

Chapter 2 – Scripture on the Fall

But I cannot deny that I find still lingering here and there certain of the old views of nature of which I used to hear but too much here in London some five-and-thirty years ago... that this Earth did not reveal the will and character of God, because it was cursed and fallen; and that its facts, in consequence, were not to be respected or relied on. This, I was told, was the doctrine of Scripture, and was therefore true. But when, longing to reconcile my conscience and my reason on a question so awful to a young student of natural science, I went to my Bible, what did I find? No word of all this. Much – thank God, I may say one continuous undercurrent – of the very opposite of all this.

Charles Kingsley¹

Adam and death

As we turn to the passages of Scripture most often cited when considering the “fallen Creation” the most useful place to begin will be the stern warning God gives Adam when he is placed in the garden.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”²

It is unnecessary for this discussion to spend too long discussing the exact nature of the tree. John H Walton, after an in-depth word study, concludes that “good and evil” is a merism (*ie* including all that lies on the spectrum between extremes), indicating “discerning or discriminating wisdom.”³ This is consistent with Eve’s observation that the fruit was “desirable for gaining wisdom”⁴. In fact, The Jewish historian Josephus, writing in the first century, also refers to it as “the tree of wisdom,”⁵ and so does the Jewish philosopher Philo.⁶

Since wisdom is something both desirable and later offered as a gift by God (*cf.* Prov. chs.1-9) we must suppose that God always intended that wisdom should sooner or later be learned by Adam

¹ Kingsley, Charles (1819-1875) <http://www.online-literature.com/charles-kingsley/scientific/7/> (1871) accessed 06/01/2016.

² Gen. 2.15-17.

³ Walton, John H, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2001), pp.170-172.

⁴ Gen. 3.6.

⁵ Josephus, Flavius, *Antiquities*, 1.40.

⁶ “For, as [Moses] intimates, it is *prudence*, and this is the science of knowing, through which good and beautiful things and bad and ugly things are distinguished; and (the science of knowing) all things which are contrary to each other, of which the one is of a superior order, and the other of an inferior order. Now the wisdom which is in this world is not God but is truly the work of God; it sees nature and studies it. But the wisdom which is in man sees with dim eyes, confusing one thing with another, for it is weak in seeing and understanding purely, simply, clearly each thing by itself alone. Wherefore with man's wisdom a kind of deception is mixed, in the same manner as to the eyes certain shadows are often an impediment to catching sight of unmixed and pure light.” (Philo, *Questions on Genesis*, 11.)

through communion with him in the garden (as *torah* was later to be imbibed in childhood⁷) rather than being seized prematurely. After all, “*the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom*”⁸, and it was the due fear of God that was lacking in the act of taking the forbidden fruit. Paul, commentating on the Fall, indicates that what was gained as “human wisdom” was, in fact, folly:

*Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools...*⁹

In any event, it is noteworthy that the warning was given to Adam alone, and the penalty for disobedience – death – was given to him alone too. The focus on Adam himself in this is maintained throughout the Bible, for though Eve is the one deceived into eating, it is Adam whose punishment is linked to it¹⁰, who alone is named as the one excluded from the garden and from eternal life¹¹ and who is said later to be the one through whom sin and death entered the world¹². So there is a sense in which Eve seems to share his punishment under some kind of “federal headship” model, rather than in her own right. The text itself does not make any comment about Adam’s offspring sharing his punishment, but they clearly *do* die, and the sharing of all mankind in his death is explicit by the time of the New Testament.

So Adam certainly has some kind of archetypal role for mankind. But no such representative role is indicated for him, anywhere in Scripture, towards any *other* part of Creation than man. Adam alone, and consequently Adam’s race, incurs the penalty of death for disobedience.

The nature of the penalty of death is sometimes disputed, a distinction being made between physical and spiritual death. Although there is some theological use in the distinction, neither the Genesis story nor the main NT texts have much to say on it. The latter, in the light of Christ’s resurrection, clearly view the idea of eternal life as both a spiritual *and* physical matter. And the Genesis text, by tying the tree of life closely into communion with Yahweh in the “midst of the garden”, also links the two inextricably.

