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On the face of it, no poet could have been more hostile than was Blake to the accepted theodicies of his age, with their facile justifications of human suffering in terms of the will of God or the greater good. He had no belief in "the benevolent avuncular God who explains away all suffering and injustice at the Last Judgment and proves himself to have had the best intentions all along."<sup>1</sup> When in annotating Bishop Watson's *Apology for the Bible* he came across the title of another of the Bishop's works, *The Wisdom and Goodness of God, in Having Made Both Rich and Poor*, he reacted vigorously and trenchantly to what he saw could only be an attempt to justify inequitable property relations under the pretence of religion: "God made Man happy & Rich but the Subtil made the innocent Poor This must be a most wicked & blasphemous book."<sup>2</sup> The lament of Enion at the end of Night the Second of *The Four Zoas* satirizes such appeals to "The Wisdom and Goodness of God" as the complacent response of the prosperous to the misery of others:

It is an easy thing to talk of patience to the afflicted . . .  
To see a god on every wind & a blessing on every blast  
To hear sounds of love in the thunder storm that  
destroys our enemies house  
To rejoice in the blight that covers his field, & the  
sickness that cuts off his children  
While our olive & vine sing & laugh round our door &  
our children bring fruits & flowers  
(35:18, 36:5-8, E 325)

In such hypocritical celebrations of divine providence Blake can always hear the smug accents of Job's comforters, or the self-satisfied moralism of the ant lecturing the grasshopper on "the laws of prudence." Such are the "soft mild arts" for keeping the poor in their place that Urizen recommends from his book of brass (*FZ* 80:1-21, E 355). These arts depend on the belief in a God whose providential decrees are both ineluctable and inscrutable. In *Milton* this God is Satan, the "Miller of Eternity," who wields "the Harrow of Shaddai / A scheme of Human conduct invisible & incomprehensible" (4:12-13, E 98). Some of Blake's most poignant utterances are

directed against the belief in this remote and inscrutable deity:

Seek not thy heavenly father then beyond the skies:  
There Chaos dwells & ancient Night & Og & Anak  
old . . .

(*Milton* 20:32-33, E 114)

At the beginning of *Jerusalem* the Saviour calls to Albion,

I am not a God afar off, I am a brother and friend;  
Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me:  
Lo! we are One; forgiving all Evil; Not seeking  
recompense!  
Ye are my members O ye sleepers of Beulah, land of  
shades!

(*Jerusalem* 4:18-21, E 146)

"Is the body diseas'd when the members are healthful?" Orleans had demanded of the assembly of nobles in *The French Revolution* (line 182, E 294), and the converse equally applies. If all men are "members" of the Divine Humanity (and hence, as St. Paul says, "members one of another," Ephesians 4.25) then it is inconceivable that the good of the whole can be served by the suffering of any part.

Nevertheless Blake's rejection of the concepts of theodicy and providence was not and could not be final. For a theodicy serves not only to legitimize injustice (as Blake saw very clearly), but also to provide a necessary explanation for the existence of evil, which continues to exist whether explained or not. Blake was at vigorous issue with the established Christianity of his day over its definition of sin, and he correctly identified the repressive nature of most of its ethical doctrines; but he never doubted that man as he existed in the world was fallen, and that any attempt to reverse that fall depended on understanding it—which implied, on justifying it. The trajectory from paradise lost to paradise regained passes through some notion of the fall as *felix culpa*. As a corollary, the whole process is seen as under the control of a superintending providence, conceived as extrahuman. Both fall and redemption are stages in a divine plan,



which is carried out by human agents of course, but agents who are in necessary ignorance of the nature of what they are doing. Despite Blake's insistent attempts to identify God with humanity, one always arrives back at a sense that human redemption depends on the action of a saviour outside man. I wish in the present paper to explore Blake's treatment of the theme of providence in *The Four Zoas*, which Kenneth Johnston has aptly called "the great battleground of Blake's imaginative development."<sup>3</sup>

