The themes of creation and the origination of the cosmos are receiving a great deal of attention these days. Although the Hebrew Bible contains a variety of cosmogonic traditions, most agree that God creates the universe by imposing order upon a primeval, pre-created chaos. The Bible does not, however, present this chaos in a uniform manner. In his recent book, for example, J. D. Levenson identifies two major traditions about chaos. In the one chaos is an inert mass lacking order or differentiation. God creates by isolating the various elements that will make up the created universe, and thereby imposes a structure upon the primeval muck. In this tradition God is a potter and chaos the unworked clay, a metaphor familiar from the Bible itself (e.g., Gen. ii 7; Isa. xxix 16, lxiv 8; Jer. xviii 1-6). The best known example of this tradition is Gen. i, but Levenson also finds it in Ps. civ.


In the other tradition chaos is a living being with its own will and personality. It is at cross-purposes with God, who must first vanquish the beast-named alternatively Rahab, Tannim, Leviathan, Behemoth, Yam, or Nahar-before he can proceed with creation. This tradition can be found throughout the Hebrew Bible, but is most common in the book of Job (e.g., iii 8, vii 12, ix 13, xxvi 13, xl 15-32), the Psalms (e.g., lxviii 23, lxxiv 13-15, lxxxix 10-11), and the oracles of the prophets (e.g., Isa. xxvii 1, li 9-10; Ezek. xxix 3-5, xxxii 2-8; Hab. iii 8-15; Zech. x 11).

Isa. xlv 7 is thought to be the sole exception to the notion that chaos is pre-created and independent of the deity. Since C. Stuhlmueller’s 1959 article scholars have commonly interpreted this verse as an assertion of Yahweh's authorship of everything, including chaos. In that article Stuhlmueller writes, “In II Is[aiah] even this chaos is God’s creature... In the beginning, even before chaos, God alone IS, the creature WILL BE” (pp. 460-1). A number of scholars, including J. D. Levenson, J. Day and M. Weinfeld, go so far as to suggest that the verse is a deliberate polemic against the more common notion that chaos existed prior to creation. Sensing the implication that the older notions of chaos

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4 Weinfeld’s argument, available only in Hebrew, is conveniently summarized by Day ([n. 1] p. 55) and Levenson ([n. 1] pp. 124-7). According to these summaries, Weinfeld believes that Deutero-Isaiah composed this oracle in conscious opposition to Gen. i (cf. Westermann [n. 3], p. 132). Day and Levenson modify