In any case, the context of Genesis within ANE literature shows that physical death is clearly in mind, since that is the concern of comparable texts. For example, in the *Eridu Genesis* Ziusudra (the equivalent of Noah) is granted eternal life as a reward after the Flood, and in the later *Epic of Gilgamesh* the hero visits him (under his alternative name of Upnapishtim) in an unsuccessful attempt to live forever as well. Another such failure is that of Adapa the sage, in the eponymous myth, who appears to be duped by his patron god Ea into not eating the food of eternal life when he is offered it. “Living for ever”, and not just “living spiritually”, are clearly in mind.

This leads us to a sharp contrast the Bible makes with the parallel literature, which is that, uniquely, Adam *loses* eternal life, or at least free access to it, rather than failing to gain it. The tree of life in the

⁷ “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” Deut. 6.4-9.

⁸ Prov. 1.7.

⁹ Rom. 1.22.

¹⁰ Gen. 3.17.

¹¹ Gen. 3.22-24.

¹² Rom. 5.12.

garden is not forbidden him¹³, and the penalty of his death comes as a result of his exile from the garden into the land of Eden, for *“he must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever.”*¹⁴

The implication must be that mankind has no innate immortality, but only that granted by God – and in fact, assuming the tree of life to be at least partly metaphorical, eternal life is gained only in communion with God, the very thing broken by Adam's disobedience. Man, then, was created mortal, but may overcome death through relationship with God. This leads us to consider the case of animals, which according to the “traditional view”, did not die before the Fall.

If this were the case, then either Adam would have been alone in needing to eat from the tree of life to avoid death (a strange situation for the one made in God's image and likeness), or all the animals in the world also must have had access to the tree of life. This makes no sense whatsoever in material terms, if we are to imagine snow leopards, kiwis, jellyfish and even earthworms migrating to Mesopotamia, on a regular basis, for their dose of life. Remember that there was just one tree of life, in one garden small enough to be cultivated by a single human couple, in one small corner of the Near East. And for the animals to have incurred death after the Fall, Adam's exile would have had to apply to them too – something on which the text is as silent as it is about their implication in Adam's sin.

One other feature from the text itself also demolishes such an already bizarre interpretation (though an inevitable one, given animal deathlessness before the Fall). And that is that the creation ordinance allocating food to man and animals, which I shall discuss below, allowed the eating of fruit from trees for man, but not animals.¹⁵ They would have been forbidden access to the fruit of tree of life anyway.

There are no grounds whatsoever, then, in Genesis 2-3, for suggesting that any creature other than Adam and Eve ever had exemption from natural death, nor was threatened with death together with Adam, nor incurred that penalty along with him. Mortality was their natural state, as we shall see below. The New Testament goes along with this in speaking only of the resurrection of *human beings* to new life in the age to come. We therefore have no warrant for suggesting that animal death came through the sin that condemned Adam to death.

The serpent, Eve, Adam and curses

Apart from the exaction of the penalty of death, promised in Gen. 2.17, through Adam's exile from the garden, Genesis 3 contains the scene of God's additional judgement on the three guilty parties in the case. These too, I will show, give no support whatsoever for the idea of a fallen Creation.

The first to be confronted by Yahweh is the snake:

So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

*“Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!*

¹³ Gen. 2.9,16.

¹⁴ Gen. 3.22.

¹⁵ Gen. 1.29-30.

*You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.
And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.*¹⁶

Exactly how the identity of the snake was understood by the original author of Genesis is hard to gauge in the “mythic” language of the genre employed. But it is clear that later biblical writers detached it entirely from the animal realm and equated it both with Satan’s agency (eg Rev. 12.9) and Satan’s human agents (eg Matt. 3.7; 12.34). The prophecy of enmity between the woman’s seed (v.15) and that of the serpent therefore has some clear prophetic import in later Scripture, beyond simply that of snakes biting people and getting trodden on. Since snake-gods were common in the ANE, some anti-pagan sentiment may well be included in the text, but that need not concern us, being at best obscure.

