, into king, husband, man, judge, councillor, warrior. One cannot say "man" without thinking "armed"; and therefore, when we pronounce the latter word, thought builds up the whole. There is thus nothing artificial in the expression of Caedmon: "the armed one and his woman, Eve". It may strike strangely on our ears to hear Jesus called the "ring-giver" and his disciples referred to as the body-guard, the bold warriors. But to the Germanic mind it was impossible to avoid these expressions, as long as the ancient circle of thought remained unbroken. There was no actual thought of Jesus as sweeping across the country upon a viking expedition; the poet does not even say

"ring-giver" because it was the custom to rhyme man with generosity. Jesus was the Lord, his disciples the men; Jesus was the man of luck, his disciples those who partook of his luck, and the relation between master and men could not be apprehended in the quality of a fraction; it must take up the idea of entirety, and enlist all words in its service.

'The idea of a wolf or of an eagle is made up of all the experiences accumulated at different times anent the life and character of the creatures names; their habits and appearance, their wills and propensities. And so the animal stands as an inseparable whole, living its life without regard to its place in a classificatory system, possessing its limbs and its qualities in a far more absolute fashion than nowadays. For thought was so completely dominated by the idea of entirety, that it lacks all tendency to take the world in cross-section, analysing, for instance, the animal kingdom into heads and bodies, legs and tails, or the forest into leaf, branch, trunk and root. The separate parts simply have not in themselves that independent reality needed to produce such word-formulae as: leg or head. A head is only conceived as the head of a particular beast, it must be either a dog's head, or a wolf's head, or some other individual variety of head. Even a leap seen ahead on the path will have a particular character, it will be the haste of this or that animal, not a movement in general.

'It is thus not the fairy tale alone which lives

upon the art of conjuring up an entire organism from a single claw, a hair, a thread. The old proverb: "where I see the ears, there I wait the wolf", held good among primitive men in a far more literal sense than with us; at the first glimpse of those two ears, the wolf sprang up, rushed in, bringing with it a whole atmosphere, setting all senses to work, so that the eye saw its trot, its stealthy glance behind, the dirty yellow of its pelt; so that the nose scented it, the hand felt a tickling sensation as of bristly hair. And not only does it bring its atmosphere when it comes, but it spreads a whole environment about it. It enters on the scene as a character, and radiates its habits, its manner of life out into a little world of its own.

'It is but rarely that we find, in the popular tongue, any mention of such generalities as "tree" or "beast". The earth has its growths of oak, beech, ash, elm, fir; its inhabitants, wolf, bear, deer, eagle, raven, serpent. The curse of outlawry, in the Scandinavian, holds good "as far as FIR grows". The proverb to the effect that one man's meat is another man's poison runs, in its northern equivalent thus: "what is scraped off one OAK is all to the good of another". "The FIR that stands alone will rot", neither bark nor leaf can protect it. It is a good omen when the wolf is heard howling under the branches of the ASH. The great world-tree is not called the TREE of Yggdrasil, but the ASH of

Yggdrasil. And poetry retains, here as elsewhere, the old sense of reality. Sigrun sits waiting in vain by Helgi's burial mound: "Now he were come as he had in mind to come; there is no hope now, for the EAGLES sit perched already in the ASH and sleep is in their eyes". "Lonely am I now as the ASPEN on the hill" (when its fellows have withered one by one) - thus runs Gudrun's plaint.

'In the language spoken on the steppes, the moorlands, in the forests, specific and classifying terms play but an insignificant part. The general terms fall completely into the background; they form but the shadow of reality, not the stem of reality itself, as they are with us. The individual manifestations stand so abruptly one against another, rise so independently out of the natural soil, that they can have no immediate contact with one another; and thus the systematical arrangement into animals and plants, into species and classes which to us is of primary interest, has no footing at all.

'Wholeness and independence, these are the two main qualities of images in the simple mode of thought which still shows through in the offshoots of the heroic poetry, and to which we find parallels about us among non-European peoples. Our words are wide and vague, because we see and feel things loosely, and accordingly concern ourselves more with the interaction of phenomena than with actual objects. Our world is built upon generalities and

abstractions, and the realities of life recede behind the colourless "facts", as we call them, of cause and effect, laws and forces and tendencies. The words of ancient and primitive races are narrow and precise, answering to the experience of men who did not run their eyes over nature, but looked closely at every single object and took in its characteristics, until every item stood forth before their inner eyes in its fulness, as a thing unique. This definiteness of experience seriously hinders analysis and classification, but this does not mean that the spiritual life is kept down to a simple verification of the actual facts, or that ideas are merely acknowledgements of the impressions. On the contrary, ideas have, for these thinkers, a strength and influence which can at times lead strangers to regard the barbarians as philosophers all; the truth, however, is that they are distinct from the philosophers by the very force and power and reality of their ideas.

'The conceptions that make up the body of our spiritual life, such as colour, beauty, horse, man, exist by themselves in the intervals between the things of the world, and our sensations are but the pegs on which they are hung. In the primitive mind, every idea is firmly connected with an object; the thing is seen in its perspective, as it were. Answering to the narrow scope of the word, we find a dizzying depth in its idea, since this in itself includes all that can be thought of

the object named. The meaning is not restricted to cover only the body of things, but embraces their soul in the same degree. In the idea of "oak" lies all that one can think of quercus; from the oak itself as it rises before the eye, or can be felt with the hands, from its speech, its form, its peculiar manner of moving, its fertility, and the like, to "oakness", the state of being oak, the quality which makes one an oak tree. So comprehensive is the thought, and so intimately wrapped about reality. The full depth of the word is not reached until we arrive at the state of pure being, a being which in respect of spirituality has every claim to admittance among the company of the highest ideas, but which differs nevertheless from our venerable abstracts in having a marked character; a pure being, in which lie predestined the qualities of lobed leaves, gnarled branches, broad-crowned growth, edible shell-fruits.

'Endeavouring now to track down these thoughts, it may be that the exertion we feel in the task involuntarily applies itself to our estimate of those old thinkers, and induces us to think of them as profound reasoners. And there is still greater danger that the motion of our thoughts may be transferred to the ideas we are following, so that we imagine primitive ideas as something complex or complicated. For us who endeavour to think again the strange thoughts of a stranger, the difficulty lies first and foremost in keeping firm hold of the unity and banning all suspicion of musing and

profundity. Primitive idea is not created by a reflection whereby something is abstracted from reality, nor by an analysis loosing the separate elements from their connection and rearranging them in logical categories - on the contrary, it depends on a total view, the nature of which is inimical to all analysis. We call the primitive idea oak - oakness two-sided, but with only conditional justification, inasmuch as the ideas of primitive peoples do not contain anything which can properly be called dualistic. It points simultaneously out towards something spiritual and something material, but it has no seam in it where matter and spirit meet. Idea and reality, that which is perceived and that which is felt, are identical; are, so to speak, two opposite poles of the conception. We can begin with the concrete; with a wolf, a stone; and gradually, through its character and qualities, its evil nature and goodwill, its mobility and weight, arrive at the qualities of wolfness and stoneness, as subtle as any philosopher could spin it, and yet at the same time as strong in its reality as any sense impression. And we can commence with a "force", the force of being a wolf, a stone, and through the effects produced by that force arrive once more at the solid objects before us. We can move forward or backward from pole to pole, without any somersault, without even the least little hop. The connection is unbroken, because the thought never at any point loses hold of the idea

of a limitation in character and form. "The things of our world are flat and silhouette-like to such a degree that they shade into one another and merge into such vague entities as "nature" or "world". Primitive facts are all-round objects and shapes that stand out free of the background, and when our comprehensive phrase "the whole world" is translated into old Norse, it takes this form: "As far as Christian men go to church, heathen men worship, fire bursts forth, earth bears fruit, son calls mother, mother suckles son, men light fire, ship strides, shields flash, sun shines, snow drifts, fir grows, falcon flies the spring-long day when the wind is full beneath its wings, heaven vaults, earth is peopled, wind howls, water flows into sea, carles reap corn".

'Thus we are led to see that the primitive way of depicting life is realistic in the truest sense of the word. The epic formulae, as we are apt to call them, paint the world as it is, but their world is very different from the place in which we move and have our being. Primitive men differ from Europeans not in theories about reality, but in the reality itself.'

In the chapter 'Life and Soul',²³⁷ Grönbech once again strongly emphasises the difference between our way of looking at things, and the ways of other peoples;

²³⁷ CT I pp. 205-227.

and the fact that we interpret their words in terms of our own ideas instead of theirs. For the Teuton, according to Grönbech, everything had its own soul, its own characteristic life and will; whereas we think of life or soul as one thing which has become manifested in different forms. We spontaneously interpret Teutonic poetry as expressing metaphors and personifications, but the old poets mean something deeper than that: they are expressing men's immediate awareness of the natural things surrounding them, and the immediate awareness of each thing's full character and life, whether it be animal or bird, the earth or sea, or simply a stone or tree. Everything has a soul and therefore its own personality and will.

This old outlook springs naturally from man's great dependence on his surroundings; he needs to seek nature's good will and must therefore understand the souls surrounding him. The change in outlook comes about when man gains more control of his situation, separates himself from such closeness to the natural world, begins to reflect on his own human nature, and then to read back into the natural world the characteristics he finds in himself.²³⁸

We also impose on nature our own systems of classification,²³⁹ but we must beware of attributing these categories to alien cultures.²⁴⁰ To the primitive

²³⁸ CT I pp. 219-220. ²³⁹ CT I p. 223.

²⁴⁰ Cf. CT III 'Natures' pp. 20-21.

Teuton all members of the same species had the same soul; all members of the same class, indeed, were identical in both body and soul, so that when this wolf or that bear appears it is not, in fact, this or that animal, but wolf or bear simply, reborn in another appearance.²⁴¹

In speaking of man's relation to nature in primitive Teutonic thought Grönbech states:

'He does not feel the distance between himself and the bear as greater than that between the bear and the wolf; each of the three is an independent existence, and their relation one with another can thus never be expressed in any fixed constellation as with us who invariably set man uppermost and never between the two ... Nature is to primitive man a realm filled with free self-existing souls, human and non-human, which are all on the same line of existence and can enter into all sorts of combinations through bonds of friendship or kinship'.²⁴²

In speaking of the secret of life in primitive experience, he states:

'The soul is something more than the body, as it is seen and felt in space-filling reality, but it is not anything outside the material ... the body is a part of the soul, or even the soul itself. The moment we grasp a stone firmly in the hand, we have grasped the soul of the stone, it is the

²⁴¹ CT I pp. 225-226. ²⁴² CT I p. 278.

soul we can feel'.²⁴³

'Life is will. All that is, acts because it feels an impulse, feels pleasure in this and displeasure in the other. The soul of the stone, as well as that of the tree and the animal, is filled with desire and purpose and preference, but the stone's will is not the animal's and neither is that of the human being. Man had soon to discover that everyone of his surroundings loves and hates in its own fashion, according to its unassailable principles - after its own kind. It is this discovery which has made man so watchful and sensitive to all manifestations of the souls surrounding him. Woe to him who thought that things had human will and human power.'²⁴⁴

× This is why, according to Grönbech, ritual operations vary, being suited to the different wills operating in man's world.²⁴⁵

Grönbech is very clearly of the opinion that modern European intellectual reflection has done nothing to help our understanding of primitive culture.

'European philosophy has emancipated thought from experience to such a degree that it becomes possible to picture all nature in the likeness of man. We have discovered, or rather learned from the Greeks and carried the discovery further,

²⁴³ CT I p. 208. ²⁴⁴ CT I pp. 210-211.

²⁴⁵ CT I p. 211.

that it is human life and human existence that resides in plant and stone. For the last three centuries, the task of philosophy and science has been to deprive life and existence of the most prominent human features and reduce them to vague colourless ideas applicable to all organisms, and in a wider sense to all phenomena'.²⁴⁶

'But to understand the ways of primitive man we must to some degree be able to realise his experience.'²⁴⁷

Grönbech opens his chapter on Life and Soul:

'It is a melancholy fact that modern researches into primitive thought have led us farther and farther away from any real understanding of foreign cultures and religions. And the reason is not far to seek. The European is hampered by his naive faith in his own system and his own logic as the measure of all things; the missionary and the ethnologist invariably try to force a ready-made scheme on cultures of radically different patterns, in the same way as linguists formerly arranged all tongues after the scheme of Latin grammar; just as the introduction of gerund and supine and ablative only served to obscure the structure of Indian or Australian languages, so our rigid dualism cannot but distort primitive psychology. The Scandinavians, the Greeks, the Hindoos, the

²⁴⁶ CT I p. 213. ²⁴⁷ CT I p. 219.

Israelites as well as the Indians and the Australians have been examined by the catechism: what do you believe about the soul, how do you conceive the interaction between body and soul, what becomes of the soul when it leaves the body, as if the Hellenistic and European dualism as it is embodied in the catechism and the handbooks of psychology were at the root of all experience. By such an examination from without, facts may no doubt be brought to light, but the facts are often worse than false, because they are wrenched out of their natural coherence. Without an understanding of primitive thought as a consistent whole, our forefathers' talk of²⁴⁸ life and death, soul and body would be incomprehensible.

In writing of holiness, Grönbech asserts that there was a close association between holiness and luck.

'In the high seat, in the grove, and on the mountain, we stand face to face with a power which seems never before to have forced itself upon us: that of holiness; but in reality, we have traced its influence at every step. It is luck in its mightiest shape'.²⁴⁹

'Holiness is the very core of life in men'.²⁵⁰

'In those members of the clan who constantly dwelt within the narrowest circle of luck, holiness was at its strongest'.²⁵¹

'In times of great strength and renewal in the life of the clan, holiness would thicken in the house and embrace all with its whole force'.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ CT I p. 205. ²⁴⁹ CT II p. 116. ²⁵⁰ CT II p. 118.
²⁵¹ CT II p. 121. ²⁵² CT II p. 129.

The transition from the temporal to the religious 'exists only for us; to the Germanic mind, the transition from human life to the divine was an unbroken continuation'.²⁵³

In speaking of its spiritual power Grönbech writes,

'A woman's skill in brewing was something far more than housewifely capability; it was the test of her holiness and its force, of her strength in the gods and her power over luck'.²⁵⁴

In speaking of Heill and Séls, Grönbech refers to the oneness of body and soul.²⁵⁵

Heill is defined as 'luck'.²⁵⁶ It is 'luck, blessing resulting from a sacred ceremony and manifesting itself in good omens'.²⁵⁷

Reverting to the gulf which Grönbech believes to exist between modern ways of thinking and the modes of thought found in a primitive culture like that of the Teutons, we find the following statement at the opening of the Essay on Ritual Drama:

'It is a task of almost disheartening difficulty to interpret the culture and religion of a primitive race in modern language. Our words are incapable of expressing ideas that are not only divergent from our own but run in totally different dimensions. In order to reproduce the intellectual life of these races, we must unlearn our psychology, and learn another, no less reasonable but differing in its very principles. Primitive ideas and

²⁵³ CT II p. 130. ²⁵⁴ CT II p. 165. ²⁵⁵ CT III p. 18.
²⁵⁶ CT III p. 18. ²⁵⁷ CT III p. 19.

sensations and sentiments have a harmony and tension of their own, because their holders group the harvest of experience according to another point of view, bring it to consciousness under strange aspects and construct a reality so alien to ours that words like god and man, life and death, as they are understood by Europeans, carry no meaning in their language'.²⁵⁸

The word 'primitive' conveys the idea of something less developed, and Grönbech regards this as preposterous. Grönbech prefers the term 'classical' which he believes indicates an outlook which is realistic and embraces all aspects of experience in a single whole, over against 'our romantic civilisation' for which reality lies in the reactions of the mind, the ideas, sentiments, and moods which reflect a shadowy world external to it. This means that conceptions of time and space and actual experience are very different in the classical and romantic cultures.²⁵⁹

'In our experience the primary property of bodies is extension, whereas in classical culture it is primarily a force or life that governs all ideas.'

For us, time is a continuous flow from an unknown past into an unknown future; but for the men of classical ages 'the actual life is the result of a recurrent beginning'.²⁶⁰

'... classical thinking is concrete in its very

²⁵⁸ CT II p. 260. ²⁵⁹ CT II pp. 260-261.

²⁶⁰ CT II p. 261.

essence; in our experience, life is something abstract ... whereas in classical culture it is "luck and honour; life as it manifests itself in the character of the race, in its history'.²⁶¹

'The religious principle does not admit of an analysis on our lines nor of any translation into our historical forms'.²⁶²

'The historian of religion will not be able to elucidate the ritual and the legends of a classical race until he has succeeded in identifying himself - so far as such an identification is possible to modernman - with the worshippers, until he has learnt to look at things with their eyes, to re-experience heaven and earth, animals and plants, and convert this new experience into appropriate ideas'.²⁶³

²⁶¹ CT II p. 262. ²⁶² CT II p. 263. ²⁶³ CT II p. 267.

Section B. W. Eichrodt

5. INTRODUCTION

In his 'Theology of the Old Testament',²⁶⁴ Eichrodt is clearly concerned to avoid two extreme views of the nature of God: pantheism, or a very close association of deity and nature on the one hand, and deism on the other. Like all those who are concerned with a proper understanding of Christian theology Eichrodt wishes to find a proper balance between a recognition of God's transcendence and a recognition of God's immanence. He also believes, as most other Christian thinkers do, that the Bible reveals the true nature of God, and therefore the extremes to be avoided must be avoided there, and there the right theological balance must be found. The bulk of the Bible is the Old Testament, and whatever variation of teaching there may be in that extensive literature, Eichrodt clearly believes that the overall impression and picture of God given in most of the texts is, and must be the right one. The light may shine more brightly in some places than in others, but it is always, or nearly always, the true light.

Although he does not say much about it, Eichrodt also appears to be very much aware of the impact which natural science has had on thought, not least religious thought and the interpretation of the Bible.²⁶⁵ At

²⁶⁴ W. Eichrodt, THEOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, London, Vol. I, 1961, Vol. II, 1967. Translated by J.A. Baker.

²⁶⁵ See, e.g. E2 p. 161,f ; p. 163 ft. 4; pp. 166-167, and ft. 4 on p. 167.

times he seems to feel that scientific thought has made biblical narratives and teaching appear outmoded and even crude, but that natural science is barren when we are seeking meaning and purpose in life. For Eichrodt the fundamental assumption of natural scientists that natural processes occur of their own accord in conformity with immutable and impersonal principles gives a wholly inadequate picture of the natural world, and therefore a wholly inadequate account of human life, which is so closely bound up with the natural world. The truth about nature revealed by scientific research cannot be denied, and we cannot ignore it in our interpretation of the Old Testament; but it is only a partial truth and must not be allowed to undermine our faith in the biblical revelation which conveys truth of even greater significance about nature and man.

It is perfectly understandable that Eichrodt's exegesis of the Old Testament should have been influenced by such considerations, but the possible distorting effects of overriding theological and apologetic interests will have to be borne in mind in the following examination of his exposition of the Israelite understanding of nature.

Eichrodt bases his 'Theology' on the belief that the concept of most fundamental importance in Israelite religion is that of the covenant.²⁶⁶

'The concept in which Israelite thought gave definitive expression to the binding of the people to God and by means of which they established firmly from

²⁶⁶ E1 pp. 11, 13-14, 17-18.

the start the particularity of their knowledge of him was the covenant'.²⁶⁷

× The character of the covenant excludes any possibility of understanding God's relationship with his people in terms of popular nature religion. There is no blood relationship between God and people, nor are God and people indissolubly linked by their mutual association with the land. God has freely chosen his people and may as freely reject them, and therefore there can be no means whereby divine power is automatically employed. Gifts and punishments, even when these take the form of natural events, are the consequence of God's sovereign will, and are to be understood in personal terms which recognise God's lordship on the one hand and the people's obligation to be obedient on the other.²⁶⁸

A religion based on this kind of covenant inevitably came into conflict with Canaanite religion and culture. Canaanite influence created a tendency to associate God much too closely with the mysterious life-force seen in nature, and God, land and people were drawn together in such a way as to destroy utterly the true character of the Israelite covenant with God. Those who succumbed to Canaanite influence saw the cult as automatically effective ritual and it gained in importance as people came to regard it as a sure means of winning or compelling divine favour.²⁶⁹

Canaanite thought associated the god very closely

²⁶⁷ El p. 36. ²⁶⁸ El pp. 42-45.

²⁶⁹ El pp. 45-47.

with the sanctuary and this was a notion which had to be radically modified before it could be properly applied to Yahweh.²⁷⁰ In the popular religion of Canaan

'The constant presence of the god was as much taken for granted as the unceasing existence of the forces of Nature in which that presence was manifested; and from this it followed that the god was firmly settled in the sanctuary dedicated to him'.²⁷¹

Sacred stones were taken over from the Canaanites and often regarded as media of divine power, although sometimes explained simply as memorials of Yahweh's self-manifestations.²⁷² Nevertheless, the idea that the stones actually contained holy power led

'to the temptation to seek to control the divine holiness by sacrificial rites, and to the closely associated misunderstanding of Yahweh as a locally limited Nature deity'.²⁷³

The bull image, particularly associated with Jeroboam I,

'defines Yahweh's nature one-sidedly as a vegetation deity and teaches men to see his manifestations in the destructive and creative forces of Nature'.²⁷⁴

Canaanite nature festivals were celebrated in order to fill ordinary life with divine power, and at the same time strengthen the divine power itself. While Israel's

²⁷⁰ El pp. 104-107. ²⁷¹ El p. 105. ²⁷² El pp. 115-116.
²⁷³ El p. 116. ²⁷⁴ El p. 117.

spiritual leaders did not despise the association of God with nature, the worship of Baal encouraged men to see God as actually present in the processes of nature and to believe that they could lay hold on God and enter into intimate association with him. This was firmly rejected by those who were anxious to preserve the true character of Yahweh worship, and hence the nature festivals underwent changes designed to teach the true nature of the covenant God who had revealed himself in Israel's history.²⁷⁵

Sacred actions were often connected with notions of cleanness and uncleanness, or with holiness. In so far as these notions are applied to land, animals, food, blood, illness or bodily blemishes, their origins were no doubt various: alien cults, magic rites, disgust or horror, foreign means of inducing prophetic frenzy, orgiastic communion with the deity. Nevertheless, once diverse rites and beliefs were brought into relation to the covenant God, Yahweh, they acquired a much deeper meaning than was possible when they existed in isolation and were associated with a variety of deities or demons. Mechanically efficacious ritual was replaced by the aim to please God.²⁷⁶

Prostitution, characteristic of Canaanite religion, was utterly incompatible with the proper worship of Yahweh. Of the sacred marriage Eichrodt says:

²⁷⁵ El pp. 119-123; on the Passover, p. 129.

²⁷⁶ El pp. 133-139.

'In this context the deity is worshipped principally as the mysterious life-force in Nature, and it is the worship characteristic of an agricultural civilisation which is the normal setting for such customs'.²⁷⁷

A little later he writes

' ... in the sphere of religious thinking both ritual and moral, Israel's sensibilities instinctively resisted the whole sexual-orgiastic complex which was bound up with magic and the divinization of Nature and which was such an important feature of their heathen environment. Behind this attitude lies their awareness of the exalted nature of the covenant God, who is open to no kind of coercion and holds sway over the natural order as its true Lord'.²⁷⁸

Speaking of the title 'ēl 'elyōn,

'Significantly, the Creator-concept is ... associated with this "most high god", thus making explicit that distinction of El from a force of Nature which is demonstrable also in other places'.²⁷⁹

Of the title 'ēl 'ōlām Eichrodt says,

'Here is made explicit the refusal to drag down the deity into the flux of natural phenomena - something which is inevitable in the case of those

²⁷⁷ El p. 151. ²⁷⁸ El p. 152. ²⁷⁹ El pp. 181-182.

vegetation and nature gods for whom the mystery of life and death plays such a vital role'.²⁸⁰

Concerning the name Yahweh, which expresses the active presence of God, Eichrodt says,

'It shares that OPPOSITION TO ALL THAT IS MERELY NATURALISTIC and part of the phenomenal world, which is characteristic of the worship of El'.²⁸¹

The title לַיְי could refer simply to a local deity, and such לַיְי existed in the natural phenomena of their district: vegetable and animal life, springs, rivers, storm and sunshine. The term could also signify the Lord of Heaven 'who throughout Syria from the second millennium onwards was worshipped as the Godhead towering above all local gods', and who was not only revealed in such phenomena as thunder and fertile growth, but as the compassionate protector of the individual.²⁸²

Local baals were quite often regarded as expressions of this great deity, and this made them something much more than mere vegetation deities. It also made much easier a dangerous accommodation of the worship of Yahweh to that of Baal, and the later name could even be applied to Yahweh and used in the personal names of Yahweh worshippers.²⁸³ The nature god Baal, however, had no concern with history; and the worship of Baal was essentially alien to that of Yahweh. Prophetic

²⁸⁰ El p. 183. ²⁸¹ El p. 191. ²⁸² El p. 201.

²⁸³ El pp. 201-202.

protest led to the use of the name baal being eventually eliminated from Jewish religious language.²⁸⁴

'Both in the new formation of its own divine names and in the selection it makes of those which it has inherited or which have been imported from without, the faith of Israel demonstrates an unmistakable tendency to emphasize both THE MIGHTY IMMANENCE AND THE EXALTED TRANSCENDENCE of the deity. God is conceived as set over against the numerous forces of Nature, but also as summing up their multiplicity in his own UNITY.'²⁸⁵

According to the priestly literature any actual irruption into the earthly sphere was contrary to the nature of God.²⁸⁶ In speaking of the Word of Creation Eichrodt says,

'It is by this means that the Lord of the universe regulates his relationship with our world without in any way becoming involved in its laws, or tied to its order. Here God's transcendence of the material world is set in the sharpest possible contrast to any pantheistic conception of interfusion or evolutionary development'.²⁸⁷

What Eichrodt says about נִי is also important in this connection. For Eichrodt, when we consider the way in which God accomplishes his will in the world, the concept of נִי is of especial significance. By seeing

²⁸⁴ El pp. 202-203. ²⁸⁵ El p. 205.

²⁸⁶ El p. 408. ²⁸⁷ El p. 410.

the whole world as dependent on God's spirit or breath, polytheism could be rejected, while at the same time deism or pantheism were also avoided. An intimate link is formed with the one God, to whom everything is utterly subordinated. The sovereignty of God over natural forces is also emphasised by the association of the spirit of life with the creative word of God.²⁸⁸

In speaking of the priestly faith, Eichrodt states that the common factor in all its assertions about God and man is the concept of permanent order.

'The divine Law imposed on the cosmos is ... the perfect expression of the divine power in Creation, holding all things in its hands'.²⁸⁹

Eichrodt recognises that development of the idea of God's transcendence can lead to a deistic divorce of God from the world;²⁹⁰ but the priestly outlook in fact promoted belief in God's sovereign rule over the world and mankind here and now.²⁹¹ God as Creator 'at every moment holds this whole world in his hands and rules it by his laws'.²⁹²

'Because of its charismatic character the Yahweh religion tended to conceive and portray the effective working of God's power as something manifested in convulsive disasters, events quite outside the normal run of things'.²⁹³

288 E2 pp. 46-50. 289 E1 p. 433. 290 E1 p. 434.
291 E1 p. 435. 292 E1 p. 436. 293 E1 p. 453.

Eichrodt mentions natural calamities and miracles as examples of this; but he also says,

'Of course God's working was also acknowledged in events such as birth and death, sickness, fertility and so on, which were none the less wonderful for being of everyday occurrence'.²⁹⁴

This last sentence appears to be contradicted early in Vol. II, where Eichrodt claims that natural phenomena which were familiar and beneficent to men, such as sun and moon, springs and rivers, trees and woods, were not regarded as visible expressions of God. The chief visible expression of the Godhead in the realm of nature was the thunderstorm; and appearances of fire, as in a volcanic eruption, were also regarded as visible evidence of the presence of God.²⁹⁵

Eichrodt could avoid the contradiction by making a distinction between God visibly expressing himself and God working in nature, but the distinction is somewhat forced since if God is directly at work in some event he is surely visibly expressing himself in it. A thunderstorm is more striking than grass growing on a hillside, and a burning bush which is not consumed is more striking still. We could therefore say that Israelites more readily recognised God at work in the storm and the bush than they did in the grass growing on the hillside; but if they recognised God at work also in such everyday, often taken for granted occurrences, they surely regarded them,

²⁹⁴ E1 p. 453. ²⁹⁵ E2 pp. 16-19.

too, as visible expressions of the divine nature.

Furthermore, the thunderstorm and volcano express God's anger, and while authority beneficent and authority enraged or menacing may both be recognised, the latter demands more immediate attention and active response.

Eichrodt would no doubt reply to this that he was not merely thinking of God working in natural events, but actually revealing himself. The storm and volcano are literally theophanies. Eichrodt speaks of this attitude as prevailing in Israel until about the time of Elijah, the first clear indication of a change in attitude being seen in the story of Elijah at Horeb in which God has become completely invisible and the gentle breeze conveys his whispered word. The elemental forces which once expressed the presence of God have become instead signs or symbols of the divine presence.

Even if this reply be accepted, we are still left with the long period following Elijah when literal theophanies were not believed in by Israelites; but we must also ask how many Israelites ever really believed that they were seeing God when they witnessed a storm. Perhaps lightning was looked upon as a glimpse of the glory surrounding Yahweh, and perhaps some Israelites thought of thunder as the roar of his voice. Yet an actual vision of the deity is spoken of as such, and is clearly distinct from events which in themselves simply indicate the presence of God, but are not actually aspects of the deity himself.²⁹⁶ Eichrodt's whole discussion²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ See Exodus 24:9-11. Cf. Exodus 19:21; 33:8-23.

²⁹⁷ E2 pp. 16-20.

of these supposed manifestations of God in nature reveals some embarrassment at the notion of Yahweh himself being seen in any natural occurrence, but once we see such events simply as signs of God's presence we have to admit Eichrodt's original confusion.

Attention has been drawn to this confusion, not because it is of particular importance in itself, but because it is the signal of more serious confusion about the relationship of God to nature when Eichrodt comes to examine that question more closely. Is any natural process merely natural, the working of unnumerable events bound together in a spontaneously functioning chain of cause and effect? Or is it really supernatural, a revelation of direct divine creativity? And does the answer we give apply to all natural events? Or is one answer true for some, the other true for others?

We must next turn to Eichrodt's attempt to expound the Old Testament answer to these questions.

6. TWO VIEWS OF NATURE

Eichrodt believes that two views of God's relationship with the world are to be found in the Old Testament. This contrast springs from the use of the concept of the word as the means whereby God is linked with nature.²⁹⁸ This concept indicates that the processes of nature came about through the free choice of a being absolutely superior to nature, and that they cannot be understood in a merely deterministic sense or interfered with by magic.

²⁹⁸ E2 pp. 74-76.

Various texts illustrate the view that the processes of nature are 'the movement of living forces released by a specific word from Yahweh'.²⁹⁹

The second view, which contrasts with this, depicts the world as a system established by God's word, and working with unalterable regularity according to fixed laws. The forces once established by God's word function in a predetermined way and reveal an automatically working power. Eichrodt believes that this picture of the world developed under the influence of the conception of God's word in the Law: it is a 'static conception of the natural order'.³⁰⁰

A little later Eichrodt states,

'It cannot be denied that implicit in this substitution of the static conception of the Law for the dynamic one of the Word was the threat of a deistic removal of God far from the events of this world'.³⁰¹

× According to Eichrodt this threat of deism was averted parly by linking the word of God and the spirit of God; and partly by the hypostatization of the word whereby it becomes active in the world of men and nature and makes real the operation of God himself from day to day.³⁰²

In chapter 17³⁰³ Eichrodt returns to these two points of view concerning God's relationship with nature,

²⁹⁹ E2 p. 75. ³⁰⁰ E2 p. 75. ³⁰¹ E2 p. 77.

³⁰² E2 pp. 77-78. ³⁰³ See E2 pp. 151-162.

and says of them that they are 'THE INSEPARABLE AND MUTUALLY INDISPENSABLE ASPECTS OF A RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION OF NATURE BASED ON THE REVELATION OF THE COVENANT GOD'.³⁰⁴ The first point of view arose because the Israelites looked upon nature as very much involved in the events of human life. This did not mean that the forces of nature had a mythological life of their own; it meant that just as God directly affected the life of men, so he directly controlled natural events, giving rain, making plants grow and so on.³⁰⁵

This view is to be seen reflected in the fact that both creation and preservation are expressed by one verb, אִנָּן. 'It is hardly going too far to describe this Old Testament view of the maintenance of the world as creatio continua'.³⁰⁶ The Old Testament portrays natural events 'as a DIRECT ACT OF GOD who controls both Nature and history by the omnipotence with which he fills all things'.³⁰⁷

'This belief in Providence ... derived its unshakeable firmness and unique energy from the practice of explaining every event without exception in terms of God's action'.

'... for every event there was but ONE divine causality'.³⁰⁸

The second point of view arose out of the contemplation of nature for its own sake as something which

304 E2 p. 162. 305 E2 pp. 152-153.

306 E2 p. 154. 307 E2 p. 153. 308 E2 p. 176.

God had created and ordered. Nature is seen as exhibiting regularities in the occurrence of events, and an independent life of its own. The priests, who were particularly interested in regular order, gave especial attention to this view of the world, and gave it its most striking expression. The life of nature proceeds according to the ordinances of God.³⁰⁹ This life has been created by God, and even the most impressive phenomena of nature cannot exist in complete independence of God. Nevertheless, this view is different from the popular one developed by the prophets

'in that it understands God's sovereignty incomparably more emphatically as something indirect, exercised through the operation of forces established once for all and guided in predetermined courses'.

Men were thus made 'more or less clearly conscious of the rule of definite ordinances and laws in the cosmos'.³¹⁰

Earlier Eichrodt has referred to man's special position in nature, and his awareness that nature stands over against him 'as an autonomous entity keeping him at a distance',³¹¹ and that there is a cosmic order which he has to respect.³¹² Mankind has a close relationship with nature, but this is because they are both ruled by the one sovereign deity. Nature does not exist to be

³⁰⁹ E2 pp. 154-156. ³¹⁰ E2 p. 156.

³¹¹ E2 p. 118. ³¹² E2 pp. 118-119.

simply exploited by man, and there are areas in which he must not interfere. Nature is controlled by ordinances of God which man must respect, or nature itself will rebel against him.³¹³

From the time of Jeremiah onwards there was a remarkable readiness to acknowledge the regular order of nature, and the prophet himself could apply to the autonomous cosmic order the same term as was used to denote the statutes of Israel, and contrast the regularity of the self-contained natural order with the variable standards of human conduct.³¹⁴

The priestly account in Genesis 1 depicts the world 'as an organism with laws proper to its own life', and a clear distinction is made between creation and preservation by the conclusion of the account with the day of rest. The creation is thus not an act of caprice and the world enjoys a divinely approved life of its own as against one that is merely ephemeral.³¹⁵

Deutero-Isaiah is the prophet most influenced by the idea of nature as a wonderful system with 'solid, objective reality', although he did not abandon the old way of speaking of God's direct working in natural events. This new world view encouraged prophetic reference to the natural order, and we even find reference to the laws of heaven and earth, 'a phrase which makes it seem that the writer had arrived at something very like our own conception of laws of Nature'.³¹⁶

³¹³ E2 pp. 118-119. ³¹⁴ E2 p. 157.

³¹⁵ E2 p. 158. ³¹⁶ E2 pp. 159-160.

In the wisdom literature hypostatized wisdom has become the architect of the universe. There were those in Israel, however, who saw human rationalism as an obstacle to the proper knowledge and worship of God, and in the Book of Job divine wisdom becomes totally inaccessible to man, and the rule of rational law gives way to the existence of an autonomous life in nature dependent on the miracle of divine creation and preservation, and acknowledged in faith rather than understood.³¹⁷

In Ecclesiastes the de-personalization of the natural order is completed, and its author 'comes closest to the modern conception of the laws of Nature'. The world has become a machine working according to its own laws without purpose and regardless of human feeling. Human reason of itself will find in the uniform natural process something which is merely ambiguous.³¹⁸

The Relationship of the Two Views to Each Other.

Before examining the texts referred to by Eichrodt in support of his position we must first answer the question whether or not the two points of view described by Eichrodt contradict each other. He refers to many texts and argues his case in thoroughgoing fashion and with a subtlety not to be found in the other authors examined. It is therefore necessary at the outset to grasp the real nature of the two outlooks he ascribed to the Old Testament. It might appear that Eichrodt has found in the Old Testament a duality of outlook characteristic

³¹⁷ E2 pp. 160-161. ³¹⁸ E2 p. 161.

of many modern believers: events have natural causes but they are also caused by God. The flowers in the garden are the effects of natural causes, but we also thank God for them. It has to be appreciated, however, that Eichrodt attributes to the Old Testament a much more clear-cut distinction than is generally implied in such modern belief.

For the purposes of this discussion we may think of four points of view which are possible concerning the relation of God and nature.

1) Natural processes entirely explain the development of the physical world, the appearances, changes and disappearances of species. These processes are entirely independent of God, if there is such a being.

2) There are no natural processes. The processes in the natural world are in reality an act of continuous creation by God. If man can make generalisations about noticeable regularities, this is because God acts consistently according to certain principles to which he freely binds himself.

3) Natural processes were devised and set in motion by God. Once established the processes were left to work on their own. This view is compatible with (a) deism, or (b) with the belief that God is continually sustaining the natural world.

4) Natural processes were devised and set in motion by God. Once established the processes were left to work on their own, but God intervenes in the natural world from time to time. Such intervention may be thought of as (a) arbitrary; or (b) according to principles which transcend the expression of law and order in the physical universe.

Eichrodt tries to combine 2) and 4b), but we must ask if it is possible at one and the same time and with

respect to the same object of thought for one person or group to hold both points of view. The answer is quite clearly that it is not. If a gardener believes that the vegetables in his plot are growing spontaneously through natural processes which take place simply because of the life that is in the earth (view 4), then he cannot at the same time believe that God is continually creating them, (view 2). He cannot believe both that God has created the world and ordained its natural processes, and that every happening in the natural world is a creative act of God. This remains true even if he believes that the earth would have no life or even existence unless God were continually preserving it. The distinction between preservation and creation is here clear enough, even if it were to defy quite precise definition. The gardener, after all, can think of himself quite legitimately as the preserver of the life of the soil when he spreads manure or fertiliser over it, but he does not confuse this with the actual production of the cabbages and beans, which occurs of its own accord once the right conditions have been established. We may compare the statement in Genesis, 'And Yahweh God took man and placed him in the garden of Eden to till it and look after it', the last verb being **לְשָׁמְרוֹ**.

Likewise, someone may regard the conception and formation of a human child as entirely the work of God, a fresh act of creation. Even if they were able to watch the process or follow it in a reconstructed pattern of natural events, they could still maintain that this was the outward manifestation of an act of continuous creation; or regard the original conception as the work of God and

the remainder of the process as its natural outworking. But if we do believe that conception, or the whole development of the baby in the womb, is the direct act of God then we cannot at the same time regard it as occurring spontaneously as a result of the right conditions.

It may be, of course, that someone holds one view with respect to one area of life, and the other view with respect to another. The man who regards cauliflowers and lettuces as the fruit of natural processes might regard human beings as the direct creation of God. Or the views of an individual or group may change from time to time. Or a believer in natural processes may also be perfectly willing to believe that God can, and from time to time does intervene in such processes to bring about results which would not otherwise occur. And because of these possible variations any given individual or group may be inconsistent or quite confused in their outlook; but it will still remain the case that with respect to any given object these two views are incompatible: if every cabbage or every child is the product of a direct act of creation, then it is not the product of spontaneously working natural processes; and if it is the product of such processes then it is not the result of God's direct creative act.

It is clear that Eichrodt believed that some change took place in ancient Israel in the generally accepted view of nature, but it is also quite clear that he believed both of the incompatible views he has described to be characteristic of Old Testament thought. As we have seen, he says that they are 'THE INSEPARABLE AND MUTUALLY INDISPENSABLE ASPECTS OF A RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION OF NATURE'.³¹⁹

³¹⁹ E2 p. 162.

It is not surprising, however, that he claims that these indicate 'a divine reality transcending human thought', and admits that they have been united only in some pragmatic sense because they have not been 'conceptually harmonized'.³²⁰

Deutero-Isaiah is described as 'a thinker who knows how to synthesize opposing insights'.³²¹

While it would be unfair, and perhaps a serious failure to grasp an important truth, to dismiss such statements as nonsense, they must give rise to suspicion. If some reality transcends human thought, is this not just another way of saying that it cannot be thought, is unintelligible? And if something cannot be thought how do we know that it can BE? If it is precisely the case that opposing views are views that cannot be combined, what does Eichrodt mean by saying that they have been combined? Pragmatic unity without conceptual harmonization looks merely like a high-falutin' way of denoting self contradiction, muddle; and if such confusion does exist in the Old Testament then we must choose one of the points of view offered us as the true one, or reject both. Either the egg on my plate was laid by the hen next door, or it was created by divine fiat: but not both.

Eichrodt would no doubt reply that in the Old Testament both views are accepted, sometimes one being expressed and sometimes the other; and the religious believer today who says grace over his egg no doubt

³²⁰ E2 p. 162. ³²¹ E2 p. 159.

believes that this makes more sense than stepping outside to thank the chicken. But religious believers today only hold the two views of the egg together by assuming a distinction, which Eichrodt denies, between creation and a divinely preserved on-going process. Indeed, belief in preservation is not strictly necessary, since God could be thanked simply for creating the world with all its fruitfulness in the first place. Thanking God, however, certainly assumes a continuing interest by God in the world and its creatures, and usually goes hand in hand with some belief in the continuing activity of God in the world.

Curiously enough Eichrodt recognises that this distinction is made in the priestly account at the beginning of Genesis, but he is obviously not prepared to see in this a clue to the understanding of other references to nature. Even the verb **אָרַב** has to do double duty and indicate both creation and what we should call preservation. But in that case Eichrodt is under an obligation to show how two apparently contradictory views can be accepted together. If Eichrodt were merely concerned to describe the actual beliefs of ancient Israelites this obligation would not exist. As we have seen, it is perfectly possible for people to hold both views even if this is only the expression of a confused state of mind; but Eichrodt is not merely offering us a description of what certain people happen to have thought, but as clear a statement as he can make of revealed truth which everyone ought to accept if they wish to achieve a proper understanding of nature. That is, he has written a 'Theology'

of the Old Testament and not an history of thought in Old Testament times.

We are therefore entitled to point out to Eichrodt that, unlike Deutero-Isaiah, we have not yet learnt to combine the incompatible, and require further explanation. Otherwise we shall have to reject one or both of the views presented to us and regard some or all of the Old Testament texts regarding nature as merely a collection of outmoded attitudes and beliefs: a not unfamiliar actual reaction in the modern world.

It is hard to escape the impression that Eichrodt is appealing to us to understand his exposition of Old Testament thought in terms of paradox and arbitration or compromise, whereas both these approaches to his exposition are quite inappropriate. The contradiction is not apparent but real; and we are not being called upon to settle rival claims by giving way in part to both, but to hold together in our minds beliefs which of necessity exclude each other.

It also appears that Eichrodt is determined at all costs to rule out even the suggestion of deism, and that this is combined with the fear of presenting nature merely as a vast machine governed by its own laws and exhibiting no evidence either for or against the existence of God. This comes out especially clearly in his remarks about Ecclesiastes, which he believes to come most closely to the modern conception of the laws of nature and which at the same time displays the 'vanity' of a natural reading of the cosmic riddle.³²² One is reminded

³²² E2 p. 161.

of Fred Hoyle's remarks at the end of his lectures on the nature of the universe,³²³ and it is not out of place to quote these at some length.

'What is man's place in the Universe? I should like to make a start on this momentous issue by considering the view of the out-and-out materialists. The appeal of their argument is based on simplicity. The Universe is here, they say, so let us take it for granted. Then the Earth and the other planets must arise in the way we have already discussed. On a suitably favoured planet like the Earth, life would be very likely to arise, and once it had started, so the argument goes on, only the biological processes of mutation and natural selection are needed to produce living creatures as we know them. Such creatures are no more than ingenious machines that have evolved as strange by-products in an odd corner of the Universe. No important connexion exists, so the argument concludes, between these machines and the Universe as a whole, and this explains why all attempts by the machines themselves to find such a connexion have failed.

'Most people object to this argument for the not very good reason that they do not like to think of themselves as machines. But taking the argument at its face value, I see no point that can actually

³²³ F. Hoyle, THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE, Harmondsworth, 1963.

be disproved, except the claim of simplicity. The outlook of the materialists is not simple; it is really very complicated. The apparent simplicity is only achieved by taking the existence of the Universe for granted. For myself there is a great deal more about the Universe that I should like to know. Why is the Universe as it is and not something else? Why is the Universe here at all?³²⁴

Hoyle goes on to say that he thinks that one day we shall be able to answer these questions; and he then goes on to comment on the religious outlook.

'There is a good deal of cosmology in the Bible. My impression of it is that it is a remarkable conception, considering the time when it was written. But I think it can hardly be denied that the cosmology of the ancient Hebrews is only the merest daub compared with the sweeping grandeur of the picture revealed by modern science. This leads me to ask the question: 'Is it in any way reasonable to suppose that it was given to the Hebrews to understand mysteries far deeper than anything we can comprehend, when it is quite clear that they were completely ignorant of many matters that seem commonplace to us? No, it seems to me that religion is but a desperate attempt to find an escape from the truly dreadful situation in which we find ourselves. Here we are in this wholly

³²⁴ NU pp. 120-121.

fantastic Universe with scarcely a clue as to whether our existence has any real significance. No wonder then that many people feel the need for some belief that gives them a sense of security, and no wonder that they become very angry with people like me who say that this security is illusory'.³²⁵

In view of hints elsewhere that Eichrodt links deism with modern scientific scepticism, one wonders if he, like other biblical scholars, has not reacted so strongly against this kind of picture that he has been determined to see in the Old Testament such a close relationship between God and nature that such agnosticism or atheism is inevitably excluded, while at the same time finding in the Old Testament a recognition of natural laws now so firmly established by natural science. It is not unknown for Old Testament exegesis to be influenced by fear or suspicion of natural science, and Eichrodt's repeated warnings against deism and his explicit association of the modern understanding of nature with the lack of a sense of purpose in life suggest that he has very much wanted to find distinctive teaching in the Old Testament which would restore that sense of purpose and the spiritual values of life, without at the same time trying to pretend that natural laws do not exist. If this is so, the unresolved contradiction in his exposition becomes understandable, if not acceptable; but the next question to be answered is whether or not this contradiction lies only in Eichrodt, or if it is not characteristic of the Old Testament itself.

³²⁵ NU p. 122.

7. BIBLICAL TEXTS RELEVANT TO EICHRODT'S EXPOSITION OF
THE TWO VIEWS OF NATURE

The two views attributed by Eichrodt to the Old Testament will be referred to as the 'direct (divine) action' and 'fixed system' points of view. This is simply for the sake of convenience and these abbreviations are not regarded as in themselves an adequate expression of Eichrodt's exposition of these aspects of Old Testament thought. Texts concerning creatio ex nihilo, נִדָּן, and Wisdom will be dealt with more briefly in separate Additional Notes.

Although Eichrodt speaks of two points of view, in fact he also refers to texts which express belief in the independent life of nature, and this looks very much like a third outlook which ought to be distinguished from the other two. These texts will therefore be examined separately.

Finally, Eichrodt sometimes appeals to texts as expressions of both the direct action and fixed system beliefs, and with these we will begin.

A. Texts Illustrating Both Direct Action and The Fixed System.

Genesis 1:1 -2:4a Eichrodt claims that the importance of the word in God's revelatory activity explains why statements about God's relation to the world, which first appear in the 7th century and in which the word is intermediary, show that 'THE PROCESSES OF NATURE ALSO FALL INTO THE CATEGORY OF THE FREE MORAL ACTIVITY OF A PURPOSEFUL WILL, and are thereby lifted out of the sphere

of naturalistic determinism'.³²⁶ The account of the genesis of the world opens an historical work 'which with unprecedented stringency and consistency makes the absolute superiority of God over nature the basis of its statements about him'.³²⁷ These statements occur in a section of Eichrodt's work in which texts are appealed to in order to illustrate the direct activity of God in nature under the influence of 'the ancient DYNAMIC OF THE PROPHETIC WORD'.³²⁸

And yet, at the same time, the priestly description of the creative word is said to reveal a tendency towards a static conception of a system which continues with absolute regularity for ever, with earthly forces working in accordance with fixed laws.³²⁹ Eichrodt also refers to specific texts in the P account as illustrations of the fixed system view, and to these we shall return.

Genesis 8:22

עַד כָּל־יָמַי הָאָרֶץ זֶרַע וְקָצִיר
וְקֹר וְחֹם וְקָיִץ וְחֹרֶף וְיוֹם וְלַיְלָה
לֹא יִשְׁבְּתוּ:

This text refers to the regular passing of the seasons, and suggests, although it does not explicitly state, that these are natural processes: 'the stable cycle of natural phenomena' resulting from a 'once for all divine decree', to use Eichrodt's own words.³³⁰

³²⁶ E2 p. 74. ³²⁷ E2 p. 74. ³²⁸ E2 p. 75.

³²⁹ E2 p. 75. ³³⁰ E2 p. 151, ft. 1. Cf. p. 157.

A little later, however, Eichrodt appeals to this text as an illustration of direct divine action,³³¹ which contradicts the previous view. Furthermore, it is not very plausible. The impression created by this biblical statement taken in its context is that the events referred to are regular processes which will continue as a kind of framework for the rest of life unless God should intervene to stop them; but God is promising that he will not intervene ever again as he has just done in sending the flood. It is not impossible to read into the text the idea that God will regularly bring about the seasons according to their accustomed pattern, but this idea is not expressed by the text itself and is a forced reading of it.

Psalms 104 and 148. Eichrodt speaks in general terms of these psalms, along with 8, 19A and 29, as if they expressed the fixed system idea. We are told that they illustrate the 'independent life of the universe', 'order and beauty of the cosmos', 'the firm control of the forces of nature which allows them to move only in accordance with fixed ordinances'. These texts emphatically understand God's sovereignty as something indirect, 'exercised through the operation of forces established once for all and guided in predetermined courses'.³³² Psalm 104 is said to give a picture of the unity, coherence and harmonious order of the world and express Israelite feeling for the natural order.³³³

³³¹ E2 pp. 153-154. ³³² E2 pp. 155-156. ³³³ E2 p. 113.

Eichrodt also refers more specifically to 148:5f in this connection; but he also refers to 148:8 as an expression of direct action.³³⁴

אֵשׁ וּבָרָד שֶׁלֹּג וְקִיטּוֹר רוּחַ סֶעָרָה
עָשָׂה דְּבָרוֹ:

The ordinance of Yahweh is referred to in verse 6, **קִין־נֶתַן** and this certainly means that God has made an unalterable cosmos, and that the chaos which once existed cannot return.

Verse 8b certainly suggests a direct influence of God in natural events, although it does not mean that every natural event is directly produced by God to fulfil some immediate purpose. However, whether we see the stormy wind as an exception to or an illustration of the general rule, it would be a mistake to see Psalm 148 as any kind of encouragement to deistic belief. The repeated **הִלֵּלֵהוּ** is a strange exhortation for a deist.

It is also extraordinary to find in the same psalm in such close proximity to verses 5-6, a statement which supposedly exhibits such a sharply contrasted tendency. Perhaps Eichrodt has a tendency himself to see a sharp contrast where it does not exist, assisted by an analysis of texts out of context and a certain lack of sympathy with poetic imagination and expression.

Psalm 104:7 is used by Eichrodt to illustrate direct divine action.³³⁵

מִן־גַּעְרָתָךְ יְנוּסִין מִן־קוֹל רַעֲמֶךָ יִתְפַּזְּזוּ:

³³⁴ E2 p. 75. ³³⁵ E2 p. 75.

The context is verses 5-9, and however כִּסְּתוּ in verse 6 be interpreted or even amended, the picture is clearly that of the primeval waters retreating to their appointed place at Yahweh's command. This is part of God's creative act belonging to the past and says nothing of God's relationship to continuing natural processes. Verse 9, with its reference to a boundary beyond which the waters may not pass, might be taken as a reference to a permanent ordinance.

Eichrodt also refers to verse 32 as an illustration of direct action, and this will be commented on along with other similar texts.

Isaiah 40. Verse 8 is held to express the fixed system idea.³³⁶ Verse 26, on the other hand, is supposed to express direct action.³³⁷ Verse 8:

דְּבַשׁ קִצְרָה נָבִיל זָיִץ וַיִּדְבֵּר אֶל־הֶרְנוּ.
דְּקוּם לְעוֹלָם:

Taken with verses 6 and 7 we are simply presented here with a contrast between human beings who come and go, and God who remains for ever and whose will cannot be gainsaid. The prophet wishes to engender belief in his prophetic message among a people whose faith and hope had no doubt faded somewhat after years of exile. The coming to bloom and fading away of flowers might be taken to reflect belief in a continuing natural process, and no doubt it did; but this is hardly a text to quote in support of the point, and it has nothing to do with deism or the cosmos as a fixed system.

³³⁶ E2 p. 76. ³³⁷ E2 p. 75.

In verse 26 we read:

שָׂאוּ-מְרוֹם עֲנִיָּכֶם וַיֵּרְאוּ מִי-בְּרָא
אֵלֶּה הַמִּזְוִיָּא בְּמִסְפָּר צְבָאָם לְכֻלָּם
בְּשֵׁם יִקְרָא מִרְבֹּ אֲוִנִים וְאַמִּיץ כֹּחַ
אֶשׁ לֹא נִעְדָּר:

The stars have been made by God, and he calls them out by number and name. This could certainly be taken to mean that God directly controls the appearance every evening of every star; but the text is poetic and could therefore be taken to be the prophet's rhetorical method of emphasising God's power as creator and his perpetual acitivity as preserver of the universe. The stars do not all leap into view at once as evening draws on, but appear gradually, and it was no doubt this familiar phenomenon which led to this mode of expression. The style of the passage indicates poetic imagery from which we can deduce nothing more than that the prophet believed the stars to be created by God and their appearing to be determined by God: how they were created or how they are made to appear as they do is not even a question raised, let alone answered.

Jeremiah 10. According to Eichrodt verse 12 expresses the fixed system idea,³³⁸ and verse 13 belief in direct action.³³⁹ Verse 12 reads:

עֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ בְּכִחוֹ מִכֵּיץ תִּבֵּל בְּחִזְקָתָהּ
וּבְתִבּוּנָתָהּ נִטָּה שְׁמִיָּם:

This reference occurs in a section on the structure

³³⁸ E2 p. 111. Cf. p. 158. ³³⁹ E2 p. 153.

of the cosmos, its 'marvellous construction' and 'skillful ordering'.³⁴⁰ This verse suggests, although it does not explicitly express or necessarily imply belief in a fixed system.

Verse 13 reads:

לְקוֹל תִּתֵּן יְהוָה מִיָּמִים בְּשִׁמְמִים וַיִּצְלַח
נְשָׁאִים מִקִּצֵּה אֶרֶץ בְּרָקִים לְמִטָּה
עָנָה וַיִּזְרַח רוּחַ מֵאֲצֻרֵי יוֹ:

The context of this verse is one in which the greatness of the one true God is being contrasted with the utter futility of looking for power among the other so-called gods. This verse appears to refer to the thunderstorm, and the subsequent verses to raise the implicit question as to how hand-made idols and their makers are to fare when confronted by this colossal demonstration of power. מֵאֲצֻרֵי could refer to mists, but more likely indicates the rising of dark clouds on the horizon.

This verse, therefore, very probably refers to the thunderstorm as a direct revelation of God's power, which is also revealed indirectly in the cosmos he has made.

If, however, Jeremiah did see in the thunderstorm the direct activity of God this was presumably because of the exceptional violence and potentially destructive power of such storms; or it may even be that he regarded the thunderstorm as a theophany. Eichrodt does not refer to this text in his remarks about theophanies in nature, but, as we have seen, Eichrodt does regard the thunder-

³⁴⁰ E2 p. 110.

storm as visible evidence of the presence of God on earth. According to Eichrodt, in the Old Testament God manifests himself in

'the natural forces which break out with startling suddenness to terrify men and to threaten them with destruction, such as the lightning-flash, the dark thunder-cloud or the raging storm - all of which are combined in the majestic phenomenon of the thunderstorm'.³⁴¹

He also refers to the thunderstorm as 'the favoured medium of the theophany'.³⁴²

On Eichrodt's own showing, therefore, verse 13 must refer to something exceptional from which generalisations about God's relationship with nature cannot be made. We must also remember the poetic and rhetorical style of the passage. It is possible that Jeremish saw in the thunderstorm tremendous forces which were nevertheless under the control of God without believing that God was directly responsible for every crack of thunder, every flash of lightning or every drop of rain. He could equally well have seen in the thunderstorm a reflection of the colossal power of God which was alone sufficient to control such elements in the creation and preservation of the world, and to have given vivid poetic expression to this belief.

