

VEGETARIAN LIONS AND UNDIVINE RULERS:

NATURE-AND-HISTORY TRANSCENDENCE

IN THE BIBLE'S WAY OF SEEING AND LIVING IN THE WORLD ----- Elliott #1628

"How would you like the world / your life different?" is a much tougher question than if you leave off the word "how." Some cosmic-gentic-hormonal Discontent nudges our species and niggles our spirit toward a Different felt to be both Other Than and More Than without loss of Memory-Identity-Relation. In more than the literal sense, we are made of Stardust, and Woody Allen's cinema trope on the old popsong "Stardust Memories" is a sadsack version of the human yearning which, visible and invisible, bursts forth with as many creativities as the human being has dimensions....This thinksheet preaches (1) that the Bible's way of expressing this fact about humanity should be seen as means rather than end, and (2) that this fact of transcendence is itself treated in the Bible as indictive of human existence as means (to "the glory of God") rather than end ("the human potential," or other anthropocentric ideal).

1. One nonbiblical reference, to get us started: Omar Khayyam's *Ruba'iyat* (Edward Fitzgerald tr.) seems, at first sight, erocentric (centered on flesh pleasures), but on closer observation turns out to be necrocentric, one long howl in the dark against death. In glorious language he cries out for a different world/life (l.lxxiii): "Ah Love! Could Thou and I with Fate conspire / To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire, / Would not we shatter it to bits--and then / Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!" This very pot-tery analogy is used in OT(Jer.) and NT(Paul) with God as potter, not we--and we who are to be remade, not the world or life! The different role-assignment clues us into the biblical answer: the ruling polarity is God-or-death. So Omar's atheism is logical, following from his necrocentrism (e.g., l.xxvi): "...Life flies; / ...the Rest is Lies; / The Flower that once has blown forever dies." Nature and history cancel transcendence, which is only illusion.
2. In contrast, the Bible's theism relativizes death; and this not by a Freudian Eros/Thanatos standoff but by offering the Grand Alternative, the Lord of Life and Death (Eden, Exodus, Return, Resurrection). Death is neither denied nor accepted: it is transcended, and various metaphors present this fact.
3. Violent death, says the Bible, entered the world through sin, and will end when sin is no more. How do you put that in story form? Vegetarianism, for one thing: none of God's creatures, including humanity, is to be meat-eating: Gn.1.29f (cf. Golden Age / Future Age Persian, Greek, and Roman myths). This is relieved after the Fall (Gn.9.3), and almost reversed by Paul (who parallels strong faith and strong food [i.e., meat, "anything"]: Ro.14.2). When the Gentle Time (Shalom, Kingdom of God) returns, the lion will go back to chewing "hay" (Is.11.7, Confrat. and NAB; other trs., "straw"; repeated, 65.25). In the compassionate vision of the End-Time, everybody-everything has been conscientized into non-hurting and non-destroying (Is.11.9; the animals, vv.6-8; cf.Hos.2.18; Gn.2.18-20 is another picture of our being at peace with beasts). On God's part, the social parallel is that the hurting and destroying of the poor and needy is to cease: Is.11.4. (including the necessary destruction of resisters, the "wicked"). This whole *anakephalaio-sis* hangs (both senses!) the cruel present between an *a-himsa* (non-violent) past and an even more thoroughly compassionate future (the higher-level *ana-* in the eschatological re-heading [*-kephalaio-sis*] of the creation in God). A lesson for the now: Grace transcends nature, and we should be gracious to nature (including self and neighbor!). Ontological note: I call upon the category of dipolarity (as does Hartshorne in his theism), accepting both "nature" and this "trans-nature."
4. "History," said Joyce, "is a nightmare we should awake from." Grace transcends history with its humanity-chewing, overclaiming, "divine" rulers.