What does concern us is the sentence, in v.14, that the snake would be cursed to crawl on its belly and eat dust. This seems to be regularly taken by Creationists not only as an indication that the snake lost its legs in the deal, but that it offers a template for widespread changes in the rest of the animal kingdom. This, to be frank, is sheer fantasy.

A snake without legs would be essentially (with apologies to any taxonomists reading this) a lizard¹⁷. And it was a snake, not a lizard, which tempted Eve in the story. John Walton points out that, like eating dust, the expression “*crawl on your belly*” indicates merely humiliation:

*...he is going to be docile, rather than in an attack position. The serpent on its belly is nonthreatening, whilst the one reared up is protecting or attacking.*¹⁸

So the net effect of this curse on the world of nature, outside the spiritual arena, is nothing more than a loss of status for snakes. It isn’t even condemned to eat meat – just dust! In any case, there would be no justice in punishing the entire animal kingdom with anatomical changes for the fault of one demonically-affected reptile.

Eve is next up for judgement:

*To the woman he said,
“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with painful labour you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.”*¹⁹

¹⁶ Gen. 3.14-15.

¹⁷ The Cretaceous varanids (or a similar group) are thought to be the (legged) ancestors of snakes.

¹⁸ Walton, John H, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve* (Downers Grove, IVP, 2015), p.130.

¹⁹ Gen. 3.16.

Although an increase in physical suffering during labour may be indicated here, it's also possible that general problems in family life, parallel to the apparent "war of the sexes" at the end of the verse, may be intended. After all, in Eve's own life we read of how her sin leads to the murder of her second son by her first, whom she also loses to exile to the land of Nod. Both must have been far more painful occurrences to her than childbirth. In any case, nothing whatsoever in this verse affects any part of non-human nature.

That leaves the sentence pronounced on Adam himself:

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,'

*"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.*

*It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.*

*By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return."²⁰*

The inevitability of death is only gently (and mercifully?) hinted at the end of this, and the new information is the curse on the ground, which we are told will result in Adam's staying alive only by the sweat of his brow, against the obstacles of thorns and thistles, for the rest of his life.

From at least the time of Luther onwards this has been taken, for reasons that are exegetically obscure, to indicate a deterioration of the entire natural order, involving death, decay, disease, parasitism, meat-eating, extreme weather and more.

But actually all it says is that, for Adam, the productiveness of the ground will be cursed – and that by greater *vigour* of the living order in the form of thorns. Much of that could, actually, be accounted for by his expulsion from the sacred garden, for he no longer has access to the fruit of the many trees growing there, and must farm the steppe. But there is more. Although few commentators actually seem to refer to it, perhaps because they are subconsciously committed to the "fallen Creation" mind-set, the curse on the ground is clearly said later to be *lifted*, in Gen. 8, as part of the "general amnesty" tied up in God's covenant with Noah after the Flood:

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

²⁰ Gen. 3.17-19.

*“As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease.”²¹*

Note that the curse on the ground is treated in a separate sentence from the destruction of all living creatures, governed by a different verb – they do not refer to the same thing. Now although the Flood would clearly have disrupted at very least that year's harvest, agricultural imagery is not used in the Flood narrative, although other symbols of “de-creation” are. Neither is the word “curse” mentioned within the narrative, but instead harks directly back to what God says to Adam in 3. If there was an existing curse on the ground (to warrant the words “never again”), it was that spoken to Adam, and in the light of Noah's sacrifice that curse has ever since been rescinded.