Finally, it must be admitted that if all of these texts really express the views attributed to them by Eichrodt our attention is sharply drawn to the question

³⁴¹ E2 p. 16. ³⁴² E2 p. 17.

whether or not we really can accept the claim that Old Testament writers at one and the same time stated or implied mutually exclusive views of the relationship between God and nature. The alternative is to suppose that Eichrodt was himself confused, sometimes seeing one view expressed in a given text, and at other times seeing another, without ever realising the need for some explanation as to how such peculiar modes of thought and expression could ever come about.

B. Texts Illustrating the Fixed System View

Genesis 1:11.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תִּדְשֵׂא הָאֲרֶץ דִּשָּׂא עֵשֶׂב
מִזֶּרַע זֶרַע יֵצֵא פֶרֶר עֹשֶׂה פֶרֶר
לְמִינֵהוּ אֲשֶׁר זֶרַעוֹ-בּוֹ עַל-הָאֲרֶץ
וַיְהִי-כֵן:

This statement clearly implies that the earth itself contains the energy whereby vegetation can be enabled to appear, and asserts the possession of life-bearing seeds by that vegetation. The different kinds of tree and plant will propagate themselves apparently without fresh creative acts on the part of God. See also verses 12 and 29.³⁴³

Genesis 1:16ff.

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-שִׁבְיֵי הַמָּאֲרוֹת הַגְּדֹלִים
אֶת-הַמָּאֲרוֹת הַגְּדֹלִים לְמִשְׁשָׁלַת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת-
הַמָּאֲרוֹת הַקָּטָן לְמִשְׁשָׁלַת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֶת-

³⁴³ E2 p. 151. Cf p. 75.

הַכּוֹכָבִים: וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בְּרָקִיעַ
הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאֵר עַל-הָאָרֶץ: וּלְמַשֵּׁל
בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר
וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כֵּן-טוֹב:³⁴⁴

The sun and moon and stars are made by God, and regularity of movement is implied by the statement that they shall rule day and night and mark the distinction between the light of day and the darkness of night. We might add that regularity of movement is implied in verse 14 since the heavenly lights are to mark seasons and years. And, of course, they are to give light. Light already exists as an independent entity created by God's first command, and there are those who see a contradiction between asserting the creation of light and then stating that sun, moon and stars give the light. The writers of the Genesis account are not likely to have thought of themselves as uttering contradictions, however, and presumably they thought of light being concentrated in sun, moon and stars, just as one would light lamps. ³⁴⁵
קָאֹר , used of the sun and moon, means a lamp.

The statements in these verses are not inconsistent with the idea of God putting light into them afresh every day or night, but the inescapable impression of the account is that one sun, one moon, and innumerable

³⁴⁴ E2 p. 75.

³⁴⁵ See BDB, under קָאֹר; S.R. Driver, THE BOOK OF GENESIS 11th ed., London, 1920, p. 9; J. Skinner, GENESIS (ICC), 2nd ed., Edinburgh, 1930, pp. 24-26; G. von Rad, GENESIS, London, 1961, p. 53.

stars were made once for all, with the light permanently in them.

Genesis 1:22, 28

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֵל "לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ.
וּמִלְאוּ אֶת-הַמַּיִם בַּחַיִּים וְהָעוֹף
הָרֹב בָּאָרֶץ:
וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֵל "וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֵל
פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּכְבָּשׁוּהָ
וְרָדוּ בַדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם
וּבְכָל-חַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׁת עַל-הָאָרֶץ:³⁴⁶

The command to be fruitful and multiply, a blessing given to all creatures, including mankind; and assumed to apply to land animals, although this is not stated. This is the counterpart to the implanting of seeds in vegetation, and it must be understood, as Eichrodt understands it, to refer to a process which will go on spontaneously and without intervention from God to keep it going.³⁴⁷ Divine intervention can stop it, but is not needed to promote it. Presumably we may think of the implanting of the divine breath or spirit in the same way.

Genesis 1:24

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל "תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ בְּפֶשַׁח חַיָּה
לְמִינָהּ בְּהֵמָה וָרֶמֶשׁ וְחַיֵּיתוֹ-אָרֶץ
לְמִינָהּ וַיְהִי כֵן:³⁴⁸

We may compare with this 1:11, and although the

³⁴⁶ E2 p. 75.

³⁴⁷ Cf. uses of זָרַע applied to man, animals and cereals.

³⁴⁸ E2 pp. 75, 151.

verbs are different the meaning seems to be essentially the same. Vegetation sprouts out of the earth. Animals do not sprout out of it, but are regarded as in some sense the product of the earth. Although Genesis 2 is from a different source or tradition may we not see here a connection with the making of man from the earth? Whoever wrote Genesis 1 very probably knew the story in Genesis 2.

We may also compare with Genesis 1:20.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנְיֹהֱ אֶת-הַמַּיִם שְׂרָרִץ בְּנֶפֶשׁ
חַיָּה וְעוֹף הָעוֹפֹת עַל-הָאָרֶץ עַל-פְּנֵי-
רָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם:

The RV prefers 'bring forth' for וַיֹּאמֶר; but gives 'swarm with' in the margin, a translation preferred by BDB.

Whether or not 1:24 supports Eichrodt's contention is doubtful since it is not known just what the ancient writer meant. It is impossible to suppose that he meant that while birds, fishes and men were to reproduce themselves by means of the divine blessing which gave them the power to do so, land animals were to be produced by the earth, generation after generation. We can only conclude that some intimate association between earth and animals is meant, and that this indicates a permanent characteristic of all animals but not a permanent function whereby they are continually reproduced.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁹ Cf. Y. Kaufmann, THE RELIGION OF ISRAEL, London, 1961. 'By deriving plant and animal life from the earth, and sea life from the sea, the narrator evidently intends no more than to carry back the natural link between these phenomena to the creative act of God. The perennial processes and interrelationships of nature are themselves established by divine decree', p. 67.

Psalm 8:6-9. The skilful ordering of the cosmos is revealed in this psalm, and it does indeed express man's lordship over the created world. It must also be added that if events in this world were merely regarded as perpetually directly created by God it is hard to understand just what this lordship could mean.

זָרַח וְכוֹכָבִים אֲשֶׁר כּוֹנֵנָהּ

These words suggest the once for all establishment of moon and stars. Cf. verse 6a.³⁵⁰

Psalm 19:2-7 (RV 19:1-6).³⁵¹ This psalm also celebrates the glory of God revealed in his making of the ordered world, which day by day and night by night gives silent but eloquent testimony to this fact. Verses 6-7 state that the sun runs its course with the implication that this is spontaneous and not continually engineered by God. The passage is poetic and the bridegroom and athlete are obviously figures of speech; but the idea behind the poetry seems to be that of a celestial body moving of its own accord, and one wonders if the psalmist could have written in the same style if he had thought of the sun as perpetually created and moved by God.

Psalm 24:1f.³⁵² This psalm celebrates Yahweh's ownership of the world which he has established. Verse 2 reads:

כִּי-הוּא עַל-זִמְרִים יָסָדָהּ
זָכוֹנָהּ
עַל-נְהָרוֹת

This clearly refers to the once for all establishment of the structure of the world.

³⁵⁰ E2 p. 151. Cf. p. 110. ³⁵¹ E2 p. 110. ³⁵² E2 p. 110.

Psalm 33:6,9

בְּדִבְרֵי יְיָ שָׁמַיִם נִצְּטוּ וּבְרוּיָהּ פִּי
כָּל-צָבָאָם:
כִּי הוּא אָמַר וַיֵּהָרֶה הוּא-צִנָּה וַיַּעֲמֵד:

According to Eichrodt the psalmist here, as in Psalm 148, extols 'the command given once for all by the Creator as a perpetual ordinance', but this is reading too much into the text.³⁵³ The verses referred to mean simply that God established the world and that his determination to do this was sufficient for it to take place. There is nothing in these verses about the continuing natural life of the earth. Verse 7 strengthens the impression that the psalmist is thinking of the once for all establishment of the fabric of the universe, the stage and setting on which man acts out his life. The rest of the psalm implies some freedom on the part of men, but insists that the last word about men's fate rests with Yahweh. If God has decided to destroy a man, no personal strength, swift horse or army will save him. God's control over human life is the main point of the psalm, and not any perpetual ordinance.

Psalm 136:5

³⁵⁴

לְעֵשֶׂה הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּתַבּוּנָה כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדּוֹ:

This does witness to the understanding of God revealed in the universe. The text suggests a rational order in the universe which reflects the wisdom of God. The repeated participles, עֹשֶׂה and רָקַע, might be

taken to refer to the perpetual performance of wonders and the perpetual creation of heavens, earth and celestial bodies. The perpetual stretching out of the earth, however, in verse 6, is improbable in itself, and the participles should be taken to have the force of nouns.

מִכָּה in verse 10, and יֹצֵא verse 11 cannot refer to the perpetual striking of Egypt and the continual leading out of Israel. See also גִּזַּר in verse 13.

נָתַן לָחֶם לְכָל-בָּשָׂר in verse 25 also means 'the giver of food to all flesh', since we can hardly take it to refer to the literal continual giving of food to all creatures, a kind of round-the-clock feeding time in the universal zoo.

Proverbs 3:19f

~ בְּחָכְמָה יָסַד-אֶרֶץ כֹּוֹנֵן שָׁמַיִם בְּתַבּוּנָה:
בְּדַעְתּוֹ תִּהְיוּמוֹת נִבְקָעוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּקֵּם-
יָרֵיעַ-פָּנֵי-טָל:³⁵⁵

This text states that God's wisdom and understanding enabled him to found the heavens and the earth. Verses 19-20a imply the once for all establishment of heaven and earth, and 20b suggests a spontaneously recurring process.

Proverbs 8:22ff.³⁵⁶ These verses express the importance of God's Wisdom in the creation of the world. Therefore those who acquire wisdom are linked with the creative power behind the universe; whereas those who spurn wisdom have set themselves against that creative power. Verses 22-29 refer to the creation of the cosmic structure and therefore might be taken to refer to a fixed system. On

³⁵⁵ E2 pp. 110-11. ³⁵⁶ E2 pp. 110-111.

the other hand, the whole passage, verses 22-36, is poetic and if it were held that the aim of the writer is simply to inculcate a sensible preference for wisdom, this would be compatible with both the direct action and fixed system views.

Ecclesiastes 3:11. Everything is made appropriate to its time. The whole context emphasises the order which God has established, and which in its totality is beyond man's comprehension. It does not seem, however, to illustrate either the fixed system or the direct action views, being compatible with both.

Ecclesiastes 7:29. This is referred to by Eichrodt, but appears to be irrelevant.

It is clear that a substantial proportion of the texts used by Eichrodt to illustrate the fixed system view, do express or suggest this view. In some cases, however, it appears that the idea has been read into rather than out of the texts concerned.³⁵⁷

C. Texts Illustrating Direct Divine Action

The notion of direct divine creativity as the direct cause of every natural event is not easy to accept. The events themselves do not suggest it; they do not in themselves bear some stamp proclaiming divine origin. When the unusual or extraordinary occurs this may be attributed, precisely because it is extraordinary, to supernatural intervention in the course of things; and perhaps there was a greater readiness among many ancient Israelites to see

³⁵⁷ Both passages, E2 pp. 110-111.

divine intervention in the natural world than there is among modern Europeans. But where the regular and commonly experienced are concerned, did ancient Israelites think so very differently from ourselves? Is there, at any rate, clear evidence in the Bible that they did?

Unfortunately, the bulk of the texts referred to by Eichrodt to support his contention that this was so are poetical and rhetorical, and such texts cannot be treated as literal expressions of what the writers, or any other Israelites believed about the relationship of God and nature. Their evidence in this connection is important, but in the very nature of the case simple and straightforward inferences are not possible.

Genesis 26:12.³⁵⁸ Isaac has sought refuge from famine in the land of the Philistines. 'And Isaac sowed in that land, and found in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him'. (RV). But why did Isaac not await the blessing of Yahweh in the land of famine? And why did Isaac sow seed and later dig wells?

Genesis 27:27.³⁵⁹ Isaac smells the apparel of Jacob and says it smells like a field which Yahweh has blessed. Taken literally this expresses the belief that God could directly influence the growth of crops so that this growth would be either good or bad. The following verses also express belief in God's influence over nature and the affairs of men. It is a well known fact that crops in field and garden often vary from year to year, and place to place, and since it is not always obvious why one year

³⁵⁸ E2 p. 153. ³⁵⁹ E2 p. 153.

should have been better or worse than another it would not be surprising to find such variation attributed to the direct action of God, who wishes to express favour or disfavour.

However, the piel perfect, יְבֹרֵךְ, could refer to an initial blessing by God: this is land which was blessed by God from the very beginning, it is naturally fertile land. Isaac is simply saying that the smell of his son is like the smell of a very fertile field.

Verse 28 is part of the blessing which is regarded as releasing the power of God for the benefit of the recipient and this clearly expresses influence over natural events. It does not follow from this that Isaac or Jacob or the narrator of the story believed God to be directly creating every blade of grass or ear of corn in a given field, and taken by itself the text implies neither more nor less than that God exercises control of already existing processes.

The blessing is also expressed poetically, and while it is an obvious assumption of the story that the blessing expresses real power, may it not also be the case that it expresses a pious hope? And must we not also see it in its larger context of a narrative which is determined to claim for Israel the special blessing God?

Like other texts which will be examined, these from Genesis are quite inconsistent with mechanistic views of the universe and deism. It is equally true that they offer no support to Eichrodt's fanciful ideas about continuous creation.

Similar remarks apply to Genesis 49:25, part of the

blessing of Joseph.

I Kings 17:17f.³⁶⁰ The child's sickness and apparent death are regarded by the widow and Elijah as having been brought about by Yahweh; just as his restoration is the work of Yahweh. What we have here, however, is divine intervention which first interrupts and then restores the normal course of nature.

II Kings 20:3.³⁶¹ Hezekiah prays for deliverance from the sickness which appears to have been inflicted by Yahweh, and he is subsequently saved. Once again, the normal course of nature is interrupted and then restored.

Isaiah 41:4.³⁶² Yahweh calls all generations from the beginning, that is, he gives life to all generations; but not necessarily by creating it afresh in every individual.

Isaiah 44:24ff. Verse 24 reads:

כֹּה-אָמַר יְיָ "גִּבֹּרֶת יְיָ צִוְּתָהּ מִבְּטֵן אֲנֹכִי
 "עָשָׂה כָּל נִסָּהּ שְׁמִי לְבַדִּי רָקַע
 363
 קִדְּמָהּ מִיָּדִי:

The present participles must be taken to refer to one who is able to stretch out the heavens and the earth by himself. The act of creation cannot be thought of as something occurring at the time of the prophecy. The present tense, however, might well have been intended to stress God's perpetual and therefore present control over the whole natural world, and therefore over human affairs also. The heavens and the earth were created in the past, but Israel is to be redeemed now. There is no indication, however, of any specific way in which God relates himself to natural events.

³⁶⁰ E2 p. 153. ³⁶¹ E2 p. 153. ³⁶² E2 p. 153. ³⁶³ E2 p. 75.

In verse 27 **הָאֵלֹהִים לִצְלוּף הָרָבִי** is again a poetic expression of God's absolute power, but is no more an indication of regular direct action on seas and rivers than Jesus's exhortation to faith was a promise of power to alter the landscape.

Isaiah 48:13.³⁶⁴ The apparently military metaphor of commanding troops to stand forward is used here. The aim of the prophet is to encourage faith in Yahweh who can call forth one who will assuredly destroy the seemingly invincible Babylon. The one who makes this promise to Israel is the one who founded the earth and spread out the heavens.

קָרָא אֶנֶּה אֶל־הֵם יַעֲמִדוּ יַחַד

The meaning of the participle קָרָא must be governed by the Qal perfects יָסַד and בָּרַךְ: at some point in the distant past, the world was established by the command of Yahweh; and if he has now called Cyrus to release his people from Babylon how can this fail to happen?

Verse 15 reads: אֲנִי אֶנִּי דַּבֵּר תִּי אֶף-קִרְבָּתִי

God has created the world and exercises ultimate control over human affairs.

Similar remarks apply to 50:2.

Jeremiah 5:24:³⁶⁵ Jeremiah condemns the people for not recognising that it is God who gives the rain.

אֱלֹהִים הַמַּזְלֵם could simply mean 'the giver of rain',
and in itself neither affirms nor denies that God acts

364 E2 p. 75. 365 E2 p. 153.

365 E2 p. 153.

directly to bring the rain when it comes. Jeremiah explicitly refers to the rain as seasonal, and it keeps on coming even though the people do not fear God. This suggests that there was no strong belief among Jeremiah's contemporaries that God brought each downpour of rain. The final statement in the verse:

שְׁבַעַת חֲקֹת קִצְרֵי שָׁמָר לָנוּ

also refers to the regular harvest season, and the noun חֲקֹת strongly suggests an unalterable arrangement established by God. We might translate 'He preserves for us the established weeks of harvest'. The picture is one of natural process preserved by God.

Amos 4:6ff.³⁶⁶ Various natural disasters have befallen the Israelites, all brought upon them by God. These constitute, however, what might be termed unrecognised miracles, since the clear implication of the text is that the famine or drought or whatever would not have occurred unless it had been necessary to warn the Israelites of Yahweh's displeasure. Normally the rain would have fallen, the harvest would have appeared; but Yahweh intervened to bring about events which in the normal course would not have happened, the only difference between these miracles and others like the parting of the Red Sea or the shadow on the sundial being that these do not have such an abnormal character as to demand the recognition of supernatural intervention.

Eichrodt would no doubt object to this interpretation

³⁶⁶ E2 p. 153.

of Amos's words on the grounds that all natural events are caused by God according to the Old Testament, and instead of bringing rain and harvest God withheld the rain and sent pests. This objection, however, raises problems over the interpretation of the miraculous which will have to be dealt with separately.

It would also be interesting to know what kind of experience of nature the Israelites must have had in order to see God in every natural event, and in the present case it is quite evident that Amos's contemporaries failed to see the hand of God in the natural events referred to. Perhaps Amos was different from his contemporaries in precisely this respect: he saw the hand of God directly bringing about all natural events and they did not, and this is why the Old Testament preserves his inspired insight into the true nature of things.

4:13 could be held to support his view:

כִּי הִנֵּה יוֹצֵר קָרָיִם וּבִרָא רוּחַ
וּמַגִּיד לְאָדָם מֵה-שָׁחוֹ עֲשֵׂה שָׁחַר
עֲיִפָּה וְדֶרֶךְ עַל-בְּמֹתַי אֶרֶץ
אֶלֶה־צִבְאוֹת שָׁמוֹ:

There are, however, other texts which support the doubt one has that the herdsman of Tekoa can have thought so very differently from other Israelites in this respect. He knew the natural properties of fire, the natural effects of wine, the natural behaviour of lions and the natural reaction to their roar; he knew simple cause and effect in the working of a snare and the clear distinction between the natural and the unnatural; he knew the natural effects of rain and its absence, the natural effect of certain

pests on fruit trees, the natural effects of disease and unattended corpses, the natural behaviour of locusts, the need to tend trees as well as guard flocks, and the other natural occupations of farming.³⁶⁷

Those who wish to maintain that Amos believed God to be directly active in all natural events, producing fire and then its effect, making hungry lions roar and then stimulating them to rend helpless sheep, must prove their case. Furthermore, what is meant by 'natural event'? The lion feeling hungry, the lion licking its paw, the lion blinking in the strong sunlight - all these are natural events, and where are we to stop? Such a belief in continuous divine creative activity throughout nature is a truly extraordinary type of pantheism, and requires something more than an appeal to isolated texts taken at their face value before it can be accepted as the view of Amos or anybody else in ancient Israel.

Also, Yahweh is not merely depicted in the verses appealed to by Eichrodt as bringing about natural events but also as killing young men with the sword and carrying away horses. No one would dream of taking this literally, so why are we obliged to follow a literal interpretation of the rest?

That Amos believed the world to have been created by God, who continued to exercise real control over the workings

³⁶⁷ See Amos 1:4,7,10,12,14; 2:1,5; cf. 4:11; 5:6; 7:4. 4:1; 6:6; cf. 2:8,11; 5:11. 3:4,8; cf. 5:19. 3:5; 6:12a; 4:7-8; cf. 8:13. 4:9; 4:10; 7:1-2; 7:14; 9:13.

of nature and the affairs of men, is beyond doubt. It is also beyond doubt that he expressed himself freely and at times poetically and rhetorically, that he spontaneously recognised and assumed natural processes and human freedom; and that while the presence of divine power in the world was a profound conviction there is no evidence in his extant prophecies that he gave the precise manner of divine control any serious thought.

Amos 5:8.

עֲשֵׂה כִּי-מָה וְכִס־לְ וְהַפִּךְ לַבֹּקֶר
צִלְמוֹת וְיֹם לַלַּיְלָה הִחְשֵׁךְ הַקּוֹרָא
לַיִם הַיָּם וְהַשָּׁפְכִים עַל-פָּנָיו הָאֲרֶץ
שֶׁ"שׁ

'After the night he brings in the morning' is
Eichrodt's comment on this verse.³⁶⁸

But this rehetorical passage is probably celebrating the original creative power of God, although no doubt implying his perpetual control of all natural powers. It is hard to believe that Amos really believed God to be perpetually making and re-making Pleiades and Orion or pouring out the waters of the sea on the face of the earth. Making the day dark with night might be an eclipse, which would be a miracle; or if taken closely with turning the deep darkness into morning, refers to the perpetual cycle of day and night originally established by Yahweh. The prophet is seeking to emphasise the might of God whose determination to uphold justice nothing can with-

stand; and the same is true of 4:13.

Hosea 2:10ff.³⁶⁹ All references to 'Hosea' in these comments are to the RV text.

God will lay waste vineyards and fig trees; just as verse 9 says he will take away corn and wine, wool and flax, and in verse 8 he says he gave corn, wine and oil, silver and gold. As in so many other texts referred to by Eichrodt this one clearly indicates activity on the part of God, but not the kind of activity which Eichrodt takes it to mean: 'a direct act of God', which surely excludes any notion of processes in nature or events in human history which might be controlled by God but which do have some independent life of their own.

We are here considering history as well as natural events, and it is quite clearly assumed by Hosea that the people had a certain freedom; but just as his wife was deluded and learned through hardship that it was Hosea who really loved her and would properly care for her, so Israel will learn through hardship that it is Yahweh and not Baal who really cares for the people and who has plentifully supplied their needs.

How will this hardship afflict the nation? They will be confronted by the loss of corn, wine, oil and so on. How will they lose these things? According to Eichrodt by some kind of direct act of God. Will this direct act of God appear as such to the people? It may be that the prophet thought so, but we must remember that according to Eichrodt the original giving of corn, wine, oil and so

³⁶⁹ E2 p. 153.

on was by the direct act of God and this was not obviously so or the people could not have mistaken it for the activity of Baal. Furthermore, we have no reason to suppose that the trouble which hit Israel actually made the people turn to Yahweh. Some may have done so, but the prophetic literature in general lends no support to the view that Yahweh's actions in history were or would be so unambiguous as to deny the possibility of doubt or the spontaneous preference for some other explanation of things. There are texts which envisage a time when God will intervene in human affairs in a manner which does not admit of argument, and nature itself will undergo changes of a miraculous kind; but these texts refer to the new age and not the world as we know it.

Eichrodt tries in this case, as so often elsewhere, to press the language of the text into expressing a meaning which at best is only possible, and even then only through the isolation of certain sayings from their context. 'I gave her the corn, and the wine, and the oil ... Therefore will I take back my corn ... and my wine'. These words taken at their face value do indeed express the direct activity of God in natural events; but if we once stop to reflect on them we cannot evade the question whether or not we can any longer call events caused by direct divine activity 'natural'. Nor can we evade the fact that once the words are seen as part of Hosea's whole prophecy, it becomes evident that he, like the rest of his contemporaries, or many of them, recognised natural events while at the same time believing that they were somehow and to some degree under supernatural control, just like human affairs.

A brief survey of other texts in 'Hosea' confirms this criticism of Eichrodt. There can be no doubt that Hosea saw the punishment of Israel in the shape of defeat in war, with all its attendant evils. Other texts imply or foretell exile. Some texts speak of frenzied diplomatic activity.³⁷⁰ The leaders of Israel could see the danger threatening them and tried to avoid it by alliance with a great power. Hosea states quite clearly that such alliances, accomplished or merely hoped for, would not prevent divine punishment overtaking Israel; but it is equally clear that he thought of the punishment in the same terms as those whom he condemned, that is, defeat in war.

It may be objected that God's dealings with men in history are not the same as God's control of nature; but while this distinction is necessary and useful it must not be too sharp. We began with the question what Hosea meant when he spoke of God removing corn, wine and oil from Israel, and the answer in fact has to be given in historical terms. It is interesting to compare this with the statement that Yahweh brought up Israel out of Egypt.³⁷¹ When we turn to the detailed narrative in Exodus which describes the divine deliverance we see that the evidence for this interpretation of the historical facts is to be seen in 'natural' events which depict the direct acts of

³⁷⁰ Hosea 1:4-5; 3:4; 5:13; 6:11; 7:8-11,16; 8:8-9; 9:3,6,17; 10:5-6,14; 11:5-6,10-11; 12:1; 13:16.

³⁷¹ 11:1; 12:13; 13:4.

God, and which can only be accurately designated by the term 'miraculous'.³⁷² There are interesting implications in other texts in 'Hosea'. We read that God will punish Israel by stopping child-bearing. Yet in the very same text we read that their children will be slain. See also 8:7, 'he hath no standing corn; the blade shall yield no meal; if so be it yield, strangers shall swallow it up'. Similar is the repeated statement in Enuma Elish that ALL the gods had gone over to Tiamat, when this is manifestly not the case, and would have left Tiamat without enemies to destroy if it had been true. This is a clear warning against reading poetic or rhetorical texts, or any others which express strong feeling, with wooden literalness, especially when we are searching for texts to support an already adopted line of interpretation.

We read in chapter 1 that Hosea's marriage to Gomer led to the conception of several children. We read that wine destroys the understanding and that heifers can be stubborn. Knowledge of the natural propensities of the moth is assumed, and some knowledge of how to cure wounds. The violent eating habits of the lion were known, and we find reference to seasonal rain and to the natural disappearance of early morning mist and dew. Reaping according to what has been sown is regarded as a natural sequence.³⁷³

There can be no doubt that for Hosea there were natural events and human affairs, and that divine activity

³⁷² Cf. Psalm 78:12-53.

³⁷³ 1:3,6,8; 4:11; 4:6; 5:12-13; cf. 6:1. 5:14; 6:3,4; 8:7; 10:12-13.

was to be seen in both. Hosea offers us no clue as to how God could be active in the realms of nature and human life, nor does any other biblical writer; except that in the case of miracles we are obviously meant to imagine some kind of direct exercise of power on natural elements, although the precise character of this exercise must be a mystery. Eichrodt invites us to read many texts referring to natural events as if they, too, spoke of direct divine action, but he can only do this by a forced reading of these texts, by tolerating confusion in the understanding of the miraculous, and by glossing over a blatant contradiction between supposedly direct action texts and fixed system texts. It could be, of course, that contradictions exist between Old Testament texts, but Eichrodt is loth to admit this; and anyone who does admit it must then go on to consider how a Theology of the Old Testament can be written in the light of it.

Jonah 1:4.³⁷⁴ God sends a wind to cause a storm on the sea. This is unquestionably a direct act of God, like a miracle, and is best regarded as a miracle since it is a special act of intervention designed to accomplish a particular purpose.

Nahum 1:5. The mountains quake and the hills melt at the presence of Yahweh. This is poetic rhetoric. Verse 4 tells us that God dries up the sea and all the rivers, which can scarcely be regarded as a literally correct assertion; and verse 5 does not justify Eichrodt's statement that 'The earthquake comes from the blow of his fist'.³⁷⁵

³⁷⁴ E2 p. 153. ³⁷⁵ E2 p. 153.

No doubt irregular, extraordinary and terrifying events like earthquakes were believed, at least by some Israelites, to be directly caused by God; but if so, they were miracles as far as such Israelites were concerned. In any case, if the present text is taken entirely literally it is absurd.

Malachi 2:10

הֵלֹא אֵב אֶחָד לְכָלֵנוּ אֵל אֶחָד
בְּרָאֵנוּ מִדּוּעַ נִבְגַּד אִישׁ בְּאָחִיו
לְחַלֵּל בְּרִית אֲבֹתֵינוּ: ³⁷⁶

Life comes from one God: therefore all Israelites are brothers who should acknowledge God as their one father and live peaceably with one another. It is hard to see in this text the expression of any belief in direct and continuous divine creativity.

Psalms 22:10f (RV 9f). ³⁷⁷

'But thou art he that took me out of the womb:

Thou didst make me trust when I was upon my mother's
breasts.

I was cast upon thee from the womb:

Thou art my God from my mother's belly'. (RV)

We have here poetic emphasis on God's continual care for us, even when we are only helpless infants, and it offers no justification for the notion of direct divine creativity. A literal understanding of these verses is as justified as a literal understanding of the earlier statement in the psalm, 'I am a worm, and no man.'

Psalm 65:7-14.³⁷⁸ The psalmist appears to be seeking the help of God, and his confidence that God will answer him is based on the revelation of God's greatness in nature. Verse 7 tells us that God calms the stormy seas. Perhaps the psalmist believed that the seas represented the still existing elements of chaos which might chafe against God's control but could never escape it.³⁷⁹

When he turns to a more homely illustration of God's power and care for his people, he sees it in the gift of rain. Verses 9-13 depict God providing that essential water without which there will be neither crops nor flocks. A poetic and rhetorical passage like this does not necessarily mean more than that God has once for all established the seasonal rains whereby life on the earth can continue. Even if it did depict the direct action of God bringing rain, it also assumes the natural effect of that rain on the earth's vegetation: which Eichrodt actually recognises in his statement, 'in the rain he blesses the field.'³⁸⁰

Psalm 90:3.³⁸¹ In this psalm the eternal power of God is celebrated, and the brevity of men's lives is contrasted with it. It would be interesting to know what Eichrodt would make of the sexual imagery in verse 2:

בְּאֶרֶם קִרְיָם הֵלָדוּ וַתְּחַוֶּלֶל אֶרֶץ וְתֵבֶל

'Before the hills were brought forth or you had brought to birth the earth and world'.

Psalm 107.³⁸² Verses 17f offer a rational justification

³⁷⁸ E2 pp. 152-153.

³⁷⁹ Cf. Jeremiah 5:22; Psalm 104:9; Job 26:10; 38:8-11.

³⁸⁰ E2 p. 153. ³⁸¹ E2 p. 153. ³⁸² E2 p. 153.

for sickness as a punishment inflicted by Yahweh because of sin. This implies a natural process interrupted by deliberate divine intervention, and is based on the assumption that sickness is unnatural. Cf. Psalm 6:2ff.

Verses 23ff express the idea that God causes storms and calms them.

'For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind,
Which lifteth up the waves thereof'. (RV)

This text could express belief in the direct action of God or could express in a vivid way that people should trust in God to help them through their troubles. If the former belief is being expressed, it is worth noting that storms are irregular, and the sea closely associated with the elements of chaos. A storm in this case would be akin to a miracle, an act of special intervention by God.

Verses 35ff read:

'He turneth a wilderness into a pool of water,
And a dry land into water-springs.
And there he maketh the hungry to dwell,
That they may prepare a city of habitation;
And sow fields, and plant vineyards,
And get them fruits of increase'. (RV)

Even if verse 35 be taken literally it could hardly be said to express a natural event. Verse 37 tells of people sowing fields and planting vineyards, in order to reap the appropriate harvests.

Psalm 139:13ff.³⁸³ These verses give poetic emphasis to the fact that there is no escaping God, his knowledge and

power penetrate every corner of the universe. Even in the womb we are not unknown to God, without whom there would be no growth at all. These words could express belief in God's actually constructing the babe in the womb, but we are not bound to read them so. If we do take the text literally in this respect, what are we to make of verse 15?

אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּסִתְרֵי רֵקִיעַ בְּתַחְתֵּי וְתֵי אֶרֶץ:

'When I was made in secret, And curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth'. (RV)

It is most likely that the psalmist simply wishes to emphasise that nothing, not even the smallest part of the complex and unseen development of the human body, is hidden from God.

Psalm 144:5.³⁸⁴ The psalmist speaks of God touching the mountains to make them smoke, and may be referring to volcanoes, as Eichrodt thinks; although it is possible that the psalmist is thinking of storm clouds swirling round mountain tops, a sign of Yahweh's descent to the earth. Cf. verse 6.

If the psalmist is thinking of volcanic eruptions as directly caused by God, see notes on Nahum 1:5.³⁸⁵ Cf. Psalm 104:32. Could it be that in these and other similar passages the power of natural forces was felt to be a reflection of the power of God who had created and could control them? Could they be nothing more than rhetorical celebrations of God's power, this power being displayed in their creation and exceptionally in miraculous divine

³⁸⁴ E2 p. 153. ³⁸⁵ Thesis p. 223.

intervention?

Psalm 147.³⁸⁶ With reference to verse 4: it is no doubt true that God knows the number of the stars, at which modern astronomers can only guess; and it may be that they have all been named; but this says neither more nor less than is asserted in the following verse, 'Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite'. (RV)

We could presumably add to a consideration of verses 15ff verses 8 and 9. These verses can certainly be interpreted to indicate the direct control by God of the weather, the growth of grass, the feeding of beasts and ravens, the blowing of winds and the flowing of waters. If we are to interpret these statements in this way it is incidentally interesting, in the context of Eichrodt's argument, that they occur in a psalm which concludes by celebrating the laws, the permanent ordinances of God; but there is, of course, no necessary contradiction here. The statutes and judgements of God concern human affairs. But can we make such a sharp distinction between the ordinances of God appertaining to the world of human affairs and the principles of God's activity in the world of nature?

The chief problem, however, as in many other texts, is raised by the literal nature of this approach to poetry. A text like the present one simply cannot be the kind of evidence that Eichrodt wants it to be. Furthermore, if we insist on a literal interpretation, how consistent can we be?

³⁸⁶ E2 pp. 75, 153.

In what sense does Yahweh send out his commandment upon the earth, or does his word run swiftly? A literal view is obviously absurd; but is the idea of Yahweh feeding beasts and ravens obviously otherwise? And in what sense does God satisfy me with the finest wheat?

Also, if we insist on the literal interpretation of the psalm we must also see in it a contradiction of those texts, acknowledged by Eichrodt, which speak of natural processes continuing by means of their own internal energy. Does Yahweh make grass grow on the hills, or does it grow of its own accord as a result of the life put into the earth and all vegetation at creation? We are not bound to find consistency of outlook in the Old Testament, but those who undertake to write theologies of the Old Testament will have to bear the point in mind.

If we take verses 8f literally we must see God decorating the sky with clouds, preparing rain for the earth, making grass grow on the hillsides, and feeding the animals. We must also see God building up Jerusalem, personally rounding up the outcasts of Israel and offering them personal comfort. As already stated, this is poetry and to read it in this literal fashion is to reduce it to absurdity. Cf. Job 38:39ff.

Job 9:6.³⁸⁷ See also verse 5.

'Which removeth the mountains, and they know it not,
When he overturneth them in his anger.
Which shaketh the earth out of her place,
And the pillars thereof tremble'. (RV)

³⁸⁷ E2 p. 153.

Verses 7 and 9:

'Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not;
And sealet up the stars.
Which maketh the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades,
And the chambers of the south'. (RV)

The latter verse simply refers to the fact that God made certain constellations: a celebration of his creative power. Verse 7 refers to the sun not rising and the stars being prevented from giving their light: but the sun always does rise and the stars always shine. Both may be blotted out by cloud, or the sun by an eclipse, and this may be in mind here; but if so, this is certainly not what is literally referred to, and verse 7 simply shows how unreliable poetic texts are when we are looking for straightforward accounts of natural events.

D. Texts Which Illustrate the Independent Life of Nature

Eichrodt refers to many texts which he thinks illustrate belief in the independent life of nature. If he is consistent, these texts must be taken to support the direct action view of nature, but the way in which he treats them suggests that they really represent a third view which is inconsistent with both the direct action and fixed system views. Whether this is so or not, it seems most convenient to comment on them separately.

Judges 5:20.³⁸⁸ The stars fought against Sisera. This is supposed to illustrate nature fighting in alliance with Israel. It would be interesting to know just how Eichrodt

³⁸⁸ E2 p. 152.

imagines stars fighting. The river Kishon, referred to in the next verse, might have played some part in the battle in that some Canaanites might have drowned in it, but even here we can hardly take literally the statement that the river swept away the kings of Canaan and their armies. Both verses are a poetic and rhetorical expression of the fact that Sisera was certain to lose the battle since in fighting Israel he was setting himself against the powers of heaven. 'So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD'. (5:31 RV)³⁸⁹

Joshua 10:12f.³⁹⁰ The sun stood still to help Joshua defeat the Amorites. This, however, was not nature co-operating with Joshua but the result of Yahweh's intervention in the workings of nature. 'And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel'. (10:14 RV)

Isaiah 35:1f. This is a poetic expression of joy at the redemption of Israel. Deserts do not sing; and if the desert were really to be transformed into fertile land this would be a miracle achieved by the intervention of God.

Similar remarks apply to Isaiah 43:20; 44:23; 49:13; 55:12; Joel 2:21f; Psalms 96:11f; 98:8.³⁹¹

We must also ask if these prophecies were in fact literally fulfilled. Even if the prophets and psalmists intended their words to be taken literally, which is itself incredible, the mere utterances would not indicate

³⁸⁹ Cf. C.F. Burney, THE BOOK OF JUDGES, London 1918, pp. 146-149.

³⁹⁰ E2 p. 152. ³⁹¹ E2 p. 152.

any actual co-operation of nature with Israel, or any general belief in it. There is no evidence in the Bible or outside it that hills ever actually helped to form a cosmic choir, or that trees and floods lent rhythmic support, or that the desert was miraculously transformed.

If Eichrodt complains that this *reductio ad absurdum* misrepresents his reading of the text he must also accept the fact that a proper recognition of the poetic and rhetorical character of such utterances destroys them as evidence for a 'vivid sense of NATURE AS A LIVING THING, ascribing to the non-human creation a relationship with its divine Lord analogous to that enjoyed by the people of God themselves', and which illustrate 'the marked and direct connection of natural events with God, of whose activity in history and in the life of his people they are the accompaniment'.³⁹²

These texts do indeed suggest a view of nature very different from the mechanistic, and some also express a belief that the life of man and the life of nature are related; but this is no justification for the picture given by Eichrodt, based as it is on the literal reading of poetic figures. This picture, indeed, constitutes a third view of nature in addition to the two mutually exclusive views already described, since it depicts objects in nature such as mountains and trees as having a life of their own in the sense of being or behaving like personalities. This would mean that the activities of such natural

³⁹² E2 pp. 152-153.

phenomena were neither the expression of regular natural processes nor the direct result of God's perpetual control. Eichrodt says that 'it was possible just as spontaneously and axiomatically to portray natural events, which elsewhere might have been given an anthropomorphic life of their own, as A DIRECT ACT OF GOD'.³⁹³

But why 'elsewhere'? If Eichrodt's exegesis is correct, the Bible itself witnesses time and again to human-like behaviour in trees, hills, waves, and so on; and there is no escaping the fact that this is just as inconsistent with the direct string-pulling of God as an implicit acceptance of the laws of nature.

Similar remarks may be made about Isaiah 1:2, in which the heavens and the earth hear and appreciate the divine complaint; Jeremiah 2:12, in which the heavens are to be astonished and frightened at Israel's apostasy; Jeremiah 6:19, where the earth is bidden to hear God's warning; Micah 6:1f, in which the mountains are to adjudicate between God and his people; and Deut. 32:1, according to which heaven and earth are to listen to Moses' song.

Amos 9:13f. Stupendous harvests belong to the new age. This is either rhetorical exaggeration, or a miracle achieved by God, like the new age itself. It is worth noting that in verse 14 we read that vineyards have to be planted and gardens made. See also Isaiah 29:17; Isaiah 32:15; Joel 4:18 (RV 3:18).

Hosea 2:23f (RV 2:21f). Harmony between God, man and nature is re-established by God.

Isaiah 7:15. The butter and honey to be consumed by Immanuel are not necessarily tokens of Paradisal abundance.

Deuteronomy 32:13. Verse 14 and 15 could be added. This is a poetic and rhetorical statement of God's blessings upon Israel when he entered Canaan. As is well known, Canaan is elsewhere referred to as a land flowing with milk and honey, and this is the case before the Israelites enter it. The land was naturally fruitful and this is why God gave it to his people.

Ezekiel 34:26ff; 36:8ff, 35. These verses speak of the future when God will make the earth fertile and assert that his people shall dwell securely after being rescued from the heathen. The waste land will be fertile and inhabited, and people will say it is like the garden of Eden.

The future establishment of peace between man and animals is referred to in Hosea 2:20 (RV 2:18); Isaiah 11:6-8; 65:25; and Ezekiel 34:25f.

Isaiah 35:9. The way through the wilderness which Yahweh will prepare for his redeemed shall be free of lions, just as other difficulties involved in travelling through the desert will be removed. This actually implies that at that time lions will still be dangerous, like other ravenous beasts. This is at variance with the picture of the wild animals given in Isaiah 11:6-8, but it may be doubted if Isaiah or any other prophet lost any sleep over the discrepancy.

Leviticus 26:6. Obedience to God's statutes means that

God will create peace in the land; and dangerous animals will be removed.³⁹⁴

These texts refer to a desirable state of affairs to be established by God in the future for his chastened and purified people, a fact which is recognised by Eichrodt in Vol. I.³⁹⁵ Nevertheless, he also refers to these texts in Vol. II as illustrations of the independent life of nature.³⁹⁶ But in a poetic and rhetorical way they express visions of the future, and they tell us nothing of any spontaneous actions or response to man on the part of natural phenomena, animals or vegetables. They unquestionably exclude a mechanistic or deistic view of the universe, and they imply a connection between the state of nature and the moral and spiritual state of man; but the link between the two is provided by the will and power of God. Eichrodt's talk of nature having dealings with men, and refusing or bestowing her gifts, is in no way justified by the texts to which he appeals.

Job 31:38.³⁹⁷ 'If my land cry out against me, And the furrows thereof weep together'.

This is a fervent poetic expression of Job's innocence. Inferences about the workings of nature are perilous. Psalms 65:13f.³⁹⁸ The bulk of the psalm speaks of the blessings of nature as a revelation of God's love and power. There is no suggestion that nature imitates the activity of God. A little later Eichrodt uses the same

³⁹⁴ References from Amos 9:13f to Leviticus 26:6, E1, p. 480.

³⁹⁵ E1 pp. 479-480. ³⁹⁶ E2 p. 152.

³⁹⁷ E2 p. 152. ³⁹⁸ E2 p. 152.

psalm as evidence of the direct activity of God in controlling nature, but this is inconsistent with the idea of nature, behaving towards men like a living being, in imitation of the activity of God.³⁹⁹

Finally we come to a few texts of which Eichrodt says, 'In certain passages it is also "explicitly that which is contrary to all reason, purpose or law" in the created order which is thrown into relief'.

E. Texts Illustrating the Irrational in Nature⁴⁰⁰

Job 38-42. Far from expressing something contrary to all reason, purpose or law, these chapters clearly delineate the order of the universe which could have been accomplished only by the wisdom and power of God. Both wisdom and power are beyond man's comprehension and he can only wonder at them; and this is why the creator is depicted as 'incomprehensibly wonderful'.

Ecclesiastes 6:10; 9:1. It is hard to see how these texts illustrate Eichrodt's point. Even man's own life is beyond his understanding, but there is nothing here to the effect that nature expresses some kind of divine irrationality. Furthermore, Koheleth is supposed to be the Old Testament writer who 'comes closest to the modern conception of the laws of Nature'.

Ecclesiasticus 43:5. The might of God is seen in the sun which he made and controls. Verses 28f again simply celebrate the greatness of God which is beyond man's

³⁹⁹ Thesis p. 225. ⁴⁰⁰ E2 p. 111.

understanding. There is nothing here contrary to reason, purpose or law.

8. THE MIRACULOUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT⁴⁰¹

Eichrodt points out that various terms are used in the Old Testament for what we should call miracles. He then goes on to emphasise that for the faithful of Old Testament times a miracle was essentially an event which gave clear evidence of God's care or retribution, and that it might or might not be abnormal. A corollary of this view is that it was not essential to the character of a miraculous event that it should break the laws of nature, such a breach being an idea which could not occur to an ancient Israelite since he had no concept of 'an unbreakable natural order'.⁴⁰²

We may therefore summarise Eichrodt's exposition in the statement: All miracles exhibit God's care or retribution; with its implication that some events which exhibit God's care or retribution are miracles.

But what would Eichrodt make of the statement that ALL events which exhibit God's care or retribution are miracles? Either he must accept it, which he should if he is going to be consistent with his own explanation of what a miracle is, and then explain how we are to regard as miracles events which are manifestly not miraculous; or else he must reject it and then explain how we are to distinguish between exhibitions of God's care and

⁴⁰¹ E2 pp. 162-167. ⁴⁰² E2 pp. 162-163.

retribution which are miraculous and those which are not.

Prophetic preaching exhibits God's care for his people and contains both promises of prosperity and warnings of retribution, and this sometimes involves the performance of miracles, but often it does not. Jonah's return journey was brought about by means of a miracle, but the sign to the people of Nineveh was the call to repentance. Miracles occur in the narratives concerning Abraham, Jacob and Joseph, but divine promises are made, covenants established and the divine purposes accomplished often without any miracle at all.

David's rise to power and the subjugation of Israel's enemies are depicted as signs of God's blessing, but generally involve no miracle; while the psalms give ample testimony to God's care and retribution in human experience without reference to the miraculous. Nor is this surprising since simple reflection is sufficient to tell us that the showing of care or retribution and the performance of miracles are two different things, which may be contingently connected but are not necessarily so.

If Eichrodt recognises this he will then have to find some other means of identifying the miraculous and it is difficult to see how he can avoid the modern definition which expresses the notion of supernatural intervention to stop or direct the normal processes of nature. This also is not altogether surprising since 'miracle' is a modern word, and we should either use it in its proper modern sense or be prepared to argue that it is irrelevant to an exposition of the Old Testament view or views of nature.

Eichrodt does not see matters in this clear cut way, and he might object to the foregoing criticism on two grounds: (i) He does not actually say that the expression of divine care or retribution is the essential character of the miraculous. (ii) The word 'miracle' does not have to be so restricted in its meaning. 'Throughout the Old Testament the miraculous is conceived in the widest possible terms. Even the course of Nature itself counts as a miracle'.⁴⁰³

The second point may be readily conceded in so far as the word 'miracle' is concerned. Today we can speak of something as a miracle, meaning by this that it is amazing or wonderful, or that it could only be accomplished by God and is beyond man's power or understanding. But as is argued elsewhere this is a rhetorical and perhaps even figurative use of the term, and we do not escape so easily from its common literal meaning. Does Eichrodt think that miracles in the common literal sense are referred to in the Old Testament or not? If Eichrodt believes merely that ancient Israelites regarded certain things as wonderful, breath-taking, we shall be able to infer little, if anything, about their understanding of nature. A modern atheist can feel wonder or astonishment at the beauty, intricacy, or vastness of nature, and the history of science is, like Jonathan Jo's wheelbarrow, full of surprises. But when Eichrodt tells us that he is going to explain the Israelite view of 'miracle' or 'the miraculous' we rightly expect

that he is going to deal with those abnormal events which betoken divine intervention in the workings of nature, and not merely point out to us that sometimes Israelites were awe-struck.

Eichrodt, however, has not stopped to distinguish these senses of the word 'miracle' and while this enables him to avoid recognising that the Old Testament frequently describes breaches of natural processes, and treats them as such, and this in turn enables him to evade the criticisms of modern sceptics who would treat such alleged occurrences as evidence of superstitious ignorance, it is only at the expense of clarity and consistency and proper recognition of the facts.

This leads us back to the first point in Eichrodt's hypothetical reply to criticism: he does not say what has been attributed to him. Strictly speaking this is true, although it is a not unfair inference from what he does say. At this point, however, we must again raise the question as to what Eichrodt regards as the defining, the essential character of miracle, and if we confine ourselves to his explicit statements the answer must be that he says nothing; not because of any muteness on his part in connection with this subject, but rather because an over generous intellect welcomes home all comers from the realm of definition, including one or two gatecrashers in the footnotes.

Eichrodt has mentioned the Hebrew terms מִוִּדְּוֹ and מִיֵּדְוֹ and he continues:

'It is precisely the terms last mentioned which

indicate most strikingly WHEREIN LIES THE REAL IMPORTANCE OF THE MIRACULOUS FOR FAITH - not in its material factuality, but in its EVIDENTIAL CHARACTER. Indeed it is nowhere stated how a miracle is to be recognized, except that men find it new and surprising. God's marvellous activity is recognised even in ordinary everyday events, such as the blowing of the east wind at the right moment ... or in the little incidents of life ... Hence it is not, generally speaking, the especially abnormal character of the event which makes it a miracle; what strikes men forcibly is a clear impression of God's care or retribution within it. Least of all does it occur to the devout Old Testament believer to make a breach of the laws of Nature a *condicio sine qua non* of the miraculous character of an event, though marvellous occurrences in this sense are not unknown'.⁴⁰⁴

But how do we divorce evidential character from material factuality? Or, to put it another way, how can an event be evidence for something if it never happened? According to Eichrodt the Old Testament tells us only that miracles are new and surprising, but at the same time we learn that they might be seen in ordinary everyday events. If God's activity is recognised in ordinary everyday events, in what sense is it marvellous?

The abnormal character of an event does not make it a miracle, 'generally speaking'. Does this mean that

⁴⁰⁴ E2 p. 163.

SOMETIMES the abnormal character of an event DOES make it a miracle? Marvellous occurrences which break the laws of nature are not unknown in the Old Testament, although ancient Israelites had no conception of an unbreakable natural order. Does Eichrodt mean by this that the modern reader can see that certain events must be understood as breaches of the natural order whereas the ancient Israelite did not recognise this?

In a footnote Eichrodt tells us that in some cases simple natural phenomena plus secondary elaboration produce miracles.⁴⁰⁵ He also tells us that the secondary elaboration, which reflects a defective knowledge of nature, can be eliminated without affecting the real point of the miracle stories; which is very convenient for the theologian, who can admit scientific criticism of the text while at the same time maintaining his religious interpretation. But are we to understand that simple natural phenomena just by themselves are miracles? This is the same as saying that natural phenomena are unnatural, which is not saying anything; and if we seek refuge in the expedient of asserting that they are miracles merely in the sense that they cause wonder we shall not only be playing with words, but will find the sceptic breathing down our necks to point out that this sense of wonder is both the fruit of ignorance and the cause of the so-called secondary elaborations. Spiritually superior evidential character can no more escape the gross material factuality.

⁴⁰⁵ E2 p. 163, ft. 4.

of historical events than the soul can take leave, in this world, of its too solid flesh.

This may be illustrated by reference to one or two of the miracle stories which Eichrodt mentions. Isaiah's promise that Hezekiah would recover was confirmed by the abnormal movement of the shadow on the sundial.⁴⁰⁶ Eichrodt believes that this was caused by an eclipse, interpreted by Isaiah and Hezekiah as a sign from God that he will indeed heal the king. Not that it is the eclipse itself which forms the sign, but the strange movement of the shadow resulting from it; and we must also note that the eclipse is what might be called a 'secondary elaboration' of the ancient narrative.

Either the shadow moved backwards or it did not. If it did not, there was no sign and the story is a mere piece of fiction. If it did, this either indicated a reversal of the sun's normal movement or it was the consequence of some other interference with the sun's light.

If it indicated a reversal of the sun's normal movement then we have an event which would cause wonder and not unreasonably be regarded as a sign of divine intervention, and it appears that this is how it was in fact regarded. If such an event occurred today it might well cause even greater wonder, since with our superior knowledge we realise that the backward movement of the shadow would actually be caused by a reversal in the spinning motion of the orb on its axis, and this would no doubt produce

⁴⁰⁶ II Kings 20:8-11; Isaiah 38:7-8.

consequences such as to distract attention from a shadow on a dial, or even Hezekiah's ailment.

If, however, the backward movement of the shadow did not indicate a reversal of the normal apparent motion of the sun, then it must have had a natural cause; say an eclipse.⁴⁰⁷ If there was an eclipse, then either Isaiah or Hezekiah noticed it or they did not. If they did not, then a perfectly natural event occurred which was mistakenly regarded as a miracle, but which did not constitute a miracle at all.

If, on the other hand, Isaiah and Hezekiah did notice the eclipse they either associated eclipse and shadow movement as cause and effect, or they did not. If they did not, they were once again simply mistaken and they mistook a natural event for a miracle. If they did associate the two, they either regarded the eclipse as a miracle, a deliberate act of God, or they did not. If they did not, they saw both eclipse and shadow movement as natural events, the one causing the other, and there was no miracle. If they did, it was the eclipse which was the miracle and not the movement of the shadow, and one can only comment that it is remarkable that the real miracle should have been omitted from the ancient narrative and that we should have had to wait for a modern 'secondary elaboration' to get at the truth.

It might be argued that even if Hezekiah was mistaken

⁴⁰⁷ In fact it must have had another cause, which might have been unnatural, but there is no point in pursuing other possible unnatural causes.

in regarding a natural event as a miracle, this could have been the deliberate, indeed inspired act of the prophet, a kind of charitable trick to encourage the sick man: but the fact remains that even in this far-fetched reconstruction of the situation the sign is only a sign or miracle for the man who believes he is witnessing a quite abnormal event.

But may we not see the miracle in the coincidence of a natural but striking event on the one hand and the dramatic announcement of recovery on the other? We may indeed, but we are under no obligation to do so, and this is not the point of the story as we have received it. As Hezekiah remarks, it is easy for the shadow to move one way, but the clear implication is that it is far from easy for it to move the other. In other words, either the abnormal occurred, that is there was a miracle, or the abnormal did not occur and there was not.

The same kind of analysis could be employed on the other miracles mentioned in this footnote. Either the sun stood still for Joshua, or it did not; either extraordinary plagues occurred, or they did not; manna was either an extraordinary food, or it was not; either the waves of the Red Sea parted to let the Israelites across, or they did not. And it is the extraordinary character of these events which entitles them to be called miracles, and if the extraordinary character belongs to the secondary elaboration, then the actual historical event was not a miracle. It does not follow from this that God was not at work in the historical situation in which these events happened: God may well have been guiding his people so as to take advantage of natural occurrences which he could

foresee and human beings could not. This, however, would be better regarded as the providence of God and to speak of the miraculous is misleading.

It remains true, of course, that what appears to be a natural event such as a plague or east wind, may be the deliberate act of God; and it is also true that even an extraordinary event may not be an act of God but merely derive its miraculous character from human ignorance, as comets once did in this country. If, however, we try to satisfy our scientific conscience by explaining miracles in naturalistic terms, we are not going to be able to preserve the miraculous character by a highly selective appeal to coincidences. If the world is made up of natural events and processes, these will in themselves display that ambiguity which is so much deplored by Eichrodt in Ecclesiastes. The miracles of the Old Testament, however, are far from ambiguous and are as little open to refutation or doubt as the coming of the Son of Man. And either they happened substantially as they are described, or they did not.

In a later footnote Eichrodt denies that the sun miracle at the time of Hezekiah's illness is typical of the Old Testament belief in the miraculous.⁴⁰⁸ He also says this of the miracle stories of Chronicles and Daniel; and it is not unreasonable to suppose that this is the case with the miracles referred to in the earlier footnote along with Hezekiah's. His remarks about the miracles in I Kings 13

⁴⁰⁸ E2 p. 167, ft. 4.

and many of the miracles of Elisha compel us to include them; and one cannot help but notice that this forms a rather substantial proportion of all the miracles recorded in the Old Testament and includes some which play a not insignificant role in Old Testament narrative.

Why does Eichrodt suddenly tell us in a footnote at the end of the section that these miracle-stories must be ignored if we are to understand the Old Testament belief in the miraculous? And how does he reconcile this judgment with his statement in the earlier footnote, 'Nevertheless this secondary elaboration of the miracle-stories does not affect their main point. The defective knowledge of Nature which has crept in in such cases should not be confused with defective religious judgment'?

The answer to the first question is that Eichrodt regards the miracle of the sundial and therefore others of a similar kind, as crude. Are we really to believe that God engages in removal of cosmic furniture in order to persuade Hezekiah that he is going to get well? This is neither theologically nor scientifically credible, and we must therefore get rid of it. However, the grave weakness of the secondary elaboration approach is that we are asking what the Old Testament understanding of the miraculous, and by implication of nature, is, and the sundial miracle along with floating axeheads and parting waves is part of the Old Testament, and cannot be excised merely because we find it objectionable; or even because for very good reasons we believe the miraculous nature of any given event to belong to a later rather than an earlier tradition in the Old Testament.

Further confusion is to be seen in two apparently contradictory statements by Eichrodt:

'periods when the life of faith is strong, and men have enthusiastically surrendered themselves to God, have also always been times rich in miracles.'