This issue has been somewhat evaded in the central tradition of modern Blake criticism. S. Foster Damon expresses the consensus view in describing what he terms Blake's "heresy," the claim that "God is Man's highest powers." At the same time he hedges his bets by claiming that Blake "practically says" this, and by noting that for Blake "Even Deity himself is only of parallel importance" to man, which concedes that they are not simply to be identified.<sup>4</sup> As J. G. Davies has shown, Blake is often more orthodox than we are willing to allow, so that "while emphasizing the immanence of God, he did not lose the transcendence."<sup>5</sup> According to Davies, Blake's God "By His Providence . . . directs mankind" (p. 85). In his commentary on *The Four Zoas* Damon refers frequently to the agency of "the Good Shepherd," "the Council of God," "the Lamb," "the gods," "the Saviour," "Jesus," "the Divine Mercy," without elucidating the question of their immanent or transcendent status (*William Blake*, pp. 156, 157, 162, 366, 368, 375). The strong humanist reading of Northrop Frye is more successful in eliminating awkward elements from consideration, so that even an important concept like the Council of God does not warrant an index entry in *Fearful Symmetry*.<sup>6</sup> David Erdman is more willing to recognize providential elements in *The Four Zoas*, but he insists that "in a consistently Blakean view the appearance of an external or intervening providence is really a projection or an illusion," and when it appears in Blake's text he is quick to find "strong indications that this meek resignation to God as fate goes against the grain and is not likely to endure."<sup>7</sup> But it is difficult to find a "consistently Blakean view" outside the systematizations provided by his commentators. Wilkie and Johnson, in their useful commentary on *The Four Zoas*, cannot argue away the providential elements, but they speak rather evasively of "an elusive-to-define providence, an economy of preservation for man, that operates almost independent of his will."<sup>8</sup>

Blake criticism does not really know what to make of these providential references, since they suggest a transcendent conception of God which Blake is not supposed to have any truck with. The accepted consensus has been challenged by Leopold Damrosch, in a tenaciously critical account of Blake's myth and of modern critical interpretations of it. Damrosch argues that



"Blake's system, for all its humanism, cannot get along without the divine."<sup>9</sup> He points to "the increasingly soteriological nature of Blake's myth: through Los, and ultimately through Jesus who works in Los, we are not so much regenerated as rescued from ourselves" (p. 155). In terms of the orthodoxy of Blake studies (a most unblakean thing, be it said) Damrosch is advocating heresy when he claims that "everywhere in Blake's myth the divine is invoked because it is the only agent that can reverse the Fall" (p. 248). In this paper I shall adopt a similarly heretical view, with particular reference to *The Four Zoas*. In the course of this work's composition I believe that we can see Blake being forced to shift his ground, and to invoke an extrahuman agency of salvation to do what he no longer believes can be done by human agency in history. In particular I shall examine the significance of Blake's introduction of the concept of the "Council of God" in his revisions of the poem, the providential framework within which certain actions of Urizen and later of Los and Enitharmon are described, and finally the way in which their actions are seen as contributing to the resolution of the poem. In the course of this examination we shall see that such things as man's willful self-alienation from the human community, the creation of the fallen universe, sin (and the sense of sin), and error are not unequivocally negative; they are also essential moments in a providential scheme.

The concept of the Council of God is not to be found in the earliest surviving portion of Blake's manuscript, the fair copy in his copperplate and modified-copperplate hands of pp. 1-18 and 23-42, which he probably transcribed in 1797, the date on the title-page.<sup>10</sup> Morton Paley includes it in his list of names and concepts which only appear in the last two Nights or in additions to earlier Nights.<sup>11</sup> The most substantial of these additions is a long passage on separate leaves (pp. 21-22, 19) whose place in the text was not clearly indicated or perhaps even decided on by Blake, though his editors have agreed in making it the Conclusion to Night the First. In doing so they greatly assist Blake in the revision of his myth, since by allowing what may have been "the last complete pages added to the poem" (*Wil-*



liam Blake's Writings, 2: 1724–25) to stand so early in the text they give them considerable authority. What then is the effect (and presumably the purpose) of the major conceptual change implied in the introduction of the Council of God?

At issue is a radical revisioning of the nature and status of the fallen Man. Originally he is "Universal," with the implication that there is nothing outside or beyond him; all the other "characters" of the poem are produced by a continuing process of fission occurring within him. The way to redemption lies through his reintegration, but he cannot look to any outside help in achieving this, because outside himself there is nothing (his perception of the scattered portions of himself as external is part of his problem). Once the concept of the Council of God has been introduced we must see the Man, not as universal, but as one among a number of equals. While the Man has fallen, his peers in the Council have not, and they are thus in a position to initiate redemptive action. Before we go on to consider the implications of such providential intervention we must pause to note that the Council of God does allow Blake to develop a number of points of increasingly crucial importance to him which could not be accommodated within the original Zoas myth.