If it should be felt that the linguistic association is inadequate to justify this claim, then take a look at the birth of Noah, long before the Flood:

When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. He named him Noah and said, “He will comfort us in the labour and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.”²²

I'm not sure how it could be clearer: the ground in Lamech's time is already cursed by the Lord, causing labour and painful toil of their hands – much the same wording as in Gen. 3, with no other such curses mentioned in between. Noah is destined to provide comfort in that situation, although he is not generally regarded as a provider of comfort to anyone – just a survivor of utter devastation. But in fact he does so, because by his intercession the original curse on the ground, which has lasted ten generations, is lifted.

There is, in fact, a parallel in this with the Atrahasis Flood myth of Mesopotamia, probably dating ultimately from the third millennium BC. Both may well reflect the historical memory of a time of famine before the Flood²³. Although the biblical story has a different purpose from its pagan parallels, and in some ways is an antidote to them, there nevertheless *are* parallels, which may sometimes aid our interpretation. In one passage, the gods are increasingly troubled by mankind's “noise” (which may well have moral connotations²⁴) and they cut off nature's gifts of food:

*When the second year arrived
They had depleted the storehouse.
When the third year arrived
The people's looks were changed by starvation.
When the fourth year arrived
Their upstanding bearing bowed,*

²¹ Gen. 8.20-22.

²² Gen. 5.28-29.

²³ I take all the ANE Flood narratives to refer, in all probability, to the inundation of the Euphrates involving Shuruppak, c.2900BC. But in any case the texts have literary links to Genesis.

²⁴ Cf. Gen. 18.20-21.

*Their well-set shoulders slouched,
The people went out in public hunched over.
When the fifth year arrived,
A daughter would eye her mother coming in;
A mother would not even open her door to her daughter. . . .
When the sixth year arrived
They served up a daughter for a meal,
Served up a son for food.*²⁵

Because one of the gods breaks solidarity and supplies food, the Flood is sent immediately after this instead. Incidentally, at this time the god Enlil also says “*Let the womb be too tight to let the baby out*”. There are reminders of Eve’s punishment there too, perhaps.

Once more, then, we can say that there is nothing whatsoever in God’s words of condemnation in Genesis 3 that supports any change in the natural order: the snake is humbled, the woman has family problems, and the soil is made unproductive for several generations until the curse is lifted for Noah. Natural evil has not had much of a look in so far.

The vegetarian earth

A third passage brought habitually to bear on the question of natural evil is the creation ordinance of Genesis 1, in which both animals and man are allocated vegetable food.

*Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground— everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.*²⁶

Let me first say that even if we took this as precluding non-vegetarian animals at the creation, it would have nothing to say about the absence of animal *death*. Vegetarians die from many causes other than being eaten.

In point of fact, the idea that there was no animal death and no meat-eating renders the possibility of a harmonious creation as scientifically unrealistic as the idea that the vast majority of species were completely redesigned to be “red in tooth and claw” after the Fall (without a scrap of evidence either from the Bible or science).

In the *Origin of Species* Charles Darwin spends several pages building his case for the innate over-production of nature with examples of how quickly the earth would be overrun if all the offspring of even slow-breeding species like elephants survived:

*There is no exception to the rule that every organic being naturally increases at so high a rate, that if not destroyed, the earth would soon be covered by the progeny of a single pair.*²⁷

²⁵ Dalley, Stephanie, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford, 2000) pp.26-27.

²⁶ Gen. 1.29-30.

²⁷ Darwin, Charles, *Origin of Species and Voyage of the Beagle* (London, Vintage, 2009), p.588.

But even he was unaware of the vast biomass of the creatures at the base of the food chain – such as insects on land and plankton at sea – whose unchecked reproduction would make the earth uninhabitable within no more than a year or two. Such an Eden would be like the plagues of Egypt on steroids. Alfred Russel Wallace, the co-founder with Darwin of evolutionary theory, quotes a calculation by W B Hardy, FRS, that the offspring of the protozoon *Paramecium* would in 350 generations (that is about two years) occupy a sphere larger than the known universe²⁸.