'It is however, characteristic that a real addiction to the miraculous is found only with a slackening of religious strength'.⁴⁰⁹

Eichrodt averts a head-on collision between these statements by the simple expedient of using 'miracle' in two different senses, and in the first statement miracles are 'daily events', and 'a hundred happenings outwardly small and insignificant, where another man can talk only of remarkable coincidence, amazing accident, or a peculiar turn of events'.⁴¹⁰ In the second statement the miraculous is the abnormal, the extraordinary.

Those who believe in the providence of God will readily sympathise with the first statement, although there will be differences of opinion about the extent to which one can see God involved in the events of human life; but as far as divine intervention in natural processes is concerned either we believe that he directly causes all of them, or that he directly causes some and not others, or that he directly causes none of them. As we have seen, Eichrodt wishes to find both of the first two alternatives in the Old Testament, and he also wishes to maintain that

⁴⁰⁹ E2 pp. 164, ft. 4. ⁴¹⁰ E2 p. 164.

both were somehow held together by Israelites and that they must both be held together in a modern theology of the Old Testament. This combination is impossible and all Eichrodt really accomplishes by using 'miracle' in two senses without being explicit about it and accepting the implications of such usage, is to obscure the following facts: (i) If the two views are found in the Old Testament, they are inconsistent with each other, and in our modern thinking we may only accept one or the other or neither. (ii) Time and again in the Old Testament, miracles in the literal modern sense are recognised, with the implication that natural processes were recognised also.

Eichrodt comes near to acknowledging both (i) and (ii), but his desire to produce a consistent modern theology of the Old Testament, which is both scientifically and theologically respectable, has prevented him giving proper recognition to these facts.

It is possible to argue, of course, that God directly causes every event in nature but does so according to a regular pattern, except on occasion. We may thus see God directly at work both in the flower of the field and the floating axehead. It is doubtful that such a view is ever expressed in the Old Testament or implied, and there are many texts which assert or imply belief in natural processes inconsistent with such a view; but even if it could be conceded that this belief is found consistently expressed throughout the whole Old Testament we should then have to admit that ambiguity concerning natural events which Eichrodt sees in Ecclesiastes. The east wind which saved the fleeing Israelites would bear no stamp proclaiming its divine origin,

nor would any other natural event. Such events would be subject to any kind of interpretation, according to the standpoint of the observer or participant, and we should find ourselves imprisoned in an inescapable relativism. The ancient Israelite sense of wonder and amazement at the extra-ordinary display of divine power, itself the motive for secondary elaboration, would become unintelligible; and far from strengthening faith we should merely be more exposed to the shafts of sceptical criticism.

In any case this kind of approach is explicitly repudiated by Eichrodt:

'Israelite faith successfully averted the DANGERS which threatened it because of this very belief in the miraculous. It did not allow it to lead to an abandonment of belief in the regularity of Nature, or to contempt for the will of the Creator as expressed in the natural order, or to the setting aside of the laws of Nature as something inferior and unworthy of God'.

Even here, however, he comes perilously close to losing what he has grasped, in the statement which immediately follows referring to 'witnesses to the divine activity' in 'the daily phenomena of the course of Nature'.⁴¹¹

The second of Eichrodt's apparently contradictory statements earlier quoted shows his embarrassment at the presence of the crudely miraculous in the Old Testament. According to Eichrodt ancient Israelites were protected

⁴¹¹ E2 p. 166.

from perpetual hankering after the sensational by the the knowledge that it might proceed from evil powers rather than God. Miracles were only used by God at critical periods to call forth faith, a faith which could do without the miraculous. Miracles cannot therefore be properly understood unless they are seen as part of a greater whole, the redemptive activity of God in his control of history.

This may be so, but leaving aside theological problems involved in such questions as whether or not hardening pharaoh's heart is more morally elevated than encouraging Hezekiah's hope, we cannot evade the simple fact that time and again ancient Israelites saw in the extraordinary and sensational the direct activity of God, while preserving at the same time belief in the reliability of nature in its normal processes.

9. THE MEANING OF XNN

Eichrodt claims that XNN was used to indicate both preservation and creation. According to Eichrodt this is an expression of the faith that 'sees God forming the universe at every moment' and thinks of the maintenance of the world as continuous creation.⁴¹² This implies that XNN does not mean 'preserve', but means 'create'; it was not a verb which sometimes meant 'create' and sometimes 'preserve', but always 'create', and it was sometimes applied to what we should regard as the preservation of the world. If this is so then Eichrodt will have demonstrated in the case of certain texts that God was regarded

⁴¹² E2 p. 154.

as directly active in what we should describe as natural processes. Do such texts exist? And if they do, how do we distinguish texts in which אֵרַב , create, indicates what we should call creation, from texts in which אֵרַב , create, indicates what we should call preservation?

Eichrodt's claim is all the more important because elsewhere he describes this verb as 'the technical term for that marvellous divine creativity which brings forth something new and astonishing'.⁴¹³ And it is this verb which the author of the priestly account of creation has deliberately chosen to express not simply the idea of creation, but creation from nothing. The verb therefore expresses an idea which is far removed from the idea of preservation, and even if the notion of creation from nothing is not always present we should nevertheless have an indication of a divine production of each natural event impossible to reconcile with the assumptions of both natural science and common sense. Does any text containing אֵרַב in qal or niphal express this startling belief?

Genesis 6:7. בְּרָאָתִי refers to an act in the past, and reference to the preservation of mankind is neither necessary nor easy, although not impossible.

Exodus 34:10. נִבְרָאִים refers to astonishing events of an exceptional nature, and preservation is therefore excluded.

Numbers 16:30. The demise of Korah and his associates refers precisely to an extraordinary and unique event, and preservation is therefore excluded.

⁴¹³ E2 p. 104.

Deuteronomy 4:32. Of necessity this is a reference to the original creation of man, at a certain time in the past.

Isaiah 4:5. The reference here is to a miraculous act in the future. Preservation is excluded.

Isaiah 40:26.

שָׂאוּ-מָרוֹם עֲבֵי-כֶם וִירְאוּ כִי-בָרָא אֱלֹהִים
הַמוֹצֵיָא בְּמִסְפָּר צָבָאָם לְכֻלָּם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה
מִרְבֹּב אוֹנִיִּם וְאַמְרָץ כֹּחַ אִישׁ לֹא יַעֲדָר :

ברא could here indicate continuous creation of the stars, and the verse unquestionably refers to the regular appearance of the stars and the fact that this is absolutely under the control of Yahweh. But, (i) we are not obliged to interpret ברא as referring to continuous creation; (ii) ברא is perfect; the two verbs referring to the appearance of the stars night after night are a participle, הַמוֹצֵיָא, and an imperfect, יְהוָה, and this gives the unavoidable impression of a reference to the act of creation in the past followed by reference to the continual control of Yahweh over the already existing stars in the present. (iii) The passage is poetic, and while the point of view here expressed is far removed from the philosophy of Fred Hoyle, the poetic nature of the prophet's utterance forbids us to draw conclusions about his sober view of the structure of the universe. The difference between the prophet's theistic belief and Hoyle's atheistic outlook is obviously of very great importance, but the difference arises out of personal experience and judgement concerning historical and contemporary events, and is not a deduction from or a philosophical assumption brought to an investigation into the nature of the universe.

Isaiah 40:28. בּוֹרֵא קִצּוֹת הָאָרֶץ could refer to the continual creation of the whole earth, or it could simply mean 'the creator of'. The prophet wishes to emphasise that God can save Israel here and now, and his desire to stress the ever present power of God may have influenced his manner of expression. The עוֹלָם appears to be emphatic. There is no temporal or spatial limit to Yahweh's power.

Isaiah 41:20. יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְאֵת הַיָּם is parallel to וְאֵת הַיָּם and refers to the miraculous intervention of Yahweh in the life of the nation. There is no reference to preservation, and there might not even be any actual reference to events in nature at all. The poetic and rhetorical style indicates strong feeling.

Isaiah 42:5. בּוֹרֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם could refer to continual creation, but it is parallel to בְּנֵי יָם, and רִכַּץ הָאָרֶץ and it is hard to believe that the prophet really thought of these processes going on all the time. A translation such as the RV is needed: 'he that created ... and stretched them forth; he that spread abroad ...' It is also unlikely that the giving of breath and spirit was looked upon as a continuous process, although this interpretation of the text is not impossible.

Isaiah 43:1.

וְעַתָּה כֹּה-אָמַר יְיָ בִּרְאֵי הָעָם וְיִצְרָה
שִׁבְרָאֵל אֶל-תִּיבְרָא כִּי-גִאֲלֹתִי הֵן קְרָאתִי
בְּשִׁמִּי לִי-אֶתָּה :

The reference is to the nation and not nature; but it is pertinent to ask if the prophet thought of God as continually creating and forming the national life. Such

a belief would be thoroughly deterministic and quite out of character with the whole of prophetic thought. Yahweh created and formed the nation in the past; Yahweh continues to take profound interest in the nation; Yahweh will intervene in the life of the nation; but at the same time the nation has a life of its own, which might or might not conform to Yahweh's will.

Isaiah 43:7.

כָּל הַזִּנְקָא בְּשִׁמִּי וְלִכְבוֹדִי בְּרֵאֲתִיו
זָרָתִיו אֶף-עֲשִׂיתִיו:

This is again a reference to the people, emphasising God's care for every one of them, and that no individual life exists without God. The verbs parallel to בָּרָא are זָרָא and עָשָׂה. This could mean that every individual is specially created by God, but the perfect tenses cannot refer to continual creation.

Isaiah 43:15. Cf. 43:1.

Isaiah 45:7.

יוֹצֵר אֹר וְיֹבֹרֵא חֹשֶׁךְ עֲשֵׂה שָׁלוֹם
וְיֹבֹרֵא רָע אֲנִי " עֲשֵׂה כָּל-אַלֶּה:

This is a reference to the continual activity of God. Like the stars, light and darkness come and go, and the prophet might have looked upon the light of each new day and the darkness of each night as a new act of creation by God. Even here, however, we are dealing with a poetic or rhetorical text where the main emphasis is on God's continual care for Israel. Nor would acceptance of the notion of the continual creation of light and darkness necessitate belief in the continual creation of ongoing

natural processes.

Isaiah 45:8. The Lord has created salvation. That is to say, the salvation of Israel has been decided upon and is inevitable. There is no reference to preservation of nature.

Isaiah 45:12. God has made the earth, **עָשָׂתִי**, and has created man upon it, **בָּרָאתִי**. A reference to the past creation of the earth and man is meant; and it is followed by reference to the original creation of the heavens and the statement **וְכָל-עֲבָאִם צִוִּיתִי**.

Isaiah 45:18.

כִּי כֹה אָמַר-יְיָ " בּוֹרָא הַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא הַאֱלֹהִים
יֵצֵר הָאָרֶץ וְעָשָׂה הוּא כּוֹנֵנָהּ לֹא-תִהְיֶה בָרָאָהּ
לְשַׁבָּת יֵצְרָהּ אֲנִי יְיָ וְאֵין עוֹד:

יֵצֵר הָאָרֶץ and **בּוֹרָא הַשָּׁמַיִם** could by themselves be taken to refer to continual creation; but **בְּרָאָהּ לְשַׁבָּת** make the whole verse a certain reference to the original creation in the past. If we try to make a contrast between the two halves of the verse and thereby establish two different references of **בָּרָא**, the first being to the continuous preservation of the heavens and the second to the original making of the earth, we must also take **יֵצֵר** and **עָשָׂה** to refer to the continuous forming and making of the earth. This is highly improbable in itself since these verbs normally refer to the over-all structure of the universe, and not some real but hidden divine activity in what appear to us as natural processes. The main features of the Israelite world such as hills and valleys, rivers and streams, the sky and stars, were not being perpetually formed and reformed by some gigantic

if invisible hand, any more than they are for us, and it is impossible to see any essential difference between חַרָּץ on the one hand and חַרָּץ on the other.

It is true, of course, that Deutero-Isaiah refers to radical transformations of the landscape elsewhere, and such ideas may well have sprung from actual experience of landslips, and earth tremors or quakes, in which the hand of God was seen. Apart, however, from the fact that this means reading poetic rhetoric as an expression of sober expectation rather than visionary prophecy, it is open to the fatal objection that such transformations of nature are exceptional interventions by Yahweh to alter the normal state of affairs. The exceptional, miraculous character of such envisaged events is quite inconsistent with the notion that Yahweh is for ever remoulding the world he has made.

We might compare with this verse 48:13 which tells us that Yahweh laid the foundation of the earth and spread out the heavens; and then we read:

$\text{קִרָּא אֶנֶּי אֱלֹהִים יַעֲמִדוּ יְהִיָּדוּ}$

Taken literally this must mean that the whole fabric of the universe is being continually brought into being by God, which is absurd, and contradicts the plain meaning of the initial statements in the verse. The statement is rhetorical and emphasises the fact that the whole universe is under the control of God, and would not exist if he did not will it.

Isaiah 48:7. This is a reference to the imminent salvation of Israel. Reference to preservation is excluded.

Isaiah 54:16. God has created the smith and the destroyer. This could be a reference to God's creation of every individual human life, but such a meaning is not demanded, the emphasis falling on God's ultimate control of all human life. There is no reference to God continuously creating each human life.

Isaiah 57:19. Another emphatic statement of God's control over human life; but בּוֹרֵא נֹחַ שְׁפָתַי אֶמַּח, whatever its precise meaning, cannot be taken to refer to a direct control of all that is said or done in human life, unless we are to read an absolute determinism into the Old Testament text. The prophet is simply emphasising the fact that one day the contrite will certainly reap the fruits of their humility.

Isaiah 65:17-18. The creation of the new heavens and new earth: no reference is being made to the preservation of the world. It is interesting to note that the participle

אֶרָא is twice used, not referring to the present, but a stupendous miracle in the future, which corresponds to the original stupendous act of creation.

Jeremiah 31:22. Obscure, but preservation is excluded.

Ezekiel 21:35. (RV 21:30) This is a reference to the destruction of Ammon in the land of its origin. Preservation is excluded.

Ezekiel 28:13,15. However this text is interpreted it is a reference to the original 'perfection' of the king of Tyre, and being a reference to a past event, preservation is excluded.

Amos 4:13. See note on Isaiah 45:18.

Malachi 2:10. One God has created all the people, they all have one father, and should therefore live in peace together.

There is no reference to preservation.

Psalm 51:12. (RV 51:10) Sin is to be wiped away and a new spirit created. There is no reference to preservation.

Psalm 89:13. (RV 89:12) The preceding verse reads:

'The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: The world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them'.

(RV). These verses refer to the original creation of the world, and final control of God over its existence. There is no reference to preservation.

Psalm 89:48. (RV 89:47)

זָכַר-אֱנִי מִה-קִּלְדַּעַל-מֵה-שָׁא בְרָאָה
כָּל-בְּנֵי-אָדָם:

All men receive their life from God, and their continued existence is therefore according to his will and not theirs. There is no reference to preservation. If the Psalmist had wished to express the idea of continuous creation he would surely have used the imperfect.

Psalm 102:19. (RV 102:18) The reference to the future, a people yet to be created, excludes preservation.

Psalm 104:30.

תִּשְׁלַח רוּחֶךָ יִבְרָאֵן וַתִּחְדָּשׁ פָּנָי
אֲדָמָה:

יִבְרָאֵן unquestionably refers to a continual act of creation, but it does not follow from this that it is continuous with respect to each individual animal or man. The sending forth of God's spirit which gives life to his creatures is paralleled in verse 29 by the continual taking away of their breath and their consequent dying, and must refer to a process which continues all the time, but with respect to the whole mass of animals and men, since the psalmist cannot have been making the absurd

assertion that each individual keeps on dying.

וְשׁוּבוֹן אֶל-עָפָר׃ shows that it is total death which is being referred to and we are not here dealing with a figurative expression which might refer to sleep. The whole psalm means that God gives life to all that has life; that all of his creatures are wonderfully provided for in the world whose framework he has unalterably established; that God has absolute control over life and death, and that one day this lease of life must run out, and creatures must return to 'their dust'. Individuals are no more continuously created than they continually die.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁴ But cf. G.R. Driver, THE RESURRECTION OF MARINE AND TERRESTRIAL CREATURES, JSS 1962, pp. 12-22.

Driver maintains that וְשׁוּבוֹן אֶל-עָפָר׃ at the end of v. 29 spoils the metre by adding two beats to the line, and it also creates a problem of interpretation, since if all animals die, then according to v. 30 they are all resurrected. Driver regards this as theologically objectionable, as well as it being impossible for marine creatures to return to dust. Driver believes therefore that the words at the end of v. 29 must be a gloss meant to indicate that וְשׁוּבוֹן אֶל-עָפָר׃ means 'die'.

If the gloss is eliminated שׁוּבוֹן can revert to its literal meaning, 'gasped'. בָּרָא must then, according to Driver, come from a root בָּרָא, 'was healthy', and refer to the fact that God restores their health.

Driver's suggestion should be rejected. If the phrase at the end of v. 29 spoils the metre it may be a gloss; but שׁוּבוֹן can still refer to death, the contrasted states of death and birth both being attributed to God. Driver is incorrect in his statement that the natural sense of v. 30 is a reference to resurrection, and pedantic in his objection that marine creatures cannot return to dust.

Psalm 148:5. הוֹאֵ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּבְרָאֵהוּ undoubtedly refers to the original creation of angels, sun, moon, stars, the heavens of heavens, and waters above the heavens, and this is confirmed in the immediately following words:

וַיַּעֲבֹדֵם לְעַד לְעוֹלָם

Ecclesiastes 12:1. בּוֹרֵאֵךְ could, taken by itself,

refer to continual creation, but we are not compelled to read it so, and the usual interpretation is that the participle here be taken as a noun, your creator. In verse 7 we read: וְהָרִיחַ תִּשְׁוֶיב אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר וַתִּתֵּן which unquestionably refers to the initial gift of the spirit or breath and in no way suggests a continual giving of it. Furthermore, Eichrodt sees in Ecclesiastes the complete depersonalization of the natural order and an appeal to בּוֹרֵאֵךְ in 12:1 is therefore illegitimate.

Genesis 1:1; 1:21; 1:27; 2:3; and 2:4a. These texts must all by Eichrodt's own admission refer to the original single act of creation and cannot refer to the preservation of the world. This judgement must also be extended to the use of בּוֹרֵאֵךְ in Genesis 5:1.

This brief survey of the qal and niphal uses of בּוֹרֵאֵךְ shows that in most cases it is unquestionably used of a single act, usually in the past but sometimes in the future. Sometimes it indicates repeated acts of creation, but in the majority of texts there is clearly no reference to the preservation of nature by means of continuous creation. There are several texts where reference to continuous creation is not impossible if the phrase including בּוֹרֵאֵךְ is read by itself; but these texts are poetic and rhetorical, and when the meaning and prophetic purpose of the whole context are taken into consideration such an interpretation

becomes extremely improbable, and may even threaten to reduce the whole text to absurdity.⁴¹⁵

It is a pity that Eichrodt has laid himself open to such criticism since he is unquestionably right in claiming that such men as Deutero-Isaiah and the author of Psalm 104 were far removed from what a later age termed deism, and, we may add, from such views as those expressed by Hoyle. The prophets believed that the God who created the world, continually cares for it and exercises some kind of control over it. This belief, which has been regarded all down the ages by Jews and Christians as essential to their faith, does not, however, imply the doctrine of continuous creation; and in the Bible we frequently find assertions and assumptions quite at variance with that doctrine. The prophets and teachers of ancient Israel believed that God's continued care for his world could lead, and sometimes did lead to divine intervention in the affairs of the nation and the individual, and in the workings of nature; but divine intervention in national or individual life did not imply perpetual intervention by God to make every act, word, thought, feeling and decision

⁴¹⁵ The present writer investigated all qal and niphal uses of אָרַב in a thesis on the doctrine of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:4a, presented for the Lambeth Diploma in 1976, pp. 59-106. The main conclusion of this investigation was that 'a satisfactory explanation of the verb's meaning must not only take account of its limitations to the activity of God and the absence of explicit reference to material used, but also its use along with verbs denoting human activity. Such an explanation is provided if we keep strictly to the meaning "bring into existence"'. (p. 95).

just what he wanted it to be, and many assertions in both Old Testament and New Testament indicate that this was frequently far from being the case. Even Jeremiah's visit to the potter's house results in a message which assumes a significant degree of human freedom and asserts how response or failure to respond to God's will can lead to divine 'repentance'. And if such a message can follow immediately upon the words 'Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel', this must be a warning to us not to take isolated texts at their face value.⁴¹⁶

If God's control over human affairs can be combined with an acknowledgement of human freedom, may not the same teachers and prophets have combined belief in the divine control of natural events with beliefs or assumptions about the spontaneous and deterministic character of many natural processes?

10. HUMAN CONCEPTION AND BIRTH

Some comment is needed on this subject in view of Eichrodt's account of the relationship of God to nature; but while it is hoped that these comments give a fair and balanced treatment of a selection of relevant biblical texts, they are not intended as anything like a full examination of the topic.

According to Eichrodt the impact of the early prophetic movement on Israel's religious thought made

⁴¹⁶ Jeremiah 18:7-12. Cf. texts in Exodus which refer to the hardening of pharaoh's heart.

people aware of the direct working of God through the spirit. They came to believe that Yahweh was 'present everywhere in his living breath, and could thereby engage his power at any point'. Eichrodt goes on to point out that the possession of such power could be used to satisfy the craving for miracles: bears rending children; oil miraculously increased; meal curing sickness; a leper cured; a floating axe-head.⁴¹⁷

These incidents all imply the suspension of what is normal in nature, including the first, since the appearance of the bears is obviously linked with the curse without which they would not have appeared. Whether or not these things happened, the stories reveal the way in which some Israelites thought about the power of God's spirit, and perhaps give us an illustration of the way in which all Israelites thought if they took seriously the idea that there is a God who has created the world and is in some kind of active relationship with it. Admittedly, serious thinking Israelites would exclude intervention in the normal workings of nature for merely trivial reasons; but they would be very ready to acknowledge intervention for weighty reasons, and such an outlook clearly excludes the notion of nature as a closed system or machine. Nature is perhaps thought of more as an organism than a machine, open to the influence of divine spirit, just as the human 'organism' is; and not surprisingly, since the human creature is part of nature itself. Sarah offered Hagar to Abraham because

⁴¹⁷ E2 pp. 53-54. See II Kings 2:23ff; 4:1ff, 38ff; 5:8ff; 6:1ff.

Yahweh had stopped her bearing children.⁴¹⁸ And when she did bear Isaac the matter was indeed cause for laughter all round since she and Abraham were too old for a natural conception and birth to take place. The whole story implies that women were normally fertile and would conceive and bear children following sexual relations with men. We may compare the story of Sarah and Abimelech.⁴¹⁹ The natural process would continue unhindered unless God intervened to stop it. He had established it in the first place, and could interrupt or supplement it should the need arise.

Genesis 15:5f. Verse 5 reads:

'And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to tell them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be'. (RV)

Abraham is promised a multitude of descendents. This implies a vaguely conceived divine control over natural events, but in this case there is no need to see expressed in the text any more than the unimpeded out-working of God's blessing given to mankind from the beginning. The text could mean more than that, but it does not have to. Furthermore, we should take note of verse 4:

כֹּחַ אִישׁ אֶת־כִּנּוּן יִהְיֶה לְךָ
 מִכִּנּוּן אִישׁ אֶת־כִּנּוּן יִהְיֶה לְךָ

'This man shall not be your heir; your heir shall be a child of your own body'. (NEB)

⁴¹⁸ Genesis 16:2. ⁴¹⁹ Genesis 20, especially vv. 17-18.

These words are addressed by Yahweh to Abraham, and refer to a child whose conception and birth are looked upon as miraculous. Divine activity is asserted, and the natural functioning of the human body is assumed. We must also note the word יָרָא in verse 5.

Eichrodt would have us think in terms of a contradiction: the narrator of the story thinks on the one hand of conception and birth as natural functions, and on the other hand regards them as in each case the special direct act of God who 'desires to be petitioned afresh every time for the blessing of children, which he grants or refuses', and who 'forms the individual human being in his mother's womb, clothes him with skin and flesh, gives him the breath of life'.⁴²⁰ But we are surely not entitled to attribute such contradictions to the Israelites without clear evidence, and verse 5 does not in any way demand the interpretation put on it by Eichrodt.

As has already been argued, there are not expressed in Genesis two simple and mutually exclusive views of human and animal birth; the beliefs revealed are somewhat more complex and vague, and frequently assume a natural process: too frequently, in fact, for us to suppose that ancient Israelites held any other view of normal conception and birth which clearly contradicted it.

It should perhaps be mentioned that if Eichrodt tries to evade the contradiction in the present case by arguing that the human body is simply used by God in his construction of the unborn child, this obviously cannot

⁴²⁰ E2 p. 153.

apply to Abraham.

When we turn to the birth of Isaac, forecast in Genesis 18:10ff, we learn that it is to come about through a miracle. A miracle is an exceptional occurrence and therefore no basis for general conclusions about God's relationship with nature or the normal pattern of conception and birth. Eichrodt's appeal to this case, however, shows how he did see a contradiction between two views: birth is a natural consequence; birth is the divine answer to petition.

We may compare the cases of Rebekah and Hannah. They are barren and pray to God for children, and their wish is granted. In the case of Hannah it is explicitly stated that 'the LORD had shut up her womb'. After the encouragement of Eli we read that 'Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her'.⁴²¹

The case of Rebekah could be interpreted to mean that Rebekah was naturally barren, and that God miraculously removed the cause of barrenness. This would be our way of understanding the text; but we do not have to understand it in that way, and in the light of the other cases we should probably take it to mean that Yahweh stopped Rebekah conceiving, but then relented and let her conceive because of Isaac's entreaties.⁴²²

When Yahweh saw that Leah was hated he opened her womb, while Rachel was barren. When Leah has her first-born son she calls him Reuben because Yahweh has looked

⁴²¹ I Samuel 1:5-6, 19. ⁴²² Genesis 25:21.

upon her affliction.⁴²³ And there are other similar cases. This suggests a more active intervention on the part of God to bring about conception and birth. When, however, Rachel complains bitterly to Jacob about not having children, Jacob replies, 'Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?'⁴²⁴ Later we read that God remembered Rachel and hearkened to her and opened her womb. Rachel then speaks of God taking away her reproach, as Elizabeth does many centuries later, and hopes that Yahweh will add to her another son.

Although there is a clear desire to explain the patriarchal names this cannot alter the fact that in these narratives God is depicted as actively promoting conception and birth of children. In the case of Elizabeth in the New Testament the inescapable impression is created that God has prevented Zechariah and Elizabeth having children in order to prepare the way for an undoubtedly miraculous birth. The notion of reproach, both in Elizabeth and Rachel, suggests that if the woman does not have children she must have done or left undone something to incur the wrath of God. Jacob stories proceed on the basis of rivalry between the wives, and if one of them in such circumstances is very much given to bearing children, while the other does not, this perhaps leads to unusual emphasis on the part supposedly played by God in the matter. And in the case of Jacob's sons we are also dealing with men who symbolised important groups within Israel, and perhaps the writer wishes to emphasise that these groups

⁴²³ Genesis 29:31-32. ⁴²⁴ Genesis 30:2.

came into existence through the deliberate will of God.

Samson Kardimon has drawn attention to an interesting feature of the stories about Sarah and Rachel.⁴²⁵

Kardimon refers to the fact that both Sarah and Rachel gave their husbands their handmaids because they were infertile. The reason given in the text for this procedure is expressed by the Hebrew phrase **אֵלֶּיךָ אֶת־נָכְרָהּ**, and similarly in the case of Rachel, **וְאֶת־נָכְרָהּ גַּם־אֶת־נָכְרָהּ**,⁴²⁶

'The opinion of the Talmudic sages is that the phrase "it may be that I shall be builded up through her" signifies that Sarah and Rachel gave their handmaids to their husbands for wives as a remedy for their infertility, that THEY THEMSELVES should bear children'.⁴²⁷ Kardimon points out that among Jewish interpreters this understanding of the text came to be regarded as too fantastic to accept, and gave way to a more rational interpretation, the 'building up' referring to the adoption of the handmaid's child by the wife. The rational interpretation has always been preferred by non-Jewish commentators.

Kardimon goes on to quote modern medical opinions that adoption can often enable a woman to have children by releasing her from mental and emotional strain, the psychological state having an effect on the physiological condition, perhaps by means of glandular secretion. It is apparently not uncommon for those convinced of their own infertility to have children following adoption.

⁴²⁵ S. Kardimon, ADOPTION AS A REMEDY FOR INFERTILITY IN THE PERIOD OF THE PATRIARCHS, JSS 1958, pp. 123-126.

⁴²⁶ Genesis 16:2; 30:3. ⁴²⁷ p. 123.

Kardimon concludes from his survey of medical literature that adoption appears to be a cure in some cases of infertility. 'And what is most important to our thesis is the phenomenon that THIS KNOWLEDGE ORIGINATED FROM THE COMMON PEOPLE as a result of their observations of the life around them', and it is reasonable to suppose that this knowledge was also possessed by common people in the time of the patriarchs.⁴²⁸ The interpretation of the Talmudic sages is therefore supported, and also a more literal translation of the crucial phrase.

In commenting on Kardimon's argument a number of other points must be made. He might have referred to the very strong desire for children in ancient Israel, something which by no means always characterises the outlook of modern Europeans, and this would encourage observation in this respect in the ancient Near East, and discourage it very often in modern Europe. It is also possible that strong desire for a child leads to anxiety, which in turn stops conception, as Kardimon says. Rachel's strong desire for children is evident, and we may reasonably infer it in the case of Sarah.

Rachel wants Bilhah's child delivered on to her knees, and this could be interpreted to mean that the act would help bring about fertility in Rachel; but it might symbolise the fact that the baby becomes Rachel's. In favour of the so-called rational interpretation is Rachel's statement that God has given her a son, which

⁴²⁸ p. 126.

apparently refers to Bilhah's offspring and not some future child of Rachel's. We must also note that the Hebrew phrase about being built is itself figurative and requires interpretation, and this is true whichever meaning we prefer. Even the Talmudic sages were commenting long after the original story had been told.

On the other hand, Rachel shows great joy over the birth of this son. Would she have shown such joy if this had meant simply the gift of a child by adoption? Might it not have been a sign that God had heard her prayer for a baby of her own? Sarah in effect drives out Hagar after she has conceived which would exclude adoption of the child; nor is there any evidence in either story that the wife did in fact adopt the handmaid's child as her own. In the case of Ishmael this is very clearly the case.⁴²⁹

It is possible that we see here evidence of common and astute observation, plus complete ignorance as to why there should be irregularity in the occurrence of conception and birth, and the consequent attribution of what is irregular to the direct intervention of God.

Turning from Sarah and Rachel to the story about Laban's and Jacob's flocks, we may note the following elements in the narrative: (i) God's blessing increases the flocks. (ii) Colour of fleece or hide in young depends on colour of fleece or hide in parents. In his dream, Jacob sees mottled he-goats mating with the females, and the angel of God makes it clear that this is to

⁴²⁹ Genesis 21:9-13.

recompense Jacob and punish Laban. God is manipulating a natural process for moral ends. (iii) Stronger parents bear stronger offspring, and weaker produce weaker. (iv) Seeing speckled rods causes conception of speckled young. (v) Animals mate naturally and produce young.⁴³⁰

We thus have a mixture of pious belief, simple observation leading to selective breeding, and superstition. One wonders to what extent the pious belief and superstition characterised the strongly biased folktale rather than the actual beliefs of most Israelites; but in any case, the narrative reveals an interesting mixture of recognition of natural process and belief in the possibility of divine intervention. The two, however, complement rather than contradict each other.

Exodus 1:20-21. In these verses we read that the two midwives were rewarded by God for disobeying pharaoh, and the reward took the form of giving them families. The story might be taken to mean that the two women were barren and had therefore concentrated on midwifery since they had no children of their own to think about, but now God rewarded them with fertility; or it might mean that they had very large families once they started, their fertility and the health of their offspring being strengthened by God; or it might mean simply that the midwives had large families as one would normally expect women to have, and that God did not intervene to punish them with barrenness as he would have done if they had obeyed pharaoh.

⁴³⁰ Genesis 30:25-43. Cf. 31:10-12.

The last meaning is the least likely of the three, but in all three cases there is in mind the direct intervention of God, actual or possible. The statement, however, occurs as part of a long story about the direct intervention of God in the world, this intervention being on the whole exceptional and miraculous. The whole story and therefore this particular text is not a safe guide to what Israelites believed about normal conception and birth, or even what the story teller believed, any more than the accounts of the plagues can be taken as a picture of God's normal relationship with natural events.

Job 10:8-12. This text might express belief that God makes the baby in the womb, but we are dealing with emotionally charged poetry where the emphasis is on God's absolute power over human life and his perfect knowledge of it. See also the comment on Psalm 139:13ff.

Job 31:15. 'Did not he that made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?' (RV) There is a certain equality of all men before God, and Job does not claim a specially privileged position as if he could behave just as he liked. Once again, the text might express the idea of divine construction of the unborn baby, but we are by no means compelled so to read it.

It may be maintained, however, that these texts do represent God actively engaged in creating the baby, rather than reflecting the belief that God has devised and brought into existence a complex process of growth which he alone could have created. It could be argued that while these texts are poetic, that such poetic imagery would not come naturally to one who saw prenatal development simply as a

natural process, even if the process were created by God.

If this is so, then we must accept a genuine contradiction in the Old Testament between these texts and others which clearly presuppose the operation of natural cause and effect. The prenatal growth of the baby is either a natural process, or it is a supernatural process, but not both. Eichrodt might maintain that the acknowledgement of God's control over natural processes is only a vague way of combining the actually or apparently incompatible beliefs in natural process on the one hand and creatio continua on the other; the acknowledgement of divine control is really only saying what Eichrodt himself maintains, that the Old Testament presents us with two views 'which though not, it is true, conceptually harmonized, are nevertheless pragmatically united'.⁴³¹

This is not so: it is possible to imagine God controlling or sustaining a natural process, say the prenatal development of a baby, but it is not possible to think of God CREATING every stage in, or perpetually CREATING the flow of a natural process. The 'naturalness' of the process would lie merely in its conforming to what we had come to expect, but in its essential character it would be a divine work. Control, on the other hand, does not destroy the spontaneous working of a natural process, any more than a rider's control of a horse or the mind's control over the body destroy the complex natural processes which go to make up horse and body.

⁴³¹ E2 p. 162.

The control of a machine does not destroy the automatic working of the machine, and the skill of the controller lies in his making maximum use of the machine for his own purposes.

It is hard to believe that the command to be fruitful and multiply can have meant anything other than the establishment of a natural process, and one can hardly suppose that the men of ancient Israel regarded their role in the process as an entirely superfluous one: Onan, at any rate did not, nor, apparently, did David in his dealings with Uriah the Hittite. And the supposition, to leave no stone unturned in the argument, that the male contribution imposed some constraint on the divine will, is not likely to have entered the head of any orthodox Israelite believer; and with the unorthodox we are happily not concerned.

Eichrodt may continue to hold that Israelites did believe both of two incompatible views, but if so they were vague and confused, and anyone may perhaps be forgiven for not regarding this as a very satisfactory foundation upon which to erect a Theology of the Old Testament.

It seems that Eichrodt wished to emphasise both the transcendence and the immanence of God: if Israelite believers neglected God's transcendence they would be no better than the Canaanites and other people in the ancient Near East, and God would become so closely identified with nature as to be little or no better than the personification of some natural force. If, on the other hand, divine immanence were neglected, Yahweh would become merely a deistic type of god, totally out of touch

with both nature and the history of mankind. It may be admitted that Jewish and Christian theology inevitably involve some tension between divine immanence and divine transcendence; but while Eichrodt's fear of attributing what he believes to be Canaanitism to the Old Testament teachers leads him rightly to recognise Old Testament texts depicting a transcendent God ruling a world of nature with its established processes, his fear of attributing deism to the Old Testament misleads him into searching for texts which reveal God directly and creatively active in nature.⁴³² Having found them to his own satisfaction he then believes he has preserved the two essential attributes of God and resolved the tension between them; whereas his over-emphasis on immanence has created a contradiction which in the terms of his own exposition of Old Testament thought is inescapable.

It may be, of course, that the contradiction exists in the Old Testament itself, but there appear to be no texts which demand the kind of stress on divine immanence which Eichrodt believes he has found, and in addition to this it is contrary to common sense observation and expectation. The onus of proof is on those who would attribute such ideas to any Old Testament writer.

⁴³² One wonders if Karl Barth has not had a strong influence on Eichrodt in this respect. See CHURCH DOGMATICS, Edinburgh 1960, Vol. III, 3, pp. 6-14. Barth rejects deism as basically atheistic since it alienates creature and creator, whereas they are bound together by a gracious covenant. The covenant idea is also, of course, of fundamental importance to Eichrodt; but Barth clearly distinguishes creation and providence, the former being unrepeatable.

ADDITIONAL NOTE (i) Creatio ex Nihilo

In writing of Israelite cosmology and creation Eichrodt emphasises God's independence of his creation and the way in which this is depicted as the product of a personal will with a moral purpose. God is not to be thought of as merely the first cause in a process, but as a transcendent being who is not drawn by creation into the flux of the world process. The human creature is called into existence by the miracle of creation by this transcendent deity who of his free will offers the possibility of spiritual fellowship to this creature. This distinctive emphasis of Israelite teaching was the result of Israel's experience of the covenant God.⁴³³

We have just seen that sometimes Eichrodt lays too much stress on divine immanence, but here his desire to emphasise the Old Testament belief in God's transcendence leads him to insist that the Old Testament expresses the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo. This is not the place for a thorough analysis of his argument, but some brief comment will illustrate his determination to stress God's transcendence on the one hand, and avoid any suggestion of dreaded deism on the other: not always with happy consequences for his exegesis of the text.

Not unnaturally, Eichrodt looks to the P account for a clarification of the concepts used in the Old Testament affirmations of Yahweh's unique creative power; but he runs into serious difficulty in trying to reconcile verse 2

⁴³³ E2 pp. 93-107.

with the supposed expression of creation from nothing. For Eichrodt wishes to take this phrase in its strict sense. Verse 1 he treats as a superscription and he will not allow the idea of God creating chaos into the text.⁴³⁴ He therefore endeavours to make verse 2 an indication of nothingness. וְהָיָה כְּאִין is taken to express nothingness, as in Isaiah 34:11, Jeremiah 4:23 and Isaiah 40:17.

In fact, Isaiah 34:11 speaks of the utter destruction of Edom, and the earlier part of verse 11 speaks of various wild birds inhabiting what had once been a civilised nation but is now waste land. Cf. verse 10. Verses 13-15 speak of ruins and wild animals, and verses 16-17 emphasise the fact that these wild creatures will inhabit the territory for ever by decree of Yahweh. Jeremiah 4:23 similarly paints a picture of utter ruin, as can be seen from the subsequent verses, and verse 27 contains the significant words 'yet will I not make a full end'. (RV)

The usage of the phrase in these two passages therefore contradicts Eichrodt's interpretation and supports the view that a formless chaos is indicated.

In Isaiah 40:17 we are told that the nations are counted as less than nothing in the sight of God, and one of the words used is וְהָיָה כְּאִין. The word in this case could certainly mean 'nothing', but even in this context does not have to bear that meaning, and RVm gives 'confusion'. 'Worthless' is also a possible translation, especially in

⁴³⁴ E2 pp. 104-105.

view of verse 16: 'And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering'. (RV) The entries in BDB for תהו suggest that the term was usually employed to convey the idea of total destruction, or pretence or comparative worthlessness. The word or phrase is therefore usually an indication of something in relation to something else, a comparison is being made.

The exception is Job 26:7, which pictures the earth hanging over empty space. Here again it is תהו alone which is used: נִגְהַ צִפּוֹן עַל-תְּהוֹ.

We must conclude from general usage that the phrase תהו ובהו in verse 2 probably indicates formless chaos, but the interpretation 'nothingness' is possible. Therefore the context in which the phrase appears is important; and if the whole of verse 2 in Genesis 1 expresses comparison and contrast with the ordered process which follows, we must interpret תהו ובהו to indicate disorder.

Eichrodt goes on to say that תְּהוֹם 'serves as an image for the formlessness and lifelessness which precede the divine act of creation without any tangible or objective quality'.⁴³⁵ No justification is offered for this interpretation, which contradicts Eichrodt's clear recognition that תְּהוֹם indicates vast waters which need a solid firmament to separate them.

Finally, the רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים is taken by Eichrodt

⁴³⁵ E2 p. 105.

to indicate a mighty wind; but in that case it is difficult to see how it can 'complete the picture of "non-existence" at which the author clearly is aiming'.⁴³⁶

Whatever may be the merit of Eichrodt's handling of other texts, his interpretation of this one exhibits confusion and special pleading. He claims that the priestly narrator has constructed 'an image of that nullity which constitutes the setting of the creation'; and states that 'the way in which, with the means available, he has managed to express that notion of nothingness which he had in mind can only excite our admiration'.⁴³⁷

What must in fact excite our admiration is the ingenuity with which Eichrodt makes the text mean what it does not mean; not to speak of the problems which arise when we speak of images of nothing. Had the priestly writer wished to say that God created the world, and that before this there was nothing, it is hard to see why he did not say it, and instead used expressions which Eichrodt has to admit 'involved the constant danger that his description would be misunderstood to imply a pre-existent primal matter'.⁴³⁸

Eichrodt's motive for this rationalising approach to the text becomes clear in his statement: 'In this way the concept of creation was thought out in Israel to its logical conclusion, and the deistic notion of God as *prima causa*, incorporated into the chain of cause and effect as one term in the process, was naturalized by the

⁴³⁶ E2 p. 105. ⁴³⁷ E2 p. 106. ⁴³⁸ E2 p. 106.

stress on the absolute freedom with which God acts'.⁴³⁹

The strength of this motive in Eichrodt's exegesis, or eisegesis, is only emphasised by the weakness of the argument which fails to see that deism and creatio ex nihilo are perfectly consistent with each other, and that the rejection of deism rests on our understanding of the nature of God and not the manner in which he brought the world into existence. Indeed, the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo perhaps more readily lends itself to a deistic view of God's relationship to the world than the idea of God becoming actively involved in the manipulation of pre-existent elements.

Later, Eichrodt points out that for the Israelites the material character of nature did not in itself give rise to imperfection. Normally in the ancient Near East, according to Eichrodt, imperfection was ascribed to matter, but since God created matter it must be good.⁴⁴⁰ The appeal to the divine estimate of created things as good, however, does not support Eichrodt's contention that God created matter. No doubt what the priestly writer had in mind was the imperfection of the world as we know it, against which he wished to assert the entirely good will and absolute creative power of God who can bring things into existence exactly in accordance with his good will. If things have gone wrong, and they have, this is the result of deliberate disobedience by Adam and Eve.

It is possible, however, to view matter as itself

⁴³⁹ E2 p. 106. ⁴⁴⁰ E2 p. 108.

neither good nor bad, and this seems to be the idea in the priestly account. Elsewhere in the ancient Near East the elements of chaos are depicted as actively hostile to the gods, and in parts of the Old Testament a force hostile to God and man is referred to: but for the priests the elements are simply vast chaotic forces brought under control by God.⁴⁴¹

In any case, the divine appraisal of particular acts of creation and then of the whole does not concern matter. It is stated of the light, which is created directly by God; of the separating of the lower waters into seas and the appearance of the earth, and perhaps also of the making of the firmament and the parting of the waters into upper and lower; the appearance of vegetation; the manufacture of the celestial bodies; the creation of fish and fowl; the making of animals; and finally of the whole arrangement and working of the cosmos. It is not stated of mankind, probably because man was made

⁴⁴¹ Cf. William R. Lane, THE INITIATION OF CREATION, VT 1963, pp. 63-73. Lane does not believe that considerations of syntax can prove either that Genesis 1:1 is a complete sentence, or a temporal clause; and he rejects the idea that אֵל is a theological term for creatio ex nihilo (p.69). He argues that הָיָה in verse 2 is a pluperfect specifically to draw attention to the fact that the state described in verse 2 is one that had existed previous to the action of either verse 1 or verse 3 (p. 71). For Lane, verse 2 is a parenthetical note, regardless of whether verse 1 is an independent sentence or not (pp. 70-72). The Priestly writer presupposes the existence of material which was transformed by creation, and the question of the origin of matter was one which he did not try to answer. (pp. 72-73).

in the image of God and such a creation could not be otherwise than good.

ADDITIONAL NOTE (ii) נִיָּן

When we consider the way in which God accomplishes his will in the world, Eichrodt believes the concept of נִיָּן to be of especial importance. By seeing the whole world as dependent on God's spirit or breath, polytheism could be rejected, while at the same time deism or pantheism were also avoided. An intimate link is formed with the one God, to whom everything is utterly subordinated. The sovereignty of God over natural forces is also emphasised by the association of the spirit of life with the creative word of God.⁴⁴²

Although Eichrodt does not say so we may infer from this that the dependence of a given creature on the spirit implanted by God means either that the creature is thereby directly controlled by God, or that the creature is given a distinct life over which it has at least some control. The gift of the divine spirit either implies total subordination to God's will, or it implies some degree of freedom.

Eichrodt continues by saying that divine power is within man, but is to be sharply distinguished from the individual human spirit which is also sometimes denoted by נִיָּן. The divine power is subject only to God's rule.⁴⁴³

We may now add that this implies some independence

⁴⁴² E2 pp. 46-50. ⁴⁴³ E2 p. 48.

of man's spirit, i.e. his feelings, thought and will.

The sharp distinction between the divine $\Pi\Gamma$ and the human $\Pi\Gamma$ is repeated by Eichrodt.⁴⁴⁴ He points out, however, that the term $\Pi\Gamma$ did sometimes refer to the vital energy a man feels within himself; and from Ezekiel on $\Pi\Gamma$ sometimes refers to the human mind or disposition. In this case the chief reference is to man's higher spiritual functions: moral qualities or aims or direct relationship with God.⁴⁴⁵

Eichrodt goes on to say, 'It is clear that the spirit is here losing the character of an independent supr-individual force, and is being completely incorporated into the psychic life of Man. Nevertheless its original nature continues to have this much effect, that it designates primarily the higher level of Man's interior life'.⁴⁴⁶

This statement is hard to understand. Eichrodt has distinguished two uses of $\Pi\Gamma$, the one quite separate from the other. He has then outlined what he believes to be a development in the meaning of one of these uses, i.e. the reference to the human spirit; but in the statement just quoted he seems to be asserting something of the other use, i.e. the divine spirit. In so far as $\Pi\Gamma$ refers to 'an independent supra-individual force', it has nothing to do with $\Pi\Gamma$, man's inner feeling, strength or mind. Eichrodt seems to be guilty of a confusion against which he has issued a repeated and

⁴⁴⁴ E2 p. 131. ⁴⁴⁵ E2 pp. 131-133. ⁴⁴⁶ E2 p. 133.

emphatic warning. This is not without importance for deciding between the alternative implications of רוח, the divine spirit or breath, mentioned earlier.

The bulk of Eichrodt's discussion suggests that the influx of divine רוח, spirit, wind or breath, gives a creature life; in fact, brings the creature into existence. Once existing, the human creature at least has its own רוח, its own feelings and will-power, and this is indeed the personality or self, with its own independence despite the fact that God sometimes acts on it for better or worse. The divine רוח is, as it were, the basis upon which the human רוח is founded, and the human רוח has a certain independence for as long as the human being exists.

This might appear to be contradicted by Job 27:3, where we read

כִּי-כָל-עוֹד בְּשִׁמְתִּי בִי וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בְּאַפִּי

'For even yet my breath is in me and the spirit of God is in my nostrils'.

There is here a clear identification of human breath and divine spirit or breath. Eichrodt's statement that human breath may be regarded as an effect of the divine breath of life is surely wrong. The breath in creatures is part of God's own being which for a time he shares with them. The divine breath and ours are the same.

There is, however, no suggestion in any use of רוח that God does man's breathing for him. Breath belongs to God and therefore may be given or withdrawn by him, but an active moment to moment control is

nowhere stated or implied.⁴⁴⁷

In Genesis 2:7 Yāhweh puffs into man's nostrils the breath of life. רוּחַ is not mentioned, but רוּחַ חַיִּים is taken by Eichrodt to be equivalent to רוּחַ חַיִּים.

Cf. Job 33:4.

רוּחַ-אֵל עֲשָׂתָנִי וְנִשְׁמַת שְׁדֵי הַחַיִּים:

The passages in Genesis and this one in Job in themselves simply assert the fact that life is bestowed by God.

ADDITIONAL NOTE (iii). Wisdom

Eichrodt thinks of wisdom as the principle of cosmic order. At first wisdom indicated skill in practical affairs, but it came to indicate also 'THE PURPOSE AND ORDER DISCERNIBLE IN THE COSMOS', these being looked upon as the effects of wisdom. According to Eichrodt, Job 28 expresses the idea of the divine wisdom standing before God 'as a pattern of that which was to be created' and therefore determining the natural order.⁴⁴⁸

Eichrodt believes that Proverbs 8 speaks of wisdom in very much the same way. 'Here too, therefore, wisdom is the cosmic thought, proceeding from God, creatively organizing and acting, and an objective reality even to God himself. Henceforward this connection with the creation and sustaining of all things was inseparable from wisdom'.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. C.A. Briggs, THE USE OF רוּחַ IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, JBL Vol. 19, 1900, pp. 132-145.

⁴⁴⁸ E2 p. 83. ⁴⁴⁹ E2 p. 85.

This interpretation of Job 28 appears not to be justified. The sense seems to be that men can achieve much in the acquisition of material wealth, but wisdom is not to be found by the application of human skill; and we may note in passing that it is assumed in this chapter that there are certain natural processes of which man can take advantage in the production of precious metals and stones. Nor can wisdom be obtained in return for human riches. God alone knows wisdom, and man therefore finds wisdom in reverencing God and obeying his will. This is the same message as Genesis 3.

When it is asserted that God knows where wisdom is to be found this is a poetic analogy for man's search for gold and so on. Men can search out valuable minerals in the earth; but the actual establishment of the earth required an understanding and skill of an altogether different order. It is only to that understanding that wisdom is known, and man can no more find wisdom than he can create a universe.

It may be reasonable to infer from this that the cosmos reveals God's wisdom, but verses 23-27 contain only poetic expressions of God's control over nature; and while they emphasise this divine control they cannot be taken to express more than that. Nevertheless, it might have been difficult for a poet who believed that God was the direct cause of all natural events to have expressed himself in this way.

Proverbs 8:22-36 is poetic, and Eichrodt seems to press the details of the imagery too far. The writer, like the author of Job 28, emphasises that wisdom is the possession of God; and he therefore concludes that

becoming wise brings a man close to God. In Job 28 one gains wisdom by submission to God. In Proverbs 8 one draws close to God by submitting to wisdom.

Section C. G. von Rad

11. THE HEBREW VIEW OF NATURE AND THE WORLD

This critique is based chiefly on what von Rad says in his book, *Wisdom in Israel*.⁴⁵⁰ Von Rad's remarks about the Hebrew view of nature are set in the context of assertions about how the Hebrews looked at the world as a whole, including the affairs of men; and this wider context is indeed directly relevant to a critique of the more specific remarks about nature.

Von Rad's Thesis

Men reflect upon the events of the external world and this makes them part of human experience. This experience leads to generalisations which help towards a proper adjustment to the external world. These generalisations are expressed in proverbs and other kinds of sayings, which are gathered eventually into writings and these writings have come to be called 'wisdom literature'.

Israel was no exception to this rule and there is a similarity between her wisdom literature and that of other nations, which is only to be expected. But there is a surprising difference as well because 'many of the most elementary experiences 'were set' in a quite specific spiritual and religious context of understanding'.

This leads to the question as to whether or not reality was the same for Israel and the other nations. Can we really suppose that the world appeared differently

⁴⁵⁰ G. von Rad, WISDOM IN ISRAEL, London 1972.

to the men of Israel from the way it appeared to the men of other nations?⁴⁵¹

In describing the Hebrew understanding of reality, von Rad is cautious about the use of modern terms and phraseology, and insists on the need to analyse such usage.⁴⁵² It is also possible that the term 'wisdom' is more of a hindrance than a help, since it is vague and perhaps suggests the existence of something, say, an intellectual movement, which did not exist.⁴⁵³

Modern scholars discovered that material like that found in the Book of Proverbs was to be found elsewhere in the ancient Near East, in very ancient texts. This meant that 'Proverbs' or parts of it might well be much older than hitherto supposed. It also raised the question how this Israelite wisdom, so often similar to that of other nations, was related to Yahwistic faith. Much of the wisdom could be understood quite independently of any faith in God, and this fact, together with the links with foreign wisdom teaching, suggested to some that the biblical wisdom was a foreign element added to faith in Yahweh. A proper solution to the problem can only be reached by a determined effort to let the biblical texts speak for themselves, so that we can come to grasp Israel's perceptions of reality.⁴⁵⁴ Nor must we be misled by modern abstractions which were not used by Israel as we use them. Included among these abstract terms which might mislead us is the term 'nature'.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵¹ W1 PP. 3-5. ⁴⁵² W1 pp. 6-7. ⁴⁵³ W1 pp. 7-8.

⁴⁵⁴ W1 pp. 9-10. ⁴⁵⁵ W1 pp. 13-14.

In chapter IV of his book, von Rad points out that knowledge, wisdom, is represented in later Old Testament texts as the gift of God. Hard thought was necessary in dealing with profound problems, but such thought was made possible by divine impulse.⁴⁵⁶

When we turn to the older sentence wisdom such as is found in Proverbs 10-29, we discover that the acquisition of wisdom is a purely human activity. This is in contrast to the later wisdom already mentioned, and also 'the spirituality of the pre-monarchical period, even of the period of Saul'.⁴⁵⁷ The understanding of reality in this early period might be called, following Martin Buber, pan sacralism. Every decisive event is brought into association with the sacral and ritual, as, for example, in the narrative of Saul's defeat of the Philistines.⁴⁵⁸ Only two generations later we find ourselves in a quite different world, as is illustrated by the Succession Narrative.⁴⁵⁹ Here, events follow one another in a causal chain of which the links are human aims, feelings, decisions, although there is some ultimate control by Yahweh.

Von Rad believes that between these two periods there must have been a great intellectual upheaval. The older wisdom sayings reflect this acknowledgement of the inherent determinism of events in human life; yet faith

⁴⁵⁶ W1 pp. 54-57. Cf. Job 32:6-11, 18-20; 4:12-17.

⁴⁵⁷ W1 p. 58. ⁴⁵⁸ I Samuel 13-14.

⁴⁵⁹ II Samuel 16-I Kings 2.

in the over-all power of Yahweh is not broken. 'The idea of life completely embedded in sacral ordinances has gone. But this has by no means affected faith in Yahweh'.⁴⁶⁰

We can be seriously misled by our own distinctions between faith and thought, reason and revelation, which have led some to infer from the preponderance of worldly sentences in the old proverbial wisdom that a certain rationality existed independently of faith: but this is to forget that for Israel there was only one world of experience, and 'rational perceptions and religious perceptions were not differentiated'.⁴⁶¹ The so-called secular sentences must be understood in the context of an outlook which saw the orders manifest in the world as established by God. 'The experiences of the world were for her always divine experiences as well, and the experiences of God were for her experiences of the world. It has been rightly said that in all knowledge faith is at work'.⁴⁶²

Wisdom, therefore, involves correct moral judgement and discipline, and this is closely related to faith in Yahweh. The fool, therefore, is the one who lacks moral perception and discipline, and who also rejects God.

Von Rad goes on to stress the importance of the fear of the Lord for the wisdom teachers. This is the

⁴⁶⁰ W1 p. 60. Cf. THE PROBLEM OF THE HEXATEUCH AND OTHER ESSAYS, Edinburgh, 1966, pp. 166-204; GENESIS, London 1961, pp. 27-30; OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY, Vol. 1, Edinburgh 1962, pp. 311-317.

⁴⁶¹ W1 p. 61. ⁴⁶² W1 p. 62.

essential prerequisite of real wisdom. '... effective knowledge about God is the only thing that puts a man into a right relationship with the objects of his perception, that enables him to ask questions more pertinently, to take stock of relationships more effectively and generally to have a better awareness of circumstances'.⁴⁶³

The statement about the fear of the Lord is not just another distinct saying, but an assertion of principle which is reflected in all of the sayings. The sayings in Proverbs 1-9 and in Job and Sirach, are more theological: but they still appeal to experience, and deny by implication our modern opposition of faith and knowledge. This is because for Israel 'there was only a single, unified world of experience', and theological reflection started from an examination of reality, 'understood in its Old Testament sense'.⁴⁶⁴

The difference between the Old Testament conception of reality and ours is illustrated by the fact that we use abstractions to denote objects of knowledge: life, nature, the world. Israel was not aware of such entities, and this can easily be illustrated in the case of nature, a concept which is essential to us, 'but of which Israel was quite definitely unaware. Indeed, if we use the term in the interpretation of Old Testament texts, then we falsify something that was quite specific to Israel's view'.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶³ W1 pp. 67-68. ⁴⁶⁴ W1 p. 70. ⁴⁶⁵ W1 p. 71.