In one sense the Council of God merely refines certain implications present in Blake's original conception of the Universal Man, if we see this as an attempt to reconcile an awareness of human diversity with a conviction of human unity. The "Four Mighty Ones" who are "in every Man" (FZ 3:4, E 300) are the Zoas, the primal human forces or faculties which are in constant conflict in the fallen world, where (as with the old theory of the humors) their balance or imbalance can be used to explain differences among individual men. But in the unfallen world these forces are in harmony and constitute "a Perfect Unity" (3:4, E 300), a state imagined as existing before the fall and again after its divisions have been healed. This state of harmony, Blake insists, can only exist "from the Universal Brotherhood of Eden / The Universal Man" (3:5–6, E 300–1); so that, even as he prepares to develop his myth in terms of a single Universal Man, he acknowledges the central importance of "Brotherhood." Blake was impressively sensitive to the relative status of apparently absolute values.<sup>12</sup> It could hardly have failed to occur to him that the "Brotherhood" he invokes must remain an empty concept if there is only one true individual, the somewhat abstract Universal Man.<sup>13</sup> As he progressed with the poem he recognized that he must treat man not as individual but as member of a community. In order to do this he returned to the framework of *The Book of Urizen* (1794), where Urizen's fall is seen as a deliberate cutting off of himself from the community of "Eternals," who then put him into quarantine under the guardianship of Los (chaps. 1–5, E 70–8).<sup>14</sup>

In envisaging how each Immortal relates to the collective Council of God Blake is able to define with more precision than the Zoa myth allowed his sense of positive human potential:

Then those in Great Eternity met in the Council of God  
As one Man for contracting their Exalted Senses  
They behold Multitude or Expanding they behold as  
one  
As One Man all the Universal family & that one Man  
They call Jesus the Christ & they in him & he in them  
Live in Perfect harmony in Eden the land of life  
Consulting as One Man above the Mountain of  
Snowdon Sublime

(FZ 21:1–7, E 310–11)

Where the Universal Man would have to be envisaged as either an abstract individual or as a clumsy aggregate of all men, the Council of God allows Blake to suggest how man — any man — can shift between a sense of personal individuality and one of human community.<sup>15</sup> (The Eternals apparently find it as useful to be able to contract as to expand.) The point of what Bernard Blackstone calls Blake's "characteristic doctrine of expansion and contraction" is that by it "he safeguards at the same time the unity and the variety of Eternity;"<sup>16</sup> and also makes both at least partially available to fallen men. As fallen beings we exist characteristically at the limit of Contraction, habitually viewing ourselves and others as a mere crowd of atomistic individuals external to each other. If we could learn to expand our senses, using them as human instruments rather than as passive receptors, we would see all men as one — "but that One," as Blackstone notes, "is a Family, not a Solitude" (p. 86). In terms of the myth of *Jerusalem*, Christ is "Man's consciousness of his unity" while Albion is "Man unconscious of his unity" (p. 63). Albion as he appears in *Jerusalem* seems to be another version of the Universal Man, but in his willful separation from Eternity he is very like one of the Zoas, and Blackstone actually argues that in *Jerusalem* the role previously assigned to Urizen is now played by Albion.<sup>17</sup> It is the community of Eternals, represented by Jesus, which is now the true Eternal Man, or original condition of human (comm)unity, away from which Albion has fallen. By shifting his attention from the problem of division within the self to that of alienation from the true human community Blake has sought to ensure that his solution will not be merely some form of solipsism.<sup>18</sup>

At one level the Council of God is an image of a properly human community, as it might exist on earth, composed of empirical human individuals. But within Blake's myth it is also an eternal community from which all human beings, in the form of the Man, have (or are) fallen. Now whereas the fall of any of the Zoas is the fall of the Universal Man, the fall of the Man is not the fall of the Council of God; it is diminished by his fall, but not ruined. It thus remains able to work for the redemp-



tion of the Man, offering a useful solution to the problem of how the fall is to be reversed, but constituting a problem itself in that such a conception obliges Blake to adopt a providential reading of events in which man is dependent at every stage on extrahuman guidance and assistance. This goes against the grain of Blake's humanism, and perhaps not all commentators would accept the notion that "the continued existence of an unfallen reality is represented in the council of God" (Paley, *Energy and the Imagination*, p. 156). But the providential role of the eternal community is stressed along with the centrality of brotherhood in the words spoken by "One of the Eternals" at the feast in Night the Ninth of *The Four Zoas*:

Man is a Worm wearied with joy he seeks the caves of sleep  
Among the Flowers of Beulah in his Selfish cold repose  
Forsaking Brotherhood & Universal love in selfish clay  
Folding the pure wings of his mind seeking the places dark  
Abstracted from the roots of Science then inclosed around  
In walls of Gold we cast him like a Seed into the Earth  
Till times & spaces have passed over him duly every morn  
We visit him covering with a Veil the immortal seed  
With windows from the inclement sky we cover him & with walls  
And hearths protect the Selfish terror till divided all  
In families we see our shadows born. & thence we know  
That Man subsists by Brotherhood & Universal Love  
We fall on one another's necks more closely we embrace  
Not for ourselves but for the Eternal family we live  
Man liveth not by Self alone but in his brothers face  
Each shall behold the Eternal Father & love & joy  
abound

(133:10-26, E 401-02)

New Testament echoes abound here.<sup>19</sup> The most striking allusion is to St. Paul's image of the seed to explain the resurrection of the body: "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die . . . It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15.36, 44).<sup>20</sup> Also present is an allusion to the parable of the Prodigal Son. Both allusions present a negative (the death of the natural body, the departure and degradation of the prodigal) which is essential to a following positive moment. If man's sin is to close himself off "in selfish clay" (the mortal body), the Eternals respond by helping him to persist in his folly: "we cast him like a Seed into the Earth." Without the original "selfish" secession of man from his fellows the true nature of community could not be expressed or known: it is "thence we know / That Man subsists by Brotherhood & Universal Love" (emphasis added). Similarly when Blake in his later epics defines the essence of brotherhood as the forgiveness of sins, this is to make the commission of sins an essential condition for the full expression of brotherhood. Man's fall is happy, since as a result "more closely

we embrace" as we learn that "Man liveth not by Self alone." To be sure, Blake stresses that the issue is *human* community; the "Eternal Father" and the Lamb of God are only present at the feast in so far as brotherhood prevails: "in his brothers face / Each shall behold the Eternal Father," and, perhaps, *only* there. But that is not to say that the divine as extrahuman agency working for human redemption is not inescapably present in the body of the poem. In what follows I shall try to show that we cannot discount the providential intervention of the Eternals, and of the "One Man . . . Jesus the Christ" whom they compose when fully expanded. This intervention occurs both in the form of actual entry into the world of the poem, and of the superintendence of the actions of other characters, particularly of Urizen and of Los.

As the creator of the material universe Urizen is often considered the villain of the piece. But Blake views this creation ambivalently, or rather sees it dialectically, as part of the whole scheme of fall and resurrection. Creation is a fall, but it also sets a limit to the fall, and hence prepares for its reversal. To the account in Night the Second of Urizen's creation of the Mundane Shell Blake later added a passage to assure us that: "the Divine Lamb Even Jesus who is the Divine Vision / Permitted all lest Man should fall into Eternal Death" (33:11-12, E 321). The later accounts of Urizen's activities are even more explicit in putting them within a providential framework. When at the end of Night the Fifth Urizen sets out in search of Orc, his odyssey through his own ruined world is explicitly presented as being dependent on divine guidance. Urizen seems half to suspect the providential irony within which he is placed: "When Thought is closed in Caves. Then love shall shew its root in deepest Hell" (65:12, E 344). The Divine Vision will indeed bring about man's salvation at least partly by means of Urizen's aggressive and destructive quest for Orc, twisting his purposes to fulfill its own plan.<sup>21</sup> Urizen is deluded if he thinks that he acts by his own power or to his own ends; like the heroes of another great Protestant epic, *The Faerie Queene*, he will find that the true end of his quest is a discovery of his own limitations and his dependence upon the divine:

. . . now he finds in vain  
That not of his own power he bore the human form erect  
Nor of his own will gave his Laws in times of Everlasting  
(107: 12-14, E 382. Cf., e.g., *The Faerie Queene*, I.x.1)

The horrors he encounters as he journeys through his ruined universe constitute an appalling comment on his attempts to impose his own will. This journey recalls Satan's voyage through Chaos in books 2 and 3 of *Paradise Lost*, but Urizen's journey is not merely permitted but actually made possible only by divine power.<sup>22</sup>



The ever pitying one who seeth all things saw his fall  
 And in the dark vacuity created a bosom of clay  
 When wearied dead he fell his limbs reposed in the  
     bosom of slime  
 As the seed falls from the sowers hand so Urizen fell &  
     death  
 Shut up his powers in oblivion.