Burial under bugs would not be the worst of it, though. For taken literally the passage in Genesis does not *proscribe* meat at all, but *prescribe* green vegetable for all flesh (except humans, who also get to eat fruit). There are many animals that specialise in consuming dung, animal detritus like shed skin cells (if cells were allowed to die in this paradise!), non-green plants like fungi, honey and so on. Perhaps the mountains of unprocessed faeces would be the worst aspect.

The committed Creationist might, perhaps, suggest that animals had a limited reproduction rate to prevent these evils. If so, he would be speculating on mere interpretive hints and inferences by denying outright what *is*, quite clearly, stated in the text – the command to go forth, multiply and fill the earth. Fecundity is one of the key themes of the creation narrative.

These excesses aside, it is quite impossible that any ecosystem could survive with just green plants as its food source, or that anteaters, chameleons or swifts could even begin to survive on them. Fortunately, as Derek Kidner pointed out in his commentary on Genesis half a century ago:

*The assigning of every green plant for food (RSV) to all creatures must not be pressed to mean that all were once herbivorous, any more than to mean that all plants were equally edible to all. It is a generalization, that directly or indirectly all life depends on vegetation, and the concern of the verse is to show that we are all fed from God's hand.*²⁹

Two useful interpretive points may be added to this, based on the known structure and purposes of Genesis. The first is that one element of the Creation narrative is a polemical contrast with the polytheistic creation myths of the surrounding nations. In the Babylonian myth *Enuma Elish*, for example, mankind was created in order to provide food for the gods (and to save them hard work). So for Genesis to stress that God himself feeds both his human and animal creation is not at all stating the obvious, but rather establishing a radically new theology.³⁰

Secondly, it is a hermeneutical commonplace that Genesis 1's seven-stage creation consists of his making, in the first three days, "domains" (the heavens, the sea and the earth), and in the second three days "functionaries" for those domains (heavenly bodies, birds and fish, animals and man). Land vegetation is treated not as a functionary on day six, but as part of the environment on day three. So vv.29-30 are, in effect, about handing over the supportive environment to its inhabitants. In no way does that limit either man or animals to eating only vegetation.

²⁸ Wallace, Alfred Russel, *The World of Life* (London, Chapman & Hall, 1910) p.372.

²⁹ Kidner, Derek, *Genesis* (London, Tyndale, 1968) p.52.

³⁰ "God's provision of food for newly created man stands in sharp contrast to Mesopotamian views which held that man was created to supply the gods with food." Wenham, Gordon J, *Genesis 1-15* (Nashville, Nelson, 1987), p.33.

Some interesting issues do remain, which may or may not be significant in what is not the most transparent of passages. We've already seen that only man is given access to trees bearing fruit with seeds, whereas both man and beast may eat green herbs. But one may also note that the third category of vegetation created on day three – grass – appears to have no consumers allocated to it. That seems a little hard on the cattle and sheep, but may in fact be a strong clue not to read the text too literalistically.

Another issue is that in Gen. 9.1-3, after the Flood, the fear and dread of man falls on the animals, and man is given permission to eat them. Now there are some interesting nuances here – what man is given permission to eat is, in the NIV, is “*everything that lives and moves*”, but the Hebrew term is *remes*, which as John Walton again points out from a word study, seems to indicate a particular category distinct from both “livestock” and “wild animals”; that is non-domesticated herd animals like wild cattle, antelope, deer, gazelle and ibex – in other words, typical prey animals.³¹ It looks, then, as if after the Flood man is being given permission to hunt as well as keeping domestic animals (which he had since at least the time of Cain, if not Adam), perhaps because of the food shortage already mentioned before the Flood and, no doubt, worse after it.

Whatever the implications of the post-flood permission in Gen. 9, and indeed of the verse about vegetation in Gen. 1, we should note that it adds nothing to the case for an animal kingdom taking to bloody pursuits, because the later concession applies only to man, not animals. And even that happens not at the time of the Fall but ten generations later.