Later in his book, von Rad warns against confusing the modern outlook on nature and that of the ancient Israelites. He refers to 'the phenomenon of "science by lists" which was widespread in the ancient Near East'. Also he says, 'the tersely expressed description of the events of creation in Genesis 1 is based on a widely ramified knowledge of nature which was to be found expounded in texts of the "science by lists" type'.⁴⁶⁶ But once again, the use of the term 'science' is misleading. In so far as observation and classification are an essential part of Natural Science, lists of phenomena in ancient literature are 'scientific'. And yet there is a great deal more to science than this, and the thinking of the pre-Socratic philosophers went far beyond this.

According to von Rad, '... modern man puzzles to a greater extent over the irregularities which he is unable to fit into the general pattern. The ancients, on the other hand, were amazed if, in the confusion of daily events inherent laws could nevertheless be discerned'.⁴⁶⁷

Comment

Although von Rad believes that the use of the term 'nature' in the interpretation of Old Testament texts will falsify Israel's view, he does not use as evidence for this assertion the absence of a Hebrew word for nature; and in speaking of another matter he states, 'When

⁴⁶⁶ W1 p. 123. ⁴⁶⁷ W1 p. 127.

she spoke of mystery - again the language lacks the term but not the object ...⁴⁶⁸ He does, however, overlook the fact that there are often used in the Old Testament phrases which are equivalent or almost equivalent to our term 'nature'. A few of these will be referred to in connection with work of H. W. Robinson, along with other passages which assume a concept of nature and comment on various aspects of it.

Also, the forced character of von Rad's argument is revealed in a statement which refers to Job 11:8f. 'The "four-part comprehensive formula", heaven, underworld, land and sea ... does not conceive the idea of the "whole" but simply adds together the different areas'.⁴⁶⁹ This is absurd, just as a similar comment on Psalm 139:7-12 would be. His note at the end of chapter I concerning the misleading nature of the abstract term 'nature' is merely obscure: 'One can say, in quite general terms, that she always used certain abstract terms, but that she never reached the point of turning these into broad abstractions'.

Elsewhere he likewise reveals some embarrassment over the fact that sometimes events are spoken of as caused by God, and at other times as if they were the 'functioning of a neutral order. But in the case of a circle of ideas of such general distribution, we simply cannot reckon with a self-consistent range of expressions'.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁸ W1 p. 73. ⁴⁶⁹ W1 p. 72, ft. ⁴⁷⁰ W1 pp. 133-134, ft.

What does von Rad intend to convey by such a vague statement apart from the unwilling and unintended admission that there is much in the Old Testament text which contradicts his thesis? His statement, already quoted, concerning the confused nature of daily events for the ancients, is on a par with the assertion of Mowinckel and Wheeler Robinson that for the ancient Israelite everything was possible, and is open to the same obvious objection.

Von Rad tries to justify his assertion concerning Israel's lack of a concept of nature by contrasting Israel's view with that of the Ionians, 'who are known to have been concerned with the principles of the world as a totality'.⁴⁷¹ That there is a difference between the teaching of the Ionians and that of any writer in the Old Testament will readily be agreed; but the difference does not lie in the fact that the Ionians had a concept of the totality of nature, while Israel lacked it. The difference lies in the fact that the Ionians raised and tried to answer questions about the perceived world of change and how this could arise out of some permanent substance:⁴⁷² questions which were taken up and handed on by other pre-Socratics and culminated in Plato's attempt to define the permanent objects of knowledge and the changing objects of 'belief', and their

⁴⁷¹ W1 p. 71.

⁴⁷² See e.g. J. Burnet, GREEK PHILOSOPHY, London 1914 (reprint 1950) p. 27, cf. p. 105; F.M. Cornford, PLATO'S COSMOLOGY, London 1937, p. 178; K. Freeman, THE PRE-SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHERS, 2nd ed. Oxford 1949, pp. 52, 56-58, 65-68.

relationship. There is no evidence of any such enterprise in ancient Israel, not because Israelites were unaware of nature and its complex mixture of the expected and unexpected, but simply because the question of the true nature of reality and the attempt to answer it by rational reflection and experiment seems never to have occurred to them.

No doubt at this point we touch on a genuine religious difference. For example, Amos and Empedokles were both religious men: But it is hard to conceive of Amos speculating about the workings of nature in the manner of Empedokles because for Amos there is one God whose control over all natural phenomena is an assumed certainty; and therefore speculation would have been pointless and perhaps blasphemous.⁴⁷³ Also, for Amos there were more important matters on which to speak. To say, however, that Amos had no concept of nature is absurd.

The Ionian philosophers, and other pre-Socratics, were inevitably concerned with nature as a whole, but one does not have to share the philosophic-cum-scientific aim in order to possess a concept of nature; and without going as far afield as Israel, there were no doubt many Greeks who had a concept of nature without being in any way interested in the speculations of the philosophical; and when interest was manifested by the population it appears to have been frequently hostile or derisory.

Von Rad's fear seems to be that the use of the term 'nature' to describe the Israelite view of the world will mean reading into it an intellectual scientific

⁴⁷³ For Empedokles, See G. Ph. pp. 71-75; PSP pp. 172-203.

speculation of the type to be found among the ancient philosophers or modern scientists. Like Wheeler Robinson he counters by attributing to Israelite prophets and thinkers a view of God's relationship with the world which is at best a caricature and at worst a complete distortion.

Turning to the wider context in which we find von Rad's statements about the Israelite view of nature, one cannot help but feel that he is moved by a determination to put aside all modern influences in our attempt to understand Israel, and to emphasise the peculiarity and distinct quality of Israel's outlook. This leads to exaggerated statements about Israel's identification of Yahweh and the world of which even von Rad himself betrays awareness. 'Again, the expressions "experience of Yahweh" and "experience of the world" perhaps did not entirely coincide, otherwise the statements in the sentences could simply have been interchanged. But that was never attempted'.

This admission, however, is fatal to his position. The idea that there is some problem in relating faith in Yahweh to sayings about worldly experience is destroyed if there is identity between religious and secular knowledge and belief; but if this identity is denied, then we have two distinct kinds of knowledge. They may be intimately related: but then, on the other hand, they may not, and this may vary in differing degrees from one individual to another. If we glance at actual sayings in Proverbs 10, for example, it is immediately obvious that some of them could merely express that mixture of

collective experience and moralising which characterises all proverbs, and not involve faith in Yahweh at all.

'A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. A son who gathers in summer is prudent, but a son who sleeps in harvest brings shame'. (RSV)⁴⁷⁴

Von Rad recognises this, but shrinks from imposing on the Israelite outlook some modern dichotomy such as that between faith and reason. The only way he can avoid this is by insisting on an identification of the world and God which he is then compelled to admit is not correct; and, indeed, scarcely makes sense.

His next step is to see in wisdom sayings a recognition of patterns in the world, which was always in Israel linked with recognition that these patterns are established by God. This assertion requires the support of clear evidence, and this is not forthcoming. To what extent were kings like Omri and Ahab, or Jeroboam II and Hezekiah, moved by such a faith in their political and military calculations? The experiences of Michaiah and Elijah, Amos and Isaiah suggest that the outlook of these kings, and no doubt that of their subjects, was more complex.

What are the patterns or orders which God has established? Job, Ecclesiastes and certain Psalms raise serious doubts about the existence of such orders and their supposed dependence on the will of God. The Book of Job, for all its talk of God, is an expression of

⁴⁷⁴ vv. 4, 5.

agonised bewilderment in the face of meaningless suffering, and the Preacher finds ample evidence at hand to support his contention that all is vanity. Whatever hope and faith is expressed in such Psalms as 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 137, it takes little or no imagination to see in them fear bordering on despair and a disillusionment which would not be possible in a world where divine order presented for immediate perception undeniable evidence of God's will and nature.

Are we to suppose that such questioning arose only late in Old Testament history? This seems improbable in itself, and is made very unlikely by the existence of similar questioning in much older ancient Near Eastern literature. These questionings by no means completely invalidate the common sense and prudential generalisations based on experience, but they do invalidate the argument of von Rad that certain orders or patterns were observed in 'worldly' experience, and at the same time spontaneously assumed by Israelites to have been established and to be upheld by God.

In distinguishing between a period of pan-sacralism and one of more apparently secular outlook, von Rad asserts that a revolution must have taken place over a short period in people's thinking. Nevertheless, he seems to want to make the revolution a comparatively insignificant one: in both periods he wishes us to see Yahweh immediately present and active in the world, even though the recognition of this presence might not be expressed in quite the same way in each period.

An attempt to explain the change in the character of

the text raises important questions; but whether or not an intellectual revolution provides the solution to the problem, are we to suppose that Abner and Joab, Hushai and Ahithophel, Absalom and Solomon, or David himself all seriously believed, indeed assumed that Yahweh was himself an active participant in the affairs of the world? and therefore the immediate controller of natural events, too? Although these men cannot have believed in an inflexible determinism inherent in the events of human life, they seem to have had a pretty shrewd idea of what various kinds of force and persuasion could accomplish. And what of Abigail and Bathsheba?

Nor can we infer that the outlook of Saul and Jonathan was significantly different; nor that the beliefs and behaviour of their generation were notably other than that of Solomon and Rehoboam. The events recorded of the so-called pan-sacralistic period are of special significance or even quite extraordinary: the upheaval of Philistine invasion, the anointing of a king, a daring attack and incredible victory. In situations of despair or great tension it is not unusual for recourse to be had to the guidance, consolation or inspiration of religion, whether real or merely superstitious; what would pass unnoticed in daily life becomes charged with significance for good or ill.

That there is a difference in character between the narrative concerning Saul and the Succession Narrative is obvious and important; but there is also a difference between the narratives of Jacob's doings and those of Joseph in Genesis. Does this indicate some revolution in

outlook between the period of Jacob and that of Joseph, the Joseph story being told in a way similar to that of the Succession Narrative? Or rather, do not differences of this sort reflect the standpoint, religious or literary, of the narrator?⁴⁷⁵

Finally, we must return to von Rad's question about the Israelite perception of reality compared with that of other peoples in the ancient Near East. Presumably by 'reality' he means the world as it presents itself to us in perception, plus the way in which this external world is understood.

When an Egyptian and an Israelite looked at an ox they must have seen the same thing, and unless perceptions at this level were similar, communication would be impossible. The question must therefore be about that kind of perception which is determined partly by what the percipient believes, desires and expects. There are perceptions of the world which very clearly involve judgement and presuppositions. One farmer looks at the ox and sees a potential sacrifice; another sees a valuable instrument of work. One man sees in the sacrifice a sufficient means of placating the god; another the symbolic expression of contrition or goodwill or awe, without which the offering would be meaningless or worse. Obviously this has nothing to do with being an Egyptian or being an Israelite. At this level racial or national

⁴⁷⁵ Cf. J.L. Crenshaw, STUDIES IN ANCIENT ISRAELITE WISDOM, New York, Prolegomenon, pp. 16-20.

differences might come into play, as with the famous sacred cow of India, but such differences are much more the exception than the rule.

One man sees in war the inevitable occasional expression of human greed and assertiveness; another, the fruit of diplomatic folly; another the judgement of God. There will be differences of outlook related to natural events, such as the rising of a river, the appearance of a spring, the coming of rain, the growth or failure of crops, the successful increase of herds, death by disease, and so on. To what extent can such differences of outlook be generalised into differences between nations or other groups? There seems to have been a distinct difference between the Israelite view of death and the Egyptian; but there must surely have been variety within each group, and also common elements of reaction and perception. There is also what one might call a dynamic temporal element: the change which can take place both in the individual and the group, or the majority of the group, or leaders of the group.

We must also beware of being misled by the expression of exceptional sentiments within a nation or group. Empedokles of Akragas would see in the animal some hapless human relative, and believed that he had himself already appeared in the world as a boy and girl, a bush, a bird and a fish. It would be hazardous indeed to conclude from this that 'the Greeks' believed in the transmigration of souls.

476 See J. Burnet, EARLY GREEK PHILOSOPHY, 4th ed., London 1930, pp. 225-226, Fr. 137; p. 223, Fr. 117.

Furthermore, when forming conclusions about ancient peoples, the 'fossils' from which we make our inferences are words, pictures and artefacts; attitudes, feelings and motives do not fossilise. And while there is an intimate relation between mental and emotional states on the one hand, and their expression in words and action on the other, this relation is also often a subtle and complex one. Sometimes the feelings, thoughts and motives of the writer, painter or builder are clear enough; but this is not always so. If a writer or artist gives expression to an attitude, it is very unlikely that his attitude will be unique, and he may well be expressing a point of view which he knows to be shared with other people, deliberately saying what the majority of his nation feel, or what men in general feel. There will be times, however, when we cannot be sure or hope to be sure where the boundaries are to be drawn indicating the limits of this feeling, or to what extent the depth of the feeling has been determined by the community in which the individual lives, his own temperament, his individual experience, the traditions of his people, his acquaintance with foreign traditions, and so on.

These considerations are assertions of the obvious, but they are also assertions of what it is easy to forget. They are also tiresome, because they set a limit to those generalisations which are easy to grasp and which so greatly simplify our attempts to understand the world. Among these generalisations are those concerning the religion of the Hebrews which scholars strive to make; and while the attempt is needful for any proper under-

standing of the Bible, it could be that it is sometimes motivated by a determination to find differences between Israel and her neighbours which obscure the common elements in the experiences of men, women and children, draw the boundary lines between them in the wrong places, and tend to strengthen that understanding of God's nature which at its worst martyred Stephen.

Von Rad speaks of a specific spiritual and religious context of understanding given by Israel to many of the most elementary experiences; but in this connection, what are we to say, for example, of the Egyptian Dispute over Suicide, the Instruction for King Meri-Ka-Re, and the Instruction of Amen-Em-Opet?⁴⁷⁷

To return to von Rad's question, the real world must in some sense have been the same for all ancient Near Eastern peoples, to some extent it must have varied from nation to nation, and in some ways it must have varied from person to person regardless of race or nation; and the determination these degrees of difference and similarity with respect to any given view of or question concerning reality might be a complex and subtle undertaking in which no certain conclusion is possible.

⁴⁷⁷ See J.B. Pritchard (ed.), ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS RELATING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT, 3rd ed., Princeton 1969, pp. 405-507; 414-418; 421-424.

Section D. H. Wheeler Robinson⁴⁷⁸

12. GOD AND NATURE

Robinson opens his investigation by stating that when people today speak about nature they mean by this that there is physical power at work in the world which is the immediate cause of all the events we perceive, which creates physical things and regulates them. We may take it that Robinson is referring to those events we perceive which are not the effects of human decision and action. In support of this assertion about modern usage Robinson quotes a definition of 'nature' in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary: 'The creative and regulative physical power which is conceived of as operating in the physical (sic, should be 'material') world and as the immediate cause of all its phenomena'. According to Robinson the equivalent of this idea in Hebrew would be 'God'; and he seems to mean by this that instead of looking at the natural world as a great integrated organism with a life and power of its own, as we do today, the Israelites saw the personal deity perpetually at work. The Israelites had no word for 'nature', and for Robinson this is the inevitable consequence of their belief that God creates and regulates what we should call natural events and is their immediate cause.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁸ H. Wheeler Robinson, INSPIRATION AND REVELATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, Oxford 1946. Cf. THE NATURE-MIRACLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, JTS, Vol. 45, 1944, pp. 1-12.

⁴⁷⁹ 1R p. 1.

Various texts are quoted in support of this view: a vigorous psalm of praise emphasising the might of God; the suffering of the people of Ashdod from tumours; God breathing into the model of man which he had made; God taking away the breath and giving the spirit; and the place of Wisdom in creation.⁴⁸⁰

Robinson further quotes various passages from Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiasticus, II Maccabees and Jeremiah to show how God was regarded as directly at work in the womb forming a baby and how he then breathed life into it. Such passages concerning the growth of the embryo in the womb and the birth of offspring offer 'an instructive line of inquiry for the Hebrew idea of the relation of God to Nature'.⁴⁸¹

Robinson also refers to passages concerning the eschatological transformation of nature, and insists that descriptions of this transformation must be taken realistically and not as mere poetic imagery. If we find such descriptions impossible to accept, 'it is partly because we come to Nature with an inveterate prejudice in favour of its fixity and virtual independence of God'.⁴⁸²

In speaking of the nature miracles Robinson claims that they 'illuminate the Hebrew conception of Nature', and are also an important means of revelation. 'We must not make them more difficult to understand by imposing on the Hebrew mind a modern view of Nature'. And he goes on

⁴⁸⁰ Psalm 29:3,5,7,9; I Samuel 5:6; Genesis 2:7; Psalm 104:29-30 (in both cases: וַיְבָרֵךְ); Proverbs 8:22ff.
⁴⁸¹ 1R pp. 25-28. ⁴⁸² 1R pp. 28-33.

to quote with approval words of Mowinckel: '"The fundamental principle in the world outlook of the primitive man is that everything is possible"'.⁴⁸³ For Robinson it follows from this that the attempt to classify miracles as supernatural events and count them on this basis would be futile or even impossible. What we regard as ordinary events, such as rainfall, would have to be included; not to speak of physical or psychical phenomena which the Hebrew normally attributed to angels or spirits. It is obvious that if, for Robinson, all natural events are directly caused by God, then 'miracle' cannot be defined and distinguished in terms of the direct action of God, and those events we term 'miracles' must be distinguished from ordinary events in some other way; for example, 'Nature and history are simply different aspects of the continued activity of God, and miracles are the representative occasions on which that activity specially impresses human consciousness'.⁴⁸⁴

Robinson is in fact reluctant to recognise miracles in the Old Testament because he thinks the term implies the kind of closed system assumed or believed to be established by natural scientists. If nature is a closed system then inexplicable occurrences must be attributed to supernatural causes. As he rightly insists, the ancient Israelites, or at any rate those whose views are given in the Old Testament, did not see nature as a closed system. They thought of the natural world as more directly under

⁴⁸³ 1R p. 34. ⁴⁸⁴ 1R p. 39.

the governance of God. For Robinson this means that the whole of nature is a miracle; or, to put the same thing another way, there is no such thing as a miracle. God is always actively creating natural events, and a bloody Nile or floating axe-head are simply natural events which only occur, that is, which are only brought into existence occasionally, and with the aim of impressing something on the human mind.

Comment

This summary of Robinson's main argument shows that he was emphasising a genuine characteristic of the Old Testament text: the tendency to see God actively at work in nature in a way which is not generally the case today. This characteristic is obvious, but it is also important and it is right to draw attention to it. Nevertheless, Robinson's argument is open to serious objections which show that his exposition of Old Testament teaching is often unclear and inaccurate.

First, his opening remarks suggest that if there is no single word in a language for a certain concept, then the concept does not exist. 'The Hebrew vocabulary includes no word equivalent to our term "Nature"'. Therefore the idea of nature as we understand it did not exist in the Hebrew mind. Admittedly, Robinson does not draw this conclusion outright, but his opening remarks unquestionably convey the impression that the absence of a word for 'nature' from Hebrew indicates the absence of the concept to go with it, and since the sentence quoted is the very first sentence of the book it carries considerable weight, and its significance is borne out by

the definition quoted from the dictionary.

As a linguistic argument this is not true, and a few modern examples reveal this. An area like Wensleydale has small villages and scattered farmsteads with a strong emphasis on the breeding of cattle and sheep. These features together lend a definite character to the dale, but there is not any single word which denotes this. The same can be said of the stone walls and isolated byres. Or the same could be said of such things as the flavour of a given composer's music, or the more literal flavour of a dish on the dinner table. Certain types of architecture have names; but buildings may make a distinct impression on us without belonging to those categories denoted by single words. It is a well known fact of translation, even where the languages concerned are closely related, that the true sense of a passage cannot be conveyed by a word for word exchange; nor is this merely the consequence of variety in the order in which words are used in different languages.

It is worth noting the opinion of Walther Eichrodt in this connection. For Eichrodt the concept of covenant is of fundamental importance in Israelite religion, but he believes this concept to be expressed even in passages where ברית is not used. 'The decisive consideration on this point is neither the presence nor absence of the actual term $\text{b}^{\text{e}}\text{r}^{\text{i}}\text{t}$, as certain, all too naive critics seem to imagine'.⁴⁸⁵ 'The crucial point is not - as an all too

⁴⁸⁵ E1 pp. 13-14.

naive criticism sometimes seems to think - the occurrence or absence of the Hebrew word *b'erit*'.⁴⁸⁶ In speaking of the meaning of sacrifice Eichrodt says, 'The value of linguistic usage as proof is in the last resort decisively rebutted by the automatic employment of the old terminology in even the very latest writings, by which time the ideas that underlay the actual wording were quite certainly dead'. Eichrodt refers to the phrase *לְחֵם אֱלֹהִים* found in Ezekiel, Malachi and the Priestly Code. 'These instances perfectly exemplify the persistence of cultic terminology even when the ideas corresponding to it have been changed out of all recognition'.⁴⁸⁷ Whether or not Eichrodt's judgement on any particular text be accepted, his assertion that the kind of linguistic argument we are considering is unjustified is correct.

If therefore a passage in English concerning nature is translated into classical Hebrew we shall find no suitable equivalent in Hebrew for the English term. It would be hazardous in the extreme to conclude from this that the idea or awareness of nature exists among the English but did not exist among the Israelites of the ancient world, or if it did exist bore no resemblance to the English concept.

Second, there often appear in the Old Testament phrases which could be translated by the English word 'nature'. Whether or not the equivalence is exact, it is near enough to show that the Hebrews unquestionably had some kind of awareness of the natural world similar

⁴⁸⁶ El pp. 17-18. ⁴⁸⁷ El p. 143.

to our own even if this did not lead to the kind of self conscious investigation known to us as Natural Science. A few examples at random from the text show that Israelites did use phrases which indicate what we mean by 'nature'. 'The heaven and the earth'; 'Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth'; 'in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven'. Melchizedek blesses Abram in the name of God Most High, 'possessor of heaven and earth'. Moses' Song opens with the words, 'Give ear, ye heavens, and I will speak; And let the earth hear the words of my mouth'. Psalm 24 announces at its opening, 'The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof'. Jeremiah asserts, 'He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding hath he stretched out the heavens'. Psalms 8 and 104 seem to assume a concept of nature, and these and other such passages comment, often vividly on various aspects of it.⁴⁸⁸

E. W. Heaton in writing about Wisdom often uses the term 'nature' in describing Hebrew teaching. For example, in commenting on a text in Jeremiah he states, 'It is clear that this contrast between the order of nature and the moral disorder of Israel entered deeply into Jeremiah's awareness'.⁴⁸⁹ There does not seem to be anything misleading in this.

Third, Robinson himself shows scant regard for his own linguistic principle. He states that there was no

⁴⁸⁸ Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 1:2; Genesis 2:4b; 14:19; Deuteronomy 32:1; Jeremiah 10:12.

⁴⁸⁹ THE HEBREW KINGDOMS, London 1968, p. 180. See chapter on Wisdom, pp. 165-196.

Hebrew word for 'personality', and therefore the kinship of the human and divine has to be expressed in terms of bodily resemblance.⁴⁹⁰ Despite the absence of a Hebrew equivalent for 'personality' Robinson seems to believe that the idea existed in Hebrew minds.

More important, the Israelites had no word for 'history', but this does not stop Robinson speaking of the revelation of God in history and attributing to it great and controlling significance in Hebrew religious thought. 'History supplied a revelation of God which Nature ... could never afford.' The agricultural festivals assimilated from the Canaanites were re-interpreted in the light of this historical revelation. 'The story of Creation fitly stands on the opening pages of the Bible, for it is fundamental to all the subsequent history as the Hebrew conceived it'. 'Nature is taken up into history as a constant revelation of both the goodness and wisdom of God'.⁴⁹¹

Robinson is by no means alone in attributing crucial importance to historical revelation in Old Testament religion, but if the absence of a word indicates the absence of a concept the lack of a Hebrew word equivalent to our 'history' means that the Israelites cannot have engaged in historical reflection as we understand it; and in that case so-called historical revelation cannot have had the importance for them which is claimed. Robinson, however, wishes to assert the importance of

⁴⁹⁰ 1R p. 20. ⁴⁹¹ 1R pp. 4, 20, 21.

history and therefore ignores the absence of any Hebrew equivalent for the English word. On the other hand, 'nature' for Robinson represents a dangerous concept, a threat to the true revelation of God, whether this threat emanated from the Canaanites of the ancient world or the Natural Science of the modern. He therefore makes play with a linguistic consideration in order to bolster his contention that the Hebrews were not influenced by the concept of nature, and does not produce his conclusion as the result of a proper argument from linguistic usage. This is no mere pedantic objection but illustrates a rationalising tendency which can, and in this case does lead to serious confusion.

Fourth, this confusion is most clearly seen in the use of the word 'nature' itself. If the Israelites had no word for nature and therefore no concept of nature such as we have, can we meaningfully speak of their attitude to nature at all? Can we meaningfully speak of their beliefs about the relationship between God and nature? If we do, we are making some kind of translation of their ideas and beliefs into our own terminology, and therefore our own concepts; and in order to accomplish this satisfactorily two things are required: we should try to give a clear indication of the Hebrew view without using the word 'nature' at all; and we should then define 'nature' as we use it and see if it is possible to make a translation into modern English which does not at the same time distort the Hebrew meaning. This might appear to be an unnecessarily laborious process, but it is only by using this method that we avoid vagueness and inaccuracy.

What is meant, for example, by saying that nature is taken up into history; The meaning is by no means immediately apparent, and we are in no position to judge what kind of relationship exists between this statement in English and any statement or collection of statements in the Hebrew Old Testament; and this is especially so when we bear in mind that the two most significant words have no single Hebrew equivalent and are linked by a metaphorical expression.

As we have seen Robinson does, indeed, provide us with a definition of 'nature', taken from the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. He does not make it clear whether or not he thinks this is the only or the usual sense given to the word in modern English, but since it is the only definition he quotes we must assume this to be his meaning. Curious results follow from taking this definition seriously and applying it to Robinson's own statements about what the Israelites believed. For example, the heading of this first chapter is, The Hebrew Conception of Nature; but the whole point of his opening remarks is that the Israelites had no conception of nature, and that 'The only way to render this idea into Hebrew would be to say simply "God"'. We must therefore re-write the heading, The Hebrew Conception of God: but it is doubtful that Robinson would have accepted this as a fair representation of his meaning.

Other absurdities abound if we persist in taking Robinson's definition seriously. For example, he describes the Israelite idea of God as compared with the inferior nature deities, and states, 'He was above Nature, as its

Creator and Controller according to a moral purpose'.⁴⁹²
This statement becomes meaningless on Robinson's interpretative principle; and what do we make of the statement concerning the Song of Songs, 'The erotic use of some of these references to Nature accompanies a real appreciation of natural beauty'?⁴⁹³

Of course, Robinson was not writing absurdities or producing meaningless collocations of words: but this was because he was ignoring the quoted definition of nature and employing the word in a different sense. A number of definitions are given in the Oxford English Dictionary, and the one quoted by Robinson is given as IV 11. However, definition IV 13 runs, 'The material world, or its collective objects and phenomena, especially those with which man is most directly in contact; frequently the features and products of the earth itself, as contrasted with those of human civilisation'. There is no mention here of any power at work in the material world, and the word simply denotes certain very extensive phenomena presented to our senses and upon which reflection of various kinds often takes place.

This is the usual meaning of the word in modern English usage rather than the meaning quoted by Robinson. As R. G. Collingwood puts it when commenting on the Ionians' question, 'What is nature?'.

'A modern European, if he were asked the same question, "What is nature?" would be likelier to turn it into the question "What kinds of things exist in the natural world?" and to answer it by embarking on a descriptive account of the natural world, or

⁴⁹² 1R p. 2. ⁴⁹³ 1R p. 4.

natural history. This is because in modern European languages the word "nature" is on the whole most often used in a collective sense for the sum total or aggregate of natural things'.⁴⁹⁴

Robinson quite naturally slips into using the word in its more commonly accepted sense, and we quite naturally follow him: but if we accept this escape from the absurdities involved in applying Robinson's preferred definition to his own argument, we must at the same time reject his opening assertion of the vast gulf between ancient Hebrew thought on this subject, and our own. Once again, it must be acknowledged that Robinson, in his anxiety to make a clear distinction between the truth of Old Testament revelation and the quite different view of the world thought to be implied in modern science, has selected a definition suitable to his immediate purpose, instead of examining linguistic usage carefully to see what conclusions can be drawn from it. If there is this wide separation between Hebrew thought and modern thought, it will have to be established on other grounds.

Only a few sentences after his quotation from the SOED, Robinson also quotes J. Burnet's statement that Greek philosophy began and ended with the search for what was abiding in the flux of things; and his comment is, 'The Hebrew found that in God'.⁴⁹⁵ Once again Robinson is emphasising that for the Hebrews there was an intimate link between the natural world and God, and perhaps we are

⁴⁹⁴ R.G. Collingwood, THE IDEA OF NATURE, Oxford 1945, p. 43.

⁴⁹⁵ 1R p. 1. Robinson refers to EGPh. 2nd ed. p. 15.

meant to infer that the Hebrews achieved through faith what the Greek thinkers failed to grasp by rational inquiry.

What Robinson fails to mention is that if the Hebrews whose thoughts are recorded in the Old Testament found in God that which gives unity to nature, it was a different kind of unity from that being sought by the Greek thinkers of the ancient world. For example, the earliest of these thinkers, the Ionians, speculated about the primitive stuff out of which everything is made, Thales regarding this as water, Anaximander as *τὸ ἄπειρον*, the boundless, and Anaximenes as air. How exactly we should interpret such speculations need not delay us, but it is evident that what we have here are the rudiments of what we call scientific speculation, and these highly original thinkers are still remembered as those who initiated a new way of looking at the world, with lasting significance for Western civilisation. This new way might or might not be combined with theistic belief.

When we turn to the records of their contemporaries in Israel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and II Isaiah, we find ourselves in a different world, where altogether different considerations rule the thoughts, feelings and aims of the prophets and their contemporaries, with a strong theistic belief dominating everything. Even the account of creation in Genesis 1 which might have been formulated at the same time as the Ionians were speculating on the true nature of the world, shows no interest in common with the Greek thinkers. The question, what is the ultimate or irreducible stuff out of which the natural world is made,

simply does not arise.

What meaning, then, can be given to Robinson's statement? His meaning must be that Jeremiah, Ezekiel and II Isaiah, along with whoever was responsible for Genesis 1, regarded God himself as so intimately at work in the natural world that speculation of the Ionian type would be shunned as an unnecessary, futile and possibly dangerous probing into the mystery of continual divine creation. In fact the Hebrew view would be that there are not any natural processes at all, only divine creative acts; and what links such diverse phenomena as the olive tree, birds in the tree, soil and stone, cattle grazing, sun shining and rain falling, and makes them all part of nature is the fact that God is in them all, bringing them into being and bringing about every aspect of growth, maturity and decay. 'But all this detail in Nature is unified not simply or chiefly by intrinsic qualities ... but by the universal dependence on God who made them what they are and sustains them in it'.⁴⁹⁶

This is very different from the assertion that what makes them all part of a single nature is the fact that they are all manifestations of a vast and complex process whereby one fundamental something reveals itself in a multitude of different forms according to natural processes which are at least in principle open to investigation. As already stated, this belief could in theory be combined with a belief in God, or the gods: but in fact, not with

⁴⁹⁶ 1R p. 10.

the Hebrew belief in God according to Robinson's interpretation.

Greek philosophy is a large and very varied subject in itself, and a comparison between Greek thought and that revealed in the Hebrew scriptures would be a lengthy process. Robinson's swift remark does not give the impression of being based on any such close comparison, and it cannot be pursued here; but the question must be raised as to what justification there is for attributing to the Hebrew prophets or any other thinkers in ancient Israel the view of God's intimate relation to nature which Robinson claims. If men like Jeremiah, Ezekiel and II Isaiah, or even the writers of Genesis 1, did not deal explicitly with this issue, we must make inferences as best we can from those texts which touch upon God and the natural world. There are not a few of these in the Old Testament and many are referred to by Robinson.

Let us return to the texts to which Robinson refers at the very beginning of his book. Psalm 29 is a vigorous psalm of praise emphasising the might of God. "hip is repeated for emphasis, and it is obvious that the author has not hesitated to use imagery to make vivid the overruling power of God in the forces at work in nature. The terrifying peals of thunder remind both men and gods that there is but one king. But the king does not replace the forces of nature. We are surely not to suppose that Yahweh actually makes mountains skip about like wild calves, or literally shakes the desert. This is all part of the imagery. Can we even conclude that the poet regarded the thunder as literally the voice of God? In

fact, if we interpreted the psalm along the lines Robinson is emphasising here, and especially if we regarded it as originally a Canaanite psalm, or based on a Canaanite model, we should endanger that belief in God's transcendence which Robinson wishes to make a feature of Hebrew thought, sharply distinguishing it from the Canaanite and Babylonian. 'He was above Nature, as its Creator and Controller'.⁴⁹⁷ Psalm 29 certainly illustrates that doctrine, but it is wrong to press the details of poetic imagery to produce a God who is the immediate cause of all phenomena.

The plague of tumours which afflicts the Philistines of Ashdod, is a punishment from God, and this is metaphorically described as his hand being heavy upon them. This does illustrate Robinson's idea: God is the immediate cause of this phenomenon, both in Ashdod and elsewhere in Philistine territory; but we should describe it as a miracle, and the concept of the miraculous will require separate treatment.

God breathed into the model he had made to make it live; and as a general truth about God it is asserted that the breath or spirit which is their life comes and goes entirely according to the will of God. Neither of these texts means that God is the immediate cause of breathing, which was no doubt taken to proceed of its own accord until God stopped the process. It might well have been believed that God first put breath into each baby at birth, although it cannot have been envisaged as taking place as described in Genesis 2. Nevertheless, Robinson does interpret certain passages as depicting God as

directly at work in the womb. He believes that the womb was looked upon as 'a sphere in which God was continually at work'.⁴⁹⁸ And so the picture of God making man in Genesis 2 is not just the description of an historical event but reveals, even if not literally, what happens every time a human being is conceived and develops in the womb.

But is it necessary to take literally such a statement as, 'I formed thee in the belly'? The impression given by the Old Testament is that women will bear children unless prevented by God; and this prevention may have some special purpose. In Genesis 1, God's blessing gives the actual power to procreate, just as the plants reproduce themselves by means of seeds. The blessing, to which Robinson himself refers, suggests the imparting by God of a particular power which will then work of its own accord unless God intervenes to stop it. Statements about God actually making a person in the womb are surely meant to emphasise the ultimate control of God over human life and destiny; or in Job 3:15, the 'equality' of men. In the case of Jeremiah it must refer to the profound feeling he had that God had a purpose for him, which he must fulfil. If he does not fulfil this purpose he might as well have never lived. We can scarcely imagine God actually modelling babies inside innumerable women, and although the limits of our imagination do not determine the meaning of Old Testament texts, one wonders if the Hebrews thought so very differently from us in this respect.

Proverbs 8:22ff is again a poetic passage and it is hard to see how details in it can be used to support Robinson's thesis. The notion that God's wisdom is

revealed in creation is perfectly consistent with the notion of natural processes occurring according to 'laws' which are themselves the evidence of that wisdom. This text simply does not reveal God as the immediate cause of all phenomena.

Robinson's failure to appreciate the poetic or figurative nature of Old Testament texts is well illustrated elsewhere. He quotes a series of texts to illustrate the activity of God which is a continuation of his original creative activity.⁴⁹⁹ All the passages are from the Psalms, except Jeremiah 10:13, and this is poetic in style and very like passages in the Psalms. If we read these texts literally God is indeed the immediate cause of the phenomena referred to: mists rising, winds blowing, grass growing, cattle and ravens being fed, and so on. These passages cannot be pressed to give such a meaning, however, any more than the harvest hymns we sing today, which express similar sentiments, are understood to depict a God who actually produces rain or sunshine or pushes up crops at given times in given places.

Robinson himself is not consistent in his interpretation, and immediately after quoting the Old Testament passages speaks of the divine maintenance of nature being effected 'through established ordinances and inherent energies, as the reference to the seed-containing fruit of Genesis 1 implies'.⁵⁰⁰ This is a very important point to which we shall have to return; but it must simply be indicated here

⁴⁹⁹ 1R p. 24. ⁵⁰⁰ 1R p. 24.

as inconsistent with the approach with which Robinson set out and to which he often reverts. It also raises the question how we are to interpret the sabbath rest of God. Robinson wishes to emphasise that God's maintenance of nature is a continuation of his creative work, and the rest of God is quickly passed over:⁵⁰¹ but the sabbath rest occupies a significant place in the P account and cannot be so lightly ignored. In fact, Robinson's handling of the idea well illustrates how he wanted to see God the creator ever active in nature, but was at the same time aware that God's present activity in nature, however we look at it, is simply not the kind of direct action described in Genesis 1.

In speaking of the P account Robinson asserts that the statement that God rested is the only crudely anthropomorphic statement in the P narrative.⁵⁰² One wonders in that case quite how we are to evaluate statements about God making, speaking, separating and seeing, all of which are prominent in the narrative. Furthermore, Robinson will not take the sabbath rest figuratively since in Exodus 31:17 it is obviously viewed as a literal fact. In that case the rest must be taken to imply a description of work in the foregoing narrative, and Robinson accepts this and favours the idea of God working on a pre-existent chaos. In that case one would have thought the notion of God working was crudely anthropomorphic; and it must be remarked that he believes the text to express physical

⁵⁰¹ 1R pp. 23-24. ⁵⁰² 1R pp. 18-19.

resemblance between man and God, and acknowledges that some have regarded that expression as crudely anthropomorphic. Robinson discusses the matter and accepts this anthropomorphic element, but seems to explain away its alleged crudity by recognising the necessity to think of God in anthropomorphic terms.⁵⁰³ This necessity would in turn lead to the kinship between the human and the divine being expressed in terms of likeness. 'The living personality of God was ... conceived in all periods after the image of man, and had to be so conceived. Indeed, the necessity still remains'.⁵⁰⁴ But if that is so, why not recognise all the anthropomorphic expressions in the P account, and why single out one as crude?

Robinson seems to have a fundamental misconception of the use of language, and to neglect the natural or even essential use of metaphor in commonplace everyday affairs. We read that God employs each object in nature according to its intrinsic capacity and fitness, and the application of this notion to the text suggests that we are to take literally assertions that clouds make suitable chariots, and winds messengers; that righteousness pours out of the sky, and salvation emerges from the earth.⁵⁰⁵ The appropriateness of given references is surely a literary one to be sought in the poetic imagination rather than the divine manipulation of elements in the external world.

⁵⁰³ 1R pp. 19-20. ⁵⁰⁴ 1R p. 20.

⁵⁰⁵ 1R p. 16.

13. MIRACLES, THEOPHANIES AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF NATURE

We must next investigate the influence of Robinson's basic approach to the relationship of God to nature on his concept of the miraculous. The inclusion of the story of the tumours in the texts to which he refers is significant.⁵⁰⁶ It illustrates Robinson's contention that so-called miracles should not in fact be distinguished from other natural events as specially caused by God, since all natural events are so caused. Nevertheless, there is no escaping the fact that there are nature miracles in the Old Testament, and hence the title of chapter III and the acknowledgement that there are 'three chief terms used in the Old Testament to denote "miracle"'.⁵⁰⁷ How, then, do we define the miraculous?

One attempt which Robinson makes can be dismissed immediately. To say that a miracle is an event which specially impresses the human mind still leaves us with the question why the event was impressive. The answer to the question in such cases as the floating axe-head or the bloody Nile is that the event was a miracle; and we are no further on.

Robinson's investigation into the meanings of מִוֶּלֶד, מִפֶּלֶא, and מִפֶּלֶא, is no more satisfactory than the above definition. He has already told us that each of these terms is used to denote the miraculous. He then goes on to show that they are frequently used of natural or normal events and things. He then concludes from this

⁵⁰⁶ 1R p. 1. ⁵⁰⁷ 1R p. 34.

that the ancient Israelites regarded as miraculous what we should look upon as purely natural phenomena. In other words, if we take each of these words as equivalent to 'miracle' in English, we shall then find in the Old Testament many assertions in which 'miracle' denotes something we should regard as natural or normal; so that a miraculous meaning is given to what we understand and explain in naturalistic terms. On the other hand, if every natural event is a miracle, then none is, since the word 'miracle' is used to distinguish a given event from other events; but if all events are regarded as caused by the supernatural intervention of the deity, then there is no basis for the distinction, and it could never occur to anyone. Hence Robinson's assertion that the distinction between natural and supernatural implied in the use of the word 'miracle' is not found in Hebrew thought.⁵⁰⁸

Such, in brief, is Robinson's argument, and the first and obvious comment which must be made upon it is that if ancient Israelites did not make our modern distinction between the natural and supernatural; and if this distinction is implied in the use of the word 'miracle'; then אֲתָנָה, מִוִּפֶּת, and נִפְלְאוֹת, cannot mean 'miracle', they cannot specifically denote the miraculous.

And we must here take note of an ambiguity in what Robinson says when he asserts that they 'denote "miracle"'.⁵⁰⁹ It is quite true that all three words are used on occasion to denote miraculous events, but it does not follow from

⁵⁰⁸ 1R p. 37. ⁵⁰⁹ 1R p. 34.

this that it is the specifically miraculous character of the events which is being referred to. Robinson's phrase, however, could be taken to mean that it is. Nor does the ambiguity belong merely to this verbal expression, but to the whole of Robinson's argument concerning **אוֹת**, **מוֹפֵת**, and **נִפְלְאוֹת**. Sometimes he wants to make these words mean 'miracle', and then he can argue that their reference to natural events shows that the Israelites looked upon all natural occurrences as miraculous. For example, the use of **אוֹת** to refer to the rainbow 'shows how "miraculous" meaning could be given to what is for us a purely natural phenomenon'.⁵¹⁰ At other times he does not want them to mean 'miracle', because he wants to argue that the ancient Israelites did not distinguish between the natural and the supernatural, whereas the concept of the miraculous implies that distinction.⁵¹¹ As an exemplary exercise in eating one's cake and having it, this could hardly be bettered.

When we turn to the actual usage of **אוֹת** and **מוֹפֵת**, it becomes immediately obvious that to regard either of them as meaning 'miracle' results in absurdities. For example, in the case of **אוֹת**, we should have to say that Rahab's scarlet cord was a miracle, or that circumcision or the stone memorials of the crossing of Jordan were miracles.⁵¹² In the case of **מוֹפֵת** we should be obliged to classify as miracles Isaiah's walking about naked and Ezekiel's symbolic removal, and failure to mourn publicly

⁵¹⁰ 1R p. 35. ⁵¹¹ 1R p. 37.

⁵¹² Joshua 2:12; 4:6; Genesis 17:11.

for his wife's death.⁵¹³

The meaning of **סִימָן**, is 'sign' or 'token', and although BDB give 'miracle' as a meaning, this is immediately qualified by the remark 'as pledges or attestations of divine presence and interposition'. In his discussion of **מוֹפֶת** Robinson quotes S. R. Driver as stating, 'Mopheth is a portent, an occurrence regarded merely as something extraordinary, 'oth is a sign, i.e. something ... ordinary or extraordinary, as the case may be, regarded as significant of a truth beyond itself, or impressed with a divine purpose'.⁵¹⁴ One conclusion we are compelled to draw is that the application of **סִימָן** to the rainbow was regarded by the Israelites as miraculous.

For **מוֹפֶת**, BDB give the meanings 'wonder, sign, portent'; and it is quite clear from the way the word is used that it applies to extraordinary events which convey some message, some warning from God. Although the events are extraordinary, however, they are not necessarily miraculous, as we have seen. Also, Driver is wrong in saying that **מוֹפֶת** refers to an occurrence regarded merely as something extraordinary, since such occurrences conveyed meaning.

נִפְלְאוֹת is the participle of the niph'al denominative verb meaning 'be surpassing, extraordinary'.⁵¹⁵ It denotes specifically what is marvellous, wonderful, and it is not surprising that it should be applied to such things as the plagues in Egypt and the miraculous parting

⁵¹³ Isaiah 20:3; Ezekiel 12:6,11; 24:24.

⁵¹⁴ 1R p. 37. ⁵¹⁵ BDB p. 810.

of the Jordan.⁵¹⁶ Nevertheless, it does not mean 'miracles', and its application to a natural event such as the coming of rain does not mean that such a phenomenon was regarded by the Israelites as miraculous.⁵¹⁷ In Psalm 119:18 it refers to commandments in the law of God, and these could not be termed miracles.

This might seem to be a somewhat hairsplitting criticism of Robinson's argument. If Eliphaz can speak of the rain as one of God's marvels, is this not to all intents and purposes the same as calling it a miracle? The word is generally applied to things which God alone can produce, and which evoke a sense of awe in man. The rain, which to us is simply an effect of climatic conditions, the consequence of the interaction of chemical elements, was for Eliphaz the direct result of divine action, something which God gave or withheld according to his will.

This is a point which cannot be ignored, but it remains true that if we accept it we shall have to return to Robinson's view and the insuperable difficulties which that entails. If the rain is a marvel in the same sense as the plagues in Egypt then Moses could have threatened pharaoh with a shower. Admittedly, this would not have been destructive, but it is equally true that it would not have been regarded by the Egyptian court as a sample of Yahweh's power. Such an event could not even have been looked upon as a veiled threat, and would have evoked smiles rather than apprehension.

⁵¹⁶ Micah 7:15 and Psalm 106:22; Joshua 3:5.

⁵¹⁷ Job 5:9-10.

The complete identification of the meanings of **נִסְאֵל** in Micah 7 and Psalm 106 on the one hand, and Job 5 on the other, is an invitation into the realms of the absurd: and yet Eliphaz does refer to the rain as one of the unnumerable **נִסְאֵל** brought about by God. What does he mean?

The answer to this question must surely be that the word is used in a figurative rather than a literal sense, much as people today will use the word 'miracle' of such things as the appearance of plants in the spring, the birth of a baby, or some example of the intricate working of a natural process towards a given end. Nor is such language inappropriate on the lips of a religious believer. A literal miracle is something achieved by the direct action of God and which could not possibly have been brought about by any other means. Human effort and normal patterns of cause and effect are insufficient to explain such occurrences, and generally speaking they are also therefore unexpected. When, however, the word is used to denote something which is a part of normal patterns of cause and effect, it is used in order to indicate two facts which must be taken together. First, that the event in question is ultimately beyond human control, and probably human understanding. The farmer, for example, will organise his work in accordance with what centuries or millennia of experience have shown to be successful, but without an infallible guarantee of success. It could be, for example, that the rain will not fall at the right time, and his efforts will not bear fruit. Second, all events are under the ultimate control of God. Whatever

human effort may achieve and whatever occurs through natural processes, is only made possible because of the creative activity of God and his providential preservation and ordering of the life of the world.

This modern use of the word 'miracle' exactly illustrates the use of מִוִּלְיָהּ in Job 5. It is precisely Eliphaz's aim to make Job see that human beings cannot challenge God since they have neither the knowledge nor the power. When Eliphaz speaks of the divine frustration of the wicked he is implicitly acknowledging a certain freedom of human will and a certain success on the part of the wicked, but insisting that the last word is with God, who exercises final control over all that happens in the world. The rain is a natural phenomenon which well illustrates this, partly because of the suggestion it carries of the divine creative power which separated the waters and now puts them to use for the benefit of mankind; and partly because rain does not come and go according to a rigidly fixed pattern of cause and effect. It is obviously something beyond the control of man, although he can make good use of it. This does not imply, however, that rain was looked upon as a quite unnatural phenomenon, or that it was not viewed as something which in general came and went as part of a pattern of events which was repeated with marked regularity from one year to another. The pattern of agricultural activity in Palestine corresponded to a pattern of seasonal change. When Samuel prayed God to send rain out of season, this was a miracle in the literal sense, and the people were afraid.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁸ I Samuel 12:16-19.

If the regular rainfall is a marvel, this must be in a different sense, the kind of non-literal sense which, as we have seen, Robinson is slow to recognise.

It might be thought possible to defend Robinson's view by arguing that for the ancient Israelites the difference between literal marvels and figurative marvels was simply that the literal variety occurred only once, or very rarely. In this case a literal marvel would draw attention to itself by its unusual character, and at the same time serve as a reminder that God is the immediate cause of all things, including those we take for granted because of their regularity.

This is theoretically possible, but we must ask if it is an actually possible reaction for human beings. If the ancient Israelites managed to dissociate the notion of natural causality from the regular juxtaposition of natural events we should have an interesting anticipation of Humean scepticism, but it is highly unlikely. Even more important, there are many texts in the Old Testament which clearly imply the existence of natural cause and effect, just as there are many which imply the existence of human freedom and responsibility, but in neither case is this thought to derogate from the sovereignty of God.

We may close this particular discussion by remarking that at the start of the section on nature-theophanies, Robinson refers to 'the general miracle of all nature as the handiwork of God',⁵¹⁹ and one is left wondering if

⁵¹⁹ 1R p. 39.

it would not have been better for him to take the final drastic step of eliminating altogether the terms 'nature', 'natural', 'supernatural' and 'miracle' from descriptions of Old Testament thought. This, however, he is manifestly unwilling to do, and he next proceeds to an examination of nature-theophanies.

Since, according to Robinson, God is continually revealed in nature, how can we distinguish a theophany from other natural events? As Robinson remarks, 'Every thunderstorm was a potential theophany';⁵²⁰ and we therefore want to know what transforms a potential theophany into an actual one.

Robinson states that a theophany 'is a transient manifestation of deity, and, as such, to be distinguished from the continuous revelation of Him in all Nature'. He then goes on to describe the character of the theophany as 'rather its intensity than any peculiarity of essence ... The theophany is essentially "more of the same thing"'.⁵²¹ Applied to the thunderstorm this presumably means that there would be an extra specially loud bang and brilliant flash of lightning, or lots of such bangs and flashes. Robinson, however, does not say so, although he refers to the theophany at Sinai and clearly believes that that involved a storm. We might also ask if the revelation of God at Sinai can really be accounted for in such a way.

Robinson refers to the burning bush incident by way of example of what he means by a theophany, and he

⁵²⁰ 1Rp. 40. ⁵²¹ 1R p. 39.

speaks of this being linked with primitive ideas of the life in all vegetation, and of fire as peculiarly associated with deity.⁵²² Be that as it may, the one thing made clear by the biblical text is the total inadequacy of Robinson's explanation of theophany.⁵²³ The burning bush is not an intense form of something, 'more of the same thing'; nor is it represented as such in the text: the angel of Yahweh appears in a flame of fire in the middle of a bush. The bush burns with fire without being consumed, and this attracts Moses' attention. Once Moses' attention has been gained the bush plays no further part in the story, and the theophany consists of the voice of God which Moses hears and understands. The story implies that Moses might have seen God if he had not hidden his face for fear of doing so. The story also makes it quite clear that a bush which burns without being consumed was quite extraordinary in Moses' experience, and called for explanation. Apparently he thought that closer investigation might show why this was the case, or appeared to be so. If for the primitive man everything is possible, and if, as Robinson seems to think, Moses was a primitive man, he would not have regarded the burning bush as particularly noteworthy; any more than he would have been unduly surprised if his flock had taken off and flown over the mountain of God.

Robinson refers to the transformation of nature which is an essential part of eschatology.⁵²⁴ He insists that descriptions of this transformation must be taken realistic-

⁵²² 1R pp. 39-40. ⁵²³ Exodus 3:1-6. ⁵²⁴ 1R pp. 28-33.

ally and not as mere poetic imagery. If we find such descriptions impossible to accept, 'it is partly because we come to Nature with an inveterate prejudice in favour of its fixity and virtual independence of God'. The Hebrew belief, however, has developed under the influence of the very early idea of nature 'as itself alive, and able to respond even psychically to God's demands, in the past, the present, and the future'.⁵²⁵

The transformation of nature is necessary because it has participated in the sin and Fall of Man, and must therefore be renewed when man's final salvation is accomplished. Man's sin brought a curse upon nature, but when the curse on man is removed so it will disappear from nature. 'This unity of land and people for weal or woe derives from their common dependence on God as their creator and upholder, and future transformer'.⁵²⁶

Robinson's argument in connection with this subject no more proves God the immediate cause of all phenomena than the other evidence to which he has appealed. Even if descriptions of the future transformation of nature were meant to be taken literally, and this may well be true, the eschatological change is by definition a reference to the end of this world, and simple inferences from that state of affairs cannot be made about the present. The eschatological transformation of nature is a miracle; or perhaps we should say, a miraculous return to the original creative acts of God. When Deutero-Isaiah speaks of rivers, lakes and trees appearing in the desert, he is describing precisely that special intervention of God in the world which we call miraculous; and so is

Ezekiel when he speaks of the life-giving stream flowing from the restored temple and bringing life to the Dead Sea. Such conceptions are even consistent with a deistic outlook. The watchmaker may, after all, suddenly return to his watch, prise open the back and do drastic things to the machinery.

Robinson also explains the importance of prophetic interpretation in Old Testament miracles.⁵²⁷ His comment on the east wind which enabled the Israelites to pass through the Red Sea is that 'the merely physical event would not become a miracle of deliverance until it found an interpreter in Yahweh's prophet. Interpretation is inseparable from miracles of the Old Testament pattern'.⁵²⁸ It is clear that Robinson means by 'miracle' an event which has a religious meaning for whoever observed or experienced it. The event might be normal or abnormal, but if prophetic insight revealed the purpose of God in it, it was a miracle. A mere east wind was not a miracle of deliverance, but in the historical situation in which it occurred a prophet like Moses could indeed perceive that it was such. This is also why the actual events on Mt. Carmel during Elijah's battle with the prophets of Baal are of no consequence. We can never know what a dispassionate observer would have seen; but its significance lies not in the mere observable events, but in Elijah's prophetic interpretation of them and the consequent

⁵²⁷ 1R, chapter III, sections 3 and 4.

⁵²⁸ 1R p. 43.

victory of Yahwism over Baalism. In a later chapter of his book, concerning the general function of prophecy,⁵²⁹ Robinson states that the prophet was the interpreter of nature, making clear Yahweh's purposes of judgement or deliverance, which are accomplished in his control of natural phenomena such as locusts and drought, storm and flood, lightning and fire. Through the prophets, 'Nature becomes articulate' and without them 'there would be no revelation'.⁵³⁰

It is clear that at this point in his argument Robinson has assumed his interpretation of the relationship between God and nature depicted in the Old Testament; but he nevertheless creates the impression that what is miraculous is really determined by prophetic interpretation and not by the publicly observable character of the events themselves. The distinction between the miraculous and non-miraculous does not correspond to the distinction between the normal and the abnormal, since these are classified together as all events caused by God. The distinction between miraculous and non-miraculous is established by prophetic insight. We are nevertheless entitled to ask why there should be a distinction between the normal and the abnormal, and what Robinson means by these terms. The usual interpretation of such a distinction would be that normal events are those which fit into a commonly recognised pattern, whereas the abnormal are those that do not. The confusion which arises from a refusal to recognise this distinction in the Old Testament can best be appreciated by an analysis of examples given by Robinson himself.

⁵²⁹ 1R chapter XII. ⁵³⁰ 1R p. 162.

In their escape from Egypt, the Israelites were assisted by a strong east wind. We could regard this as simply a normal event which occurred at a convenient moment for the Israelites. Religious perception, however, sees in it a timely intervention by God; and thus it becomes a miracle. We might ask, if the Israelites had not been escaping, would the wind have appeared and forced back the sea? According to Robinson the answer must be that it would not, and the idea that the wind is merely a natural event is therefore false. To an uncommitted observer an ordinary strong east wind would have appeared to be a co-incidental normal event, but according to Robinson this would have been an illusion. This wind was not part of a regular pattern of natural events, but an exceptional wind sent to help Israel. Interpretation in that case is not enabling us to see that an otherwise normal event had a special significance, but that an apparently normal event was not normal at all, i.e. not part of a regular pattern of events.

If, on the other hand, the wind were as strong as is implied, it would, indeed, be very far from normal, and its abnormality would have led to immediate recognition of its miraculous character without any prophetic interpretation being needed.

The incident of the burning bush could not be regarded by any stretch of imagination as a normal or natural event. Bushes do not burn without burning away. The same applies to Elijah's sacrifice on Mt. Carmel, the Nile turning to blood, or the shadow reversing its direction on Hezekiah's dial. These incidents may have

natural events, normal occurrences, as their origin; but they are not so recorded, and there would have been no point in such a record.

Most of these miracles do not require prophetic insight to be appreciated as miracles in the Oxford Dictionary sense. Pharaoh fails to appreciate the facts, but his heart was hardened. His reaction, in fact, is something of a miracle itself since he obviously knows what is happening but perversely refuses to recognise it.

It is therefore correct to designate many events recorded in the Old Testament as miracles. They are in themselves abnormal and quite unlike, or even contrary to the normal course of nature; or sometimes they are normal events, perhaps of exceptional severity, which occur at a time especially opportune or necessary for Israel. The warnings sent by God according to Amos require prophetic interpretation, or at least some degree of religious perception, to be regarded as miracles.⁵³¹ And yet, if the interpretation is correct they are just as abnormal as the burning bush or the floating axe-head since they would not have occurred but for the active intervention of God in the normal pattern of natural events. The miraculous nature is not obvious, but it is nevertheless the case. And one interesting fact about the warnings referred to by Amos is that the rest of the population did not regard them as warnings from God, and therefore may be presumed to have seen in them nothing

⁵³¹ Amos 4:6-11.

but natural occurrences, even though of exceptional severity or peculiar distribution.