(71:25-29, E 348)<sup>23</sup>

As Blake stresses, "Endless had been his travel but the Divine hand him led" (72.2; E 349). Blake is careful to point out that the Divine Hand does not *compel* Urizen to fulfill its purposes, but brings them about precisely by helping him to reach what he sees as his own goal.

And now he came into the Abhorred world of Dark  
 Urthona  
 By Providence divine conducted not bent from his own  
     will  
 Least death Eternal should be the result for the Will  
     cannot be violated

(74:30-32, E 351)

Blake never conceives of man merely as the passive instrument of the divine, and he was to insist in *Jerusalem* on the inviolability of the will. There, when the friends of Albion attempt "with kindest violence to bear him back / Against his will thro Los's Gate to Eden," their premature attempt fails, "as the Will must not be bended but in the day of Divine / Power," and "The Family Divine" does not second it, remaining "silent calm & motionless" (*Jerusalem* 39[44]:2-3, 18-20, E 186).<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless it is clear that the human will alone is ineffectual without divine aid, and that the relation between human intention and divine purpose is characteristically an ironic one.

This is particularly so in the case of Urizen, whose awareness of his own dependence on divine aid is hazy and typically retrospective. Los and Enitharmon, through whom most of the positively redemptive action is channeled, have a more explicit awareness of the situation, though they are not exempt from error. Indeed it is by their errors that they participate in the divine plan, errors that take a triple form: sin, the conviction of sin, attempts to redeem sin. Now Blake's attitude to the question of sin is complex and possibly ambivalent, and divides his commentators.<sup>25</sup> During the early 1790s he often seems to reject the whole concept of sin as a Urizenic mystification used by priests and kings to repress humanity. But when he later identifies the forgiveness of

sins as central to true Christianity his position is more complex. Just as brotherhood is meaningless without some sense of a community to which the individual might belong, so the forgiveness of sins is an empty notion if there is no such thing as sin:

... O Mercy O Divine Humanity!  
 O Forgiveness & Pity & Compassion! If I were Pure I  
     should never  
 Have known thee; If I were Unpolluted I should never  
     have  
 Glorified thy Holiness, or rejoiced in thy great  
     Salvation.

(*Jerusalem* 61:43-46, E 212)

To complicate matters further, if there is no such thing as sin, then the conviction that one has sinned (or that others have) is itself a sin, or at any rate an error that calls for forgiveness. When the Divine Voice comforts Jerusalem by showing her Joseph forgiving Mary (*Jerusalem* 61:1-52, E 211-12), the whole point would seem to be lost unless we accept the idea that Mary has in fact committed adultery, and that adultery is a sin, though, like all sins, it can be wiped out by forgiveness. The early Blake probably followed the antinomian sects in identifying the forgiveness of sin with its abolition: "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled" (Titus 1.15). But the later Blake would have appreciated the full force of Jesus's words to the woman taken in adultery—"go, and sin no more" (John 8.11). Blake moves in effect from the defiant antinomian assertion that "every thing that lives is Holy"<sup>26</sup> to the more orthodox recognition that "There is none that liveth & Sinneth not!" (*Jerusalem* 61:24, E 212).<sup>27</sup> The forgiveness of sins is predicated on the awareness that man cannot fulfill the demands of the moral law. This is certainly a point against the moral law and its creator, Urizen, who finds to his cost, as Blake sardonically puts it, "That no flesh nor spirit could keep / His iron laws one moment" (*The Book of Urizen*, 23:25-26, E 81). But Blake is not simply calling for the abolition of the moral law, since without the realization that its impossible demands cannot be met man could never recognize the necessity for the forgiveness of sins. These complex issues will perhaps become a little clearer if we examine the situation of Los and Enitharmon in Night the Seventh of *The Four Zoas*.