Careful attention to the Hebrew nouns, in fact, also helps clarify the creation of the animals themselves back in 1. For the living creatures (*nepes* = “soul”) brought forth “after their kinds” on day six are *behemah* (meaning domestic livestock), *remes* (which as we have already seen means “non-domesticated prey animals”) and *hayya* (which are the wild animals – the predators).³² Incidentally, these three functional categories are the only three “kinds” mentioned in the text, as opposed to the multiple quasi-Linnaean “baramins” of Creation Science.

Gen 1.30 says nothing at all about the diet of the sea-creatures, either by way of permission or prohibition. I trust that nobody will suggest they ate green herbs, or the tree of life. The real reason for the omission, of course, is that the second day of creation is concerned with the separation of waters rather than anything else. On Day Five the water creatures are shown to occupy their environment by “teeming” there, as the land creatures occupy theirs by eating the vegetation.

The very vocabulary of the Creation account, then, militates against an entirely vegetarian, predator-free world before the Fall, and not just because wild beasts are mentioned in contrast to prey animals, but because domestic animals are mentioned too. What was Adam supposed to do with domestic sheep and cattle, if both milk and meat were forbidden, and clothes not yet required? Perhaps they'd help him plough the thorny soil, but that would only be after the Fall had excluded him from the freely-available fruit of trees in the garden.

But to be honest, there is little point in marshalling further arguments *against* the idea that most of the creatures we have now actually received their present forms, habits and mortality because

³¹ Walton, *op. cit.* 2001, p.341.

³² *Ibid.*, p.125

Adam sinned, since there is, as we have seen, precious little in Genesis ever to suggest the idea in the first place. The whole theory is built on sand, or perhaps we should say, since it depends on an overblown emphasis on Adam's role in the world, the whole theory is built on the dust of the ground.

Good, very good, stupendous

To complete our look at key passages within the book of Genesis itself, we must deal with the argument that the repeated use of the phrase “*God saw that it was good*” cannot be truthfully applied to things as they are now, and must therefore mean that before the Fall things were much better if not perfect, and that this necessarily means there was no death, no decay and no suffering.

In the first place, let us remember that what he had created was “good” in *God's* eyes, which may have no bearing whatsoever on what is good in *our* eyes. Ezekiel, after all, wrote:

“Yet the Israelites say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Are my ways unjust, people of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust?”³³

Why should our opinions on God's ways be any more reliable than those of the Israelites?

The word “good” (*tob*) appears in chapter 1 of the light in v.1, of the land and sea (v.10), of vegetation (v.12), of the heavenly bodies (v.18), of the sea and sky creatures (v.21), of the animals (v.25) and finally, in v.31, of everything, which God calls “very good.” It is no coincidence that the word appears seven times in the creation story (like other key words in Genesis; numerology is a sophisticated compositional feature of the whole Pentateuch).

“*Tob*” has as wide a semantic range as its equivalent English word “good”, and may or may not carry moral connotations, being just as often applied to “usefulness” of function as to anything deeper. For example, in the context of the first chapters of Genesis it is used of the trees that are *good* for food (2.9, 3.6), of the tree of the knowledge of *good* and evil (2.9 *etc*), of the *good* gold mined in Havilah (2.12) and negatively, of the *not-good* lack of a companion for Adam (2.18).

Once more, John Walton's careful use of word study is useful. He suggests that insight is gained into the meaning of “good” by asking what “not good” implies in 2.18. He takes into account the Israelites' experience of the works of creation being sometimes inauspicious to them, and concludes:

As a king sets up an administration by which the state will operate, so God is setting up the administrative organs of the cosmos. Time, climate, and vegetation represent the tri-part governing structure of the cosmos (as the executive, judiciary, and legislative branches constitute the means by which the American government operates). They were perfectly conceived and properly initiated in suitable functioning order, though they have now become agents that threaten survival and forces against which we struggle to no avail.³⁴

Now, in the light of our study of God's use of the creation in Chapter 1, I would quibble with Walton about whether God's “administration” has “become” anything at all, other than what it always was to begin with. A tool does not change by being put to a new use. If God sometimes uses these agents

