THE LORD'S SECOND SPEECH IN THE BOOK OF JOB

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The second speech of the Lord, comprising almost the whole of chs xl and xli of the book of Job, is the conclusion of the great debate which is framed between Prologue and Epilogue. In every art form which operates in the dimension of time, conclusions serve particular functions, and share common characteristics. They are used to resolve the dissonances that precede them, to solve the mysteries that have been posed, to unite the separate threads of narrative or melody, to put to rest the agitation or passion. Their functions sum up to leaving the "audience" with a sense of completion and satisfaction.

As currently understood, this second divine speech does not answer this description in any way. Instead, after a promising opening, it tails away into a wordy description of two beasts, Behemoth and Leviathan, whom the majority of scholars identify as hippopotamus and crocodile,¹ celebrating their strength and their invulnerability. So read, George Bernard Shaw's description of the speech as a "noble irrelevance"² is perhaps the best that can be said of it. There are three possible explanations for this disappointment which is the conclusion of a great work of art.

1. The author either did not understand, or deliberately decided to disregard, the canons which determine the nature of a conclusion.

2. The speech was not composed by him as the conclusion of the work, i.e. it has been interpolated by another writer, or additional material which is the true conclusion has been lost.

3. The current understanding of the speech is fundamentally in error.

¹ Samuel Bochart, Hierozoicon (London, 1663), Book 5, ch. 15.
² Preface to Parents and Children (Misalliance) (London, 1910).
It is the third of these explanations which is adopted here, with the fault in understanding the speech depending upon the wrong identification of both Behemoth and Leviathan, compounded by failure to appreciate at any level the complex allegorical nature of the speech.

1. Chapter xl

There has been a long-standing tug-of-war amongst the scholars over the identities of the two creatures who dominate these chapters. In effect, two almost equally mistaken theories have been contending. One holds that Behemoth and Leviathan are mythical monsters of pagan origin; the other that they are two real creatures, with the current favourites as mentioned above, hippopotamus and crocodile. As there is without any question a mythical monster one of whose names is Leviathan (= Lotan), and as this monster appears in the book of Job both by that name (iii 8), and by a number of other names (Rahab, Yam, Tannin, Tehom, Nahar), there is certainly a strong case which can be made out that the mythical monster theory is at least half-right. On the other hand there is no mythical creature called Behemoth in pagan mythology, and despite Pope’s and Day’s heroic attempts to identify the creature with “the ferocious bullock of El” or “El’s calf”, no convincing evidence of a terrestrial partner for Leviathan by any name. It is true that very late Hebrew speculation treats the two “beasts” as of the same genre, but there is nothing to suggest that such treatment derives from anywhere but Job xl-xli itself.

If, however, Leviathan is a mythical monster, and Behemoth is not, does this necessarily mean that Behemoth is therefore a natural creature? that the second theory is also half right? The answer to this question must be certainly be no, for not only are there other possibilities, but such a resolution would allow nothing in common between the two creatures, leaving their juxtaposition in God’s

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4 vii 12, ix 13, xxvi 12, xxviii 14, xxxviii 8-11.


6 Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the the Jews* 7 (Philadelphia, 1938). See the Index for numerous references.