Robinson's remarks about prophetic interpretation of events are often true, but in connection with a consideration of the relationship of God and nature they are misleading. Nothing can alter the fact that the Old Testament record recognises certain events as unusual and caused by a special intervention of God which alters the otherwise normal course of events: that is to say, miracles. When, therefore, Robinson says that the same events are happening today but we lack the prophetic insight to recognise them, he is utterly misleading. It is true that some events, like the warnings in Amos, are ambiguous in their public character, and it is not clear whether we should call them miracles or not. Applied to such events our modern term might be misleading. It is nevertheless also true that there is no such ambiguity attaching to many of the other events recorded in the Old Testament and the question as to whether they really happened or not cannot be dismissed as Robinson dismisses it. It is rather a question of crucial importance, and so is the allied question as to whether or not all ancient Hebrews accepted them as facts. Robinson betrays some awareness of the importance of these questions in his recognition of the legendary element in the Elijah and Elisha stories, but instead of facing them he sidesteps the issue.

If the bush burned without being consumed; if the Nile turned to blood; if fire from the sky kindled Elijah's sacrifice; those who witnessed such extraordinary events

must have been influenced by them in forming their view of nature. We today would presumably be influenced by such events.. It may be, of course, that these miracles only strengthened beliefs already held by the ancient Israelites; and it may be that if such things occurred today they would constitute a challenge to our outlook which was not the case in ancient Israel. The fact remains, however, that such occurrences must influence belief. When the bush burned Moses regarded the event as quite extraordinary, and went to see why this should be so. In this respect there is no difference between Moses and a man of modern times. A voice then addressed Moses out of the bush, and claimed to be God speaking. Moses was afraid. A modern man would react in some similar way to the same phenomena. No one today could fail to be any less impressed by a retreating shadow on the sundial than Hezekiah was; and the modern reaction to a Nile turned to blood or a flating axe-head would be similar to that of the ancient world. Likewise, if a leading Churchman today expressed the view that a summer's drought was a warning from God he would be greeted by the scepticism which characterised the outlook of Amos's contemporaries.

14. THE NATURAL ORDER

This brings us, finally, to those parts of Robinson's exposition where he recognised 'the established ordinances and inherent energies' of nature; a recognition, as already pointed out, singularly at variance with his view of God as the immediate cause of all phenomena.

Robinson speaks of the harmonious order of nature revealed in Psalm 104, and says that we must not so exaggerate the immediacy of God's control of nature that we neglect the Hebrew recognition of order in nature. In the covenant with Noah the rainbow is a pledge of the fixed order which shall prevail in the future; and elsewhere in the Old Testament there are clear references to the regularities in nature.⁵³² In speaking of the importance of Wisdom in the relationship between God and nature, Robinson comments on the danger of confusing this with the Stoic doctrine of the Logos, since the idea of divine immanence was foreign to native Hebrew thought.⁵³³ The Hebrew writers, in dealing with the familiar realities of nature 'found something suggesting a quasi-independent entity that needed restraint'. In speaking of God's conservation of the world, Robinson refers to 'the energies imparted to it in creation'.⁵³⁴

There is no doubt that recognition of natural order is a prominent feature of the Old Testament record; but in the context of Robinson's exposition we must ask how this fact is to be reconciled with his claim that God is the immediate cause of all phenomena, and that for the primitive world outlook everything is possible.

Robinson attempts a reconciliation between the two views by asserting that the quasi-independence of nature is to be thought of in psychical terms, and not in terms

⁵³² 1R pp. 9-10. ⁵³³ 1R p. 11. ⁵³⁴ 1R pp. 12, 17.

of the energy or elements of modern science, since 'the material objects of nature were conceived as having a psychical life of their own'.⁵³⁵ Robinson believes that this attitude to nature reflects 'pre-logical' thinking, and the habitual ignoring of the distinction between organic and inorganic nature as a result of which all things appear to live.⁵³⁶ Furthermore, according to Robinson, the Israelites believed that their own self consciousness gave them insight into the psychical life of nature.

'Just because the Hebrew habitually distributed consciousness to hand, foot, eye, mouth, ear, heart, liver, bowels, and kidneys, he could the more easily conceive of a psychical life in Nature. After all, our bodies are the one part of Nature of which we can get an inside view. The body seemed to show how Nature felt and acted when viewed from within, and it was natural to extend this psychology to the external world'.⁵³⁷

It is because nature has this psychical quality that it can 'respond to the rule of its Creator and Upholder, on whom it directly depends', and thereby become 'the unique utterance of a unique Being'.⁵³⁸ The life which is actually in nature thus gives the true impression that there is an actual objective natural order; while at the same time that life is the means whereby God actively controls everything.

Leaving aside the by no means insignificant question

⁵³⁵ 1R p. 12. ⁵³⁶ Cf. W. Robertson Smith, THE RELIGION OF THE SEMITES, 3rd ed., London, pp. 85ff, quoted by Robinson.

⁵³⁷ 1R p. 15. Cf. paragraph 1 of Robinson's summing up, p. 47.

⁵³⁸ 1R pp. 16, 47.

as to whether or not the Old Testament texts justify Robinson's claim that the Hebrews looked at nature in this way, let us grant this claim for the sake of the argument. We must then ask if he has united the two views of God's relationship with nature which appear to be at variance with each other: and the answer must be that he has not done so. If the life in nature really has been given to nature by God, and if the impression of independence is therefore true, then God is not the immediate cause of all phenomena. If, on the other hand, the life of nature is merely the instrument whereby God controls natural events, then the impression of independence is false; and Robinson's preference for the phrase 'quasi-independence' confirms what many other of his statements assert, that this second alternative is his real opinion. The psychical life in objects represents the puppet strings whereby the master controls every movement. The puppets in general present us with uniform patterns of behaviour, but they have no real life of their own and unity is given to the performance only through the single minded will of the unseen director. The real weight of those texts which assert or imply genuine life and energy in nature and the common and complex intermingling of cause and effect, is completely ignored in the development of Robinson's main thesis.⁵³⁹

539 Cf. Y. Kaufmann: 'The story of Genesis 1 seems to represent the *tōhū wābōhū* ... as a kind of primordial stuff out of which God fashioned the world. Herbage and animals spring from the earth, and sea creatures out of the waters, as if these substances harbored the vital seeds of life'. (R1 p. 67)

In speaking of the trees of knowledge and life: 'life

The over-all inconsistency and confusion in Robinson's statements seem to arise from: 1) A determination to do justice to all aspects of the subject. 2) An acute consciousness of the tendency of all modern readers to understand the Old Testament in a modern way which would have been meaningless to the Israelites of Old Testament times. 3) A firm belief that a proper understanding of the Old Testament can only be reached by refusing to make a kind of separation between God and nature which modern scientific investigation has all too often encouraged us to make. 4) The principle that a proper understanding of the Old Testament must be reached by reading carefully just what the authors said, and paying attention to the actual usage of Hebrew terms.

No one can quarrel with these principles, but Robinson does not actually recognise Hebrew meaning and usage, and he does not recognise it because of his determination not to read back into the Old Testament a modern view of nature. It would be patently absurd to read back into the mind of any ancient Israelite the scientific outlook of a modern chemist or botanist; but, if not so absurd, it could be equally misleading to read back into the Old Testament a radically different outlook. The determination to find and emphasise a distinction can stop the texts conveying their proper meaning, just

539 (Contd.) and knowledge may be acquired by eating of their fruit - apparently regardless of God's will'. (R1 p. 67)

Kaufmann asserts that there is no natural bond between God and nature and that God does not live in the processes of nature, and therefore no part of nature is divine. (R1 pp. 70-72) Cf. quotation, Thesis p. 206.

as much as does the unthinking assumption that a given Hebrew writer looked at natural events just as we do. Robinson's emphasis also prevents him properly acknowledging the different aspects of the subject and perceiving the right relationships between them.

Perhaps Robinson's approach can be rendered more useful by following principles 1) and 4) without any initial attempt to say whether or not, or to what extent the Hebrew view of nature will resemble our own. This would also have the advantage of recognising that any given Hebrew in a given time and place might have looked at things differently from another Hebrew in another time and place, or even if they were contemporaries in the same area. Similarly, not everyone today in England is a chemist or botanist, and among chemists and botanists there are no doubt varied views of nature. Perhaps the chief characteristic of modern Englishmen, and one which would have struck an Israelite farmer forcibly, is a widespread and profound ignorance of nature; to which is closely related a marked weakness in observation and total inability to produce on request a scientific explanation of anything.

Furthermore, Robinson's reference to 'a modern view of Nature', which we are apt to impose on the Israelite mind, suggests that there is one view common to educated people, at any rate in the Western World. Is this so? And how does this warning relate to another assertion which he makes that the Hebrew conception of a continued creation 'is in full harmony with what both the science and the philosophy of the modern world can accept'? It may be

that there is some division among natural scientists in their over-all view of nature, and perhaps many of them have never formulated such a view, this being a philosophical rather than a scientific undertaking: but Robinson seems to want sometimes to treat science as a vindication of the ancient mode of thought, and at other times as revealing an outlook fundamentally at variance with the ancient view and a hindrance to the proper appreciation of what Israelites actually thought. The two approaches to Natural Science are not necessarily incompatible, since this term denotes a very wide range of intellectual and experimental work; and, as suggested, philosophical reflection on this work no doubt varies from one scientist to another; but in that case the only way fruitful use can be made of comparisons with modern scientific work is by being far more specific; and above all by the recognition that scientific work is based, for purely practical purposes, on the assumption that nature is a closed system, without implying that this is the whole truth about nature.

Today, we are aware that scientific investigation has revealed an immense number of details about chains of cause and effect in natural events, and has emphasised what appears to be some kind of physical necessity. Nevertheless, not everyone would conclude that nature is a closed system, however necessary that assumption may be for scientific progress. And there are still those who are prepared to assert the intervention of God in natural events to bring about effects which, but for such intervention, would not occur; for example miracles of healing.

There are also those who believe the whole natural order in its normal workings to be in some way dependent on the creation and preservation by God, and that an hypothesis necessary for the achievement of the limited aims of Natural Science is not proved by scientific success to be the whole truth.

As for primitive man regarding everything as possible, we must ask, Who is primitive man? Were the ancient Israelites primitive men? And if so, in what does their primitiveness consist? To regard everything as possible is to have given up all belief in order and probability: did Mowinckel and Wheeler Robinson really believe this of any men, primitive or otherwise?⁵⁴⁰

⁵⁴⁰ Robinson's argument must be seen, however briefly, in a wider context. If Robinson and other scholars who think like him were correct in their description of ancient Israelite mentality, we should have, in the Israelite view of nature, a piece of striking evidence to support the belief that there is a large and significant cultural gap between ancient Israelite society and our own, and that cross cultural communication can take place only to a very limited degree. If the more extreme view of Pedersen were correct, even the possibility of any such communication would be put in doubt. In that case, the Bible can hardly be regarded as the continuing source of truth for the Church down the ages. For example, we may be able to understand what the Bible is saying about the relationship of God and nature, but we shall be quite unable to shed the cultural conditions that make us what we are, and accept the biblical assertions as true.

This is the argument put forward by D. Nineham in his book, The Use and Abuse of the Bible: A Study of the Bible in an Age of Rapid Cultural Change, London, 1976. Cf. the review by R.P.C. Manson, JTS, October 1977, pp. 541-544. Nineham accepts the kind of view propounded by Robinson: 'the Jews had no distinct conception of impersonal laws of nature and thought of every event as in some sense an act of God'. (p. 176; cf. pp. 20-22). But this interpretation of the biblical evidence appears to be incorrect, and a more careful analysis suggests a much closer similarity

540 (Contd.) between common sense views of nature in ancient Israel and modern Europe.

Cf. the misleading influence of Robinson on Gordon D. Kaufman, A Problem For Theology: The Concept of Nature, HTR 65, 1972, pp. 337-366. 'It is worth remembering in this connection that the Hebrew vocabulary did not even have a term corresponding to our word "nature". The fundamental unity and order of the context within which man lived was provided directly by God'. (Ft. 10, p. 349)

See also J. W. Rogerson, The Old Testament View of Nature: Some Preliminary Questions, in Instruction and Interpretation, Leiden, 1977, pp. 67-84. On the idea that men in the ancient world saw nature as possessing a psychic life of its own, and exhibiting some kind of personal quality over against the modern scientific attitude to nature as an impersonal object, see J. W. Rogerson, The Old Testament versus Mythopoeic Thought, in Myth In Old Testament Interpretation, Berlin 1974, pp. 85-100. Later in this book Rogerson states 'it is becoming clear that the notions of a primitive mentality different from that of moderns must be abandoned'. (MOTI p. 180) Rogerson appeals to R. G. Collingwood's Idea of Nature as strongly supporting this view since Collingwood shows that 'the difference between the various theories about the nature of the universe from the Greek atomists to contemporary science lay not in any change or improvement in the powers or functioning of the human mind', but rather upon the discovery of new facts through experimentation. (MOTI p. 180) Rogerson also refers to the position of Lévi-Strauss that primitives display logical processes in their thinking, and differentiate between objects in the natural world and classify them. (MOTI pp. 104-105) See also J. W. Rogerson, Anthropology and the Domestication of the Savage Mind, Cambridge 1977.

For a critique of theories of primitive religion of the type upon which scholars like Robinson and Pedersen have depended, see E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion, Oxford 1965 (1977 reprint) especially the Introduction, pp. 1-19; and chapter on Lévy-Bruhl, pp. 78-99. A few quotations from Evans-Pritchard's Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande, abridged ed., Oxford 1976, will also show how misleading have been beliefs or assumptions about primitive peoples. 'Zande belief in witchcraft in no way contradicts empirical knowledge of cause and effect. The world known to the senses is just as real to them as it is to us. We must not be deceived by their way of expressing causation and imagine that because they say a man was killed by witchcraft they entirely neglect the secondary causes that, as we judge them, were the true causes of his death. They are foreshortening the chain of events, and in a particular social situation are selecting the cause that is socially relevant and neglecting the rest'. (p. 25)

'The boy who knocked his foot against a stump of

540 (Contd.) wood did not account for the stump by reference to witchcraft, nor did he suggest that whenever anybody knocks his foot against a stump it is necessarily due to witchcraft, nor yet again did he account for the cut by saying that it was caused by witchcraft, for he knew quite well that it was caused by the stump of wood. What he attributed to witchcraft was that on this particular occasion, when exercising his usual care, he struck his foot against a stump of wood, whereas on a hundred other occasions he did not do so, and that on this particular occasion the cut, which he expected to result from the knock, festered whereas he had had dozens of cuts which had not festered. Surely these peculiar conditions demand an explanation'. (p. 21) 'Azande attribute nearly all sickness, whatever the nature to witchcraft or sorcery: it is these forces that must be worsted in order to cure a serious illness. This does not mean that Azande entirely disregard secondary causes but, in so far as they recognize these, they generally think of them as associated with witchcraft and magic. Nor does their reference of sickness to supernatural causes lead them to neglect treatment of symptoms any more than their reference of death on the horns of a buffalo to witchcraft causes them to await its onslaught. On the contrary, they possess an enormous pharmacopoeia (I have myself collected almost a hundred plants, used to treat diseases and lesions, along the sides of a path for about two hundred yards), and in ordinary circumstances they trust to drugs to cure their ailments and only take steps to remove the primary and supernatural causes when the disease is of a serious nature or takes an alarming turn.' Evans-Pritchard goes on to point out how well Azande understand disease and its treatment in so far as this is possible on the basis of common sense observation; 'almost every disease is not only diagnosed, its probable course foretold, and its relation to a cause defined, but also each disease has its own individual treatment, which in some cases has evidently been built upon experience and in other cases, though it is probably quite ineffectual, shows a logico-experimental element'. (pp. 195-196)

The whole question of the relationship of different kinds of thinking in different cultures is discussed at length and from different points of view in Modes of Thought: Essays on Thinking in Western and Non-Western Societies, edited by Robin Horton and Ruth Finnegan, London 1973, and dedicated to Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard.

For the suggestion, sometimes implicit rather than explicit, that ancient Israelites were spontaneously religious in their thinking in contrast to the secular outlook of modern times, cf. David Martin, The Religious and the Secular, London, 1969. With reference to the complexity involved in the history of possible choices between different orientations towards the world, 'the trouble with the concept of secularization is that it attempts to simplify that

540 (Contd.) complexity in the interests of ideology or of an over-neat intellectual economy'. (p. 6) Martin's whole book is an argument that the distinction between the religious and the secular is often too blurred to be anything other than misleading, and although at times it may be overstated, is a healthy warning against any over simple distinctions between the biblical world and our own.

On the contrast between religious Hebrews and rationalist Greeks, cf. W. K. C. Guthrie, The Pre-Socratic World-Picture, HTR, vol. 45, 1952, pp. 87-104. Guthrie protests against the tendency to classify Greek thinkers as rationalists or mystics: 'we are in a period of thought before such distinctions had any meaning'; and Empedokles is referred to as an outstanding example of the fact, (p. 103). Guthrie quotes Aristotle, who said of his predecessors that they all shared one central idea, '"all nature is encompassed with the divine"'. (p. 104)

See also James Barr, Man and Nature - The Ecological Controversy and the Old Testament, BJRL 1972-1973, Vol. 55, pp. 9-32. When Barr makes a brief and heavily qualified answer to the question as to what the intellectual antecedents of modern science are, he also issues the following caution: 'Basically I would be against all attempts to explain a complicated modern process by setting it against two or three simple and remote models such as "biblical thought" or "Greek thought"'. (p. 27)

Section E. E. C. Rust

E. C. Rust wrote two books which are relevant to a study of the relationship of God and nature in the Old Testament. The first, Nature and Man In Biblical Thought, reveals the strong influence of Wheeler Robinson and Pedersen. The second, Science and Faith, contains far less direct exposition of biblical thought but endeavours to relate biblical interpretation to an evaluation of the knowledge gained by the methods of natural science. It will be as well to deal with the two books separately. Chapters 15 and 16 will concern Nature and Man In Biblical Thought, and chapters 17, 18 and 19, Science and Faith.

15. PSYCHIC WHOLE AND DIFFUSED CONSCIOUSNESS

Rust interprets Genesis 1 to mean that God used the already existing elements of chaos in the creation of heaven and earth, but that God is unquestionably transcendent and exercises absolute sovereignty over this material in the work of creation.⁵⁴¹ In commenting on Psalm 104 he says, 'Yet there is no hint in this or any other Nature Psalm of nature pantheism. The natural order has its own life and all things stand over against Yahweh sufficiently to offer Him their praises'.⁵⁴²

Basing his assertion on Pedersen, Rust states that Sheol is closely associated with the deep; so closely, indeed, that 'To go to Sheol is thus to return to the primeval chaos from which the created order first emerged. Man dies and his shade descends to the pit, returns to the chaos out of which God moulded and shaped all living

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⁵⁴² NATURE AND MAN IN BIBLICAL THOUGHT, London, 1953, pp.30-36.

NM p. 43.

things'.⁵⁴³ We may compare the statement of Pedersen, 'He who is in Sheol is also in the ocean, because they both denote the subterraneous, negative power, the world of death and chaos ... Sheol and the ocean are fused in a unity, as the source of all that is evil'.⁵⁴⁴

Both writers seem to confuse association and identification here, and to be basing their exposition upon a literal and false interpretation of poetic passages. Perhaps it is worth mentioning that Sheol is not referred to in Genesis 1:1-2:4a, but if it had been an element in chaos its place in the newly created order would surely have been explicitly indicated. Nor do actual descriptions of what goes on in Sheol tell of chaos.

Rust says later that the nation is a 'psychic whole' and that nation and land are so intimately related as to be a unity. This means that when man is cursed, so is the land: if Yahweh is with his people the land is "Desolate", and the wilderness and the chaos return'.⁵⁴⁵

Rust's view probably reveals the direct influence of Pedersen. There may well be some truth in this interpretation of the text, just as there appears to be a definite connection in the Bible between sin and suffering; but just as the latter connection can be thought of in too simple and crude a way, so Rust presents us with an over simple view of the relationship we must draw if we take his view as it stands seriously: at the time of the Exile,

⁵⁴³ NM p. 47. ⁵⁴⁴ P1 p. 463. ⁵⁴⁵ NM pp. 50-51.

Palestine should have turned into a desert, and even have been completely overrun by the ocean. We are also faced with the paradox that the desert, where accursed Adam does not dwell, should be blossoming like the rose; whereas the land inhabited by man should be turning to a wilderness, except perhaps in those isolated pockets where some faithful Enoch still walks with God. This is manifestly not the case, any more than suffering is allotted in every case according to the degree of guilt in the sufferer, and the Old Testament itself bears eloquent witness to the fact that the very reverse often seems to be true.

Rust speaks of the consciousness diffused throughout nature which makes possible communion between man and nature, and is the means whereby natural objects can be used by God. This diffused consciousness is to be regarded 'as a mana diffused in natural objects' which 'has also the capacity to be indwelt and used by higher powers and in particular by Yahweh Himself'.⁵⁴⁶

The illustrations from the Bible given by Rust do not in fact lend any support to his view, and can only be forced into some semblance of agreement with his interpretation by a tacit dismissal of poetic or figurative expression in the ancient literature. Rust tells us that Joseph's dream about the sheaves 'is more than mere dream

⁵⁴⁶ NM p. 53. On mana, cf. TPR, in which Evans-Pritchard refers a number of times to the use of this term in misinterpretations of primitive thought; but see especially pp. 11-12, 14-15.

symbolism, it is more intimately connected with the contemporary view of nature itself'.⁵⁴⁷ However, when Joseph's contemporaries, his brothers, were told the dream they commented on it, 'Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him'. (RV) After Joseph's second dream concerning the sun, moon and stars his elder contemporary, his father, responded, 'What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?' (RV) Joseph's contemporaries saw the dreams as symbolic, and it is as symbolism that they are fulfilled.⁵⁴⁸ There is no mention of sheaves of corn or celestial bodies bowing down, and such behaviour is only attributed to them in dreams and as an obvious contrast to their normal behaviour. It is not Joseph's contemporaries but certain modern scholars who see in such things 'more than mere dream symbolism'.

The symbolic nature of Jotham's fable is not merely obvious but essential to the meaning of the text. Jotham did not regard the meeting of the men of Shechem as an opportune moment to deliver a botanical lecture, but to hurl sarcastic abuse and a warning at them before running for his life. It is totally illegitimate to wrest from such a statement what is supposed to be an Israelite outlook on nature; and when we stop to reflect on the behaviour attributed to the trees in the story it is incredible that anyone, ancient or modern, should have

⁵⁴⁷ NM p. 52. ⁵⁴⁸ See Genesis 37:8; 37:10; 42:6-9.

regarded it as expressing 'the psychic life of the natural order'. If this story is expressing something more than a human moral, what more is it telling us, and where is the evidence of such an interpretation?⁵⁴⁹

In referring to Leviticus 19:23-25, which forbids the taking of fruit from newly planted trees for three years, Rust states that when the fruit is stripped from the trees in the fourth year this is likened to the act of circumcision, and this in turn implies that the life of the trees must be respected. Verse 24, however, does not liken the stripping of the trees to circumcision since neither 'the act of stripping' nor 'the act of circumcision' is referred to, and Rust's exegesis merely affords a striking lesson in how easy it is to read words into the text once we have decided what to find in it. Rust's way of expressing the verse naturally makes us think of the parallel with male children, but the text actually says,

וּבִשְׁנָה הָרְבִּיעִת הִיא כָּל-פֶּרִי
קִדָּשׁ הֵלֹלִים לַיהוָה

'But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy, for giving praise unto the LORD'. (RV)

There is, of course, reference to circumcision in the preceding verse:

וְעַרְבֵי לִתְּם עֲרֻכָּתוֹ אֶת-פֶּרִיו שְׁלֹשׁ
יָמִים לַיהוָה לְכֶם עֲרֻלִּים לֹא יֵאָכְל:

⁵⁴⁹ Judges 9:6-21.

'then ye shall count the food thereof as their uncircumcision: three years shall they be as uncircumcised to you; it shall not be eaten'. (RV)

This is a figurative use of circumcision meant to emphasise the untouchability of the fruit. The trees are to be treated as if they were uncircumcised people. The passage about the trees is followed by prohibitions against touching or having anything to do with certain other things, such as blood, or magic. In Deuteronomy 10:16 and Jeremiah 4:4 the same figure is applied to the heart, the context in these cases making it clear that the need for obedience is being emphasised.⁵⁵⁰ Leviticus 19:23-25 certainly stresses the need to treat newly planted trees with respect, but only expresses a meaning with which many modern foresters and gardeners would sympathise. Rust is entitled to claim that the peculiar expression used requires further explanation, if this is what he feels about it; but he must justify such explanation by producing evidence in its favour. He is not entitled to re-write the text on the basis of a literal interpretation of figurative language.

Rust next refers to the custom of leaving corners of fields unreaped at harvest time. Following Frazer, he refers to the parallel custom among primitive peoples of leaving some cereal to feed the spirit which gave life to the crop. 'The psychic life of the corn min must not

⁵⁵⁰ See BDB, עֵרֶל, עֵרֶל, עֵרֶל, p. 790

be ill-treated or man will suffer'.⁵⁵¹ The parallel is not altogether clear, but in any case the two references to this custom in Leviticus give a quite different reason for the custom: the cereals and fruit are to be left for the sake of the poor. This clearly intelligible reason is given twice in exactly the same words, 'thou shalt leave them for the poor and for the stranger'; but the mere explicit statement of the text is dismissed by Rust as a later moralisation of the motive on the human level.⁵⁵²

Later than what? Later than the state of affairs depicted by Rust's anthropological guesswork: but even if this guesswork is correct it cannot alter the clear meaning of the text. If Rust is using the text to illustrate Israelite modes of thought it is the text he must use and not some text-substitute. It is open to Rust to argue that the old way of thinking continued among the people of Israel and that it was the leaders who tried to imposed on them a more moral way of viewing the custom; but once again, he must offer evidence for such a claim, and also tell us how he evaluates the common mode of thought on the one hand and the biblical mode of thought on the other.

There is no point in pursuing this line of argument since Rust offers no evidence whatever: as in the previous case, he surreptitiously re-writes the text for us, conveying by his statement about the supposed later

⁵⁵¹ NM p. 53. ⁵⁵² NM p. 52.

rationalisation of motive the suggestive impression that he is giving us the real, original meaning of the custom described in Leviticus; while in the biblical writer has merely misled us by his 'later' moralising tendency. To return to the main point: the biblical text does not support Rust's contention that the Bible expresses or Israelites believed in a diffused consciousness in nature.

When David is told to listen for the sound of marching in the tops of trees this implies nothing of psychic-life in them, and might simply have meant the sudden stirring of the wind among them. It was probably the evening land breeze and covered the sound of his troops moving. We cannot be sure what is meant, but it is quite misleading to call them 'oracle-giving'. David has already consulted the oracle which warns him to make an attack from the rear instead of a frontal assault, and whatever happens in the tops of the trees is a signal to launch the attack.⁵⁵³

However, it came about that certain trees were looked upon as sacred, they are exceptional and by their very nature offer no basis for generalising about all trees, nor do they imply anything about psychic-life in natural objects.

Rust refers to a number of poetic passages in support of his contention.⁵⁵⁴ Once again, we are confronted by the selective approach to poetic passages, which seems to depend on reading the selected texts literally. This is

⁵⁵³ NM p. 53. See II Samuel 5:22-25. ⁵⁵⁴ NM p. 55.

a wholly illegitimate procedure and, as we have seen in other cases, leads to absurdities. If the author of Job 38 means that the morning stars really sang in chorus at the creation of the world, does he also intend us to think of the sea as a kind of gigantic baby, or the constellations as beings that can be bound or led about? Does Rust suppose that the stars actually fought against Sisera, and that this is what the author of Judges 5 intended and that his readers or hearers understood?⁵⁵⁵

Rust quotes Wheeler Robinson to the effect that such expressions are not merely arbitrary figures of speech, but we can only agree that they are not arbitrary on literary grounds or in a literary sense. It is natural for people to sing when they are happy and Job 38:7 is therefore an appropriate way to express the joy of heaven at the moment of creation, and also the joy of human beings thanking God for their life and expressing wonder at the ordered universe. The rushing of a torrent is a natural analogy for one totally victorious army chasing another off the battlefield, and someone who sees the power and goodwill of God in the whole of the created order might well imagine all things joining with him in a great chorus of praise.⁵⁵⁶

It is quite true that the Old Testament expresses a view of nature which is a far cry from a merely mechanistic universe, but we are not going to discover what

⁵⁵⁵ See Job 38:8-9, 31-32; Judges 5:19-21.

⁵⁵⁶ Psalm 148.

that Old Testament view is by using poetic images as if they were literal descriptions and deducing from them that natural objects possessed some kind of conscious personal feeling and rational power, for this is what the phrase 'psychic-life' and Rust's whole argument imply.

Rust quite rightly points out that evil enters into the world through the sin of man and that there is nothing evil in matter itself according to the Old Testament. Rust, however, writes as if the sin of man brought a curse upon the land almost as if it were a chemical reaction. It is linked with 'the psychic totality of nature', and it appears that if man as one element in this totality goes wrong, then this will have inevitable repercussions throughout the whole. 'Because of the sin of Adam the ground too has become accursed'. 'The chaos can return where man's sin brings curse to the ground. Adam's sin, according to the J narrative, means the return of the earth to the wilderness chaos. The thorn and the thistle once more take up their abode and threaten man's source of sustenance. Hence the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah transforms them into a wilderness of brimstone and salt, whilst a like doom threatens the land of any others who turn away from Yahweh their God'.⁵⁵⁷

The texts referred to by Rust make it quite clear that desolation is brought about by the action of God. 'Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven'. We must also note

⁵⁵⁷ NM pp. 56, 57.

such phrases as 'the sicknesses with which the LORD has made it sick', 'an overthrow like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboi'im, which the LORD overthrew in his anger and wrath', 'the LORD uprooted them'.⁵⁵⁸

Zephaniah 2:9 indeed foretells that Moab and Ammon shall become a wilderness, but the analogy with Sodom and Gomorrah is explicit; verse 11 tells us that 'the LORD will be terrible against them', and verse 9 refers explicitly to the devastation of war.

Rust recognises the action of God in other cases, but fails to see that if curse, and, indeed, blessing, take their effect through the intervention of God, then this renders the concept of the 'psychic-totality of nature' quite unnecessary, and means that the texts in question do not in any way demand or suggest such a view of the world.

One wonders if Rust, along with Wheeler Robinson and Pedersen, has not attempted to replace the mechanistic picture of the universe with what we might call a psychic one. Rust, for example, recognises the regularities of nature, but is anxious to assure us that these regularities are not limitations set to God's activity 'in the way that the scientist has so often conceived his scientific and natural laws'.⁵⁵⁹ Rust and Robinson certainly seem to have been moved by a profound determination to destroy the notion of a closed system, with which God can

⁵⁵⁸ See Genesis 19:24; cf. v 29. Deuteronomy 29:16-28, especially vv. 22, 23 and 28.

⁵⁵⁹ NM p. 70.

only interfere if he wishes to influence it; and they seem to have seized on Pedersen's ideas as providing a biblically based alternative in which the machine is replaced by a spiritual entity which has a natural affinity with God and with which he has an intimate spiritual relationship. Unfortunately this view is justified neither by the Bible nor our knowledge of nature; and perhaps this is not an accident, since the ancient Israelites lived close to the natural world and were not misled through attraction or repulsion by elaborate physical theories and the metaphysical ideas that sometimes go with them.

'Behind God's covenant with His chosen people lies His covenant with nature itself. It is open to His command and obeys His decrees. Its psychic life responds to His Word and is capable of being indwelt by His higher power'

'Hence we have ... a picture of all nature as dependent upon its Creator who is active in it'.⁵⁶⁰

Rust is very dependent on Wheeler Robinson, and his exposition of the Israelite outlook is therefore open to the same objections as Robinson's. He runs into the same difficulty over the attempt to combine the idea of God's continuous direct activity in nature with the fact, clearly recognised by the Israelites, that nature exhibits chains of cause and effect which do not in themselves suggest the presence or intervention of a creator,

⁵⁶⁰ NM pp. 64-65, 69.

and which were regarded as operating of their own accord. This leads to confused use of theological concepts and a muddling of ideas in which each one is seized upon to serve the needs of the immediate dialectical moment.

Having rejected not only deism, but also a 'mediating theism which gives natural laws a place within the activity of God', Rust continues,

'For the Hebrew, nature was shot through and through with the divine activity. He had no idea of chains of causality and secondary causes. Everything depended directly upon God Himself, and His control of the life of His creatures was immediate. He governed personally the regularities of the natural order'.⁵⁶¹

In writing of the ancient Hebrew, Rust says, 'there was no place in his mind for a chain of causality or for secondary causes, and thus we should expect that for him the universe was an atomized collection of events each directly linked to God from whom they derived their unity'.⁵⁶²

Like Robinson, Rust has difficulty in maintaining this view consistently, partly because the obvious operation of secondary causes is clearly recognised in the Bible, and partly because he is afraid of over emphasising the immanence of God and running dangerously close to a pantheistic outlook.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶¹ NM p. 66. ⁵⁶² NM p. 68.

⁵⁶³ See NM p. 70, where he quotes Robinson.

'Nature did possess a quasi-independence of its own. Its life was not the life of God. The sun, moon and stars could be summoned to praise their Maker. But the diffused psychic life of nature could be indwelt and controlled by God Himself'.⁵⁶⁴

This means, as in the case of Robinson, that in the phrase 'quasi-independence' the emphasis must fall on 'quasi'. Nature has no real independence at all, and when the sun, moon and stars are called upon to praise God, they will do so because they have no choice, any more than the cathedral organ will play loud or soft, merry or sad, except at the will of the player who is manipulating it. We may compare the statement that the prophets saw the processes of nature co-operating with God, and nature could do this because it had its own psychic life. But this assertion is inconsistent with those which state that the psychic life was simply the medium whereby God directly produced all events in nature.⁵⁶⁵

The same criticism applies to the following passage in which Rust wriggles on the horns of the insoluble dilemma he has created for himself.

'The Hebrew knew that the fruit came from the inherent energies of the tree, just as the corn developed from the seed'. (independence) 'He was aware of the long and patient processes by which man must prepare the soil if he was to reap its increase'.

⁵⁶⁴ NM p. 66. ⁵⁶⁵ NM p. 68.

(independence) 'Yet the knowledge of those processes was the gift of God'. (divine action, quasi-independence) 'He knew that the rain had its part to play, but that too was God's gift', (divine action, quasi-independence) 'and it was God who prepared the corn which covered the valleys' (divine action, quasi-independence) 'after the rain had fulfilled its function'. (independence)

It is interesting to reflect upon the position of man in such a world. Men may accept or reject God, and thereby bring upon themselves curse or blessing. The consequence must be inevitable since God is in immediate control of all things. Therefore, the wicked will find his farm turning to desert, while the good will find his labourers too few for the harvest. A pretty picture, and the stuff of which fairy tales and popular novels are made, but scarcely a realistic record of human life either as we know it or as it is depicted for us in the pages of the Old Testament.⁵⁶⁶

As Rust recognises, he has produced a picture of God ever engaged in creative activity, and he confuses this with the notion of God preserving the world. 'Indeed, His creative activity was continuous. He had created the world in the beginning but He was still creating'.⁵⁶⁷ In support of this Nehemiah 9:6 is quoted, with emphasis on the present continuous sense of the final verb. The passage in Nehemiah reads:

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. Luke 12:13-21, the parable of the rich fool.

⁵⁶⁷ NM p. 68.

אֶתֶּה-הוּא " לְבַדָּךְ אַתָּה יָצַטְתָּה אֶת־
הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צִבְּאֵם הָאָרֶץ
וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ הַיָּמִים וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם
וְאַתָּה מְחַיֶּה אֶת-כָּל־כֵּלָם

As Rust himself acknowledges, the verb עָשָׂה means 'made', and the verb חָיָה is here suitably translated 'preserve'. God has made all that is and he continues to sustain its life, and without this continuing preservation, there would be no life. There is thus a clear distinction between the original making, creating of the world, and its continual preservation; and the text, far from supporting Rust's contention, contradicts it.

Rust also argues that the use of בָּרָא for acts at various times within the created order is evidence for the continuing creative activity of God, but the uses of בָּרָא referred to prove nothing of the sort. This is because the acts referred to are of an exceptional nature and hence imply the special intervention of God. Once again, the texts concerned mean the very opposite of what Rust wishes to infer from them.⁵⁶⁸

The reference to the working of wonders is especially important, since it is typical of the insuperable problem created for Rust, as for Robinson, by the miracles of the Old Testament. Rust once again follows Robinson, in his discussion of the miracles, and his argument is open to

⁵⁶⁸ NM p. 69.

precisely the same objection: the wonders and signs of the Old Testament frequently imply the suspension of the natural workings of the created order through the intervention of God to bring about some special effect. The attempt to evade this simple fact merely causes confusion.⁵⁶⁹

To return to the false equation of creation and preservation: If the Nehemiah text could be interpreted as Rust wishes, it would indeed imply the perpetual creative activity of God, but in fact it presupposes the completion of the creative work of God and implies the continuing function of the world in dependence on God's sustaining power but not at God's perpetual prompting.

Rust also runs into trouble over the relationship between the divine transcendence and the divine immanence. Both are firmly asserted although, as we have seen, the attempt to relate the two concepts on Rust's terms proves an impossible undertaking. It may be possible, but Rust makes little headway with the attempt; and he makes the attempt more difficult by introducing the notion of a mediator. How can the idea of mediation be combined with the picture of God at work in the world, directly causing every event which occurs? In this respect there is a remarkable paragraph:

'Yet, if God was thought of as active in nature, He was also regarded as transcendent to it. We have no Greek idea of an immanent reason. As Hebrew thought developed, Yahweh no longer walked the earth He had made but looked down upon it and sustained its life. With the increasing transcendence of God we find more and more use of

mediating conceptions for His creative activity such as the Word, the Wisdom, and the Spirit of God, but always His immediate relationship to His world is maintained, so that the created order expresses His mind and will'.⁵⁷⁰

The God who was introduced to us as the direct creator of every event no longer walks the earth in 'developed' Hebrew thought, but looks down on the earth; and although his 'immediate' relationship to his world is maintained it is through the 'mediating' activities of Word, Wisdom and Spirit. The only effect of such a passage is to give the impression of a theological three-card trick.

16. CREATIO CONTINUA

Later in his book Rust reverts to the idea that God's transcendence was emphasised in later Jewish thought, and that there was therefore the need to postulate or recognise mediating agencies between God and the world.⁵⁷¹ An examination of Apocryphal passages is beyond the scope of the present thesis, but Rust refers to Job 38:7, Psalm 89:5-7 and Psalm 148:2-3 as evidence that the stars were identified as angels, and he detects here Babylonian influence.⁵⁷²

None of these texts in fact justifies such an identification. The stars are not mentioned in Psalm

⁵⁷⁰ NM p. 71.

⁵⁷¹ NM chapter VI, pp. 124-160.

⁵⁷² NM p. 126.

89:5-7, and the parallelism of Psalm 148 is meant to emphasise that all creatures should offer God a great hymn of universal praise. The idea of universality is conveyed quite simply by giving a list of created things and beings, and while these are placed in what might be called natural groups, the notion that in parallel lines the same thing is referred to twice in different words is actually excluded, with the clear exception of verses 1,2 and 14.

Rust himself refers to the fact that he has appealed to Job 38:7 as an illustration of the diffused psychic consciousness of the natural order, but if we are now to believe that the 'stars' are really angels the text can no longer be used as evidence of the character of the natural order. Angels assist in the government of the natural order;⁵⁷³ stars are part of that order. If the 'morning stars' are really 'sons of God', Rust must surrender this text as a reference to nature; and the identification in this case is certainly possible, but not necessary.

If angels, or any other beings mediated between God and the natural world, did they function in any way independently of God, or did they simply carry out his will with infallible obedience? If the former is true, then we must surrender the idea of the continual direct activity of God in nature. If the latter is true, we are merely paying lip service to a pretty attenuated concept of divine transcendence, rather as if one were to accuse

⁵⁷³ NM p. 127.

a pianist of not being a musician because he has no direct contact with the strings of his instrument.

In the final chapter of his book, when he formulates his conclusions about the relationship between God and nature based on his investigation into biblical texts, Rust makes little mention of mediating agencies. God's transcendence is defined in terms of his holiness, and Rust turns to the problem of expounding God's relation to nature undistracted by any concept of mediation. For our present purpose the crucial exposition lies in section 2 of this chapter.⁵⁷⁴

Rust is very reluctant to allow the natural world any genuine independence, and he prefers to speak, as he has earlier in the book, of quasi-independence or semi-independence. This is because he wishes to avoid any suggestion of a mechanistic universe whose forces continue to act of their own accord independently of God. On the other hand, he is aware that his own earlier emphasis on the direct creative activity of God in nature is equally dangerous, and while he wishes to continue to emphasise God's direct activity in the natural world, and its direct dependence upon God, he is forced to recognise that the logical outcome of this unqualified view is pantheism. According to Rust, Malebranche and the Occasionalists developed an extreme form of the biblical emphasis, and he comments on their view, 'Since all causality was divine, the creatures ... became merely the occasions for the

⁵⁷⁴ NM pp. 257-265.

exercise of the divine causality. But such an attitude reduces the creatures to nonentities'.⁵⁷⁵ Rust rejects this view, and seeks to avoid it in his own exposition by describing biblical thought in terms of the doctrine of creatio continua. In this way we escape both pantheism and a mechanistic model of the universe.

But what does Rust mean by creatio continua? He includes the notions of God sustaining and preserving the world, and governing it and watching over it. This does not destroy man's independence, for man can disobey God if he wishes, or he may enter into a right relationship with God: and man's general relation to God gives us the clue as to how we should understand the relation of the natural world to God.⁵⁷⁶ Rust repeats what he asserted early in the book, that nature as depicted in the Bible has a psychic as well as a physical function and power and therefore 'The Hebrew probably understood the divine activity in nature much as he understood God's relation to human personality'.⁵⁷⁷

We have already seen reason to doubt Rust's claim that the Bible asserts a psychic consciousness in nature; and the analogy with human personality breaks down also, because human beings display a power of will, of choice and decision, which is not to be seen at all in large areas of the natural world, and only to a very limited extent in the rest. This distinction between man and nature is recognised by Rust, but not its significance. We can imagine the organic life of a man being sustained

⁵⁷⁵ NM p. 259. ⁵⁷⁶ NM pp. 261-262. ⁵⁷⁷ NM p. 262.

by God while the man's genuine independence is preserved by the existence of his will, but this is not possible for the realm of nature. We are still left with the question whether secondary causes exist or not, and this would also apply to the secondary causes which are thought to exist in the organic life of man himself.

Rust wishes to answer this question by saying both yes and no. He is prepared to speak of God sustaining or preserving the world, and to accept the operation of secondary causes.⁵⁷⁸ On the other hand, preservation is to be understood in terms of creation, it is *creatio continua*; and while secondary causes operate they do so only through the direct co-operation of God. He regards the difference between preservation and creation as only a 'relative one', and he states that it 'arose chiefly from the fact that creation involves novelty and newness and excludes that previous existence which is the pre-supposition of preservation'.⁵⁷⁹

Once again, Rust recognises a distinction without realising its crucial significance; the distinction being all the more important in Rust's case because creation is for him *creatio ex nihilo*.⁵⁸⁰ Preservation is keeping something in being, creation is bringing it into being. When we look at a growing tree we may believe that God is preserving it, that without his sustaining power it would vanish completely. The way in which God sustains the life

⁵⁷⁸ NM pp. 263-264. Cf. p. 245, where he speaks of God 'controlling the forces of nature'.

⁵⁷⁹ NM pp. 263-264. ⁵⁸⁰ NM p. 258.

of the tree is a total mystery to us, but we actually mean, in speaking of sustaining power or preservation, that the tree does have a life of its own, that it is an object pervaded by natural processes which operate of their own accord. We may even think of the divine preservation as simply God's continuing will that the tree should continue to have its life and his refraining from intervening to stop it.

We may, on the other hand, imagine God to be far more actively engaged in the development of the tree, and we may even think of God every moment producing the living cells which comprise the growing tree. In that case it is wrong and utterly misleading to speak of God preserving the tree. God is doing nothing of the sort: he is creating it, he is bringing something into existence which did not exist before, and which would not come into existence but for his own creative activity.

It is, of course, perfectly true that something new is coming into existence, whichever view we adopt. The tree is not just a perfectly static object, and like everything else in nature it is continually changing: growing up, growing old, dying. Even death itself does not bring stability. Nevertheless, the processes which take place within circumscribed boundaries and according to specific patterns to produce a relatively permanent and therefore recognisable object, a tree, are either proceeding of their own accord, or they are divine creative energy actively at work. If they are the former, we are at liberty to regard them as somehow sustained and preserved by God; and if they are the latter, the notion

of preservation is excluded and the tree is an example before our very eyes of divine creativity.

It is still open to us to speak of God preserving this species of tree by continually creating individual members of the species. Or we may think of God preserving the tree, but intervening now and again to direct its growth according to his will; but in so far as God does intervene his work is creative and not preserving. Creation and preservation are mutually exclusive concepts.

When Rust turns to explain exactly what creatio continua means in relation to the operation of secondary causes, we find ourselves in understandable confusion. Rust leans heavily upon what he calls 'Reformed' thinkers. According to Heidegger,

"Concurrence or co-operation is the operation of God by which He co-operates directly with the second causes as depending upon Himself alike in their essence as in their operation, so as to urge or move them in a manner suitable to a first cause and adjusted to the nature of a second cause".⁵⁸¹

According to Auguste Lecerf,

"causes, whatever they may be, have no efficacy apart from that which is communicated to them. The principle power granted to created causes is obediential power".⁵⁸²

⁵⁸¹ NM p. 264, from Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics, E.T. of Reformierte Dogmatik, London 1950, p. 258.

⁵⁸² NM p. 264, from AN INTRODUCTION TO REFORMED DOGMATICS, E.T. London 1949, p. 147.

A little later Rust comments on the Reformed thinkers,

'They are careful to argue, for example, that the activity of second causes is that of God as well as of the second cause, since the action of the second cause is a conjoint action "by which God produces one and the same action along with the second cause, so that the action of the first and second cause is one"'.⁵⁸³

Again Rust comments,

'For these thinkers the forces of nature are thus in some way the manifestation of the divine energy and creative power. There is an effectual continued creation whereby the whole natural order leans back upon the divine will and discloses the divine activity. The Old Testament chugqoth then become descriptions of the natural modes of activity of the second causes and point directly back to the divine will by which they are allowed to move into action and from which they receive the power to act'.⁵⁸⁴

If it is possible to draw any conclusion at all from this verbiage, it must be that Rust wishes to see God creatively active in all natural events, but is embarrassed by the thought of falling into the pantheistic trap which ensnared the Occasionalists. He therefore speaks of 'second causes' and the 'natural order', thereby avoiding any suggestion of pantheism; but it is hard to avoid the impression that for him the natural order with its complex interrelationship of of secondary

⁵⁸³ NM p. 265. Heppe, op. cit. p. 260. ⁵⁸⁴ NM p. 265.

causes is anything other than a sham, an illusion of human perception which requires the enlightenment of scriptural, and Reformed, inspiration to see the truth. A proper recognition of the distinction between creation and preservation would have prevented this confusion whereby the independence of the natural order is given with one hand and taken away with the other, but it is doubtful that Rust would have welcomed such a clear-cut distinction.

When Rust comes to summarise his conclusions about the miraculous as this is revealed in the Bible, he makes the following statement about the realm of nature as this was seen by men of biblical times:

'It had its regularities, which betokened, as it were, the normal working of the divine will. But God was so directly behind all events that He could act in the exceptional way or concentrate His presence especially in a normal happening, provided this contributed to the accomplishment of his saving purpose'.⁵⁸⁵

Rust goes on to assert that in miracle God always worked in and through secondary causes, but his entitlement to speak of secondary causes is seriously open to question, especially in view of the fact that he regards secondary causation as belonging to scientific models rather than nature; and this renders his exposition of

⁵⁸⁵ NM p. 243. See whole summary, pp. 292-294.

biblical thought quite misleading. He speaks of secondary causes used by God as often disclosing 'capacities beyond those of their created nature'; but in that case, in what sense can we still regard them as secondary causes?⁵⁸⁶

It is not without irony that Rust speaks of the word 'miracle' as much abused, especially since it is the modern sense he is referring to. No amount of intellectual wriggling and juggling with words can evade the fact that a totally unconvincing exposition of biblical miracles is the Achilles' heel in certain scholars' views of the biblical understanding of nature, including that of Rust.

17. TOWARDS A THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF NATURE

In his book, *Science and Faith*,⁵⁸⁷ to which the present heading is the sub-title, Rust is not primarily concerned with the biblical view of nature. He does, however, refer to the Bible several times and it is clearly of great importance to him in expounding his thesis concerning the religious and scientific attitudes to the world. This chapter is an outline of Rust's argument and its relevance to biblical interpretation.

Rust maintains that the knowledge gained by the methods of natural science is limited and does not do justice to the whole truth about the world, including human life.

'If the scientific approach be accepted as the only way of knowing, it does imply a certain type of metaphysic. Its rejection of all qualities and

⁵⁸⁶ NM p. 293. ⁵⁸⁷ SCIENCE AND FAITH, New York, 1967.

values, the mechanistic connotation of its models or, even when they are mathematically formulated, its ignoring of purpose and teleology - all suggest a covert naturalism. Indeed, if its statements are the sole source of knowledge and if we ignore as complementary the insights of the poet, the artist, and the religious man, or if we explain away the latter, the inevitable outcome is a depersonalization of man and a mechanization of nature'.⁵⁸⁸

The scientist is also very much concerned with the analysis of objects, and therefore often concentrates his attention on the parts to the detriment of a proper understanding of the whole, and the character and purpose of the whole. The religious man discerns patterns which others do not see, and his religious insight enables him to appreciate things and persons in their wholeness. Even more important, religion involves an intuitive awareness of the presence of God in the world, and this awareness can only be explained in personal terms. It is in the light of this awareness that the religious man sees all else, and it is this which makes him see patterns in events; things and persons in their wholeness; and purpose and value in life. Such perception comes intuitively, like our knowledge of other persons, and does not come about through the kind of reasoning and weighing of evidence characteristic of natural science.

Even the natural scientist is often compelled to

⁵⁸⁸ SF pp. 76-77.

acknowledge, or at least assume the importance of intuition, the awareness of wholeness, and the explanatory value of purpose in his work. He must proceed on the basis of faith, however rational his methods may be: faith in the rational structure of the universe and its intelligibility to our minds. Thus, natural science itself bears witness to its own inadequacy as a full explanation of the meaning of life.

Furthermore, modern physics has demonstrated the inadequacy of the notion of cause in understanding the true nature of matter and energy; and the indeterminacy revealed in the behaviour of sub-atomic particles not only makes impossible a mechanistic view of the universe, but reveals the way in which God can enter and influence the processes of nature without breaking the so-called laws of nature. These 'laws' are nothing other than statistical generalisations, and the breaking of these 'laws' merely the destruction of some analogical model found useful by scientists. The unpredictable nature of genetic mutations, so important in Evolution, likewise destroys a deterministic interpretation and reveals a way in which the will of God can operate in natural growth.⁵⁸⁹

Rust's understanding of the biblical view of nature fits in well with the rest of his argument:

'The Hebrew emphasis was on will rather than reason, on personal being as a dynamic whole rather than on

⁵⁸⁹ See, e.g. SF pp. 281-287.

static reflective rationality ... He thought of God in terms of will and personal disclosure. If man was to know God, he would know him not as the end of a ratiocinative process ... but only insofar as God chose to make himself known'.⁵⁹⁰

'The Hebrew spoke of a divine transcendence which was otherness. God was not man. Yet in this tradition God is also immanent as Spirit and creative word, present with the order of nature and the lives of men, creating and sustaining, even suffering within, the spatiotemporal order'.⁵⁹¹

Events may be observed by others, but God is disclosed in them only to the religious mind. When a wind drove back the waters of the sea of reeds, it required the prophetic consciousness of Moses to turn this into a revelation of the presence of God.⁵⁹² For the ordinary observer this occurrence, coming at a crucial moment for the Israelites, is just a happy accident and would be understood in terms of chance: but for Moses it is a sign of the presence of God and must be regarded as a saving act of Yahweh.⁵⁹³

In the Bible, the work of God in his world, creating, sustaining and redeeming it, is spoken of as the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is revealed to us as active in both creation and incarnation; and it is also the Holy Spirit which illumines men's minds and enables

⁵⁹⁰ SF p. 7. ⁵⁹¹ SF p. 8. ⁵⁹² Cf. NM pp. 4-5.

⁵⁹³ pp. 104, 284.

them to see him active in sustaining both them and their material environment.⁵⁹⁴

On the other hand, when man is alienated from God he is also alienated from his natural environment. When he seeks to exploit nature selfishly, nature no longer co-operates with him.⁵⁹⁵

Rust makes some comment on biblical miracles, stressing their importance as events which reveal the presence of God and demand an appropriate response from those who witness them. 'What made them extraordinary was that they disclosed, often in unexpected ways, this saving presence. Thus what characterized miracle was its revelatory significance.' ⁵⁹⁶

The Hebrew did not think of nature as a system of causes and effects, but thought of it rather as a created order dependent upon the ever present and active God.⁵⁹⁷ What, therefore, distinguished a miracle from other natural events, was not its abnormal nature but its disclosure of the presence of God; and in this sense normal processes like rain and storm were sometimes regarded as miracles since they revealed God to men. The New Testament gives the same religious interpretation of miracle. In both Testaments it is clear that the eye of

⁵⁹⁴ SF pp. 184-186. ⁵⁹⁵ SF p. 272. Cf. pp. 301-302.

⁵⁹⁶ SF p. 288. Cf. p. 292. See pp. 287-300 for full section on biblical miracles.

⁵⁹⁷ Cf. NM p. 18: Speaking of God, 'He is directly behind every event of the natural order'.

faith could see God at work in normal events as well as the unusual; whereas the eye of disbelief would fail to see God even in extraordinary occurrences.

The modern view of miracle merely invokes God to fill in the gaps in our scientific knowledge; but it also attributes to the scientist a greater knowledge than he can attain, since he is increasingly compelled to employ the categories of probability and chance in his investigations of nature, and the absolute orderliness which characterises explanations in terms of secondary causes belongs not to nature but to his analogical models.

For the believer, therefore, the biblical miracles will always be true, whether they are ever explicable by scientific knowledge or not. That is to say, they can never be explained away: from the point of view of human knowledge they may be normal or abnormal, but in either case they will remain for the committed believer revelations of God.

18. PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS RAISED BY RUST

It is not part of the present purpose to make anything like a detailed analysis of Rust's book, but part of the interest of the volume lies in the fact that he has tried to relate the biblical view of nature to a rational defence of the Christian outlook in face of the challenge to the Church by sceptics who base their case on the discoveries and successes of modern science. A detailed examination of his argument would be very lengthy and it might be better carried out by a group of scholars, including representatives of the various major

branches of natural science, than by a single individual. Nevertheless, a brief evaluation of his main argument must be attempted before comment is made on his use of the Bible.

Rust says many things which are both true and important. His emphasis upon the significance of our knowledge of persons and the similarity between this human knowledge and our awareness of the presence of God will be accepted readily by religious believers in the Jewish and Christian traditions. His remarks about the limitations of scientific method, and the need to distinguish between experimental methods and results on the one hand, and the metaphysical theories which have been built on them on the other, are true and needful reminders in any argument concerning the religious and scientific attitudes to the world. He makes many interesting comments on scientific discoveries, philosophical theories and theological interpretations of the Bible, and the extensive evidence which he brings forward in the course of the argument is indicative of an unusual breadth of knowledge.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted, in fairness to those who would survey the same evidence from a different point of view that Rust has set out with a conclusion to be demonstrated. The overall impression of the book is of a rationalising rather than a rational argument. The rationalising is shrewd and well informed, but it is better calculated to confirm the like-minded believer than convert the unbeliever. Many authorities are quoted, but in a highly selective fashion, and it is clearly

impossible in such short compass to do justice to the thought of most of them. Rust is confessing his own intellectual approach to the problems confronting him when he writes of the biblical miracles:

'Now it is true that all historical knowledge is personal knowledge and that no historical investigation can be thoroughly "objective", since all of us approach history with absolute presuppositions. The Christian must also be prepared to accept all the critical apparatus that modern historical scholarship offers, so that he can determine as far as possible the *sitz im Leben* of the miracle stories themselves. By his faith commitment he will stand with the Gospel writers, but he will also endeavor to weigh fairly the historical evidence that is available. Yet he knows that his acceptance of the miracles will not be determined solely by the historical evidence, any more than will the denial of miracles by the naturalist. The latter already feels that modern scientific empiricism has settled that issue, and the Christian knows that his faith in a risen and incarnate Lord has equally settled the general issue of miracle, however much the historical evidence may lead him to accept some of the miracles more than others'.⁵⁹⁸

In the light of this statement, Rust's criticism of Hume

⁵⁹⁸ SF pp. 296-297.

is curious.