³³ Ezek. 18.29.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.115-116.

in judgement of humanity, it is because *humanity* has changed (which is not in dispute here), not because Creation has changed. It is also doubtful if it is fair to say that God's creation *habitually* works against us. Our survey of the biblical material in the previous chapter suggested that, for the most part, Creation is used to bless us. Jesus said:

*But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*³⁵

But in any case, if the sense of *tob* in Genesis 1 has functional, rather than ethical, significance there is nothing that makes it *necessary* for Creation to have been profoundly re-worked to account for appearances today. We cannot look around, fail to see perfection, and conclude that the "goodness" has gone out of it. To do so is to accept Richard Dawkins assessment:

*The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.*³⁶

In fact, it is fairly self-evident that any such conclusion must be fatally subjective. Just how much "non-perfection" will we allow to be present before we decide (as if we were the ones to decide!) that it is too much? What in the world *can't* count as suffering or evil on somebody's reckoning? Make all the animals vegetarians, and their provision abundant, and our vegetarian animals might still get hungry on the way to the tree, or thirsty on the way to the waterhole – and it could be taken as evidence of a fallen world. If we can't have the deer fighting for mates, and if instead they are virtuously monogamous for life, they would still have to be born in *exactly* a 50:50 sex ratio lest the odd bachelor or spinster suffer loneliness. Is it an evil that our own cells are programmed to die to keep our bodies functioning at all?

In the human realm, I have just listened to a radio interview with a mountaineer speaking of the unique life-enhancing thrill of danger. Are we to conclude that he is out of step with God and that the earth was made only for the risk-averse? C S Lewis was quite justified biblically in having his fictional *hrossa* hunt and kill the fierce *hnakra* in the unfallen world of Malacandra in his partly allegorical *Out of the Silent Planet*.³⁷

No, only God can decide what constitutes the goodness of his world. And since he has not told us in Scripture that he has altered his ideas and changed things around (either deliberately or by force of changed circumstances), then once again we simply have no justification for inventing a new Universe out of thin air, or out of over-interpreted Bible verses, which amounts to the same thing.

The same is true when considering the views of old-earthers who believe "natural evil" stems from the processes inherent in creation itself, and especially evolution. It's a question of accepting either the authority of God's word, which says that what he created was "very good", or that of contemporary people who say on their own authority that it wasn't.

³⁵ Matt. 5,45-46.

³⁶ Dawkins Richard, *God's Utility Function* (Scientific American, November, 1995), p. 85.

³⁷ Lewis, C S , *Out of the Silent Planet* (London, Bodley Head, 1938).

Both groups of people, one presumes, in order to give “evil” anything more than a purely subjective meaning, must take into account something like Augustine’s definition of evil: a privation of some good. The Creationist must account for the lack of any mention of such a privation in the biblical text, outside the boundaries of mankind, and the Evolutionist for such a privation being, apparently, built into the very fabric of creation by the God who is incapable of evil... but yet (apparently) speaks untruth in Genesis by pronouncing his work “very good.”

Geneticist and epidemiologist Seymour Garte has pointed out to me that Genesis 1, rather surprisingly, does not call the pinnacle of Creation, mankind, “good”, apart from the general summary of v.31. He suggests that this might be because the Creation is directed *towards* and *for* mankind’s good. This seems to me very reasonable, and underlines the point I have been making here – that “good” refers to “fitness for purpose”. Mankind, in God’s rational and spiritual image, is very much created as an end in himself, rather than “for a purpose”, even though he is given the role of ruler of this world, under God. The rest of Creation, at least as it is set forth in Genesis, functions on behalf of mankind – God’s viceroy and priest in his cosmic temple – and its “goodness” is directed to that end. As the Psalm 8 puts it:

*Yahweh, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

*You have set your glory
in the heavens.*

*Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.*

*When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?*

*You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honour.
You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:
all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,
the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.*

*Yahweh, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*