'He would introduce bias into historical judgment and prejudice a true estimate of historical evidence for the actuality of an event by unwarranted and prejudicial weighting. Historical claims should be dealt with on grounds which do not prejudice acceptance of a miracle before we start investigating its historical actuality'.⁵⁹⁹

Rust goes on to castigate the sceptic for his biased approach to the text; but if, in the quotation just made, we make the opening pronoun refer to Rust instead of Hume, and if we substitute for the word 'acceptance' the word 'rejection', can we be said to be unjust to Rust's own self-confessed method of handling the biblical evidence?⁶⁰⁰

It is interesting to contrast Rust's view with that of Geza Vermes.

'Most people, whether they admit it or not, approach the Gospels with preconceived ideas. Christians read them in the light of their faith; Jews, primed with age-old suspicion; agnostics, ready to be

599 SF p. 296.

600 Whatever criticism of Hume's views may be made, he did rightly draw attention to the problems created for claims to the miraculous by their conflict with normal experiences of the world and the scientific assumption that there are laws of nature; and he rightly emphasised the unreliability of much human testimony when considered as historical evidence. It is clear that Rust himself is not unmoved by such considerations, but is reluctant to face their implications.

See D.C. Yalden-Thomson, HUME: THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE, London and Edinburgh, 1951, pp. 113-136, 173-176, containing AN INQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING, Section X, OF MIRACLES, and APPENDIX.

scandalized; and professional New Testament experts, wearing the blinkers of their trade. Yet it should not be beyond the capabilities of an educated man to sit down and with a mind empty of prejudice read the accounts of Mark, Matthew and Luke as though for the first time'.⁶⁰¹

Whether or not Vermes himself succeeds in his self appointed task, it is a good description of the way in which Rust has not approached either the biblical or any other material used in his book; and apparently he does not even think such an approach possible, although this is a point on which he wavers; and an unwary reader might be forgiven for imagining that he is being presented with a mass of evidence objectively handled.

Scientific Models

Rust also wavers in his attitude to the so-called models or analogues used by scientists in their work. The correct interpretation of the significance of analogical models in scientific interpretation is a very important part of Rust's argument and will lead us directly to a consideration of his view of the biblical miracles and the Hebrew attitude to the natural world.

Rust wishes to present us with a picture of the universe in which God is directly active. The book concludes with a section on the sacramental character of the universe, and this conclusion is fully in keeping with

⁶⁰¹ G. Vermes, JESUS THE JEW, London 1973, p. 19.

the direction of Rust's argument throughout.

'The picture that emerges is of the universe as an area in which God and man meet through the medium of a physical order'.⁶⁰²

The Hebrew view of God and nature as revealed in the Bible is therefore the right one, and a proper understanding of the miracles recorded in the Old Testament focuses our attention on this essential truth: a miracle does not indicate the breaking of any law of nature by the arbitrary intervention of an omnipotent God, but merely a special disclosure of God who is in any case always disclosing himself in natural events. For the Hebrew

'the whole creation waited upon God and drew its power and regularity from his gracious will. This meant that God was present, everywhere active in his created order. One distinctive note of miracle was that it was "more of the same thing". The living God who was dynamically present everywhere was here disclosing himself in an extraordinary way to fulfil his purpose'.⁶⁰³

The reconciliation of this interpretation of natural events with the scientific outlook is effected in two connected ways. First, the elements of chance and unpredictability revealed in modern physics and genetics show those points in the natural order at which God can control the developments of organic and inorganic nature.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰² SF p. 307. ⁶⁰³ SF p. 288.

⁶⁰⁴ Cf NM p. 18. Of the 19th century conception of nature as a closed system Rust says, 'already science itself is dissolving this away'.

With this may be compared the contingencies of history. And while the contingencies of physics, biology and history will be looked upon as mere chance occurrences by the uncommitted observer, to the man of faith they will reveal the workings of providence. As we have seen, Rust refers to the crossing of the sea of reeds as an example of such providential working in history, and his argument immediately precedes the discussion of biblical miracles.⁶⁰⁵

Second, Rust believes that the attribution of necessary causation to nature is a mistake; and that this mistake arises through the too close identification of analogical models with nature itself. The necessity belongs to the model and not to nature, and the denial of the activity of God in his own creation results from the quite unjustified assumption that whatever conflicts with the model must be untrue of nature. Rust argues that this is 'putting the cart before the horse: the scientist's model must be based upon the given facts of nature, and the model which does not fit the facts must be scrapped and replaced. This is perfectly evident from the history of science itself, and has been clearly revealed in the destruction of a mechanistic conception of the universe by that research in physics which has been forced to dispense with the notion of necessary causation.

Even Rust, however, is uneasy with this account of scientific explanation, and his vacillation is clearly

⁶⁰⁵ SF pp. 281-287.

revealed in the following passage:

'Though the scientist, in replacing his models, is actually probing deeper into the reality of nature, we must still not fall into the error of identifying his models with that reality. We have suggested that, at best, they are analogous, yet they would appear to be satisfactory analogues, for they do enable him to predict and control. This means that there is truth in the picture which he presents to us'.⁶⁰⁶

Rust's difficulty is obvious: he wants to appeal to the indeterminacy and unpredictability revealed in modern physics and genetics, and so the relevant models are to be accepted; but models which involve the acknowledgment of systematic secondary causes in nature are a stumbling block in the way of establishing a natural order under the direct personal rule of God, and are therefore to be rejected. Rust can reply that the former have in fact destroyed the second; but he is then resting his case on scientific views which may themselves be superseded. Rust is well aware of the dangers of bringing in God to fill in the gaps in our knowledge, yet in the case of quantum mechanics and genetic mutations he is prepared to take the risk. He is, indeed, prepared to argue that there is no risk in this case since contingencies at the quantum level are not evidence of ignorance. A certain

David Bohm has argued that they are, and that the notion of cause will have to be re-introduced to quantum physics. Nor is Bohm alone in this.⁶⁰⁷ Nevertheless, Bohm's view is dismissed in a footnote by Rust, most of which must be quoted.

'Von Neumann has shown that no conceivable change of parameters will enable us to avoid indeterminacy in quantum mechanics so long as this model is regnant. The great success of quantum theory, both in prediction and in creative advance with new insight precludes our changing from it to any other position. Bohm's position is purely theoretical, offers no practical advantage, and seems, at the moment, to afford no experimentally testable alternative'.⁶⁰⁸

The words 'so long as this model is regnant' and 'seems, at the moment' are surely significant. One can easily imagine the statement about the success of quantum theory being made with equal confidence, indeed ever increasing confidence, in the 18th and 19th centuries about the Newtonian theory. A. N. Whitehead says of what he calls Aristotle's Law of Gravitation, 'It was a generalization from observed fact, and could be confirmed by

⁶⁰⁷ Cf. E. L. Mascall, CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND NATURAL SCIENCE, London 1956. 'the world of Einstein is every bit as deterministic as that of Laplace'. (p. 169) 'although Einstein consistently rejected the doctrine of a fundamental indeterminism in the universe and has recently been joined somewhat hesitantly by Louis de Broglie'. (p. 174) 'If Einstein's belief that indeterminism is only a passing phase should turn out to be correct ...'. (p. 202)

repeated observation. In its day - and its day lasted for eighteen hundred years - it was extremely useful'.⁶⁰⁹ It is hazardous indeed to forge the kind of link between scientific theory and religious belief which Rust wants, and his own knowledge of history should have warned him against it.

What Rust has done is to involve himself in a contradiction with his main thesis. If scientific method and the scientific outlook give us a quite inadequate picture of the universe which needs to be supplemented in very important ways by religious knowledge and belief, then the latter cannot depend on the former for their truth or probability.

Rust's whole discussion of scientific models wavers between three emphases:⁶¹⁰ i) Scientific models give us a genuine knowledge of nature. ii) Scientific models are to be clearly distinguished from nature. iii) Scientific models are always becoming redundant as science progresses. Every one of these statements is correct, but the way Rust juggles with them is illegitimate. As we have seen, the first is made use of when it enables us to get rid of the mechanistic view of the universe by appeal to modern research in physics. The second and third are made use of when we wish to eliminate the notion of necessary causation from our understanding of nature by attributing it to the removable models and not the remaining natural

⁶⁰⁹ A. N. Whitehead, ADVENTURES OF IDEAS, Harmondsworth, 1942, pp. 178-179.

⁶¹⁰ SF pp. 40-62.

world. And a false consistency is given to the whole argument by a rationalising method and the arrival by whatever route at a predetermined conclusion. In fact, before a proper use of these three statements can be made we have to recognise that the second together with the third make the first a quite uncertain ground on which to base theological interpretation. If, on the other hand, the first provides us with unquestionable fact with no further possibility of qualification, then the second and third are no longer true. These latter statements will apply only to the history of science, and Rust and the rest of the human race can now look back on centuries of struggle in the happy knowledge that the goal of scientific research has now been achieved, and we are proud possessors of a perfect empirical picture of the universe.

Necessary Causation

Those who waver end up by falling down somewhere, and Rust manages to land on the cushion of an acceptable conclusion. In the words of E. L. Mascall, 'the current physical theory is somewhat more congenial to the Christian doctrine than was the theory which it has displaced. This is a welcome conclusion'. However, Mascall adds, 'but its significance ought not to be exaggerated'; and a little earlier he states, 'I am not in any way trying to use the concept of physical indeterminism as a foundation on which to build Christian theism'.⁶¹¹

⁶¹¹ CTNS p. 202.

This implicit warning is important; and it is so in the case of Rust's argument, not so much because of scientific or theological shortcomings, whether these are evident or not, but through neglect of philosophical objections, and the cushion on which we have landed turns out to be a mere camouflage for a metaphysical ants' nest.

First: If Rust wishes only to point out the temporary usefulness and partial truthfulness of scientific models, he must also at the same time admit that they vary quite a lot in their truthfulness and use, and they also vary a good deal in the way in which they are related to the natural world. We shall have to admit that in many cases at least, the superceded model is still true as far as it goes; and this in turn will involve the acknowledgement that the causation held to be operative in nature can be quite legitimately regarded as part of that truth in past theories and models, whatever further discoveries are made about natural processes. Even those few experts in the realm of quantum mechanics who can properly understand achievements and problems in that realm will work on the assumption that their equipment, both sophisticated and commonplace, will continue to behave according to the normal patterns of cause and effect. Even the eminent physicist who has demonstrated the inadequacy of the Newtonian law of gravitation will not celebrate his triumph by stepping off the top of the Empire State Building. Necessary causation, the fundamental assumption of common sense, remains as the unprovable foundation of induction.

Rust, however, is loth to admit this because it conjures up the spectre of a mechanistic nature; and this means that his criticism of scientific models goes much further than the recognition of their limited usefulness, and becomes a metaphysical assertion that necessary causes can only belong to men's thinking about nature and not to nature itself. Throughout much of his argument this is not made quite clear, but when he comes to discussion of biblical miracles he is forced to pronounce on this fundamental issue. After all, if the water of the Nile turned to blood; or if, to mention a miracle with a more welcome outcome, water turned into wine at Cana of Galilee, we must either claim that God interfered with the normal working of secondary causes; or else claim that such causes do not exist.⁶¹² Rust opts for the second explanation when discussing the concept of the miraculous. He refers to the usual modern definition of 'miracle' which implies the suspension of natural laws.

'But then we must remember that what we call "natural law" is a property of our scientific models and is an abstraction from reality. Thus miracle is not a suspension of nature but of our model... Natural law is our abstracted description of the regularities and invariants of the natural process. But this

⁶¹² Or must we also regard it as a possibility that God put into operation secondary causes of which we at present are ignorant? This might be plausible in the case of some miracles, even if it is not very persuasive in the case of the two quoted.

description has a statistical base... It is difficult in a scientific age to believe that a special divine intervention means a break in this orderliness. Yet this difficulty is present because we have forgotten that the orderliness is associated with the model'.⁶¹³

We may well raise the question whether the difficulty exists merely for a scientific age, and it is a point to which we must return; but the present point is that Rust is involved in a far-reaching scepticism, and while such scepticism roused Kant from his dogmatic slumber it appears to have had a more anaesthetic effect upon Rust. Instead of welcoming Hume as a candid friend, he treats him warily, making what use he can of Hume's scepticism, but never properly facing the issues raised by it. This is the inevitable and undesirable consequence of a rationalising and selective approach to the question of how, if at all, we are to reconcile the scientific and religious attitudes to the world. Hume's philosophy raises serious questions which no thinker can avoid, and his remarks about claims concerning miraculous events deserve something better than mere frantic cries of 'Deist' and 'skeptic'. The spirit of scepticism is not so easily exorcized. Rust more than once refers with approval to Whitehead's 'Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness', of which the notion of 'simple location' is an example.

⁶¹³ SF p. 293.

Whitehead, however, immediately goes on to point out that this argument is a repetition of that of Hume, something which Rust ignores.⁶¹⁴

Second: Rust welcomes chance into his scheme of things, much as he tries to make use of philosophical scepticism; but chance is a curious concept to use in the establishment of Christian belief. "Chance" has become a permanent element in the scientific approach to nature'. Yet this element of chance reveals the hand of God, and in the discoveries of quantum mechanics 'we may be touching the mysteries of life and mind'.⁶¹⁵

Rust is claiming that mathematicians and physicists have to admit that chance plays a part in the phenomena they investigate. Rust, however, then goes on to assert that this is not chance but purpose, which somewhat alters the meaning of the original admission. Rust should offer evidence to support his radical re-interpretation of scientific evidence; but if his evidence satisfies scientific criteria it will be theologically valueless, and if it is theologically useful it will not satisfy scientific criteria. Ne'er the twain shall meet, and if Rust had done more than pay lip service to Kant he would have recognised the fact long before putting pen to paper.

Are we really touching the mysteries of life and mind in the discussions of quantum mechanics? And if so, why should we think so? Whitehead has carefully examined

⁶¹⁴ SF pp. 47, 55-56, 59. Cf. A. N. Whitehead, SCIENCE AND THE MODERN WORLD, Cambridge 1932, pp. 64-65.

⁶¹⁵ SF p. 283.

the Positivist school of thought, and mentions one obvious criticism of the extreme Positivist doctrine: the regular evolution of things stretching out over vast regions of space and time is not likely to be the product of mere chance. Whitehead is very critical of Positivism, but he rejects this objection to it for two reasons: i) In an infinite time and throughout infinite space anything is possible. Something must be the case, and the present observable state of things is as likely or unlikely as any other conceivable state. ii) In relation to the whole of time and space our observations are very limited, and even in relation to our own time and position in space 'our observation is rough, inaccurate and sporadic'.⁶¹⁶

These remarks are pertinent to Rust's argument, especially the first. Chance, like scepticism is a two-edged weapon, and while it is perfectly open to Rust to maintain that what we view as chance is in fact the providential working of God, he needs to make out his case. From the philosophical point of view it is a case which will require unusually sophisticated argument since it is hard to see how one can proceed from truths or probabilities about facts within the universe to assertions about the universe as a whole. Whitehead's statement could hardly be bettered:

'In any finite region of space and time, with its finite cargo of atoms, any preconceived arrangement of paths, however simple or however complex, is

⁶¹⁶ AOI pp. 147-148.

equally unlikely, indeed there is an infinite probability against it. But we are not dealing with a preconceived concept, we observe what in fact is the case in a limited region. Something must be the case, and what we have observed is what in fact has been the case. There is nothing preconceived, and thus there is no question of infinite improbability ... The fact in the past is neither probable nor improbable, it is what in fact took place within the ambit of our observation'.⁶¹⁷

Whitehead's remarks in the same book about statistics are also relevant to Rust's argument. Rust sets great store by the fact that the so-called laws of nature are expressions of statistical regularity, but in so doing he has merely dragged in another Trojan Horse. If the theist can use such an argument to give God elbow room for the manipulation of the universe, the atheist can equally well argue for the absence of any fundamental order or design in nature and attribute all to chance. In fact, nothing at all follows from the statistical nature of our descriptions of uniformities in nature. Whitehead's remarks are again part of his criticism of Positivism.

'Mathematics can tell you the consequences of your beliefs. For example, if your apple is composed of a

⁶¹⁷ AOI pp. 147-148. The same point is of fundamental importance in Hume's DIALOGUES CONCERNING NATURAL RELIGION (Ed. with Introduction by Henry D. Aiken, New York 1948), but see especially Philo's arguments in Part II.

finite number of atoms, mathematics will tell you that the number is odd or even. But you must not ask mathematics to provide you with the apple, the atoms, and the finiteness of their number. There is no valid inference from mere possibility to matter of fact, or, in other words, from mere mathematics to concrete nature'.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁸ AOI p, 150. For a recent attempt to answer the question how we might reconcile the acceptance of miracles with the acceptance of scientific method, see Peter Byrne, MIRACLES AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE, THE HEYTHROP JOURNAL, Vol. 19, no. 2. April 1978, pp. 162-170. 'Many nineteenth and twentieth century theologians have sought to abandon the traditional conception of miracles as violations of the laws of nature. It has been increasingly felt that this conception of miracle is an encumbrance, something which can only bring religious belief into disrepute with modern, scientifically-minded people. It has been felt that this conception of miracle betrays a contempt for science and hence that it must be abandoned by all those who have any respect for scientific thought and practice'. (p. 162) Byrne's method of removing this embarrassment is to argue that proper scientific method involves accepting facts as we find them whether they are expected or not. He then goes on to argue that if an uncaused event occurred, this would not destroy the relevant scientific law but would only mean that it was true in general, and not invariably so. Scientific laws would still stand, but they would have the character of generalisations to which there could be exceptions. If, therefore, we accept any or all biblical miracles, we are not contradicting sound scientific methodology. (pp. 167-170)

Byrne is right to defend the traditional concept of the miraculous in religious thought, and he is right in insisting that a proper scientific outlook does not try to evade facts which do not fit the expected pattern of events. The remainder of his main argument, however, is naive. If any uncaused event should ever take place and be recognised as such, not only would a given scientific law be destroyed, but all scientific or natural laws as at present understood. Experimental scientists have to assume that nature is a complex of events deterministically related to one another, and it has achieved considerable success on this assumption. An uncaused event would destroy the assumption of determinism, and any religious believer who asserts that an uncaused event has taken place will

19. THE MIRACULOUS

What, then, are we to say concerning those concrete manifestations of God's activity in nature termed 'miracles'? Rust's treatment of this subject bears a strong similarity to that of Wheeler Robinson, and is therefore open to the same objections.⁶¹⁹ The similarity of their comments on the Old Testament text extends to the use of the same phrase to emphasise that for the Hebrew miracles were simply the same kind of event as other happenings in nature, all natural events being signs of divine activity. 'One distinctive note of miracle was that it was "more of the same thing"'.⁶²⁰ Rust is apparently dependent on Robinson for the use of this phrase, and this interpretation of the Old Testament evidence must be rejected in the case of Rust as in that of Robinson. We might also add that his fondness for referring to 'the Hebrew', who in the early pages of the book is compared with 'the Greek', is

618 (Contd.) unquestionably be in conflict with scientific methodology as normally understood. Byrne recognises in a footnote, p. 170, that if some causal laws are not universal in scope, i.e. if an uncaused event can occur, then particular causal connections are not necessary. He does not, however, seem to appreciate the fundamental significance of this fact for his total argument. Furthermore, biblical miracles are not uncaused events, they are caused by God or some other supernatural agency. They therefore imply an intervention in the otherwise naturally determined events of nature.

619 SF pp. 287-300. Cf. NM, ft. p. 51. Rust is writing of the psychic life of the earth and states, 'Cf. H.W. Robinson, Revelation and Inspiration in the Old Testament, Oxford 1946, pp. 13ff. This is a discussion to which I am greatly indebted'. There are further references to Robinson's book throughout Rust's discussion.

620 SF p. 288.

another example of the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness: 'the Hebrew' is merely an abstraction who takes the place in our imagination of the many generations of individual Hebrews and who, unlike them, becomes the unresisting receptacle of whatever notions we find it convenient to foist on him.⁶²¹

We must here return to the point Rust makes about the difficulty we have in believing in divine intervention in the orderliness of nature in a scientific age. It is precisely in making such a point as this that generalisations can be so misleading, and that we can be led, as we have seen Robinson was, to exaggerate the difference between what people think today and what Israelites thought in the ancient world; and, indeed, to be completely wrong in the case of any given individual or group of individuals, ancient or modern. It is obviously impossible to make the comparison: there is no modern Endor at which we can make our tryst with representatives of ancient Israel. We can, however, examine the few Old Testament miracles to which Rust makes reference.

Most notable among these is the crossing of the Red Sea.⁶²² According to the biblical account the Israelites are caught between pharaoh's army and the sea, with no hope of escape. They cry out to Yahweh, and complain to Moses that it would have been better to serve the Egyptians than die in the wilderness. Moses assures them that they will be saved by Yahweh, since he has

⁶²¹ SF pp. 5-10. ⁶²² Exodus 14:1-15:21.

already been told by God that the whole aim of the exercise is that the power of God shall be revealed in the destruction of pharaoh and his army.

After Moses has reassured the people, he is told by Yahweh to lead the people forward, and to divide the sea by lifting up his rod over it, and thus a path of dry land will be made over which the people can move. It is also revealed to Moses that Yahweh's triumph over pharaoh will be revealed when the king and his army enter this newly created passage through the sea.

To stop the Egyptian army catching the Israelites, the angel of God in the cloud moves behind the Israelites and separates the two camps during the night.

Then Moses stretches out his hand over the sea, and Yahweh makes the sea part by means of a strong east wind which blows throughout the night. The Israelites then move along the passage of dry land, with walls of sea water on their right and left. The Egyptians pursue them and in the morning Yahweh throws them into confusion by damaging their chariots. Too late they try to retire, realising that Yahweh is fighting against them; but at this point Moses is instructed to stretch out his hand again over the sea in order to bring the waters back upon the Egyptians. The whole Egyptian force is overwhelmed, and the Israelites see their bodies washed up on the sea shore.

There follows a song of praise to Yahweh in celebration of this triumph, and it should be noted that there are two references in it to the wind used by God to accomplish

his victory.⁶²³

It is immediately apparent that there is some difference between Rust's description of this event and that given in the Bible. For Rust the occurrence would be regarded by a mere observer as 'the superficially happy accident of a wind driving back the shallow waters of the "sea of reeds" when the Israelites are on its shores'.⁶²⁴ According to the biblical writer the observer would see Moses stretch out his hand over the sea, a passage-way carved through the sea by a powerful east wind, the Israelites walking between two great walls of sea water, a remarkable cloud bringing up their rear, the confusion of the Egyptians caught between the walls of water, Moses stretching out his hand once again, and the returning waters engulfing the Egyptians, whose bodies would later be seen strewn on the sea shore. By no stretch of imagination could this be described as a superficially happy accident, or , indeed, 'more of the same thing'.

If the observer were able to pursue his investigations to the extent of questioning Moses about the event, he would not be offered an interpretation of an otherwise normal occurrence which, be it accepted, transforms this occurrence into a revelation of God. This would be true of Sennacherib's invasion or the destruction of Babylon by Cyrus; and it would be true in these cases and not in the case under discussion precisely because the one is a miracle in the generally accepted sense of the term,

⁶²³ Exodus 15:8,10. ⁶²⁴ SF p. 284. Cf. pp. 104, 298.

and the other two are not. Moses would explain to our reporter on the spot that he was acting under the immediate guidance of God, whose quite undeniable intervention had saved Israel and destroyed the Egyptians. Moses was not acting as prophetic interpreter, but as the obedient instrument of God's will.

Rust would no doubt reply that this criticism is based upon a naive interpretation of the Exodus account which cannot be taken at its face value. It certainly appears to be more sensible to see the historical event as actually the conveniently timed blowing of a wind on shallow water, since this appears to be both a perfectly credible natural happening and what is clearly recorded in the text. The account we have is probably a much later description of the escape, embellished so as to bring out the true prophetic interpretation put on it. Thus the sting of hostile criticism is drawn and we can all sleep easily in our beds.

This reconstruction of the historical situation may be correct, but we cannot help seeing in it the indirect influence of modern scientific method and achievement, and a tacit acknowledgement that no educated person today can honestly accept such a miracle without question. Coming from someone whose faith has 'settled the general issue of miracle',⁶²⁵ this might seem strange, but the shadow of Hume, expelled from the front door, is already falling over the threshold of the back.

⁶²⁵ SF p. 297.

First, it is not wise or justifiable to offer a reconstruction of the account given in the biblical text as if it were unquestionably true, without further explanation. There is good reason to believe that different ancient traditions have been combined to produce the present biblical narrative, and it is easy to assume that the earlier tradition contains reminiscence of genuine historical and geographical information, while the later tradition contains details which turn the incident into a stupendous miracle or heighten the element of the miraculous already present. However, the ease with which such an assumption can be made is in sharp contrast to the difficulty of demonstrating that such is the correct interpretation of the text we have received, not to speak of the possible influence of the assumption on our analysis. The precise areas of the text covered by each tradition cannot be determined with certainty, and a later tradition may contain older material than an earlier one.⁶²⁶

Second, any reconstruction of the historical situation must also bridge the gap between the occurrence as it really happened and the report of it given in the text. If this is not plausible, the reconstruction likewise

⁶²⁶ See, e.g. M. Noth's analysis, EXODUS, London, 1962, pp. 102-126; P2, pp. 728-737, especially 728-731; Lewis S. Hay, WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AT THE SEA OF REEDS? JBL no. 83, 1964, pp. 297-403. Hay dismisses naturalistic interpretations of the parting waters as purely speculative, follows Noth (EXODUS p. 118) in believing that movement of the water ill fits the episode, and prefers to follow suggestions in the text that an actual battle was fought.

lacks plausibility. If, for example, in the present case a battle was fought, with the Hebrews achieving a remarkable victory over the Egyptians, why is this not recorded? Why should Yahweh's victory in battle be ignored in favour of a narrative which is, *ex hypothesi*, largely fictitious? It may be that there is a reasonable answer to this question, but if there is not the suggested reconstruction of events loses much of its plausibility. If we may refer briefly to the New Testament: it has been suggested that the feeding of the multitude came about through the example of unselfishness by a boy, others being stimulated by his example to share their food with their neighbours; or when Jesus was roused during the storm it was his disciples and not the elements who were told to be calm, the dropping of the wind occurring by sheer coincidence at the same time and giving rise to a misunderstanding. All things are indeed possible to the credulous, but leaving aside the purely speculative nature of such 'reconstructions' there is once again considerable difficulty in understanding how the supposed historical events can have led to the stories actually recorded in the Gospels.

Bearing in mind these two points, we must ask what plausibility there is in the suggestion that a strong wind drove a passage through waters which, if shallow compared with the Red Sea, were nevertheless too deep for the escaping Israelites to wade through. If the Exodus account is based on an actual situation during the departure of the Israelites from Egypt we can reasonably assume that it was remarkable enough to be remembered and regarded as a manifestation of divine activity. The

remarkable character of the incident lies for Rust in the timing of the wind, which comes at just the right moment for the Israelites. We may imagine both Moses and the people crying to God in their despair, and then suddenly finding an unexpected escape route created for them by the powerful east wind. The religious conclusion would be obvious, and would be reinforced if the pursuing army was impeded and thrown into confusion by the soft ground. The development of this story in oral tradition to produce our present account seems perfectly plausible.

There are only two questions to answer before we accept this persuasive interpretation of the text. How strong was the wind? Was the original incident a miracle?

Leaving aside the drowning of the Egyptians, which may be the product of patriotic imagination, the water must be thought of as deep enough to make thought of escape through it out of the question. The Israelites, after all, were desperate and not to be deterred by the thought of getting their feet wet. It follows from this that the wind would have to be of immense strength to shift sufficient water to make a path, and it would also have to be concentrated very narrowly at one point. Any doubt about this will be removed by the observation of a gale force wind blowing on a lake or tarn.

Furthermore, the displaced water would have to go somewhere, and since the wind came from the east in order to create a passage for the Israelites who were moving west to east, there can be no doubt as to who would catch the full force of it.

How was the passage-way kept open while the Israelites crossed? Did the wind keep on blowing, or were the waters held back by a separate miracle? The text does not tell us.

The wind which we thought was going to be so convenient turns out to be an embarrassment. It is so much 'more of the same thing' that its effect on the Israelites would have been devastating, and an advance in the teeth of it a total impossibility. Not only would such a tornado constitute a more effective barrier to escape than the water it was meant to remove, but it would have swept both Israelites and Egyptians back into Egypt by a more direct route and with much greater velocity than they had left it. A supposedly natural or normal event, a fragment of genuine recollection in a highly coloured piece of fiction, and conveniently handy for the rationalist who wishes to make the biblical account palatable to modern taste, turns out to be as fantastic as the rest of the tale.

Let us temporarily waive this objection to Rust's interpretation, and all those others which have been raised against the view he shares with Wheeler Robinson, and try to see afresh in what sense the crossing of the sea can be called miraculous.

According to Rust, a miracle is an event in which God discloses himself. The event may be normal or abnormal. All natural events are in any case directly caused by God, and what distinguishes the miracle is its revelatory character. The miracle under discussion fits this description exactly according to Rust since a perfectly

normal event is revealed to faith as the intervention of God to save his people. The miracle consists in the fact that what appears to be a coincidence is revealed to Moses as a deliberate act of God.

However, if all natural events are deliberate acts of God then there can be no such thing as a coincidence. Scholars like Rust and Robinson insist that the ancient Israelites looked at nature very differently from the way we do, and instead of a system of secondary causes saw God ever at work. If we take this view seriously, perhaps more seriously than Rust or Robinson do themselves, the concept of coincidence cannot possibly have entered an Israelite head; and therefore the notion of a deliberate, and consequently revelatory act of God could not have been thought of in contrast to it.⁶²⁷ Nature, as a collection of the deliberate acts of God, would be the order of the day in the consciousness of every Israelite, and it would be impossible for the occasion under discussion or any other event in nature to become the subject of self conscious reflection of the kind revealed in the text.

It might be replied that although natural events were looked upon as acts of God they nevertheless formed patterns in the experience of the Israelites just as they do in ours. The event we are thinking about was abnormal

⁶²⁷ The 'consequently' is important. Cf. D. Nineham. The Use and Abuse of the Bible, pp. 20-21. Nineham, of course, believes that this was actually true of the outlook of ancient Israelites.

and therefore drew attention to itself as a special act of God. If the Israelites had not been in their predicament the wind would not have blown and the waters would have stood in unruffled calm.

This may be so, but it is not Rust's argument, and contradicts it. If the blowing of the wind and the parting of the waters were abnormal then they could not be regarded as a mere coincidence. God acted in an unusual way because of the unusual situation, and this is precisely what should have been expected in the light of previous events. The Israelites ought not to have looked for the normal pattern of God's activity because the situation in which they found themselves was far from normal.

The attempt to relate the incident to Rust's emphasis on the significance of chance in scientific research has no happier results. If the suggestion be accepted that God directly influences the elements, why did he use a wind at all instead of simply displacing the waters according to his will? If we have already decided that the biblical account contains elements of a quite credible description of natural occurrences, we shall have to accept that God worked in this particular way without being able to give a reason for it. We shall also have to accept the objection that we have no reason to regard such natural occurrences as in any sense miraculous, and that our attempted interpretation of the biblical account has resulted in explaining it away. In the present case, for example, natural coincidence replaces the extraordinary

events recorded in Exodus and therefore the need for the divine intervention disappears. Hume is now comfortably re-established in the house from which he had been expelled and, like the demon in the parable, he has brought his friends with him.

When we examine the other Old Testament miracles referred to by Rust the abnormal is retained, but the divine vanishes. In Exodus 7:8-8:19 we read how Egyptian magicians turned rods into serpents, turned water into blood, produced frogs from nowhere, but failed to change dust into lice. Rust comments, 'Egyptian magicians and false prophets were alike able to produce extraordinary happenings'.⁶²⁸ But, of course, God was not at work in what Rust calls 'false miracles'. We are also left with the extraordinary view that the miracles performed by the Egyptian magicians actually happened, whereas the crossing of the sea was not a miraculous event.

Whatever may be the true interpretation of the biblical text we shall certainly never reach it by combining the inaccurate definition of a crucial term with a highly selective approach to both scientific research and the Bible, and then engaging in a rationalising argument which at the same time confuses possibility with probability. This is no answer to doubt, either in the mind of the believer or the hostile critic; and it produces a false impression of the biblical text.

⁶²⁸ SF p. 289.

When we return to the Exodus account of the crossing of the sea, there cannot be any doubt that we are reading about a miracle in the normally accepted sense of the term, and this is what the writer of the story wants us to understand. Like the miracles in Egypt which preceded it, it demonstrates and is meant to demonstrate the superior power of Yahweh over the Egyptian gods and pharaoh and that no being can frustrate his will. The opening sentences of Exodus 14 strongly suggest that the people were led by God into a situation from which they and pharaoh knew it was impossible that they should escape. A man cannot make a passage-way through the sea by stretching out his hand over it, and then make the waters return by the same means: nor did Moses himself attempt such a thing until commanded to do so by God. The wind which parts the sea is a miraculous wind, blowing a path through the waters, but otherwise having no effect. The miraculous cloud stops the Egyptians attacking the Israelites before they can escape, but no ancient Israelite, any more than any modern Englishman would, expected a cloud to behave as this one did or to achieve such an effect.

Nor is it sufficient to say that we are here confronted by the unusual or abnormal. It is by the accomplishment of the impossible that Yahweh is proved to be the true God. If Yahweh had not performed the impossible there would have been no revelation of his presence, and no Israel to respond to it: such is the biblical message.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁹ This seems to be tacitly admitted by Rust in NM p. 38: 'Because He is the Lord of history and because history is wrought out in the sphere of nature, Yahweh's control must extend over nature as well ... Only because He is able to control the waters of the Red Sea can He deliver His people'.

PART II

In Part II we are concerned with an aspect of the Hebrew view of nature which has long puzzled commentators: the distinction between the clean and the unclean. It is at this point that we find direct contact between Old Testament scholarship and anthropology, with a possible new approach suggested by the latter discipline, which, if correct, would correct a failure on the part of Old Testament scholars to recognise the significance of the symbolic in Israel's, or any other nation's attitude to the world of nature.

After a survey of what Old Testament scholars have said about the distinction between clean and unclean and the problems raised by the interpretations of the biblical text, we shall turn to a consideration of the of the anthropological approach to the subject, especially the work of Mary Douglas, and attempt a critical evaluation of this approach in order to distinguish between those points which are relevant to Old Testament interpretation, and other which are more controversial and involve far-reaching inferences which go beyond what the evidence can support.

20. THE CLEAN AND THE UNCLEAN: SOME SCHOLARLY INTERPRETATIONS

In Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:3-21, certain creatures are classified as unclean. The word generally used is אָבִי־שׁוֹא , although sometimes in Leviticus we find the word זָבָח , given in RV as 'abomination', along with a piel denominative verb 'make abominable', and given in BDB as 'detestation, detestable thing; detest, make detestable'. In Deuteronomy 14:3 the noun תּוֹעֵבָה is used, given in RV as 'abominable thing', and in BDB as 'abomination' along with a denominative verb meaning 'regard as an abomination, abhor, cause to be an abomination'. There is no essential difference in meaning between these words, but אָבִי־שׁוֹא seems to refer primarily to some quality in the object, while זָבָח and תּוֹעֵבָה seem to refer primarily to the attitude which ought to be adopted towards it.

The distinction between clean and unclean animals is also found in Genesis 7:2,8; 8:20, the word טָהוֹר being used to indicate the clean, with no separate word for the unclean.

Other things are also designated 'unclean', such as a woman after the birth of a child, an individual with a certain kind of skin disease and anything contaminated by it, and a building in which a type of fungus appears.⁶³⁰

This classification of animals is strange and justified neither by common sense observation, nor more careful

⁶³⁰ Leviticus 12; 13; 14:33-53.

scientific investigation. It is by no means apparent why the pig, because of its cloven hooves and failure to chew the cud should be classified as 'unclean' along with a woman who has just given birth to a child; nor is it clear why various kinds of lizard should be classified as 'unclean' along with a 'leper'; $\chi \omega \omega$ being used in all these cases.

Sometimes we feel a natural sympathy with the rules of avoidance and can rationalise our revulsion in terms of hygienic considerations: we do not wish to catch leprosy and we do not feel any appetite for a meal of lizards or mice. But these reasons are totally inadequate to explain the biblical rules.

First, they by no means cover all the cases. We are perfectly happy to eat the forbidden pork and hare, and would be reluctant on the other hand to consume permitted locusts. This is simply a matter of taste. Second, there is no particular danger of disease being carried by the creatures designated unclean any more than by a young mother. Third, hygiene and taste do not account for the rituals, at times elaborate, which have to be undergone before a person who has contracted uncleanness can return to the normal life and worship of the community.⁶³¹ This ritual emphasises the fact made clear in the Bible that the rules of avoidance, including the classification of creatures into clean and unclean, are religious. Things are clean or unclean because they have been so designated by God,

⁶³¹ See, e.g. Leviticus 12:6-8; 14:1-32.

and to meddle with the unclean is an offence against the holiness of Yahweh, Israel's God.⁶³² By attributing this judgement to Yahweh the biblical text implies that there is something mysterious about it. Moses, Aaron and the people have to be informed that such and such creatures are unclean. The command is based upon distinctions already made by normal observation, but this observation in itself, so it is implied, would not lead to the distinction between clean and unclean; yet once Yahweh has so commanded, the distinction is observed by the faithful with a strictness at times amounting to fanaticism, not only into New Testament times, but right down to the present.

Many other nations have rules of avoidance similar in principle to those found in the Old Testament, and a classification of animals which owes nothing to ordinary observation or scientific analysis. Such rules and classification are bound up with beliefs in supernatural power, and the societies which hold them are frequently designated 'primitive' or 'savage'. The laws of Leviticus and Deuteronomy have therefore often been seen as simply the Israelite version of ideas held all over the world by many different peoples and the survival of a primitive outlook which the authors of Leviticus and Deuteronomy may themselves have failed to understand, and rationalised as best they could. It is perhaps worth remarking that these rules are not usually explained by scholars as an

⁶³² See, e.g. Leviticus 11:1, 44-45; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1. Cf. Deuteronomy 14:1-2, 21.

actual revelation by God.

W. F. Lofthouse opens his remarks on Leviticus 11-15 by asserting that for modern readers the section is probably the least intelligible in the book. According to Lofthouse, the rules of avoidance are taboos, a word of Polynesian origin, and reflecting the primitive nature of the fears expressed. The origin of such taboos is obscure, but there might have been several reasons: ritual hygienic, or moral, or because of 'the nature of things'. The code has its origin in a time 'far anterior to Moses', and later legislators 'would naturally be puzzled by the apparent caprice' to be found in it.⁶³³

T. Witton Davies in commenting on Deuteronomy 14:3-20 merely remarks that many theories have been proposed to explain its origins, and advises us to consult the Bible Dictionaries.⁶³⁴

N. H. Snaith says of all the matters dealt with in Leviticus 11-15 that they are not ethical but have to do with ritual cleanness and uncleanness. According to Snaith, their basis in Leviticus is that God rescued the people from Egypt and he is holy, and therefore they must be holy, and that involves being ritually clean. This has nothing to do with ethics, but is religious. The laws were

⁶³³ A.S. Peake (ed.), A COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE, (New ed. with supplement), London and Edinburgh 1937, pp. 202-203.

⁶³⁴ Peake, p. 237.

originally primitive and based on what Snaith calls 'natural religion' and they may have come about for a variety of reasons: hygiene, natural revulsion, association with heathen deities. They were partly concerned with the preservation of society.⁶³⁵

In his commentary on Leviticus, Snaith says, 'It is difficult to see why some creatures are clean and edible and others neither. Possibly the reason is to be found in association with heathen cults. Sometimes it seems to be because of unpleasant habits. In the case of birds, they are apparently all birds of prey and possibly the reason is that they shed blood. It has been suggested that the origins are totemistic, but there are totemic systems where the totem is eaten. No one explanation fits all cases, and we can no more fit them all into one scheme than we can fit all the various sacrifices. These things "just grow", and ritualistic assimilation does therest'.

'To the Jew all down the centuries the swine has been the most offensive abomination of all. The origin is in its association with heathen cults ... Just as throwing incense on the fire before the statue of the emperor was the prime test for the Christian, so eating seine's flesh was the test for the Jews'.⁶³⁶

⁶³⁵ M. Black, H. H. Rowley (ed), PEAKE'S COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE, London and Edinburgh 1962, 207a-207e.

⁶³⁶ N. H. Snaith, LEVITICUS AND NUMBERS, London, 1967, pp. 81-82. Cf. THE DISTINCTIVE IDEAS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, London 1944, chapter 3, especially pp. 59-61.

G. Henton Davies, in commenting on Deuteronomy 14:3-21 states: 'The grounds for the choice are lost to us, but differences from the previous or neighbouring inhabitants of the land, remnants of totemism natural repugnance and so on have played their part'.⁶³⁷

A.W.F. Blunt regarded the primitive significance of the original distinction between clean and unclean and the notion of purification as wholly ceremonial. They arose in an age when spell and magic predominated and when the savage reacted in fear to the large number of phenomena which exhibited a power he could not understand. The distinction 'may even be traceable ultimately to instincts which mankind shares with the higher animals'. Eventually the dangerous holy and the dangerous unclean came to be distinguished, the latter being marked by an intrinsic repulsiveness, and rituals became carefully differentiated; but even then 'ideas and rules survived which can be explained only as relics of primitive and even primeval taboo customs'. In dealing specifically with unclean food Blunt remarks that 'the savage had no consistent theory of taboo' and believes it impossible to give any certain explanation of the separate items. For Blunt, the recognition of clean and unclean seems to have had no religious value, and with the teaching of Jesus and Paul ceremonialism, if not extirpated, was reduced considerably, 'and it is the custom to explain such ritual regulations as survive on grounds that accord better with

⁶³⁷ PCB, 238a.

the spirit of Christianity and the ideas of civilised society'.⁶³⁸

A similar conclusion was reached by A. S. Peake.⁶³⁹ Peake makes it clear in a footnote that he is dealing with ceremonial uncleanness, not ethical or religious. The laws of defilement came to be greatly elaborated by the Jews, but 'the laws of uncleanness are far older than the Hebrew people ... they are not the creation of the higher religion of Israel', this truth being self evident.⁶⁴⁰

'Anthropology, however, has proved, what might naturally have been suspected, that they belong essentially to the prehistoric past. Their congenial atmosphere is not that which breathes in the Hebrew prophets, but that which animates the crudest forms of savage religion.

'Some of the laws might, indeed, be explained on rational grounds, as due to sanitary precaution, to love of cleanliness, to natural aversion from disgusting objects. But it is certain that these do not explain many of the prohibitions, and cannot account for the precise selection or omission which characterizes the list of things unclean. We may grant that these considerations may have played some part in late development, but this should probably be reduced to a minimum. It is more likely, in fact, that the laws of uncleanness created sanitary

⁶³⁸ J. Hastings (ed.), DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE, Edinburgh 1909, pp. 144-146.

⁶³⁹ J. Hastings (ed.), A DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE, Vol IV Edinburgh 1902. Article, UNCLEAN, UNCLEANNESS, pp. 825-834.

⁶⁴⁰ HDB p. 826.

laws and aversion for certain things than that they were created by them'.

Peake goes on to say that laws of uncleanness could help a tribe to survive if in fact they coincided with good sanitation, by a process of natural selection, and thus good sanitary laws would be established, but not intentionally. '... even in higher religious ritual cleanness may be obtained by bathing in very dirty water'. He equally firmly rejects the explanation in terms of natural disgust, as this is simply feeling which has become second nature through custom. For Peake, the laws of cleanness and uncleanness are essentially irrational in character.⁶⁴¹

Peake appeals to anthropology as the means to understanding such laws and makes frequent reference to W. R. Smith and J. G. Frazer, as well as less frequent references to other anthropologists. The Hebrew laws should be regarded as part of a widespread system of taboo according to which both holiness and uncleanness were first of all regarded as almost the same, and only later distinguished.⁶⁴²

Once the distinction had been made, holiness was associated with God and could therefore become the vehicle of more developed religious feeling and thought. Uncleanness, however, 'remained to the last a virtually savage idea, one of the heathen survivals in Judaism which Christianity had simply to eliminate'.⁶⁴³

⁶⁴¹ HDB p. 826. ⁶⁴² HDB p. 826. ⁶⁴³ HDB p. 827.

Peake goes on to discuss the notion that laws of uncleanness originated as a protest against heathenism, and he clearly recognises that this explanation excludes the explanation in terms of primitive origins. '... the laws of uncleanness, while largely a survival from pre-historic savagery, or the semi-civilization of primitive Semites, partly originated in a protest of the higher religion of Israel against heathenism. Certain things which were connected with heathen cults, and constituted a danger to spiritual religion, were placed under taboo'.

Peake, however, clearly regarded this explanation as covering only a small part of the laws of avoidance. 'It is probable that the extent to which the laws are due to protest against heathenism has been overrated in recent discussions. Similarly, in the face of savage parallels, it is probable that some laws in the Priestly Code, which are often regarded as very late developments and impracticable refinements, are in substance of the highest antiquity. That, as at present codified, they are late is clear, and such a passage as Leviticus 11:24-38 is not unfairly regarded as exhibiting the rudiments of the casuistry of the scribes. But the central prohibition of the passage is probably quite early. It is remarkable that some taboos which survived into the Levitical legislation, disappeared among the more conservative Arabs'.⁶⁴⁴

Peake returns to this point after recording the

⁶⁴⁴ HDB p. 827.

attitudes of various ancient peoples to the animals listed as unclean in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. He believed that the uncleanness of certain animals resulted from the fact that they had been totems of primitive Semites, although there is no evidence of totemism among the Hebrews in the historical period. This explanation also, however, depends on seeing a similarity between the customs of the Hebrews and the taboos of 'savage races'.⁶⁴⁵

Peake goes on to mention two other explanations: 'The lists in Deuteronomy and Leviticus may include food traditionally taboo. In this case the Law simply endorses, as in so many instances, ancient practices. But they may also forbid food, not on the ground of immemorial custom, but because its use in heathen rites constituted religious danger to Israel'.

Needless to say, he regards the criterion of parting the hoof and chewing the cud as probably a late attempt to define a class by a single formula although the members had already been selected on other grounds.

The laws of uncleanness were vastly developed in New Testament times. Jesus, however, repealed at one stroke all the Levitical rules concerning unclean meats. 'There can be no such thing as ceremonial, there is only moral defilement'.⁶⁴⁶

Oesterley and Robinson believed that the distinction between clean and unclean animals was one of great antiquity,

⁶⁴⁵ HDB pp. 829-831. ⁶⁴⁶ HDB p. 834.

and that it is extremely unlikely that the priestly compilers of the codes we have in Leviticus knew the original reason for the distinction. This did not matter, however, because the distinction was simply used to make clear the difference between Jews and Gentiles.⁶⁴⁷ They refer to the word **חַטָּא** as equivalent to 'taboo', and say that it means 'unclean', but not in the sense of disgusting or impure; 'it is simply a ritual term for something that must not be touched or, in the case of animals, eaten'.⁶⁴⁸

This is difficult to accept in view of the other terms used in Leviticus and Deuteronomy; nor is the rest of their briefly expressed opinion clear. They assert that the prohibition of a large proportion of the unclean animals seems pointless since no one would think of eating them anyway, but that reason comes to the rescue in a comparison with the customs of heathen Semites for whom the unclean creatures were divine, and therefore not ordinarily eaten or sacrificed.⁶⁴⁹

This opinion is taken from W. R. Smith,⁶⁵⁰ but it is not clear from Oesterley and Robinson's statement whether they thought the Hebrews refrained from eating and sacrificing the unclean animals in imitation of their heathen neighbours, or because they were repelled by their intimate association with heathen worship. It is natural to assume that the latter reason is the correct one, and this is confirmed by the authors' statement that

⁶⁴⁷ W. O. E. Oesterley, T. H. Robinson, HEBREW RELIGION: ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT, London 1937, pp. 70, 287.

⁶⁴⁸ HR p. 70. ⁶⁴⁹ HR p. 70.

⁶⁵⁰ KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE IN EARLY ARABIA, Cambridge, 1903, p. 311.

the term 'abomination' in Leviticus 11 is applied to unclean beasts and heathen gods, but nothing else. The difficulty with this argument, however, is that the joint condemnation of beasts and gods is for Oesterley and Robinson very probably part of the later priestly attempt to distinguish Jews clearly from their Gentile neighbours and in that case cannot be used as evidence concerning the origin of the classification of certain creatures as unclean.⁶⁵¹

Roland de Vaux, in writing about the minds of the ancients, states, 'There was a mysterious and frightening force inherent in things which were impure and in things which were sacred, and these two forces acted on everything with which they came into contact, placing the objects or persons which touched them under a kind of interdict ... These primitive notions are found in the Old Testament'.⁶⁵²

De Vaux goes on to say that very archaic customs have been preserved in Israel's religion, and he comments on the strangeness of the fact that they have been retained in priestly legislation which was the very latest part of the Pentateuch. De Vaux explains the fact by claiming that these customs were given a new meaning, which was to inculcate the idea of the holiness of Yahweh and his people and separate Israel from the surrounding pagan world.

⁶⁵¹ HR p. 287.

⁶⁵² Roland de Vaux, ANCIENT ISRAEL, London 1961, p. 460. See pp. 460-464.

With reference to the red heifer de Vaux states:
'This rite certainly originated in pagan practices, and it must have been originally a magic rite: many peoples regard red as a protective colour to avert evil and to put demons to flight ... The rite, then, must be of ancient origin; it was accepted by Yahwism, and the role of the priest made it a legitimate ceremony'.⁶⁵³ De Vaux refers to prescriptions found in Leviticus 13-14 as 'evidence of very primitive ideas; they are the remains of old superstitious rites'.⁶⁵⁴

De Vaux believes that the need for purity and the fear of impurity became an obsession with the Jews after the Exile and so ritual became 'a narrow system of formal observance', condemned by Jesus and denied by St. Paul's principle that nothing in itself is unclean or impure.⁶⁵⁵

Martin Noth believes that Leviticus 11 contains regulations which must be old, or even primitive. The external bodily features and peculiarities in behaviour were a useful means of establishing a simple if superficial classification, but cannot be the real reason for it. The real reason is to be found in the connection of these creatures with foreign cults, idolatrous practices and powers working against God.⁶⁵⁶

L. E. Toombs⁶⁵⁷ states that this distinction has an

⁶⁵³ AI pp. 461-462. ⁶⁵⁴ AI p. 463. ⁶⁵⁵ AI p. 464. Cf. Romans 14:14.

⁶⁵⁶ M. Noth, LEVITICUS, London 1965, pp. 91-92.

⁶⁵⁷ L.E. Toombs, article, CLEAN AND UNCLEAN, THE INTERPRETER'S DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE, New York 1962, Vol. I, pp. 641-648.

important place in the religions of tribal societies, and that its origins are complex and obscure and involve conflicting and contradictory elements. He continues, 'Primitive man makes no real distinction between animate and inanimate nature, but regards the whole universe as infused with a personality or personalities akin to his own. The vital force in the world may be conceived as a diffuse and mysterious presence (e.g. the "mana" of the Melanesians), or it may be made concrete and individual in a hierarchy of gods and demons'.⁶⁵⁸

Nonhuman powers may be dangerous and if they are believed to be in any object such as a rock or tree or animal, this object becomes taboo, that is, unclean, and any contact with such an object renders a person unclean. Self preservation is thus the fundamental reason for laws of cleanness. 'The pig was unclean for the Hebrews probably because of its extensive use by the Canaanites as a sacrificial animal'.⁶⁵⁹

It must be remarked in passing that Toombs does not explain why danger leads to uncleanness, and his statement about the pig suggests that it was dangerous because it was unclean, not unclean because it was dangerous.

Toombs also believes that tribal conservatism was largely responsible for the establishment of rules of cleanness and uncleanness. Innovations were sources of contamination and hence the camel was forbidden because it

⁶⁵⁸ IDB p. 643. ⁶⁵⁹ IDB p. 643.

was not part of the traditional diet.⁶⁶⁰ Birds considered unclean were so regarded probably because they are flesh eaters and scavengers.⁶⁶¹

'It appears, then, that the distinction between holy and unclean is not simply a religious but a cosmic division running through the whole universe and dividing animals, objects, and places into two categories which could be mingled only at the gravest peril'.⁶⁶²

Eichrodt speaks of the various prescriptions as explicable partly in terms of the rejection of heathen rites, other causes being the fear of disease as evidence of God's wrath and natural revulsion against abnormality or blemish. He also believes that disgust at the appearance and habits of certain animals led to their being declared unclean, although he does not specify any. According to Eichrodt all of the rules came to serve a higher purpose by being seen as the expression of Yahweh's demand for a way of life pleasing to himself.⁶⁶³

The Jewish Encyclopedia states in the article on clean and unclean animals that the distinction in Genesis was intended for sacrifices only. Genesis 8:20 indicates that clean beasts are sacrificed; in 9:3 we learn that all animals are food for man. In Leviticus and Deuteronomy however, it is unquestionably a food law.

The prohibition against eating meat of animals which

⁶⁶⁰ IDB p. 643. ⁶⁶¹ IDB p. 645. ⁶⁶² IDB p. 647.

⁶⁶³ EI pp. 134-137.

have died naturally, of disease or through molestation by a carnivorous beast, belongs strictly speaking to the law concerning blood.

Various reasons have been suggested over the centuries for the distinction, and it is clear from the brief survey in this article that there has been no small difference of opinion on the subject: hygiene, separation of Israel from the nations, animals as symbols of vices and virtues, animals as totems, actual effect of meat on the eater, simply a divine command incapable of explanation; and various combinations of these views.

Some Jews have held that in the Messianic Age all animals will be declared clean by God.⁶⁶⁴

In the article on dietary laws other reasons are added for the distinction:⁶⁶⁵ the loathsome appearance of certain animals, and that the unclean were regarded as created by an evil power. The author also states, 'Really, the animals forbidden in the Mosaic law are almost the same as are prohibited to the priests or saints in the ancient Hindu, Babylonian and Egyptian laws'.⁶⁶⁶ Originally, unclean animals were avoided by people claiming special holiness, including priests. The idea that Israel was to be a kingdom of priests was emphasised by the extension of the rules of avoidance to the whole people. The warning given to Samson's mother shows that people in general did

⁶⁶⁴ THE JEWISH ENCYCLOPAEDIA, Vol. IV New York and London 1903, pp. 110-113.

⁶⁶⁵ JE pp. 596-600. ⁶⁶⁶ JE p. 599.

not heed the dietary laws.

On the rule about not seething a kid in its mother's milk: 'It seems to rest on Temple practice, which avoided the mixing of dishes that required a different treatment from the Levitical point of view'.⁶⁶⁷ '... the great majority of West European Jews have broken away from the dietary laws'; and some Rabbis have proposed the modification or abrogation of these laws which only hinder Jews from making proper contact with other people and presenting them with religious truth.⁶⁶⁸

The Encyclopaedia Judaica, in the article on dietary laws repeats the reasons for the distinction between clean and unclean given in the 1903 Encyclopaedia. It is added that Reform Judaism makes the observance of the laws optional.⁶⁶⁹

Two Themes: Primitive Origins and Heathen Practices

In all of these discussions there are two themes which keep on appearing: primitive, savage origins; and rejection of heathen practices. Both of these are commonly held to explain the rules of avoidance in Leviticus and Deuteronomy and it is perhaps the most interesting feature of Peake's article over against those of the other commentators that he regards these two explanations as alternative rather than complementary to each other. This may be because he had strong personal convictions about the irrationality and danger of ceremonialism in religion, as seems to have been the case also with Blunt who adopts a view similar to Peake's but without being so explicit about it; but whatever the motive, Peake's judgement in

⁶⁶⁷ JE p. 599. ⁶⁶⁸ JE p. 600.

⁶⁶⁹ ENCYCLOPAEDIA JUDAICA Vol. 6, Jerusalem 1972, pp. 26-43.

this respect is worth serious consideration. If we account for the seeming irrationality of the laws about unclean animals by attributing them to an age in which our primitive and savage forefathers reacted in quite irrational ways to natural phenomena, then we cannot, at the same time, give a perfectly rational explanation of them in terms of the rejection of heathen rites. Peake does not say this and he may not have been conscious of the fact that the distinction between these two lines of interpretation is so clear cut, but it is nevertheless implied in his refusal to use the two explanations together, and his clear preference for the former.

Let us apply this line of argument to the ban on pork, for example. For many people this is totally unintelligible, and solemn declarations about pig's trotters and the animal's eating habits only make the rule even more nonsensical. If, however, we are told that the presence of this rule in the text is merely the survival of a very ancient custom which arose at a time when men could not think properly, and perhaps even at a time when men were not too readily distinguishable from the humbler creation, we feel satisfied. Our belief that the rule is nonsense is confirmed, while at the same time we can account for its survival into historical times by the well known force of immemorial custom. If, on the other hand, we are told that the consumption of pork had a prominent place in Canaanite rites, and that it was wholly undesirable that Israelites should participate in or copy these rites, we are once again satisfied, but for a quite different reason. This time the rule makes perfect sense

and we recognise that our failure to see this was merely the consequence of ignorance about the historical situation in which the Israelites lived.

It is, of course, possible to argue that the pig was originally avoided because of primitive irrational fears and that the later priests used the custom for their own quite different purposes. They saw the pig as a metonymic symbol of Canaanitism and the rejection of the one vividly represented the rejection of the other; but in that case we must recognise that for the purposes of biblical interpretation the explanation in terms of primitive superstition is superfluous. The rule we have received in Leviticus and Deuteronomy would have to be regarded as a rational one, whatever its previous history.

This is virtually the standpoint of Eichrodt with respect to certain of the forbidden animals. In speaking of prescriptions concerning cleanness and uncleanness he says, 'The comparative study of religion has supplied us with an overwhelming quantity of material, which has been successfully used to throw light on the ultimate origins of such customs in primitive tabu-beliefs. But in this context more than in any other it is necessary to keep in mind the proverb, "The same thing done by two different people is not the same thing". The ultimate task of the comparative study of religion must be to establish what the religion of Yahweh made of the material which it inherited'.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁷⁰ El p. 134.

Another way of looking at the two explanations in terms of savage origins or in terms of the rejection of heathenism, is to see one as the result of emphasis upon the close similarity between Israel and her neighbours in the ancient Near East, and the other as the consequence of emphasis upon their dissimilarity; and when the two are combined the result is not unnaturally paradoxical. Fr. de Vaux, for example, as we have seen, depicts the Jews adopting at a late date in their history primitive and pagan magical rites and distinctions in order to preserve their unique and holy character in the midst of a pagan world.⁶⁷¹ De Vaux, of course, while acknowledging the similarity of ritual practice between Israel and other orientals clearly asserts that the meaning of Israelite practice cannot be explained by a mere comparison with that of other peoples;⁶⁷² but nevertheless, it remains true that the Israelite legislators cannot at one and the same time have retained a custom concerning, say, the pig, as the survival of an immemorial practice similar to that of other peoples, and also adopted or retained it as a reaction against the threat of heathen rites.

It seems to be generally agreed that rejection of heathenism is not sufficient to explain all the rules of avoidance; and even if this explanation is correct for certain animals, such as the pig, this leaves us with no answer to the question why the pig should be singled out in this way, and not such beasts as bulls, cows, lambs, and goats.⁶⁷³ Other explanations for the uncleanness of

⁶⁷¹ AI p. 464. ⁶⁷² AI pp. 433, 447.

⁶⁷³ Cf. e.g. I Kings 18:22ff; ANET p. 134, where Baal

various creatures often appear to be guesswork and to have varying degrees of plausibility. It is impossible, for example, to see why the camel should have been regarded as unclean simply because it was not part of the traditional diet, as Toombs maintains. Distaste for an unfamiliar food is not sufficient to brand it an abomination in the sight of God; and by the time the laws of Leviticus and Deuteronomy were written the camel must have been for centuries a familiar object. The lumping together of various hypothetical causes as combining in some unspecified way to produce the religious distinctions of Leviticus and Deuteronomy is tantamount to offering no explanation at all. Snaith's statement that such things just grow and that ritualistic assimilation does the rest is an explanation of the same variety as that contained in the statement 'We are here because we are here'.

If we think the vulture was unclean because it eats carrion, this is admittedly plausible and fits in well with other rules of avoidance, although we are still no wiser as to why certain carcasses should be unclean. If we see the pig as the symbol of heathen rites, we cannot account for the fact that it is singled out for this treatment as against other animals used in pagan ritual.

This kind of approach to the origins of the legislation

673 (Contd.) slaughters bulls, lambs, rams, calves, kids, and there is reference to he-lamb-gods, ewe-lamb goddesses, bull-gods and cow-goddesses; p. 139, where Anath slaughters various animals as a trigute to Baal; p. 143, where Keret offers a lamb, a kid and a turtledove to El and Baal. AI pp. 433-434 for Mesopotamia; p. 438 for the Canaanites.

in Leviticus and Deuteronomy is not impossible but it still leaves us very uncertain as to why the Israelite legislators should have treated so many creatures in the way they did and why such great importance should have been attached to these observances.

Perhaps the most serious weakness in these explanations of the Israelite classification into clean and unclean animals, including the idea of the rejection of heathen cults, is that they are not given in the text. This may appear to be untrue in the case of heathenism since both Leviticus and Deuteronomy give clear and emphatic warnings against contamination by foreign practices and make it clear that their laws are being promulgated to preserve the purity and holiness of Yahweh's people. Nevertheless, it remains true that the text does not state that such and such animals are unclean because they form part of the heathen rites to be avoided by Israelites.

There is no mention at all of heathen rites in Leviticus 1-10; nor is there any reference to heathenism in 11-16. In 17-26 there are several specific warnings against imitating heathen practices: not to sacrifice to he-goats /satyrs; a general warning against the practices of Egypt and Canaan; against idols; against eating blood, enchantments, augury, and marks on the body, and against prostitution, which could be a reference to cultic practice and against mediums and wizards; against offering children to Molech, and against mediums and wizards; a general warning against following Canaanite customs, including reference to observing the distinction between clean and unclean creatures; and a third warning against mediums and

wizards; another warning against certain marks on the body; and other possible references to cult prostitution; and warnings against idolatry.⁶⁷⁴

There is no reference to heathenism in chapter 27.

Therefore we are never told in Leviticus that creatures are unclean because of their association with heathen practices. Certain heathen customs are singled out for specific mention; and certain criteria are offered whereby some clean and unclean creatures can be distinguished, others being named as unclean with no further comment; but the unclean creatures are never explicitly linked with heathenism, and if this is the reason for their classification as unclean the omission is surprising.⁶⁷⁵ If connection with heathenism is the reason for the rejection of just some of the creatures, it is even more surprising that they are not singled out for special mention. Creeping things are an abomination, *yrw*, and their avoidance is linked with recognition of Yahweh's holiness and the distinctive character of the Israelite people.⁶⁷⁶ There is therefore an implied forceful rejection of heathenism in this ruling; but we cannot conclude from this that creeping things were unclean because they had a special association with Canaanite and other heathen practices, nor have we any reason to suppose that this is the case. It could be rather because the abstinence on grounds of

⁶⁷⁴ See Leviticus 17:7; 18:3-4, 24-30; 19:4, 26-29, 31; 20:1-5, 6, 22-26, 27; 21:5, 7, 9; 26:1, 30.

⁶⁷⁵ Leviticus 11:3-12, 20-23, 26-27, 39, 41-42.

⁶⁷⁶ 11:41-45.

uncleanness was peculiar to Israel and not because it was a conscious reaction against foreign habits. The avoidance of creeping things would be a badge of Israel's unique nature and association with Yahweh, and this would be true for the rest of the unclean creatures; and no other reason is given than that such creatures have been forbidden by God.

Later, we have the explicit linking of the distinction between clean and unclean creatures with the avoidance of foreign practices and the emphatic separation of Israel from the rest of the nations, the same verb, **בָּטַל**, being used to assert that Israel's separation between the clean and the unclean is essential to his separation from the peoples.⁶⁷⁷ It might be concluded from this that the unclean are to be avoided because they are living symbols of the unclean nations which employ them in their own heathen practices; but the conclusion is not a necessary one; and if we adopt it as more likely than not we must also conclude that all of the unclean creatures were associated with heathen cults, whereas it appears that many of them were not. The Book of Leviticus nowhere states or clearly implies that unclean creatures were linked with heathen rites, and their avoidance is simply attributed to the command of Yahweh which in itself is sufficient to distinguish holy Israel from the rest of the peoples.

Warning against contamination by foreign practices

⁶⁷⁷ 20:22-26.

is the familiar theme of Deuteronomy and time and again explicitly asserted throughout the book.⁶⁷⁸ The list of clean and unclean creatures in Deuteronomy 14:3-21 is preceded by reference to the making of marks on the body, which may well be tokens of heathenism, and reference to the holiness of Israel and his special relationship to Yahweh and consequent distinction from all other nations. The list is concluded by the prohibition against seething a kid in its mother's milk, and this might be because it was a Canaanite practice.⁶⁷⁹ Nowhere in the book, however, is it stated that certain creatures are unclean because they are associated with heathenism; nor does the context in which they appear, or the use of the word **טמא** entitle us to draw such a conclusion.⁶⁸⁰

In chapter 12, for example, the prohibition against the consumption of blood occurs in the context of emphatic commands to destroy heathen shrines, and worship only in the place indicated by God, with a concluding warning not to be ensnared by abominations hateful to Yahweh.⁶⁸¹ But blood was not prohibited because of its association with heathen shrines, and if it had been it could never have been poured out on the altar of Yahweh. In I Samuel 14:32-35 Saul is told that the people are sinning against Yahweh by eating the blood of the animals they have slain,

⁶⁷⁸ Deuteronomy 4:15-20; 6:13-15; 7:1-5, 22-26; 8:19-20; 11:16-17, 26-28; 12:2-3, 29-31; 13; 14:1-2, 21d; 16:21-22; 17:2-7; 18:9-14, 20; 20:16-18; 23:17-18; 27:15; 29:16-18, 25-26; 30:17-18; 31:16-21; 32:16-17, 21.

⁶⁷⁹ Cf. G.R. Driver, CANAANITE MYTHS AND LEGENDS, Edinburgh 1956, p. 121.

⁶⁸⁰ Cf. Deuteronomy 25:16, where swindling is **תִּפְעֵל**.

⁶⁸¹ **כָּל-תִּפְעֵל אֲשֶׁר שָׁנָא**. Cf. Leviticus 19:26ff.

and his answer is to use a great stone as an altar and call the people to slaughter their animals there, the blood obviously being poured over the stone altar as an offering to God. No reason is given in this narrative to explain why such action was needful, and it was no doubt assumed that the reader would know. We learn from Genesis 9:4 that blood contains the life of the creature, and is therefore forbidden for food, and this reason is repeated in Deuteronomy 12:23, and also, even more significantly in Leviticus 17:11.⁶⁸²

Considerations of this kind do not prevent Eichrodt stating of the outspoken repugnance to the consumption of blood that it is 'connected with the rejection of heathen customs which made the drinking of blood a part of the cult of certain animals or a means of inducing ecstatic prophecy or of orgiastic communion with the deity'.⁶⁸³ That there is some relation to the rejection of heathenism is clear from the biblical text; but if connection with heathen practices was the reason for the law it is hard to see why the biblical legislators did not say so, and why they substituted a quite different reason, which in turn justifies the important use of blood in Israelite

⁶⁸² Cf. AI p. 419. De Vaux's remarks are also interesting: 'We may note, too, that the Ras Shamra texts, like the Phoenician and Punic inscriptions, do not seem to attach any ritual importance to the blood of the victim'. (p. 440)

In speaking of the Israelites' employment of ancient rites about the use of blood he says, 'rites, then, which retained their efficacy and which were not found among the Canaanites'. (p. 441)

⁶⁸³ EI p. 135.

ritual. Therefore the reason for the prohibition of the consumption of blood in Deuteronomy 12 cannot be settled by a mere appeal to the context in which it appears.

Similarly, in 17:1 it is forbidden to sacrifice an animal with a blemish, and such a sacrifice would [~] לֹא יִשְׁחַט; but it is unlikely that this rule came about because it was the Canaanite or other heathen custom to offer blemished animals, despite the fact that it is sandwiched between 16:21-22 and 17:2-7 which clearly refer to the rejection of heathenism.

We cannot, therefore, explain the origin of the law of clean and unclean animals in Deuteronomy 14 by an appeal to the context in which it appears; an appeal which would also involve the unacceptable conclusion that all of the unclean creatures must be associated with heathenism.

21. THE PRIMITIVE AND THE SYMBOLIC

The alternative to seeing the distinction in terms of the repudiation of heathenism, natural repugnance, tribal conservatism and so on, is to see it as the survival of a prehistoric attitude. This seems to be tantamount to the admission that we can never know the reason for such a classification, but if anthropologists assure us that many peoples all over the world have adopted or do adopt a similar attitude towards animals, birds, fishes, insects, and even vegetation, we feel that we can safely attribute the judgement to primitive mentality and thereby relieve ourselves of the obligation to search for a reason. There is no point in looking for reasons among the irrational.

However, having swept our problem under the prehistoric carpet we are confronted by the question why the priests and legislators of Israel should have elevated mumbo-jumbo into a vital sign of Yahweh's, and therefore Israel's holiness. It is easy to assume that the answer to this question is that an ancient people like the Israelites still shared to some extent in the primitive outlook: the classification into clean and unclean survived because the attitude which produced it had survived. We have already seen that some scholars deny to the Israelites any proper conception of secondary causation, insist that they received only impressions of the whole and were incapable of analysis into related parts, that they spoke and wrote a simple language which in turn reflected a mode of thought unmarked by what we should recognise as logic. The scholarly articles and comments concerning the rules of avoidance already referred to frequently use the term 'primitive' and sometimes the word 'savage', and terms like this inevitably suggest human beings scarcely worthy of the title, creatures whose reaction to the natural world is far more instinctive than rational, whose minds are darkened by almost total ignorance of the proper relations between natural phenomena, and whose substitute for correct observation is the superstitious association revealed in magic. No one, of course, would attribute quite such an outlook to the Israelites of historical times whose religious literature has come down to us: but if an important section of their law, and therefore a significant portion of their lives, displays the survival of such a mentality, and if there are other signs in their

literature of a marked failure to observe proper connections in nature, and so on, we must conclude that their way of thinking was very different from our own, and the meaning of their writings to a large extent beyond us, or demonstrably foolish in the light of later knowledge. The cultural gap between an ancient Israelite and a modern Englishman would be unbridgeable, and, indeed, not worth bridging.

We have already seen reason to doubt the assertions of those scholars who have attributed to the Israelites a view of the natural world far removed from our own; but we are now confronted by a classification of creatures which seems to display an even greater irrationality and primitiveness than the view which has been rejected.

In the attempt to reach a proper judgement in this matter it will be as well to drop the word 'savage' altogether. If we are content to use this term in the description of the life and thinking of ancient or contemporary peoples we have already thereby made our judgment and begged the question we are trying to answer.

The same is almost true of the word 'primitive', but it is a term which has been frequently employed by authors and it is useful to have some single word by means of which we can denote those cultures which we see as markedly different from our own. Robin Horton defines 'primitive' as used by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Emile Durkheim as 'pre-literate, pre-industrial, pre-scientific', over against 'modern', which means 'literate, industrial, science-oriented'; and no doubt this would be true for many other writers as well. Later, Horton expands this definition

to include another characteristic of primitive societies, 'a relatively low degree of role and institutional specialization'; although at the same time he expresses a preference for the word 'traditional' which he feels avoids the 'strong overtones of contempt and opprobrium' conveyed by 'primitive'. Since the term 'primitive' has been so commonly used it seems best to go on using it, but to bear in mind its sense as defined by Horton and the warnings he has given about its suggestiveness.⁶⁸⁴

We must next take note of the fact that primitive societies or cultures are not marked by the ignorance and lack of intelligence which some have attributed to them.

Sonia Cole, writing of Neolithic man,⁶⁸⁵ refers to the cultivation of cereals, fruit and other plants, domestication and breeding of animals, making of axes and other implements, development of spinning, weaving, pottery, and basket making, construction of boats and sledges, and possibly some wheeled vehicles, a certain amount of art, and varied buildings, all of which indicate careful observation and intelligent use of materials, plants and animals according to their natural properties. This was in a period which would be very ancient even for the eighth and seventh century prophets.

There was also trading, in axe-heads for example,

⁶⁸⁴ MT ft. p. 249; ft. p. 272. Cf. TPR p. 18; and Mary Douglas, PURITY AND DANGER, London 1966, pp. 92-93.

⁶⁸⁵ S. Cole, THE NEOLITHIC REVOLUTION, 4th ed., BRITISH MUSEUM 1967.

and a careful discrimination of the less and more valuable. 'Neolithic men apparently took great trouble to obtain the most suitable material for their axe-heads and it was traded over considerable distances ... the large demand for axe-heads for forest clearance led to the exploitation of underground seams of flint and gave a new impetus to an age-old craft, which now became part of a well organised industry... Flat polished flint axe-heads showing an exceptionally high standard of workmanship are associated with early Neolithic burials in Scandinavia'.⁶⁸⁶

Cole also refers to the experimentation which must have taken place to find out which animals were suitable for domestication, in the course of which there must have been a good deal of trial and error. 'The Egyptians tried to tame antelopes, gazelles, monkeys and hyaenas without much success'.⁶⁸⁷ She also refers to weaving and pottery. 'Although spinning is a simple process, weaving requires a loom; this was one of the great inventions made in the Neolithic stage. The production of durable pottery, too, is quite a complicated process and was a most important Neolithic discovery. Just as great pains were taken with the shapes and decorations of pots, so there is evidence of colour and pattern in linen cloth ... Neolithic crafts were not only utilitarian but also artistic'.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁶ NR p. 31. ⁶⁸⁷ NR p. 20. ⁶⁸⁸ NR p. 37.

Nor is it merely that people who engage in what seem irrational activities often in other respects behave very rationally and display skill in observation, techniques and so on; but what appear to be superstitious acts may themselves have a perfectly rational purpose, or more than one purpose, which can only be understood in terms of symbolism. Raymond Firth, for example, has written of the different meanings which can be given to the ritual act of a Tikopia chief.⁶⁸⁹ The concept of level of meaning in symbolic behaviour can operate in anthropological inquiry in both an implicit and an explicit way. Take again the example of the Tikopia chief rubbing the temple post. Explicitly he explained the meaning of this (symbolic) act as cleansing and decorating the body of his god, represented by the timber, on analogy with other decorative acts applied to the human body, and submissively making an appeal to the god by giving him pleasure. But implicitly the chief was also making a demonstration of power. He chose the time to perform the rite; he stood up to his full height in front of his seated followers in a temple so sacred that normally one should go on hands and knees. He scrubbed the timber in an aggressive way, emphasising by his forceful actions that it was his privilege to do this. Implicitly the chief was showing initiative, and claiming control of a political order by a series of energetic physical behaviour patterns of a coded kind designed to secure benefit in the non-human sphere of crop fertility and the human sphere

⁶⁸⁹ R. Firth, SYMBOLS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE, 1973, p. 82.

of health. This is my way of putting it as an anthropologist. But this implicit meaning of the symbolic action could have been got from the chief himself by more roundabout explanation - as indeed I got it piecemeal. On the other hand, there were different levels of explicit meaning which varied according to the status and knowledge of the member of the group concerned. Some people could give much more coherent, more sophisticated, more syncretist interpretations of the symbols than could others - a kind of "inner" meaning, though overtly expressed. It is tempting to identify such more esoteric meaning as the "true" meaning of the symbols. But each level is valid, and must be aligned with the others for a developed analysis of the place of symbolism in social process - as Audrey Richards and Victor Turner, for instance, have shown'.

The Coronation might seem a strange ritual for a modern people to use in establishing their ruler, but it clearly has meaning for most people in the nation whatever may be their opinions of the Anglican liturgy and even if they have never heard of the divine right of kings. The whole of the television film of the occasion was shown again to mark its 25th anniversary. Firth discusses it at some length and in the course of the discussion makes the following comment: 'Moreover, it may be argued that the people were not really fooled. They tolerated the symbolism of the ceremony because they enjoyed it and had already accepted the Queen. Much of the symbolism found response in a set of ideas and sentiments of a diffuse moral kind about British social relationships, family life and institutional patterns focused upon and epitomised in

the person of the young Queen - such appears to be fair inference from their behaviour'.⁶⁹⁰

Returning to primitive peoples, Mary Douglas, to whom much fuller reference will be made later, asserts that the belief that magic or ritual are crudely mechanistic has been demolished. She believes that we must beware of being influenced by that brand of Protestantism which sees all ritual as merely formal and opposed to the true religion of feeling and will, and she rightly dismisses Pfeiffer's anti-ritualist approach to the Old Testament. Douglas points out that ritual expresses and re-creates experience; and modern European life is full of ritual, which is distinguished from the primitive not by its scientific basis, but its fragmentary nature. In primitive societies ritual is used to achieve desirable ends: rain at the right moment, peace and harmony between men, safe delivery of a baby; but the ritual is designed to achieve these ends by working in harmony with the powers controlling the universe, and not by trying to compel them in some crudely mechanical way - an idea which would be regarded as absurd.⁶⁹¹

If, then, we are not entitled to infer from the use of symbolism crudity of intelligence among those who use it, we must next face the question what positive meaning and value symbolism has; including, of course, that of the ancient Israelites.

⁶⁹⁰ SPP pp. 87-90. ⁶⁹¹ PD pp. 58-72.

Dan Sperber and the 'Meaning' of Symbolism⁶⁹²

Dan Sperber has drawn attention to the considerable problems facing anyone who attempts to give a theoretical explanation of symbolism, and thereby insight into the ways of thinking of those who use the symbols. Sperber acknowledges from the beginning that the symbolism of primitive peoples can neither be explained nor dismissed as simply irrational, and yet at the same time symbolism often appears to be meaningless, nonsensical.⁶⁹³ For example, the Dorze of Ethiopia, among whom Sperber worked, believe that the leopard is a Christian animal which observes the fasts of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Dorze themselves do not seem to acknowledge this truth in practice and they guard their animals just as carefully from the predatory leopard on fast days as on any other day of the week; but they nevertheless hold the belief and take it seriously.⁶⁹⁴ We must also note the contrast between Christian leopards and were-hyaenas.⁶⁹⁵

Sperber distinguishes between semantic knowledge and encyclopaedic knowledge, the former being about categories and expressed in analytic statements, and the latter about the world and expressed in synthetic statements. Symbolic knowledge resembles encyclopaedic and is often based on encyclopaedic knowledge; but it is not the same as, and may even contradict encyclopaedic knowledge, as

⁶⁹² D. Sperber, RETHINKING SYMBOLISM, Cambridge 1975.

⁶⁹³ RS pp. 1-4. Cf. p. 98.

⁶⁹⁴ RS pp. 93-95.

⁶⁹⁵ RS pp. 129-130.

we have seen.⁶⁹⁶

Sperber has already spent much time destroying the idea that symbolic knowledge can be explained in semantic terms, and it may be readily agreed that when a Jew denounces the pig as unclean he is not engaging in a process of definition, or establishing a code in which 'pig' equals 'unclean' rather as so many dots and dashes may indicate a letter or word. The statement that the pig is unclean, like the statement that the leopard is an orthodox Christian animal, appears to be about an existing state of affairs, it is the attribution of a characteristic to the pig; and yet not a characteristic available to normal sense perception, common sense observation or scientific analysis.

Sperber's answer to this dilemma is to argue that symbolic knowledge is a way of knowing. 'By asserting that symbolism is a cognitive mechanism, I mean that it is an autonomous mechanism that, alongside the perceptual and conceptual mechanisms, participates in the construction of knowledge and in the functioning of the memory'. Sperber suggests that the principles according to which this symbolic mechanism works are not derived from experience, 'but are ... part of the innate mental equipment that makes experience possible'.⁶⁹⁷

Thus, for example, the slaughtering of a sheep becomes a sacrifice, an act in some way effective, because

⁶⁹⁶ RS pp. 91-94. ⁶⁹⁷ RS pp. xi-xii.

of the beliefs which are brought to the act by the participants. The symbolical nature of the killing is not found in deeds or words, but in the unconscious assumptions and conscious beliefs brought to it by human minds.⁶⁹⁸ It is also important to note that these assumptions and beliefs are shared. Cultural symbolism works because of shared knowledge much in the same way that irony does.⁶⁹⁹ At the same time, Sperber insists that there is room for individual variation in the understanding of symbols, although this capacity is limited by the fact that cultural symbolism creates a common interest and outlook.⁷⁰⁰ Christian leopards, which defy normal classification, are not therefore symbolically significant despite this anomalous classification, but because of it, and their existence comes about through the desire of the Dorze to encourage certain beliefs about themselves in relation to other cultural groups surrounding them. '... without being able to deny their recent integration into the Orthodox church, they are tempted to believe that in another sense they have always been Christians - that to be Dorze means to be Christian, and always has. Now, if the leopard is Christian of its nature, the Dorze, who are no less strict than it is in their alimentary morality, can use it as the basis of an argument to evoke a more comforting image of themselves'.⁷⁰¹

Sperber points out that the leopard, like the hyaena,

698 RS pp. 111-112. 699 RS pp. 123-129.
700 RS pp. 136-137. 701 RS p. 133.

displays certain exceptional characteristics which mean that it is not simply classifiable as an animal without further qualification. It inhabits mountainous areas near human beings and sometimes kills their domestic animals; it kills more animals than it eats and often waits for some time before eating its victim. The humanisation of the leopard goes back much further than its Christianisation. The symbolism is therefore partly based on encyclopaedic knowledge, and development in the symbolic knowledge is parallel to cultural change among the Dorze.⁷⁰²

A proper evaluation of Sperber's argument would be lengthy and involve psychological and philosophical questions as well as the consideration of much anthropological material.⁷⁰³ Nevertheless, his argument must

⁷⁰² RS pp. 129-139.

⁷⁰³ Sperber adopts a narrow definition of 'meaning' which he relates to the existence of systematic relations between sentences and phrases (RS pp. 9-10). He claims that symbols do not have meaning: they are not like analytic propositions which give knowledge of categories, nor are they synthetic propositions which give knowledge of the world - there are no Christian leopards. They are therefore not some kind of proposition, to be understood by comparison with the rest of language, but part of the cognitive process.

Sperber's argument, which is subtle and at times hard to follow, seems to be open to criticism, partly because his definition of 'meaning' is too narrow and specialised (Cf. Ryle, below); and partly because he separates the meaning of propositions too sharply from the facts of the external world to which they refer. The proposition, The lion is an animal, may be an analytic proposition; an example of what Sperber calls semantic knowledge; but that depends on how we look at it (Cf. Ayer, below). For a child it might well be a piece of information in his developing knowledge of the external world. But in any case, the words only have meaning if 'lion' and 'animal' refer to something, and until we know what they refer to they are meaningless sounds or marks. If Sperber had not

be taken seriously as offering a possible approach to the interpretation of ancient Jewish beliefs about animals, birds and fishes, and it is interesting in that it would mean accepting the actual anomalous character of the levitical classification as a point in its favour as an effective piece of symbolism. It would also link the rules of avoidance firmly with cultural characteristics of the Israelites and with changes in the character of life of the Jewish people as a whole, while at the same time leaving some room for variations in individual interpretation and reaction to them.

22. MARY DOUGLAS: SOCIETY AND THE NATURAL WORLD

Another anthropologist who has closely linked attitudes to the natural world and the overall structure and culture of society, and who has in addition tried to interpret the levitical classification as an illustration of her general conclusions, is Mary Douglas. Douglas firmly rejects the idea that such classification can be explained away as the survival of a merely irrational primitive mentality and she castigates Frazer in particular for

703 (Contd.) adopted such a narrow definition of meaning, and if he had recognised the close relationship between meaning and fact, he might have been more willing to acknowledge the general readiness to ascribe meaning to symbols and the extreme awkwardness of describing symbolism without using that concept. If all propositions are to be divided into analytic and synthetic (RS p. 92. Cf. Ayer, below), the resemblance of symbolic expressions to the latter must be taken seriously.

Cf. discussions by G. Ryle, SYSTEMATICALLY MISLEADING EXPRESSIONS, chapter II of LOGIC AND LANGUAGE (FIRST SERIES), ed. A.G.N. Flew, Oxford 1952, pp. 11-36; originally published in PROCEEDINGS OF THE ARISTOTELIAN SOCIETY, 1931-32. G. Ryle, TECHNICAL AND UNTECHNICAL CONCEPTS, chapter VI in DILEMMAS, Cambridge 1960. A.J. Ayer, LANGUAGE, TRUTH AND LOGIC, 2nd ed., London 1946, pp. 31, 95-97.

encouraging this view. Douglas gives an outline of the development of anthropological thinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with particular reference to Robertson Smith and his influence for good on Durkheim, to whom Mary Douglas herself clearly owes much, and for ill on Frazer. What follows is a summary of her description of this development.⁷⁰⁴

Robertson Smith, Frazer and Durkheim

Primitive religion has been supposed to be characterised by a failure to distinguish properly the unclean and the holy. This view was propounded by Frazer and Robertson Smith. 'In this way a criterion was produced for classing religions as advanced or as primitive. If primitive, then rules of holiness and rules of uncleanness were indistinguishable; if advanced then rules of uncleanness disappeared from religion ... The less uncleanness was concerned with physical conditions and the more it signified a spiritual state of unworthiness, so much more decisively could the religion in question be recognised as advanced'.⁷⁰⁵ This idea was consistent with, and encouraged the view that primitive societies were characterised by insensitive cruelty and fear, and made up of "savages" who could scarcely claim to belong to the same species as nineteenth and twentieth century Europeans.

Tylor showed that modern civilisation is the latest product of a long process of cultural development from a

⁷⁰⁴ PURITY AND DANGER, pp. 10-28. ⁷⁰⁵ PD p. 11.

state of savagery. He pointed to survivals of this earlier condition in later society, and held them to be evidence of an evolutionary process, much as Darwin drew attention to the survival of rudimentary organs as clues to an evolutionary scheme.

Robertson Smith accepted the idea of a cultural evolutionary process, but unlike Tylor was mainly interested in the common elements which link modern and primitive experience. He therefore emphasised the idea that primitive religion is not essentially an attempt to placate hostile supernatural forces, but the establishment of a right relationship with a supernatural power favourable to the whole community. Closely allied to this is a concern with genuinely ethical values; Israel was superior to her neighbours precisely because of the strong emphasis in Israelite religion on the moral nature of the community's relationship with God.

For Robertson Smith, the myth, the cosmological theory, belief in demons and the mechanical efficacy of ritual - magic - were something apart from true religion, and would only be used by the aberrant individual, or come to the fore at a time of social dissolution.

Therefore, the more developed a religion, the greater the ethical content; and the more primitive, the greater the intrusion of magic and so on.

Durkheim followed Robertson Smith in his emphasis on the communal aspect of religion, this being the really important link between them; and he relegated rites which were not part of the community cult to the realm of 'magic'.

Magic, including rules of uncleanness, was a form of primitive hygiene. Magic belongs to the realm of the profane, to be distinguished clearly from the realm of the sacred. This kind of distinction ignored the complexities of actual social life, and in this respect Robertson Smith was nearer to the truth than Durkheim.

Frazer took the idea of magic from Robertson Smith and made it the first stage in an Hegelian dialectical development of culture. For Frazer, magic had no connection with morals, and was an attempt to manipulate mechanical forces in the world by means of imitation or releasing powers of contagion. Magic could only be plausible for beings of colossal ignorance and a very narrowly circumscribed conception of the world's extent. The antithesis of magic was religion, a fraudulent priestly and political attempt to deal with the inadequacies of magic. Modern science is the culminating synthesis which renders both magic and religion pointless and useless; but this scheme suggests that magic was the real ancestor of modern science, no matter how foolish the actual practice of magic may have been.

Frazer's views have influenced both Old Testament and Classical scholarship, and there has been a strong tendency to see the use of ritual as magical, mechanical, and to set this over against the more developed teaching of the prophets who emphasised personal communion with God and the morality that goes with it. Ritual thus becomes a sign of contamination by more primitive surrounding civilisations. This neat scheme, however, was rendered suspect in two ways: the recognition that ritual in the

Bible was of very great importance in the later literary sources of the text; and the clear indication of certain texts, both within and without the Old Testament, that given rituals were meant to be allied with specific feelings and attitudes. 'All in all, Frazer's influence has been a baneful one. He took from Robertson Smith that scholar's most peripheral teaching, and perpetuated an ill-considered division between religion and magic. He disseminated a false assumption about the primitive view of the universe worked by mechanical symbols, and another false assumption that ethics are strange to primitive religion. Before we can approach the subject of ritual defilement these assumptions need to be corrected. The more intractable puzzles in comparative religion arise because human experience has been thus wrongly divided'.⁷⁰⁶

Durkheim's main thesis is so influential in Douglas's thinking that some account, however brief, must be given of it. Douglas herself admits to having been accused of '"pure, unreconstructed Durkheimianism"', although it would be quite incorrect to suppose that her use of Durkheim is uncritical.⁷⁰⁷

Durkheim and The True Nature of Religion⁷⁰⁸

Durkheim believed that he could discover the true

⁷⁰⁶ PD p. 28.

⁷⁰⁷ M. Douglas, IMPLICIT MEANINGS, London and Boston, 1975, p. 287.

⁷⁰⁸ E. Durkheim, THE ELEMENTARY FORMS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE, London 1915.

nature of religion by examining it in its most primitive form, that is to say, what it was like in the most primitive form of society; and he believed he had found this primitive society and religion among the aborigines of Australia, supplemented by information about the Indians of North America. At the very opening of his book he makes the following important statement: 'In fact, it is an essential postulate of sociology that a human institution cannot rest upon an error and a lie, without which it could not exist. If it were not founded in the nature of things, it would have encountered in the facts a resistance over which it could never have triumphed. So when we commence the study of primitive religions, it is with the assurance that they hold to reality and express it'.⁷⁰⁹

A little later he also makes the important assertion that not only were science and philosophy born of religion, but that the very categories in which we must think, if we are to think at all, are the product of religious thought.⁷¹⁰

Next Durkheim lays before us the general conclusion of his whole book, that 'religion is something eminently social. Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities ... So if the categories are of religious origins, they ought to participate in this nature common to all religious facts;

⁷⁰⁹ EF p. 2. ⁷¹⁰ EF p. 9. Cf. pp. 13-20.

they too should be social affairs and the product of collective thought'.⁷¹¹

The truths of religion therefore are true because they are derived from what is real, what actually exists: society. And the same must also be the case for all scientific and philosophical truth. Robin Horton has accused Durkheim of being inconsistent by making a sharp distinction between the sacred and the profane, while at the same time deriving the so-called profane from the sacred; and Mary Douglas has accused Durkheim of inconsistency by making modern natural science an exception to the rule that knowledge of the universe is socially constructed.⁷¹² Nevertheless, whatever inconsistencies Durkheim may have been guilty of, he firmly emphasised the social origins of human thought, and Douglas's explicit aim is to remove at least one inconsistency in his thought by driving his premises to their logical conclusion.

Having discussed the definition of religion, and dismissed various conceptions of what constitutes elementary religion, Durkheim next puts forward his own view that the totemism of primitive Australian societies is the most elementary form, the examination of which will show us the true nature of religion.

Totemism, like all other known religion, offers 'a complete representation of the world', 'a conception of

⁷¹¹ EF p. 10. ⁷¹² MT pp. 258-276. IM pp. ix-xxi.

the universe'.⁷¹³ According to Durkheim an examination of totemism shows that men classify things in the world around them because they are themselves arranged in classes. The things which are classified are so arranged as to form a unity, and this is so because society is a unity. Indeed, the very notion of a class or category is itself the product of social factors, since, while individuals can perceive similarities, contrasts and so on, a class is not just a collection or heap of things, but a group of which the members are regarded as related together. This idea would very probably have never arisen if men had not had the experience of their own organisation in society. Furthermore, the classification of things often reveals the notion of hierarchy at work, one thing being subordinated to or co-ordinated with another; but nature itself does not provide men with such knowledge. Hierarchy is a social matter, and it is from experience of society that the idea is projected on to the world.⁷¹⁴

The object of reverence in totemism is a vague power, an impersonal force found in many different objects, but not to be confused with them, and which exists before such objects come to be and continues to exist after they have passed away. This power is both physical and moral in character, and it pervades the whole world; yet it is to be found more in some individuals and objects than in

⁷¹³ EF p. 141.

⁷¹⁴ EF pp. 144-148. Cf. E. Durkheim and M. Mauss, PRIMITIVE CLASSIFICATION, London 1969, pp. 7-9.

others, and out of the apprehension of a vague power eventually arises the notion of deities, and also the concept of power found in the natural sciences.⁷¹⁵ 'What we find at the origin and basis of religious thought are not determined and distinct objects and beings possessing a sacred character of themselves; they are indefinite powers ... whose impersonality is strictly comparable to that of the physical forces whose manifestations the sciences of nature study'. 'So the idea of force is of religious origin. It is from religion that it has been borrowed, first by philosophy, then by the sciences'.⁷¹⁶

When Durkheim asks the question where the idea of this power can have come from, he recognises that the answer cannot be the totem itself, which would be only something like a lizard or frog or plum-tree. The totem is a symbol: but of two things, the divine power or god, and the clan. And this is because the god and society are one, since otherwise there is no reason why they should both have the same emblem. 'The god of the clan ... can therefore be nothing else than the clan itself, personified and represented to the imagination under the visible form of the animal or vegetable which serves as totem'.⁷¹⁷

The feeling and concept of power are generated by society itself, since its actual considerable power over the individual, both physical and moral, is undeniable. Furthermore, this force and authority of society make their impact upon men as something external, and since

⁷¹⁵ EF pp. 188-204. Cf. p. 366.

⁷¹⁶ EF pp. 200, 204.

⁷¹⁷ EF p. 206.

men do not readily appreciate their actual origin they perceive this power as represented by objects surrounding them. The sacred character of the objects of religious devotion, therefore, is not intrinsic to them but superimposed by the imagination of men, and the inescapable fundamental truth of religion is derived from its source, society. Religious symbols express and make effective this reality, determining men's conduct like physical forces.⁷¹⁸

'Thus religion acquires a meaning and a reasonableness that the most intransigent rationalist cannot misunderstand. Its primary object is not to give men a representation of the physical world; for if that were its essential task, we could not understand how it has been able to survive, for, on this side, it is scarcely more than a fabric of errors. Before all, it is a system of ideas with which the individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members, and the obscure but intimate relations which they have with it. This is its primary function; and though metaphorical and symbolic, this representation is not unfaithful. Quite on the contrary, it translates everything essential in the relations which are to be explained; for it is an eternal truth that outside of us there exists something greater than us, with which we enter into communion'.⁷¹⁹

It is natural for collective sentiments to be expressed

⁷¹⁸ EF pp. 206-229. ⁷¹⁹ EF pp. 225-226.

in symbols, but the symbols are not mere labels attached to the sentiments. They help to create these sentiments by being objects upon which otherwise distinct individuals can focus their attention and thereby be brought into a unity; and they also vividly express the external nature of the forces men feel acting upon them.⁷²⁰ The fact that these symbols are drawn, in the most primitive societies, from the animals and sometimes plants immediately surrounding men reveals the significant fact that primitive men often confused and united things which we should keep separate; and they made these identifications not on the basis of perception, since the world as it is presented to us does not reveal such confusions, but as the result of social causes. Durkheim insists, however, that we cannot follow Lévy-Bruhl in simply regarding this as the mark of a primitive mentality indifferent to the law of contradiction. This is partly because members of primitive societies are just as capable as moderns of making distinctions, which they frequently do; and partly because the idea of making internal connections between things, plants, animals, insects and human beings was far more important than the actual connections made, and prepared the way for the more accurate observations of natural science.⁷²¹

Belief in the intimate relationship between men and certain species of plant or animal is also at the basis of rites which are performed to ensure the plentiful reproduction of the totemic species. The important point

⁷²⁰ EF pp. 230-233. ⁷²¹ EF pp. 233-239.

which Durkheim wishes to make here, however, is not that such rites are merely irrational and from a modern point of view foolish, but that they accomplish their main purpose in strengthening the unity of the group performing the rites, and thereby bring a profound sense of satisfaction and comfort to each individual; while at the same time the participant does not appreciate the real reason for the helpfulness of the cult and attributes it to the fulfilment of its ostensible function of creating plants or animals. The failure of the cult to accomplish its ostensible purpose does not destroy the belief of the worshipper, partly because such failures are exceptional and can therefore be rationalised by an appeal to exceptional circumstances, and partly because the reproduction of a given species is not the real reason for the existence of the cult.⁷²²

This latter reason also explains why modern civilised peoples continue to participate in cultic practices, despite the clear evidence against the supposed efficacy of such practices. 'They are not sure that the details of the prescribed observances are rationally justifiable; but they feel that it would be impossible to free oneself of them without falling into a moral confusion before which they recoil. The very fact that in them the faith has lost its intellectual foundation throws into eminence the profound reasons upon which they rest. This is why the easy criticisms to which an unduly simple rationalism

⁷²²EF pp. 357-361.

has sometimes submitted ritual prescriptions generally leave the believer indifferent: it is because the true justification of religious practices does not lie in the apparent ends which they pursue, but rather in the invisible action which they exercise over the mind and in the way in which they affect our mental states'.⁷²³

Finally, in his concluding remarks, Durkheim emphasises that the importance of religion lies in the practice of the cult and not in speculation or knowledge about the world. It is the work of science to discover facts, and, indeed, religion is itself a fact which can only be understood through scientific investigation. It is science which alone can offer the theoretical justification for religion which is necessary if religion is to continue; 'Men cannot celebrate ceremonies for which they see no reason, nor can they accept a faith which they in no way understand'.⁷²⁴

The Abominations of Leviticus: Their Social Significance

Returning to Mary Douglas: In commenting on what she calls the abominations of Leviticus, including the dietary laws, she rejects various explanations which have been put forward: medical and hygienic, ethical and allegorical, nationalistic and aesthetic. She does this partly by dealing with each type of explanation in turn and exhibiting its unsatisfactory nature, but chiefly because such explanations are piecemeal, whereas what is really wanted is an explanation which will make overall sense of all the particular prohibitions. For Douglas this

⁷²³ EF p. 360. ⁷²⁴ EF p. 430.

is found in the contrast between holiness and uncleanness.⁷²⁵

Douglas goes on to explain what holiness meant in ancient Israel. One aspect of its meaning is 'set apart'. Another part of its meaning is 'wholeness and completeness', and this requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong, and that there shall be no mixture or confusion between classes. To be holy brings blessing, fullness of life, whereas being unholy, unclean, abominable brings the curse, barrenness, pestilence, death.⁷²⁶

The rules of avoidance can now be understood in terms of this conception of holiness. Cows, bulls, sheep and goats were the normally domesticated animals of pastoralists, offering milk, meat, hides and wool. Douglas follows S.R. Driver in regarding the rule making them clean as an a posteriori generalisation of their habits, and this means that other animals, even if wild, are clean if they conform to the model. Douglas draws attention to the fact that this is the only reason given in the text for regarding the pig as unclean, along with the camel, hare and rock-badger, and since the sole reason for keeping pigs is for consumption the Israelites would have no reason to keep them and would be unfamiliar with their habits.⁷²⁷

All remaining creatures are judged according to the classification found in the account of creation in Genesis.

⁷²⁵ PD pp. 41-49. ⁷²⁶ PD pp. 49-54. ⁷²⁷ PD pp. 54-55.

'In the firmament two-legged fowls fly with wings. In the water scaly fish swim with fins. On the earth four-legged animals hop, jump or walk. Any class of creatures which is not equipped for the right kind of locomotion in its element is contrary to holiness'.⁷²⁸ Some land creatures are unclean because they have hands instead of front feet, the translation 'paws' being rejected by Douglas as inaccurate. Certain 'swarming' creatures display an indeterminate form of movement and therefore cut across the basic classification and are unclean. Consistently with this scheme, hopping locusts are permitted. Forbidden birds pose a problem, since they are not described, and the translation of the names is uncertain; but Douglas suggests that they are probably anomalous because they are not fully bird-like, as would be the case, for example, if they swam or dived as well as flying.⁷²⁹

Holiness is therefore something more than being merely separate. 'If the proposed interpretation of the forbidden animals is correct, the dietary laws would have been like signs which at every turn inspired meditation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God. By rules of avoidance holiness was given a physical expression in every encounter with the animal kingdom and at every meal. Observance of the dietary rules would thus have been a meaningful part of the great liturgical act of recognition and worship which culminated in the sacrifice in the Temple'.⁷³⁰

⁷²⁸ PD p. 55. ⁷²⁹ PD pp. 55-57. ⁷³⁰ PD p. 57.

Douglas's explanation of the levitical rules must now be seen as part of her larger argument about what constitutes dirt, uncleanness; and in fact she introduces her chapter on the abominations of Leviticus by referring to them as an illustration of the more general truth that defilement can only occur in relation to a systematic ordering of ideas. Pollution ideas only make sense 'in reference to a total structure of thought whose key-stone, boundaries, margins and internal lines are held in relation by rituals of separation'.⁷³¹ For Douglas, the explanation of primitive rituals of avoidance as attempts at medical hygiene, while not without some truth, is quite inadequate. The idea that primitive ritual has nothing to do with modern ideas of cleanness is also false. We kill germs while they ward off spirits: but this contrast is over simple, and ignores the fact that both primitive and modern ideas of dirt 'express symbolic systems and that the difference between pollution behaviour in one part of the world and another is only a matter of detail'.⁷³² Douglas illustrates the similarity between our hygiene and symbolic rites by describing Havik Brahmin pollution rules.⁷³³

She points out that there are two differences between primitive ideas of dirt and our own today: our idea is not associated with religion, but we think of it as a matter of hygiene or aesthetics; and it is dominated by

⁷³¹ PD p. 41. ⁷³² PD p. 35.

⁷³³ PD pp. 32-34. Based on B. Harper, JOURNAL OF ASIAN STUDIES, XXIII.

our knowledge of germs. If, however, we wish properly to understand our idea of dirt we must ignore modern bacteriology, since the idea itself existed long before such scientific discovery. If we do so, we are left with the definition of dirt as that which is out of place, and what 'is dirty 'includes all the rejected element of ordered systems'.⁷³⁴

Douglas proceeds to emphasise how fundamental to our ways of perceiving the world is the imposition of order upon the multitude of sensations received by us. Nor is the imposition of order a merely individual matter: in many respects the order we observe in the world is a matter of communal agreement. Nevertheless, the ambiguous and anomalous exist and must be dealt with: by fitting them into the accepted system of interpretation, or by destroying them, or by establishing rules of avoidance, or by declaring them dangerous and therefore unacceptable, or by incorporating them into ritual and thereby attempting to deepen understanding of existence'.⁷³⁵

It is at this point that we begin to see the profound influence of Durkheim on Douglas, and the reason for her insistence that if Durkheim's main thesis is true, it must be true for all societies, modern as well as primitive. 'The idea of society is a powerful image. It is potent in its own right to control or to stir men to action. This image has form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure. Its outlines contain power

⁷³⁴ PD p. 35. ⁷³⁵ PD pp. 35-40.

to reward conformity and repulse attack. There is energy in its margins and unstructured areas. For symbols of society any human experience of structures, margins or boundaries is ready to hand'.⁷³⁶

Douglas points out how things like cross-roads, doors and clothes can be used to symbolise social changes, and how much better the living organism is able to do this, including the human body. The various risks and problems which face a culture are therefore reflected in the way the body is treated, and the ancient Israelite concern with the polluting effects of bodily issues reflects their anxiety to protect their boundaries, their political and cultural unity against persistent outside threats. 'The threatened boundaries of their body politic would be well mirrored in their care for the integrity, unity and purity of the physical body'.⁷³⁷ We may add what Douglas does not state explicitly, that the

⁷³⁶ PD p. 114. Cf. remarks on Lévy-Bruhl and Durkheim, pp. 75-76; and R.P. Carroll, REBELLION AND DISSENT IN ANCIENT ISRAELITE SOCIETY, ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR DIE ALTTESTAMENTLICHE WISSENSCHAFT 1977, pp. 176-204. 'All societies attempt to construct their view of reality in such a way that their world may be viewed as orderly. Part of this orderly structure is the classification of elements into good or bad, clean and unclean, legitimate and illegitimate, inclusion and exclusion. Conformity to these social norms then creates a social identity. This identity may be threatened by groups or individuals who break the taboos or become unclean in any way. A certain tension exists in all societies between those who strive to maintain the cosmic order of their society and those who would endanger that order by deliberate or accidental actions'. (p. 176.)

⁷³⁷ PD p. 124.

ancient Israelite classification into clean and unclean reflects precisely the same concern: boundaries are to be strictly observed, with no risk of ambiguity, so that the holiness, the separateness of Israel from other peoples, may be firmly preserved. This explanation, however, is quite different from that which labels particular creatures as of heathen significance and therefore to be rejected, since it is based on a classification of all creatures which includes some and excludes others whether they are associated with the religious practices of foreign nations or not. The reason for the judgement also becomes, on Douglas's thesis as on Durkheim's, an unconscious or largely unconscious one: the social influences which are at work in a case like this go too deep, are of too fundamental a significance to be the subject of normal conscious reflection. A given creature, such as the pig, might also have been known to be prominent in, say, Canaanite ritual, and there might have been a conscious rejection of it on that account; but this would still not alter the fact that the real reason for the exclusion of pork from the diet was a deep-seated rejection of all that was anomalous or ambiguous as a sinister threat to the integrity of Jacob, and a conscious rejection of Canaanitism would only be the strengthening rationalisation of an unconscious or half-conscious intolerance.

Douglas refers to a criticism of Lévy-Bruhl made by Evans-Pritchard, in which the latter states that Lévy-Bruhl should have examined variations in social structure and related them to concomitant variations in patterns of

thought.⁷³⁸ Douglas herself sets about this task and in so doing reveals just how close she believes the relationship between religious belief and practice is with the structure of society.⁷³⁹ Her main argument is that an individual's attitude to symbols is directly related to, is the outcome and reflection of his place in a given society. The degree to which symbols are used or not used, and what symbols are used or not used, vary in a predictable way according to whether certain social variables are present or not. Therefore, if we are presented with an accurate description of a given culture without being told what symbols are important in it, we can safely deduce the information about the symbols; and if we know the symbols, then we can safely infer general conclusions about the structure of a given society.

The character of social life and institutions is also closely related to the attitude of the individual to his body. The way the body is treated in religious ritual, in magic and witchcraft, in sexual relations, in everyday meeting with other people, will reflect the kind of society of which the individual is a part and his own attitude towards it.

Douglas divides the types of social relationship into what she calls 'grid' and 'group'. The latter term has an obvious enough meaning: the sense of being within or without a certain social boundary, a feeling which varies from being very weak to being very strong. The

⁷³⁸ PD p. 75. ⁷³⁹ M. Douglas, NATURAL SYMBOLS, London 1970.

The grid refers to personally felt relationships, 'rules which relate one person to others on an ego-centred basis'.⁷⁴⁰ These rules will refer to such matters as age and sex which will supply criteria for determining the 'proper' relationships between individuals in a given group.

This formula will enable us to classify social relations in all societies regardless of political structure, industrial complexity or ecological variety. 'All I am concerned with is a formula for classifying relations which can be applied equally to the smallest band of hunters and gatherers as to the most industrialised nations. All we need to know is the way in which these relations are structured according to two independently varying criteria which I have called grid and group'.⁷⁴¹

Douglas has been much influenced by the work of Professor Basil Bernstein in his investigation of linguistic usage. His conclusion is that language can be divided into two types of code: a restricted code, the chief purpose of which is to re-inforce the social structure, even though it may at the same time convey information; and an elaborated code, which is far more complex and flexible, and is used primarily to convey the unique experience of the individual. Both codes are the products of a given social situation. They are mediated to all of us in our childhood in the home, and along with the code comes an emphasis on either positional control or personal control.

⁷⁴⁰ NS p. viii. ⁷⁴¹ NS p. viii.

The former involves an appeal to status in controlling behaviour, and only thinly veils an implied threat of force if the appeal is ignored or defied. Like the restricted code it aims to strengthen social structure: concepts are used like 'the grammar school boy', 'the teacher', 'father', 'social worker', 'child of that age', and so on. Personal control works according to reason and persuasion and stimulates reflection and the formation of one's own opinion; and is obviously related to the prime function of the elaborated code. Language is therefore not just a simple datum, a kind of neutral tool, but rather the product of social environment determining to a very large degree the character of individual experience.

'This present book', states Douglas, 'is an essay in applying Bernstein's approach to the analysis of ritual. It will help us to understand religious behaviour if we can treat ritual forms, like speech forms, as transmitters of culture, which are generated in social relations and which, by their selections and emphases, exercise a constraining effect on social behaviour'.⁷⁴²

The group and grid formula is an adaptation of Bernstein's method to make it suitable as a tool for the analysis of all kinds of society. Douglas's method is, in fact, a highly generalised form of Bernstein's method. The result of using this analysis is the division of peoples into four main types, a simple diagrammatic representation

⁷⁴² NS p. 21.

giving the grid as a vertical line and the group as a horizontal line, movement along each line from left to right or bottom to top indicating an increase from minimal experience of definition to maximum. Where ego-centred relationships are ill defined or non-existent and boundaries of the social unit also ill defined and almost non-existent, there is no interest in ritual and there are no taboos or other religious or superstitious beliefs concerning the body. Where group and grid are slack, bodily control is slack. There are no social boundaries of any significance, and therefore bodily boundaries are of no significance.

As we move to the other extreme where roles, status and boundaries are clearly defined, we find strong interest in ritual, and insistent control of the body, with punishment for deviation from orthodox observance. Social boundaries are significant and therefore so are bodily boundaries. The whole of ritual is a collection of symbols, any one of which can mean a great deal to a member of the community because relationships are so close knit that there is rapid and spontaneous mutual understanding: the elaborated code is not needed and could easily be disruptive.

Where the group is strong but the grid weak, communities within the group, such as families and clans, are thrown together but confused through lack of the definition of roles. 'To live in this kind of society is to live crowded together with one's fellow humans in disorderly competition ... hazards and frustrations are

produced by fellow humans'.⁷⁴³ Here, witchcraft beliefs flourish, the natural fruit of envy, favouritism, suspicion. The internal confusion of the body politic is reflected in the internal corruption of the witch, and the threat he poses to the internal health of other members of the community. The witch sometimes uses samples of internal bodily substances; and the rituals of such a group are focussed on witches - cleansing, killing, hunting; curing from the effects of witchcraft.

Where the grid is strong and the overall group weak, there is free competition and the leader is the one who can in fact succeed. There is little or no emphasis on morals, and religion is a means to an end. Ritual is a magical means of achieving given ends. 'To sum up, there is a range of societies with a secular bias. For them the universe poses technical problems devoid of ethics and metaphysics. Other intelligent beings must be propitiated, not worshipped. The Ifugao man recognises no one deity but a host of petty bureaucrats who can be expected to extort and exploit. "He sees the deities as having superior power and conceives no other way to get along with them than to bribe them in one way or another. He regards prayer unaccompanied by an offering as so much breath". Their religion is thoroughly mercenary. Others, like the Basseri nomads, are simply irreligious. We conclude that the secular world view is no modern development, but appears when group boundaries are weak and ego-focussed

⁷⁴³ NS p. 109.

grid is strong'.⁷⁴⁴

Douglas is not merely concerned to relate ritual practice and the attitudes immediately revealed in behaviour to social structure. She also argues for a close link between social variables and more far-reaching cosmological beliefs, theological or metaphysical. As we have just seen where grid is strong and group weak, mastery of techniques to bring success is of prime significance. 'No techniques of re-integration and reconciliation are provided, since there is no conception of offence against the community, only of failure. There are no over-arching doctrines of sin and atonement. In these societies, the idea of the self is free from social constraint. The self is valued uniquely for its own sake, not for any contribution it can make to the whole'.

Where the group is strong, the powers that control the universe are anthropomorphically conceived and 'The idea of the self is surrounded with prickly moral contexts in which it has to operate'.⁷⁴⁵

Where the grid is weak and the group strong 'ascetic attitudes express the rejection of what is external, the husk, the empty shell, the contamination of the senses. Strict controls are set on bodily enjoyment and on the gateways of sensual experience'.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁴ NS p. 139. The quotation is from R.F. Barton, THE RELIGION OF THE IFUGAOS. MEMOIRS OF AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, No. 65, 1946, p. 17.

⁷⁴⁵ NS p. 142. ⁷⁴⁶ NS p. 143.

For Douglas, certain conclusions are obvious: First, Harvey Cox is wrong in thinking of secularism as 'essentially a product of the city'.⁷⁴⁷ Second, those who condemn the 'Bog Irish' for their attachment to ritual observance, such as abstinence from meat on Fridays, have failed to see that the Irish labourer in London finds satisfaction in such ritual because of his social origins and his social needs. Those who wish to replace such ritual with moral exhortation and humanitarianism are likewise expressing their own social background and needs: and it is therefore not surprising that misunderstanding arises between priest and people.⁷⁴⁸

Third, notions of compensation are completely inadequate as explanations of religious practice and belief.⁷⁴⁹ Fourth, ritual observances and beliefs in the Old Testament must be understood in terms of the social structure of Israel. Abstinence from pork, like abstinence from meat on Fridays, is a badge of membership, but the symbol is not a mere attachment like a label: it actively expresses something deeply felt. The pig is singled out as especially significant because of the action of Antiochus Epiphanes and the fervour and heroism of Israelite nationalists, this example biting deep into what we might call the national consciousness. It has nothing to do with the pig qua pig; and the less such observance has meaning for the rest of the world, the

⁷⁴⁷ NS p. X. ⁷⁴⁸ NS chapter 3, pp. 37-53. Cf. pp. 3-4.

⁷⁴⁹ NS. See e.g. pp. xiii-xvi.

greater its meaning for Israel.⁷⁵⁰ Furthermore, concern with bodily purity reflects the need for Israel to protect itself from the threats to its national character and existence posed by powerful neighbours.⁷⁵¹

In her latest book, a collection of articles and essays, Mary Douglas states, 'My wish has always been to take seriously Durkheim's idea that the properties of classification systems derive from and are indeed properties of the social systems in which they are used ... But the questions about classification systems have to be well-matched by questions about the social systems that generate them'.⁷⁵² This statement occurs in the final chapter of the book, an essay entitled 'Self-Evidence', and Douglas's main point is that what appears to an individual to be necessarily, self-evidently true about the world around him is determined by the social relations which make up the community of which he is a part, and she sees this as a natural development from her earlier work. The difference between the earlier work and the later is that the anomalies which do not fit accepted classification were regarded in the former as inevitably rejected, but it is recognised in the latter that they are often auspicious or ignored. Reaction to anomaly varies from one society to another.⁷⁵³ However, this only serves to emphasise the need to relate classification all the more closely to the structure of the particular

⁷⁵⁰ NS pp. 38-41. ⁷⁵¹ NS p. 41. Cf. PD p. 124.

⁷⁵² IM p. 296. ⁷⁵³ IM pp. 280-287.

society where it is found, and when we return to ancient Israelite judgements concerning the natural world it should help us to understand why these judgements should have been so different from those of Egypt and Mesopotamia where divine animals were worshipped. The reasons for Israel's view of nature, as already suggested lies in its position as a small nation surrounded by powerful and aggressive enemies, and with boundaries which are never strong enough. What is utterly intolerable in such a society is any ambiguity about membership: there must be no doubt as to who is an Israelite and who is not, and therefore lines between classes must be clearly drawn and ambiguity firmly rejected. The pig, camel, hare and rock-badger are almost eligible for inclusion in an acceptable class, and the pig even has cloven hooves; but none of them actually satisfies the criteria for inclusion and they must therefore be named as explicitly rejected anomalies.⁷⁵⁴ And in this way the Israelites symbolically rejected all those human beings whose ambiguous status blurred their boundaries and thereby threatened the purity and strength of the nation. 'My general argument supposes that in each constructed world of nature, the contrast between man and not-man provides an analogy for the contrast between the member of the human community and the outsider. In the last most inclusive set of categories, nature represents the outsider'. 'A people whose experience of foreigners is disastrous

⁷⁵⁴ IM pp. 303-305.

will cherish perfect categories, reject exchange and refuse doctrines of mediation'. 'Animals represent God in general, humans in general, foreigners in general. As the High Priest and his kindred to the common people of the nation, as the clean to the unclean, as life to death, as humans are to animals, so were the Israelites as a whole to the rest of human kind'.⁷⁵⁵

23. A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF DOUGLAS'S THESIS

The Psychological Aspect

A very important aspect of Mary Douglas's argument is its psychological nature, and we must turn to some kind of social psychology, if her argument is accepted, for the correct explanations of ritual. This is implied in Leach's comparison of structuralist anthropology with Freudian psycho-analysis.⁷⁵⁶ It is implied in Douglas's view that what is classified as dirty is the result of a subjective reaction on the part of the percipient; although this is a percipient reacting as the member of a community. It is also implied in the remark that 'Freud is the model for appreciating the primitive ritualist', and even more clearly when she says, 'Psychoanalysts claim to work cures by manipulating symbols. Has the confrontation with the subconscious anything to do with primitive spell-binding and loosing?' Two stories are

⁷⁵⁵ IM p. 289, p. 307, p. 312. Cf. the chapter, DECIPHERING A MEAL, pp. 249-275, especially pp. 261ff.

⁷⁵⁶ E. Leach, CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION, Cambridge 1976, pp. 96-97.

then told, one illustrating 'group-therapy', and the other a cure for a difficult delivery in child birth.⁷⁵⁷ Finally, hidden mental origins are hinted at when she tells us that beliefs about the dangers consequent upon a breach of the rules of ritual are not to be taken at their face value.⁷⁵⁸

Durkheim was explicit about this point; and it is also implied in Douglas's claim that Durkheim ironically illustrates his own thesis, and in her persistent reference to what she calls 'guts knowledge' or 'guts response' in the essay on self-evidence.⁷⁵⁹

In that case we must be ready to distinguish between the reasons given by the writers of Leviticus and Deuteronomy for the rituals and rules described by them and the real reasons which will lie in that hidden control which society exercises over its members.

Leach claims that the destruction of Nadab and Abihu 'expresses the idea of purification through sacrifice rather than divine retribution'.⁷⁶⁰ This is certainly not stated in the text and must therefore be Leach's exposition of the real reason for, or true origin of the story and the ritual that goes with it. Douglas, of course, does claim to take seriously the reasons given in Leviticus and Deuteronomy for the classification of creatures into clean and unclean, but even these reasons themselves require explanation since it is by no means

⁷⁵⁷ PD pp. 70-72. ⁷⁵⁸ PD p. 32.

⁷⁵⁹ EF pp. 359-360. cf. IM pp. xiv and xx; 276-314.

⁷⁶⁰ CC p. 91.

readily apparent what cloven hooves and chewing the cud have to do with the holiness of God; and there are other cases where we are given no reason at all for uncleanness, such as the very important list of birds. If Douglas's main thesis, which is a revised version of Durkheim's, is accepted, we shall not expect to find the real reasons in the text, and we shall also not be surprised at the absence from Leviticus and Deuteronomy of any reference to the classification of Genesis 1, which might otherwise be urged as a serious objection to Douglas's exposition of the text. This classification of the natural world will have exercised its symbolic influence at an unconscious level in the minds of the priestly writers and will have been more in the nature of a profound assumption than a conscious premise.

Historical explanations of the rules of avoidance, such as the rejection of the pig, are inconsistent with this argument, and are also, as a matter of fact, internally inconsistent. Douglas's suggestion that abstinence from pork is the consequence of heroism in the face of persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes, apart from the fact that this is a very late period in ancient Israel's history, is inconsistent with the claim that the hatefulness of pork resulted from the situation of Israel around the period of the Exile.⁷⁶¹ We are also left with no idea why the camel, hare, rock-badger and a host of other creatures should be unclean.

⁷⁶¹ NS pp. 38-41. Cf. IM pp. 307-309.

It is far more important, however, that this type of explanation is quite different from that which sees deep-seated forces at work in the minds of individuals who not only make up a given society, but whose outlook is determined by that society which itself is certainly far more than the mere sum of its individual parts. It is quite true that the Babylonian conquest and the oppression of Antiochus Epiphanes constitute painful concrete illustrations of that insecurity which has led to Israel's symbolic stress on the need for clear boundaries, and on such occasions the rules of avoidance will receive special and perhaps vehement emphasis; but where the line of historical development intersects the line of social development and mental classification the intersection will re-inforce but not establish the symbols of pollution. This or that historical event will not be the real reason for the rejection of the pig or anything else, although Douglas's argument implies that the rules of avoidance must have originated in historical rather than prehistoric times. Her demand for an overall explanation of the rules of avoidance implies the rejection of piecemeal historical explanations as well as any other type of piecemeal exposition of the text. Her statement that the pig carried the odium of multiple pollution reveals the same confusion: failure to get into the class of ungulates on the one hand, and the fact that it was reared as food by non-Israelites on the other, are explanations at two different levels, and it is the first which constitutes

Douglas's real contribution to the debate.⁷⁶² She has herself recognised that the second is open to the objection that other animals reared, sacrificed and consumed by foreigners were not rejected as unclean.⁷⁶³ Confusion is made easy by the fact that both explanations are concerned with the rejection of foreign elements, but the distinction between them is nevertheless very important and must be observed.

The Evidence of Field-Work

Before proceeding to further questions about Douglas's approach to the Israelites' view of nature, we must recognise the strength of her main thesis. Although, as she herself says, only an anthropologist can evaluate it,⁷⁶⁴ the evidence is such that even a layman can appreciate that it cannot be easily dismissed or ignored. Unless we are prepared to see the position of Israel in the world in a strictly fundamentalist sense, the analogy with other cultures suggests what could be a fruitful line of interpretation. Douglas's approach recognises the strangeness and apparent irrationality of the rules of avoidance without involving the ascription to the Israelites of a total outlook and mentality which is quite extraordinary and removed from our own by an unbridgeable chasm.

Douglas's own work among the Lele of the Congo makes a connection between social life and classification of the natural world obvious. The opposition between mankind and

⁷⁶² IM p. 272. ⁷⁶³ PD pp. 48-49. ⁷⁶⁴ NS p. xvi.

the animals is a distinction basic to Lele thinking and behaviour. Men are, or ought to be, characterised by 'buhonyi', which is shame, shyness or modesty; while animals are characterised by lack of buhonyi. Some animals, however, show some degree of buhonyi, by washing in water or shyly hiding in holes or curling into a ball on the approach of men, and they are therefore put into a class of their own. An essential part of buhonyi is revulsion from 'hama', which is that which arouses or ought to arouse disgust, but it includes not only what we should recognise as dirt, but also cows' milk and eggs, and the flesh of cats, dogs, goats and pigs, since it would be disgusting to eat the flesh of tame or domesticated animals.

There are important distinctions between the meat men may eat and that which women may eat, and the forest with its spiritual strength and fertility is associated with men while the barren grassland is associated with women, the distinction being made clear and enforced by religious practice. Certain cult groups can eat certain animals or parts of animals, others being forbidden to do so on pain of contracting dangerous disease. Those who have begotten children, for example, can eat the young of animals, which would presumably be otherwise dangerous to them. No one with an afflicted part would eat the corresponding part of an animal. Men who have begotten twins have an intimate connection with animals since animals, unlike most human beings, reproduce by multiple births, this being another important distinction between mankind and the animals. This gives the fathers of twins special hunting magic, but at the same time they must avoid

eating or even seeing the unborn young of animals.

These few briefly described facts and much else that Douglas records show how both contrast and links with the animal world profoundly affect Lele thought and practice; not so much by way of conscious reflection as through assumptions about animals and humans. 'These assumptions are so fundamental to Lele thought that one could almost describe them as unformulated categories through which they unconsciously organise their experience. They could never emerge in reply to direct questions because it was impossible for Lele to suppose that the questioner might take his standpoint on another set of assumptions'.⁷⁶⁵

For the Lele, water is associated with the spirits which control fertility, and therefore all aquatic creatures have this association too. Land animals which are closely associated with water do not fit into the normal classification and become the subjects of rules of avoidance: for example, the wild bush pig frequents streams, and also breeds prolifically; the water-chevrotain is an antelope which hides in the water with only its nostrils showing; and these creatures are therefore closely associated with spirits, and therefore avoided by pregnant women. When Douglas inquired about such animals, however, she was not given explanations of this sort but merely a description of the characteristics of the animals in question as if this was a sufficient indication of their oddity, this being the kind of reaction to the natural world which

⁷⁶⁵ IM p. 28.

Douglas describes as a 'gut response'.

Perhaps the most interesting of the anomalous creatures is the pangolin, or scaly ant-eater. For the Lele the pangolin has the scaly body and tail of a fish, but instead of dwelling the water climbs in the trees with four little legs. It does not flee the hunter but waits to be killed; and it does not reproduce itself like a fish or lizard, but like humans, gives birth to one offspring at a time, and suckles its young. For the Lele it is pre-eminently suited to performing the role of mediator between humans and animals, and it is the centre of an important cult in which it is regarded as the voluntary and dignified victim, and the celebration of which will assure fertility in women and success in the chase.

Douglas, however, faces the question why the anomalous pig should be rejected by the Israelites, but the anomalous pangolin should be revered as a source of power by the Lele. The answer brings us back to her central, Durkheimian thesis. Douglas describes at some length the system of marriage alliances between villages and clans,⁷⁶⁶ and links this with animal classification, and her conclusion may be summarised in the following quotations: 'As I read it, the Lele are the most open to foreign alliance, the Israelites the least ...' 'At most I am supposing that these rules of marriage with their political penalties and rewards are to be found imprinted upon the categories

⁷⁶⁶ IM pp. 297-302.

of nature ... So I argue that their experience of mediation in marriage and political alliance allows them to imagine an effective religious mediator'. 'A people who have nothing to lose by exchange and everything to gain will be predisposed towards the hybrid being, wearing the conflicting signs, man/god or man/beast. A people whose experience of foreigners is disastrous will cherish perfect categories, reject exchange and refuse doctrines of mediation'.⁷⁶⁷

Douglas admits that her idea is speculative, but she appeals to the work of two other anthropologists as confirming her own conclusions, and indeed as an aid to the clarification of her interpretation of her own field-work among the Lele.⁷⁶⁸

S. J. Tambiah has demonstrated a close connection between attitudes to animals and rules about sex and marriage in N.E. Thailand. The notions of eating and sexual intercourse are closely related, and there is also a strong prohibition against marriage between blood brothers and sisters and first cousins, and against marrying outside one's own generation. More distant relatives and strangers may marry; but second cousins occupy an uncertain position, and if they marry they have to undergo a ceremony in which they eat rice from a tortoise shell in imitation of dogs, in order to deceive the super-

⁷⁶⁷ IM pp. 297, 299, 307.

⁷⁶⁸ M. Douglas (ed.), RULES AND MEANINGS, Harmondsworth 1973, pp. 127-166. Cf. IM pp. 287, 306.

natural beings who watch over these things. This is because dogs commit incest and ignore relative age distinctions. The dog is a symbol of irregular sexual relations and uncleanness, and while it is given the freedom of the house it is never allowed in the sleeping quarters. It features in the worst type of insult, is absolutely forbidden as food, and is treated as a degraded human.

The buffalo on the other hand, is a respected animal which dwells beneath the sleeping quarters of the house; houses being raised on poles. To the buffalo alone among animals is attributed spiritual essence; relative age status is recognised for buffaloes; it is sinful to make the buffalo work on the Buddhist sabbath; it may be eaten on only ceremonial occasions and the animal in question must be acquired from another household or village. If a buffalo reared in the household is slaughtered the same evil consequences follow as in the case of breaking marriage and sex rules. 'The attitudes toward the buffalo and ox in respect to their killing and eating thus show a correspondence to the attitudes relating to the proper marriage and sex relationships among human beings ... The buffalo and the ox that belong to the house must not be killed and eaten (paralleling prohibited marriage and sex); killing and eating the buffalo and ox in an approved manner corresponds to the rules of correct exchange in marriage and sex relations'.⁷⁶⁹

⁷⁶⁹ RM pp. 142-143.

The otter is a water creature, but resembles the dog and is a hated monster. The water monitor moves as well on land as in the water, and is altogether inedible and fiercely hated, and there is a similar attitude to the toad which is carefully distinguished from the edible frog, the latter being regarded as clearly a land animal.

R. Bulmer worked among the Karam in the highlands of New Guinea and discovered that the cassowary was not regarded as a bird.⁷⁷⁰ The Karam are highly competent observers, and yet their classification of animals is very different from that of a modern European, and the unique position of the cassowary is a striking illustration of the fact. Bulmer recognised that the singling out of the cassowary is partly based on clearly observable differences between that creature and other birds, but he also realised that these are not an adequate explanation of the status it occupies in the eyes of the Karam. Other New Guinea Highlanders regard it as a bird and hunt it in the usual fashion. The Karam, on the other hand, use a special language when hunting the cassowary, kill it in such a way that its blood is not shed, oblige the killer to eat the heart of the victim, and place him in a ritually dangerous state which prevents him planting taro or approaching the growing taro crops for one month. The cassowary must be cooked and eaten in or near the forest; and live cassowaries must be kept away from homesteads and gardens, or otherwise pigs, taro, bananas will not

⁷⁷⁰ RM pp. 167-193. Cf. IM pp. 289-295.

flourish, this being in marked contrast to the practice of other New Guinea Highlanders.⁷⁷¹

Bulmer's investigations led him to the conclusion that killing the cassowary was equated with killing a human being;⁷⁷² yet not simply any human being, but rather those of close kinship to oneself. He suggests that this is because close kinsmen are both a help in cultivation of the essential taro crop, and at the same time a possible threat to one's ownership of property; 'Cassowaries are sisters, cross cousins ... and their descendants, to men. This is really very appropriate. Brother and sister are mutually dependent, but the sister is under the brother's control, is married out ... and in a sense dispossessed of much that she would have enjoyed if she had been a male. Your cross-cousins are the people with moral claims on you which you are nevertheless sometimes quite reluctant to meet: and whose names you should not say. You cannot keep your real cross-cousins out of your inheritance, or out of your taro gardens, at least not unless and until you are beginning to suspect witchcraft and consider homicide. How appropriate that you should treat your metaphorical cross-cousins, the cassowaries, with due respect when you kill them, and make entirely sure that they never come anywhere near your taro'.⁷⁷³

Bulmer has important things to say about the taro crop, pandanus nuts, dogs and pigs, and as in the case of Tambiah the argument can only be really impressive when

⁷⁷¹ RM pp. 174-178. ⁷⁷² RM p. 185. ⁷⁷³ RM p. 187.

the whole of the material is considered. It must also be made clear that there can be no direct analogy between the behaviour of the Lele or the Thais or the Karam on the one hand, and the Hebrews of ancient Israel on the other; there is a strong presumption against explaining the behaviour and attitudes revealed in one culture by direct comparison with the behaviour and attitudes revealed in a different culture, especially one separated from the other very widely in space and time; but it can be legitimately claimed that there is strong evidence of an indirect analogy between all of them in that in each case an individual's classification of animals and general view of nature owes something of significance to the culture to which he belongs: his institutional and traditional relationships with other people within his society and beyond it determine to some extent his view of nature, and the natural world is so interpreted as to become a symbol of personal and social concern and a means of maintaining the social order. This process is unconscious, a matter of assumptions; or at times half conscious, under the probing of an investigator, and only very rarely the subject of fully conscious reflection. It is therefore all the more powerful and widespread in its influence.⁷⁷⁴

Sperber's view that symbolic knowledge is based on what he calls encyclopaedic knowledge is confirmed. The animal and vegetable symbols actually pre-suppose a close acquaintance with natural surroundings, and the Israelites

⁷⁷⁴ Cf. I. pp. 148-149.

of ancient times were no exception to this rule. Sperber is also right in his insistence that symbolic knowledge resembles encyclopaedic, while at the same time being puzzlingly different, and if Douglas's main thesis is correct we can see why: the symbolic statements about animals really are statements about the world, but about the society of which the individual is a part, and not the animals themselves.

Why human beings should interpret the natural world in this way is another question, but the material gathered together by Mary Douglas and other anthropologists makes it plausible to suppose that such an attitude to the natural world is in fact a characteristic of all or many societies, including ancient Israel.

The Limitations of Anthropology

Certain problems are raised by Douglas's argument, and these must now be faced.

In her comparison of the Lele with ancient Israel, Douglas refers to relationships between Lele villages, but to Israel's relationship as a nation to other nations. This kind of comparison may be legitimate, but one cannot help but wonder if a proper comparison should not be with relationships between Israelite villages rather than Israel's place among the nations.

There is also a general problem about the degree of certainty which can be claimed by anthropologists for their interpretations of foreign people's symbolic acts and statements. A layman is in no position to pass judgement in such a matter, but Raymond Firth illustrates

varying opinions among modern anthropologists concerning the extent to which an investigator can be sure he has grasped the truth.

For example, according to Stanner, Durkheim was confused about the clan structures of the Australian aborigines, made a too sharp distinction between the sacred and the profane and wrongly insisted on giving religious symbols an empirical, concrete reference. He therefore failed properly to appreciate the real nature of aboriginal thinking.⁷⁷⁵

Firth goes on to raise the questions whether the observer can really claim to know more about symbols used than the people who use them; and what effect there would be on the believer if he were to accept the idea that his beliefs were in fact functioning as signs for something quite other than their apparent reference.⁷⁷⁶

Nadel emphasised the cultural gap which exists between observer and participant, and the consequent difference in thoughts, feelings and motivation which must exist between them; and also the inferential nature of the observer's conclusions. Nadel, of course, drew such conclusions, and Firth appeals to the view of Victor Turner that the observer can take a more detached overall view of a given society than its members can. Nevertheless, the need for caution in interpretation is clear, as Firth himself admits with reference to his own work among the

⁷⁷⁵ SPP p. 133. ⁷⁷⁶ SPP pp. 163-164.

Tikopia: there is no such thing as 'proof' in anthropological interpretation, but only inferences of varying degrees of plausibility. Firth also refers to Monica Wilson and Audrey Richards as careful interpreters, unwilling to go beyond what the evidence of their informants clearly justifies.⁷⁷⁷

This brief reference to expert opinions suggests that anthropologists can learn much about primitive peoples, but also that caution is needed and that bad mistakes can be made. This is particularly worth bearing in mind when we try to apply the fruits of anthropological research to the interpretation of the Old Testament, the literature of an ancient people whose life we cannot share and directly investigate. As Plato remarked, it is not possible to hold a conversation with a book.

Firth also emphasises the importance of individual belief in the use of symbols. According to Firth, the influence of Durkheim has encouraged the neglect of individual variation and forgetfulness of the fact that beliefs are, after all, held by individuals. It is the anthropologist who makes generalisations about public beliefs, or what is typical in a given society, but such generalisations can be misleading if the evidence concerning individual variation is too narrow or is ignored. Firth goes on to show how private symbolism, such as that of dream or vision, can have far-reaching social consequences and lead to public action with its own public symbolism.

⁷⁷⁷ SPP pp. 17-171; 174-176; 186-187.

He illustrates this at length from the vision of Marguerite Marie Alaquoque of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and other varied examples of the same process.⁷⁷⁸

This not only constitutes a further warning about the need for caution in the application of anthropological material in Old Testament interpretation, but suggests that there is also need for caution in making inferences about what Israelites in general actually believed during the Old Testament period.

Matter Out of Place, Holiness and Uncleaness

We must turn next to Douglas's definition of dirt as matter out of place.

The statements that dirt is essentially disorder, and that there is no absolute dirt, are distinct statements, although closely related for the purposes of Douglas's argument. Douglas seems to mean that men and women in a given place develop some idea of what order means: a given society evolves, with a culture of its own. To some extent this is a subjective process, the order is not just an object to be observed; and this fact is reflected in the many different cultures there are, the differences not being explicable simply as the result of differing circumstances. If dirt is essentially dis-order, the judgement as to what constitutes dirt then becomes merely a corollary of the judgement as to what constitutes order.

Edmund Leach supports Mary Douglas's views. 'Earth

⁷⁷⁸ SPP pp. 210-215; 231-237.

in the garden is just earth; it is normal matter in its normal place. Earth in the kitchen is dirt; it is matter out of place. The more sharply we define our boundaries, the more conscious we become of the dirt that has ambiguously got on to the wrong side of the frontier. Boundaries become dirty by definition and we devote a great deal of effort to keeping them clean, just so that we can preserve confidence in our category system'.⁷⁷⁹

This methodological scheme for understanding the place of pollution in any given culture is very simple, however complicated its application might be in practice. It might also be true, but this is far from certain, and Douglas's claim that what is dirty is a purely subjective judgement - lies in the eye of the beholder - is a surreptitious way of gaining support for her main thesis that dirt is essentially dis-order; order being a partly conscious and partly unconscious attempt to give a rational account of phenomena.

It is possible, however, that the unclean is regarded as out of harmony with the rest of the cosmos simply because it is unclean. Decisions about the truth or falsity of aesthetic or moral judgements such as, 'is unclean', are notoriously difficult; but the difficulty or impossibility of establishing objective or undeniable criteria for determining truth or falsity in such cases does not mean that such judgements are never true or false.

⁷⁷⁹ CC p. 61.

There are many different kinds of pollution and uncleanness, but it does seem to be the case that very often the judgement that something is unclean is intended as a statement about the actual nature of the object in question. It is quite true, as Douglas points out, that something which is judged dirty in one context is accepted as normal in another, but even apparently straightforward illustrations of this fact present puzzling features. Gardening tools in the bathroom, for example, would not be regarded as dirty unless they had been used in the garden and not cleaned. The clinging soil which makes them dirty is, of course, a normal feature of the garden, and can be knocked off or wiped off there because it is in place. It would be hazardous, however, to draw the conclusion from this that the recently used garden tools are regarded as unclean simply because they are in the bathroom, and therefore out of place. A cake of soap from the bathroom would be equally out of place in the middle of the vegetable patch, but it would not be regarded as therefore dirty, any more than clean tools would become dirty simply by being placed in the bathroom or even in the bath itself. The cake of soap would become dirty by contact with its surroundings, but it is these that inflict the uncleanness on the soap which is looked upon as perfectly clean in itself. The breakfast egg is not regarded as dirty, but if it is applied to the newly laundered shirt, it makes the shirt dirty. On the other hand, a button from the shirt accidentally deposited in the newly boiled egg does not make the egg dirty, although it is just as unwelcome in its new situation as the egg is on the shirt.

In writing about detached hair and different reactions to it in various circumstances, Firth writes, 'To find a scalp hair in one's food or a pubic hair in one's bath may cause acute revulsion. She may, as the poets say, be able to draw you to her with a single hair, but not if the hair is in the soup. Such reaction does not seem to be merely a matter of incongruity, the "dirt as matter in the wrong place" argument which Mary Douglas has used effectively in her study of pollution'.⁷⁸⁰

These trivial illustrations should make us pause before accepting the equation of being out of place and being unclean. Something may be out of place without being therefore regarded as unclean; and something may even be regarded as dirty without being out of place: a miner at the coal face might well be very dirty, and feel so, but the dirtiness could hardly be said to be out of place.

If trivial judgements about egg spattered shirts, or rakes surprisingly encountered in the bathroom can present puzzles for the student of language and thought, how much more is this likely to be the case when we are considering such things as dirty minds or dirty looks. We may also wonder how such categories of uncleanness as these are related to that uncleanness which makes the camel and the hare unfit offerings to the God of Jacob. There can be no doubt in these cases that a serious judgement is being made about the nature or quality of something; and it is this nature or quality which makes it out of place in a given situation or context, and not the incongruity which

⁷⁸⁰ SPP p. 287.

produces the character or quality of uncleanness. Weeds are out of place in a garden, and perhaps the being out of place is part of the definition of a weed; but they are not thereby unclean.

Douglas could argue that such examples used in criticism of her definition of the unclean are indeed too trivial; they depend, as it were, upon a too fragmentary view of experience. The cake of soap, for example, belongs to a whole range of things which are clean, over against such things as gardening tools which are not. The miner is admittedly dirty at the coal face, but then, the whole coal mine is dirty, and such work is dirty work over against that of the white collar occupations. The immaculate City gent. reporting at the pit head would be out of place because of his cleanness, like the cake of soap among the cabbages, but it might be held that gentleman and soap must be seen as representatives of larger wholes, and the 'dirt as matter out of place' definition must be judged at that level.

If so, it is a case which must be argued and it would appear to be vastly more complicated than the thesis argued by Douglas. Bulmer's comment at the end of his article on the cassowary is a fair one: 'I am impressed by Dr. Douglas's general theory of pollution, that this is associated with things that are out of place in terms of the order which a society seeks to impose upon itself and on the universe it occupies. But the trouble is that things can be out of place in so many different ways, in terms of so many different, even if linked, dimensions. The first problem, operationally, seems to me to be to

ensure that the ethnographic record is comprehensively enough recorded and presented. I hope that this presentation of the Karam ethnography will at least indicate the complexity of the ethnographic task'.⁷⁸¹

Mary Douglas concedes, as we have seen, that anomalous animals might be good as well as bad, and perhaps this implies the surrender of her definition of uncleanness. Dirt is often matter which is out of place, but matter which is out of place is often not dirt.

If this is so, it has an important bearing on some of her comments on the meaning of biblical texts.

Turning to Douglas's comments on Deuteronomy and Leviticus, there is much to be said in favour of her approach to the question, which is to start with what the texts actually say, to note that each of the injunctions is based on the idea of separation. Douglas is perfectly well aware, however, that this meaning is quite inadequate as a rendering of $\omega\tau\pi$ as actually used in the Old Testament. She refers to the rather thin rendering of Leviticus 11:46 in Knox's version, 'I am set apart and you must be set apart like me'; and an even better example would be the attempt to translate 'holy' as 'set apart' in Isaiah 6:3, which, in fact, Knox translates 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Hosts'.⁷⁸² And there are many other such examples. Whatever the literal equivalent in modern English might be of $\omega\tau\pi$, it is quite evident that the Israelite regarded God, and what closely appertained to God as set apart because of some ineffable quality we designate by the word 'holiness'.

⁷⁸¹ RM p. 192. ⁷⁸² PD p. 8. Cf. pp. 49ff.

Douglas fills out the idea of holiness by making it mean wholeness, completeness. The examples she gives show that this notion is important; but it is just as inadequate as 'set apart'. Translations depending on this idea even if combined somehow with that of separation would produce renderings just as embarrassingly thin as those already referred to. The inadequacy of the notion is also obviously revealed by the fact that what is whole is not necessarily holy. Many lambs in the flock would be suitable as offerings because they were perfect specimens of their kind, but they were not therefore regarded as sacred. It was the altar which conveyed holiness and an individual creature became holy through proximity to it and being drawn into a ritual act.

This over-emphasis on the notion of wholeness is well illustrated in the comments on Deuteronomy 20 and a quotation from Pedersen.⁷⁸³ According to Deuteronomy a man who has not dedicated his new house, or not eaten the fruit of his new vineyard, or not consummated his marriage, should refrain from battle, and Douglas takes this to mean that there is a danger that the enterprise will be left incomplete if the man risks death in battle, and she follows Pedersen in supposing that the divine blessing will be lost if there is a premature breach in the 'new totality'.

However, the fatal admission is made that the ritual completion of a house, the consumption of fruit from a new vineyard and the consummation of a new marriage are not in

⁷⁸³ P2 pp. 9-10. PD p. 52.

fact necessary in order to avoid defilement. Pedersen says that a serious risk of sin is involved, but this is Pedersen, not Deuteronomy; and the idea is totally inappropriate when applied to the dismissal of the faint-hearted. We seem to have in these cases an acknowledgement of the unseen power which alone can guarantee success in battle, marriage, agriculture and building, coupled with humanitarian motives and a common sense acknowledgement of familiar facts. The deity is humane and cares for the life of the community; but only a fool would expect the Lord to build his house or grow his crops for him. The emphasis in Deuteronomy 20 seems to be on co-operation with the deity, using common sense and a humane sympathy with one's fellow men.

Douglas finds an echo of the Deuteronomic ruling in the parable of the Great Feast in Luke 14, but this comparison is quite misleading. The form of the parable might owe something to Deuteronomy, but its meaning is quite different. Furthermore, the man who gave the feast would not be offended if important rules were being observed, which makes the parable completely inconsistent with Douglas's interpretation of the Deuteronomic text.⁷⁸⁴

In support of her main contention, Douglas also refers to the word 'tebhel', 'which has as its meaning mixing or confusion'. This, like the concept of wholeness is unquestionably important; and it is indeed curious that

⁷⁸⁴ Cf. PCB 730d.

a mixture of materials in cloth should be forbidden: but once again, the idea is by itself inadequate, and in declaring the translation 'perversion' to be incorrect Douglas seems to be committing Barr's root fallacy. The word is so used in the text as to indicate something which in itself is abominable, horrible, an affront to the deity.⁷⁸⁵

Douglas's attempt to apply her line of argument to Leviticus 19 fails completely.⁷⁸⁶ The moral failures here designated are described by Douglas as 'clearly contradictions between what seems and what is', which, indeed, they are; but a conflict between what seems and what is, is not necessarily immoral and therefore unholy. Douglas dismisses the fact that the text says much about generosity and love as not her concern: 'these are positive commands, while I am concerned with negative rules'. Yet we started from the basic principle that the negative is to be understood in terms of the positive, the unclean is to be interpreted by contrast with the holy. Justice and moral goodness are mentioned as probably involved in holiness, but they then disappear from the argument and are presumably regarded as irrelevant. If so, Douglas is guilty of making or assuming a distinction between the ritual and the moral which she rightly castigates elsewhere.⁷⁸⁷

Again, Douglas rightly associates holiness with the power of blessing or curse, which in the case of the deity means the power to create or kill. That such force is related to the maintenance of order in society or the

⁷⁸⁵ PD p. 53. ⁷⁸⁶ PD pp. 53-54. ⁷⁸⁷ PD p. 51.

cosmos is without question, and human beings will so act, if they are wise, as not to offend that power and thereby bring down destruction on the order and security which make life possible. Yet the avoidance of offence by the avoidance of the unclean is not the mere determination not to confuse or intermingle the members of different classes simply because God established these categories and will be wrathful if we mess them up.

There is no escaping the fact that for the biblical writers the holiness of God is a quality and force which can in no way be adequately rendered by notions of separateness or wholeness. The only way in which Douglas can try to preserve her definition of the unclean is by being rigidly consistent in the maintenance of her main Durkheimian thesis. In that case, God and society would be the same, and the holiness of God that force, moral and physical, whereby society controls its members. The unclean would then indeed be what was contrary to order, the anomalous, the monstrous, and so on. The disparity between her interpretation of the Old Testament and what the Old Testament writers clearly intended would then be overcome by the recognition that there is a difference between conscious rationalisation, which is what we have in the Bible, and the true and powerful but unconscious motivation which has led to their statements. There is, however, a heavy price to be paid for this approach, and to this we must now turn.

Social Determinism, Objectivity and Relativism

In his review of Paul Johnson's book, Enemies of

Society, David Martin makes the following remarks about Mary Douglas, who has been assigned a place among the blessed: 'Mary Douglas really slides in sideways, partly I think because Paul Johnson has not focused his sights on her quite strongly enough. Of course she is a good Catholic, and a very good anthropologist, but she cannot be absolved from the vice of relativism. It is not merely that radicals use her for relativistic purposes. She IS herself a relativist. Paul Johnson may appeal to her for a defence of orientation and boundary markers but she is a very dodgy character when it comes to truth'.⁷⁸⁸

Douglas's group and grid argument, already outlined, implies a social determinism which fully justifies this criticism, at least as far as theology and metaphysics are concerned; and it is also implied in her definition of the unclean. She herself repudiates this suggestion that she is a determinist and it is quite evident that she does believe in the evaluation of practices and beliefs.⁷⁸⁹ Her chapter, *The Bog Irish*, is a strongly argued case for the retention of ritual and a proper understanding of its meaning. 'No wonder that Pope Paul is worried by contemporary theologians who whittle down the Eucharist's meaning and who by ambiguous terms ... threaten to reduce it from an efficacious source of power to a mere symbol'. Douglas goes on to give in outline orthodox teaching on the different modes of Christ's presence, and then comments, 'This is the message that is sent out. By the

⁷⁸⁸ TIMES HIGHER EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT, 20 May 1977, p. 16.

⁷⁸⁹ NS pp. 149, 157.

time it reaches the faithful it is emasculated more than somewhat'.⁷⁹⁰ This is one brief example of Douglas's real belief in evaluation; and occasionally her championing of a cause borders on the impassioned.

Elsewhere, however, we read such statements as: 'It follows that the solution to grave problems of social organisation can rarely come from those who experience them. For they inevitably can only think according to the cosmological type in which their social life is cast'. She describes conversion as the adjustment of a set of categories, a cosmology, to suit a new social condition: the cosmology used in the old habitat does not work.⁷⁹¹

At the opening of her chapter, Control of Symbols, Douglas speaks of 'the strong resistance made by many scholars to the very notion of social determinants of belief. They would rather think of beliefs floating free in an autonomous vacuum, developing according to their own internal logic, bumping into other ideas by the chance of historical contact and being modified by new insights'. On the other hand she insists, 'To ensure autonomy of mind we should first recognise the restrictions imposed by material existence'.⁷⁹²

Later she writes, 'Reforming bishops and radical theologians, to say nothing of utopian Marxists, must eventually recognise that the generous warmth of their doctrinal latitude, their critical dissolving of categories and attack on intellectual and administrative distinctions

⁷⁹⁰ NS p. 49. ⁷⁹¹ NS pp. 154, 144. ⁷⁹² NS p. 140.

are generated by analogous social experience'.⁷⁹³

If this line of argument is accepted, we are confronted by the spectacle of Jews heroically abstaining from pork because they must, and Antiochus Epiphanes murdering them, because he must. The Irish labourer is happy in his Friday abstinence and attendance at Mass, and his clerical exhorters and critics are equally happy in their exhortations and criticism; and both parties are happy for a reason not altogether unlike that which gives the lion satisfaction in meat and the cow in grass. It is not unjust to say that Douglas has failed to reconcile or put into proper relationship the desire to get at the truth and defend, preserve or retrieve the autonomy of the mind on the one hand, while recognising the generative power of social experience on the other.

Elsewhere, Douglas makes a virtue of necessity, although it is not quite clear whether this is by exorcizing the boggy of relativism, or extolling it as the key to real knowledge. Yet it is hard to see how she can avoid putting herself into the position of Durkheim who had to assume that his own investigation, as a piece of scientific work, had produced a description of what is the case, what is true in the correspondence sense. As we have seen, Durkheim explicitly assigned to science the rule of discovering objective truth, and if any particular piece of scientific work failed to do so, this would merely

⁷⁹³ NS p. 166. See the whole of chapters 10 and 11.

reflect its failure as a piece of science. Properly carried out, science must reveal what is the case.⁷⁹⁴

Durkheim was obviously a little uneasy himself with this view: Science must conform with public opinion or it will be without influence.⁷⁹⁵ The explanations of modern science are more methodical than those of primitive societies, and therefore more sure of being objective, 'but they do not differ in nature from those which satisfy primitive thought'.⁷⁹⁶ Durkheim rejects Lévy-Bruhl's view that primitive mythologies ignore the principle of contradiction but that scientific explanations observe it. 'Is not the statement that a man is a kangaroo or the sun a bird, equal to identifying the two with each other? But our manner of thought is not different when we say of heat that it is a movement, or of light that it is a vibration of the ether ... Every time that we unite heterogeneous terms by an internal bond, we forcibly identify contraries. Of course the terms we unite are not those which the Australian brings together; we choose them according to different criteria and for different reasons; but the processes by which the mind puts them in connection do not differ essentially'.⁷⁹⁷

The natural sciences, unlike religion, reveal to us the true nature of things; and yet 'between the logic of religious thought and that of scientific thought there is no abyss'.⁷⁹⁸ 'So if the believer shows himself indocile

⁷⁹⁴ Cf. EF p. 431. ⁷⁹⁵ EF p. 208. ⁷⁹⁶ EF p. 238.
⁷⁹⁷ EF p. 238. ⁷⁹⁸ EF p. 239. Cf. pp. 429-430.

to certain lessons of experience, he does so because of other experiences which seem more demonstrative. The scholar does not do otherwise; only he introduces more method'.⁷⁹⁹

Sometimes, therefore, Durkheim sees the role of religion and that of science in human life as quite different. The former gives expression to those social forces which make for security; the latter reveals, by whatever stages of painful progress, objective truth. At other times, however, he sees the two displaying the same kind of thinking, but the former is somewhat confused whereas the latter displays 'more method'.

This inconsistency suggests that Durkheim was dimly aware that if powerful social forces determine men's religious thinking, and if philosophical and scientific thought arises later in history out of religious, then there can be no such thing as self consciously grasped objective truth; but if objective truth is beyond our grasp, then Durkheim's own work, like that of other scientists, would no more be an expression of genuine empirical knowledge than religious belief. This second conclusion was obviously unwelcome to Durkheim, and perhaps literally unthinkable since the assumption on which all his work is based is that it is false; and yet he could not escape the uneasy awareness that the powerful social forces he had invoked were not so easily banished. If they were

⁷⁹⁹ EF p. 361.

so strong and comprehensive in their effect on men, a sharp distinction between one type of thinking and another was not justified.

Mary Douglas can see this quite clearly, and wishes to render Durkheim thoroughly consistent and therefore valuable as an unfailing clue as to why men in any given place and time think as they do. She is, however, just as inconsistent as Durkheim in the assumption upon which all her work is based, that her own description, like that of other scientific workers, is a true picture of things as they are. Sometimes the assumption erupts into an explicit statement, as, for example, 'We ... must attempt to phrase an objective, verifiable distinction between two types of culture, primitive and modern'.⁸⁰⁰

This occurs in a chapter devoted to explaining the difference between primitive cultures and our own, and Douglas argues that while the primitive world-view must be characterised as 'personal, anthropocentric, undifferentiated', our own is characterised by an advancement of thought which observes the Kantian principle that such progress is only possible in so far as the mind becomes free of the subjective conditions which hamper it. 'In our own culture mathematics first and later logic, now history, now language and now thought processes themselves and even knowledge of the self and of society, are fields of knowledge progressively freed from the subjective limits of the mind. To the extent to which

sociology, anthropology and psychology are possible in it, our own type of culture needs to be distinguished from others which lack this self-awareness and conscious reaching for objectivity'.⁸⁰¹ Durkheim would presumably have applauded this statement and simply regarded himself as one more example of such intellectual progress.

Elsewhere, however, we read that the notion of scientific truth is just another sacred cow and that Durkheim was prevented from properly developing his own insights by worshipping it. Relativism is to be consciously and cheerfully embraced, and we must fully recognise the fact that the mind actively creates its universe, while

⁸⁰¹ PD, chapter on 'Primitive Worlds', p. 78.

With respect to Kant, it must be pointed out that he did not regard the subjective conditions of thought, to use Mary Douglas's phraseology, as shackles to be escaped from, but as inevitably determining the whole of experience as well as pointing beyond it. Douglas sees the analogy with Copernicus as meaning that progress was made in astronomy when observers recognised the misleading impression created by an observer's own constitution and situation in space, and then proceeded to ignore it as a harmful distraction. Kant uses the analogy to emphasise that the world of phenomena which make up experience are not merely produced by the multitude of things which exist, but by the way in which the mind apprehends them, and that these subjective mental conditions, far from being ignored, must be fully recognised if there is to be any chance of reaching metaphysical truth.

One cannot help but wonder if the analogy with the Copernican hypothesis is not more misleading than helpful. Douglas uses the analogy to refer to judgements which the understanding makes concerning phenomena; Kant uses it to refer to the contribution the mind inevitably makes to the production of phenomena.

See CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON, Trans. Kemp Smith, London 1929 (1964 reprint), PREFACE to 2nd ed. pp. 21-23. Cf. I. Kant, PROLEGOMENA TO ANY FUTURE METAPHYSICS THAT WILL BE ABLE TO PRESENT ITSELF AS A SCIENCE, Trans. P.G. Lucas, Manchester 1953, Main Transcendental Question, First Part, Note III, pp. 47-48.

at the same time it is socially conditioned. Douglas imagines how fruitful would have been a meeting between Durkheim and Wittgenstein, like that between Rousseau and Hume: 'With a few tut, tuts Wittgenstein could soon have shattered Durkheim's faith in objective scientific truth. He would have put it to him that even the truths of mathematics are established by social process and protected by convention'.⁸⁰²

Douglas can resolve this contradiction by leaving behind the earlier argument and accepting a thoroughgoing philosophy of relativism, or else by confining the relativism to religion and metaphysics and retaining scientific objectivity. She appears to have chosen the former alternative. 'When I first wrote "Purity and Danger" about this moral power in the tribal environment, I thought our own knowledge of the physical environment was different. I now believe this to have been mistaken. If only because they disagree, we are free to select which of our scientists we will hearken to and our selection is subject to the same sociological analysis as that of any tribe'. 'This "pure, unreconstructed Durkheimianism", as a friend has called it, develops naturally from my earlier work on the idea of pollution'.⁸⁰³ These two statements suggest that Douglas felt she only gradually realised the full implications of her argument in the earliest of her books, and that she is now launched on a

⁸⁰² IM p. xix. See whole of Preface and chapter 'Self Evidence'.

⁸⁰³ IM pp. 239, 281.

relativistic sea not only without any hope, but with any wish for solid anchorage. One cannot help but wonder, however, if the investigations of sociologists are not going to provide her with that secure haven of truth which anyone attempting to chart a constructive philosophy must find somewhere. Even the Flying Dutchman found his Senta.⁸⁰⁴

Be that as it may, religion and metaphysics fall under the axe, but whereas Durkheim was explicit about this, Douglas is more coy. She appears to have decided religious views of her own, and it may be that personal conviction prevents her drawing the proper conclusion from her analysis of the way religious views or philosophies of life vary according to concomitant variations in social pattern. She shares with Durkheim a desire to preserve religion, while at the same time we are left with the uneasy feeling that its foundations have been destroyed. For Douglas the metaphysical views found in primitive cultures are a by-product of urgent practical concerns. 'To serve these practical social ends all kinds of belief in the omniscience and omnipotence of the environment are culled into play ... So the primitive world view which I have defined above is rarely itself an object of contemplation and speculation in the primitive culture. It has evolved as the appanage of other social institutions'.⁸⁰⁵

Durkheim recognised that if this was true for

⁸⁰⁴ Cf. the concluding paragraph of PC, p. 88.

⁸⁰⁵ PD p. 91.

primitive religion it is true for modern as well; but Douglas wishes to avoid this conclusion and therefore produced a statement which is thoroughly inconsistent with her relativistic arguments elsewhere. In speaking of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Mormons, she says, 'Perhaps in entertaining metaphysical questions at all these religions may be counted anomalous institutions in the modern world. For unbelievers may leave such problems aside. But this in itself does not make of believers promontaries of primitive culture sticking out strangely in a modern world. For their beliefs have been phrased and rephrased with each century and their intermeshing with social life cut loose. The European history of ecclesiastical withdrawal from secular politics and from secular intellectual problems to specialised religious spheres is the history of this whole movement from primitive to modern'.⁸⁰⁶ The acknowledgement of religious belief which has cut loose from social life is astounding in the context of Douglas's thought; and the retirement of the Pope from Italian politics, or the surrendering of claims to divine right by the House of Windsor are beside the point, because the link between religious views and social structure does not operate primarily at this conscious level.

This does, however, draw our attention to one final and extremely important point. Durkheim argued that science could give a theoretical justification of religion

⁸⁰⁶ PD p. 92.

which would enable men in modern times to continue celebrating mysteries for which otherwise they would see no reason;⁸⁰⁷ but Durkheim posited social forces of which men are unconscious as the causes of religious belief and practice, and therefore their theoretical justification should not be needed. Such justification as is required will be provided according to Durkheim by that rationalisation of experience which the believer cannot avoid. We must recognise, however, that what will really happen if scientific investigation reveals the social origins of religion is that it will destroy it. Durkheim was really on the brink of recognising that if science and religion are what he takes them to be, science is the solvent of religion. And the same is true for Mary Douglas. If religion is a 'fabric of errors', or merely a 'collective effervescence', no honest man will hold to it. If we maintain that science can give a full account of religion, then religion ceases to exist.⁸⁰⁸

In so far as Mary Douglas attempts to apply a thoroughgoing Durkheimian analysis to the religious beliefs and practices she has investigated she raises very interesting and far-reaching questions not only about these religious phenomena, but also other fields of human thought such as philosophy, mathematics and science. Indeed, according to this aspect of her argument there is no realm of human thought whose origins cannot, at least in principle, be explained in social terms. On the other hand,

⁸⁰⁷ EF pp. 430-431. ⁸⁰⁸ EF pp. 225, 362.

Douglas herself seems to be at least half conscious of the serious difficulties involved in the attempt to sustain this kind of thoroughgoing analysis.

This does not mean, however, that there is no value in her analysis or that it can be ignored. The personal inter-relationships which constitute a given society are not sufficient to explain, say, that society's view of nature, its reaction to or interpretation of natural phenomena; but such social factors will always be a necessary element in any complete explanation of such a view. Social factors may even be of crucial significance for the proper understanding of a given outlook or judgement, such as that made by the ancient Israelites concerning certain animals, birds and insects. The evidence produced by Douglas and other anthropologists strongly suggests a close connection between social patterns and judgements about the natural world, this connection being all the more important because it is unconscious or simply assumed. Douglas herself has not offered a consistent explanation for the designation of certain creatures as unclean by the Israelites, but her idea that such creatures symbolise threats to Israel's boundaries and reflect a deep-seated desire for clear classification is plausible, which is more than can be said for the ideas that rules of avoidance represent a conscious rejection of elements in surrounding paganism, or are merely the survival of savage irrationality. Douglas's approach to the abominations of Leviticus shows that what appears to us to be their gross irrationality is rather the result of reading an unconscious symbolic judgement as if it were simply a

conscious literal one. Douglas has not proved her approach to be the correct one, and perhaps in the nature of the case proof is impossible, but the broad similarity between the Israelite judgements and those found in certain primitive societies is too striking to be ignored. It may be objected that ancient Israel was not a primitive society, but such a sharp division between Israel and primitive societies cannot be allowed, and if we recollect Horton's definition we must admit that in two respects out of three Israel was nearer to primitive societies than modern: compared with, say, modern Britain, Israel was both pre-industrial and pre-scientific.

Concluding Remarks

Let us return to Raymond Firth's survey of the anthropologist's work of interpretation. 'With poet or painter the question may be argued as to the validity of the symbols they create - whether or not the symbols do the job claimed or hoped for them, of evoking ideas, emotions, or stimulating experiences. It is not ordinarily denied that the ideas, experiences, emotions can exist in somewhat the form envisaged. But with religious symbols the question can take on a different aspect. The very existence of the referent is not common ground among the commentators. Some believe that there is an extra-human, divine entity or power, invisible, immaterial, even perhaps inaccessible, to be approached or at least to be referred to by symbolic means. Others believe that this is not so, and that the symbols purporting to make this reference are actually referring to some other object - say, the operations of human society or the character of human minds.

'Anthropologists are in an ambiguous position here. Like a theologian or other religious person an anthropologist has learnt to treat religious symbols - anyone's religious symbols - with respect. He is not expected to give them authenticity in their own terms - except temporarily, perhaps by the people among whom he is studying them. But some anthropologists believe firmly in the authenticity of the symbols of one religious faith - for example, Judaism, Christianity, Islam - while others are inclined to a kind of eclectic acknowledgement that all religious symbols have some factor in their referent which goes beyond the human sphere of comprehension. Still others are avowedly humanist in their interpretations. There is a kind of assumption of professional neutrality by anthropologists towards the subject of investigation'.⁸⁰⁹

Firth goes on to point out that whatever the standpoint of the anthropologist, some other views are bound to be foreign to him, as it were; but he will always approach them with proper respect. He argues, against Walter Marshall Urban, an idealist philosopher of Yale, that the humanist anthropologist is not denying that religious symbols have a referent, but that it may not be the same as that which religious people themselves attribute to the symbols: it lies rather 'in the field of human desires, emotions, strivings, conceptualizations, institutional relationships'.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁹ SPP pp. 52-53. ⁸¹⁰ SPP p. 53.

Nevertheless, Urban's view, as outlined by Firth is cogent enough: only if religious symbols have a reference to the divine do they have any significance as values. If they are so explained in human and social terms, then they are simply not religious symbols any more: we could say they have been explained away. It is true that the observer could, for example, hold both that there was in fact no god to whom a symbol pointed, yet accept that for the participant the symbol was religious; but if the participant comes to accept the observer's view, he will cease to be a participant.

The Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy are not the products of a purely primitive society, but they do contain important elements, such as the rules concerning clean and unclean animals, which resemble judgements about the natural world made in primitive societies. Sacrifice itself, still practised by many millions of people, is foreign to the outlook of modern Europeans, and might well be regarded as the survival of a primitive attitude.

At the same time, the Bible is regarded by many people as conveying the truth about most important issues, and this is not at all the same as looking upon certain institutions described in the Bible as merely survivals of a primitive outlook which we have happily outgrown. The issue is made more confused by the fact that Christians reject certain Old Testament rites and attitudes as wrong or superceded anyway; but it is important to remember that the actual reasons for such rejection of Old Testament ritual and belief are themselves part of a religious outlook and interpretation of historical events concerning Jesus and

the Early Church. The modern investigations which cast serious doubt on the truth of beliefs implied by ancient rules and rites, have nothing in common with the reasons put forward by the Early Church for no longer observing them; and the religious beliefs of Christians might well be regarded by the same modern investigators as having metaphysical implications just as much at variance with the facts as any primitive belief.

Once anthropological material has been forced on to our attention, it is impossible to continue ignoring it, unless we are prepared to adopt a purely fundamentalist approach to the Bible and the place of ancient Israel in the world; and yet, like archaeological evidence, it has to be very carefully handled if it is to shed light on biblical interpretation, and in addition raises far-reaching philosophical issues. If Douglas is right in her suggested explanation of the rules of avoidance in Deuteronomy and Leviticus we can see all the more clearly why the character of an expanding Early Church should have led to a serious conflict centred on the food laws, and why St. Peter should have surrendered his anti-Gentile prejudices in a vision of meat. We shall still be left, however, with ultimate questions concerning the nature of God and his requirements of his creatures, and it is perhaps at this point that we must remember another Kantian principle, that meta-physical questions are not answered by examining phenomena.⁸¹¹

⁸¹¹ This principle is of fundamental importance in the whole of Kant's philosophy, but see e.g. PROLEGOMENA sections 32-35; CPR, Transcendental Doctrine of Judgement, chapter III, pp. 257-275; and The Amphiboly

CONCLUDING THESES

The following theses are a summary statement of the most important points maintained in the preceding argument.

- 1) Generalisations about Israelite mentality which form the basis of theorising about the Old Testament view of nature are invalid, since i) the Old Testament itself is our source of information about the way ancient Israelites thought; ii) it is a by no means complete source of information about the way Israelites thought; iii) it indicates wide differences of opinion among Israelites on the relation of God to nature.
- 2) A proper understanding of the Old Testament view of nature can only be attained if the distinctions between the prosaic and the poetic, the literal and the figurative, history and story, are observed.
- 3) Most of the assertions of the Old Testament are readily intelligible to a modern reader through translations, which have achieved a high degree of accuracy.
- 4) There is no evidence in the Old Testament to demonstrate or suggest that ancient Israelites brought to their observation of the natural world ideas, assumptions or categories of thought which rendered their observation of nature radically different from common sense observation today.

811 (Contd.) of Concepts of Reflection, pp. 286-288, for the distinction between phenomena and noumena. Cf. PROLEGOMENA, section 57; and CPR, Transcendental Dialectic, chapter III section 6, pp. 518-524; section 7, pp. 528-531; and Preface to 2nd ed. of CPR, especially pp. 21-30.

- 5) Some Old Testament texts imply that many Israelites did not share the belief expressed in the texts that God was directly at work in nature.
- 6) The notion of direct divine intervention in nature was not therefore an integral part of an Israelite's view of nature; the ancient Israelites did not bring to their outlook on nature an assumption of God's active presence in natural events.
- 7) The Old Testament reveals a clear ability to think in terms of abstractions, to generalise and to follow through logical argument, just as people do today.
- 8) The Old Testament implies that Israelites made temporal and spatial distinctions just as we do, and that they appreciated the distinctions between historical periods and geographical regions just as we do.
- 9) The Old Testament texts do not imply or suggest that Israelites could only gain general impressions of the main character of objects of perception and were unable to analyse objects into their constituent parts.
- 10) Old Testament texts do not imply or suggest that Israelites could only see the individual creature as a living embodiment of the whole species.
- 11) Old Testament texts do not imply or suggest that Israelites failed to distinguish between a perception and its object.
- 12) The Old Testament reveals a clear distinction between thoughts and intentions on the one hand, and consequential acts and events on the other.
- 13) The Old Testament does not imply or suggest that Israelites believed that the unity of family or nation

involved the literal identification of different members as if they were merely various parts of a single whole.

- 14) The Old Testament implies that Israelites clearly distinguished between soul and body, however intimately united they believed the two to be in this world.
- 15) The Old Testament documents reveal a clear belief in the creation of the world by God, as distinct from its preservation.
- 16) The verb *bārā* in the *qal* and *niphal* is never used to refer to the preservation of natural processes, but always means the bringing into existence of that which did not exist before.
- 17) The doctrine of *creatio continua* is not taught in the Old Testament.
- 18) Creation is depicted as the bringing into existence by God of the world through his own direct action.
- 19) Creation is depicted as involving the establishment of natural processes which will continue of their own accord by virtue of the life and energy put into them in the beginning.
- 20) The Old Testament documents reveal an awareness of natural causation similar to that revealed in common sense observation today.
- 21) The Old Testament documents do not reveal any interest in the analysis of causes such as characterises natural science today.
- 22) The Old Testament documents frequently assert that God is in some kind of active relationship with the world and that he has intervened in the workings of nature from time to time to bring about effects which

would otherwise not have occurred. The application of the modern term 'miracle' to these events is justified.

- 23) The Old Testament does not imply or suggest that the earth has some kind of personal life whereby it can enter into a personal relationship with mankind or God, or that any Israelite ever believed this to be the case.
- 24) Some Old Testament texts express a link between human morality and the state of nature, this link being provided by the will and power of God.
- 25) Biblical assertions about the activity of God in nature cannot be justified by appeals to the unpredictability which forms an essential feature of some current scientific theories concerning certain physical processes.
- 26) Biblical belief in the activity of God in nature cannot be justified by an appeal to philosophical scepticism regarding natural causation.
- 27) The Israelite distinction between the clean and the unclean in nature cannot be explained either in terms of the rejection of heathenism, or as merely the survival, in Israel as well as her neighbours, of a totally irrational response to their environment by their primitive ancestors.
- 28) The Old Testament distinction between clean and unclean should perhaps be seen as the powerful unconscious symbolic expression of a deeply felt need to defend and preserve the purity of the people against pagan influence.