When Enitharmon, like a second Eve, eats of "the fruit / Of Urizens Mysterious tree" (87:13-14, E 369) it prompts in her an awareness of her own sinfulness. As John Sutherland points out, Blake is deliberately parodying "the fall of man, tempted by Satanic falsehood, with an account of the fall of Los (and himself), tempted by the doctrines of conventional Urizenic religion."<sup>28</sup> Enitharmon's real "sin," that is, is to acquiesce in the Urizenic (or as Blake himself would later say, Satanic) accusation that she has sinned. As if to prove how difficult





it is to refrain from accusation of sin, Blackstone denounces Enitharmon's error with vigor, arguing that "it is Enitharmon's conviction of sin, her belief that the Son of God can only descend to condemn and not to forgive, that postpones the resurrection into unity" (p. 294). But Enitharmon's error is actually an essential moment in the process that will lead to resurrection.<sup>29</sup> As Sutherland comments, "The irony of this particular 'happy fall' is that Blake/Los finds that compassionate love between himself and his wife grows out of a sharing of spectrous depressions and fears" (p. 253). Enitharmon's first response to her conviction of sin is to appeal to Los (as Milton's Eve appealed to Adam) to eat also in order to redeem her.

When In the Deeps beneath I gatherd of this ruddy  
fruit  
It was by that I knew that I had Sinnd & then I knew  
That without a ransom I could not be savd from Eternal  
death  
That Life lives upon Death & by devouring appetite  
All things subsist on one another thenceforth in Despair  
I spend my glowing time but thou art strong & mighty  
To bear this Self conviction take then Eat thou also of  
The fruit & give me proof of life Eternal or I die  
(87:15-22, E 369)

The turning to Los is a positive movement, though Enitharmon's view of the situation is still fallen.<sup>30</sup> She invokes Los's sacrifice as the vicarious payment of a debt that she cannot meet; and the Spectre likewise talks in terms of a "scapegoat" religion:

The Spectre of Urthona wept before Los Saying I am the  
cause  
That this dire state commences I began the dreadful  
state  
Of Separation & on my dark head the curse &  
punishment  
Must fall unless a way be found to Ransom & Redeem  
(87:31-34, E 369)

The error in all this points the way to a truth. The conviction that *someone* must pay the debt of sin leads to misguided demands for human sacrifice, but, as Blake was later to state with exemplary clarity, the forgiveness of sins *is* a sacrifice, though of self rather than of others:

Jesus said. Wouldest thou love one who never died  
For thee or ever die for one who had not died for thee  
And if God dieth not for Man & giveth not himself  
Eternally for Man Man could not exist. for Man is Love:  
As God is Love: every kindness to another is a little  
Death  
In the Divine Image nor can Man exist but by  
Brotherhood  
(Jerusalem 96:23-28, E 256)<sup>31</sup>

Los understands the situation better, and he recognizes that the "ransom" must be a divine rather than a human sacrifice, "a little Death / In the Divine Image;" while the human capacity to put off self in repentance, in the

forgiveness of sins, or in offering oneself as ransom for another, is a pledge of the possibility of such redemption.<sup>32</sup>

Los trembling answerd Now I feel the weight of stern  
repentance  
.....  
Turn inwardly thine Eyes & there behold the Lamb of  
God  
Clothed in Luvahs robes of blood descending to redeem  
O Spectre of Urthona take comfort O Enitharmon  
Couldst thou but cease from terror & trembling &  
affright  
When I appear before thee in forgiveness of ancient  
injuries  
Why shouldst thou remember & be afraid. I surely have  
died in pain  
Often enough to convince thy jealousy & fear & terror  
Come hither be patient let us converse together because  
I also tremble at myself & at all my former life  
(87:39, 43-51, E 369)

Enitharmon is not persuaded, for her "Self conviction" of sin leads her to expect the Lamb as judge rather than redeemer; herself less forgiving than Los, she finds it hard to accept the forgiveness of sins:

Enitharmon answerd I behold the Lamb of God  
descending  
To Meet these Spectres of the Dead I therefore fear that  
he  
Will give us to Eternal Death fit punishment for such  
Hideous offenders Uttermost extinction in eternal pain  
An ever dying life of stifling & obstruction shut out  
Of existence to be a sign & terror to all who behold  
Lest any should in futurity do as we have done in  
heaven  
Such is our state nor will the Son of God redeem us but  
destroy  
(87:52-59, E 369-70)

This self-abasement and despair are essential moments in the account of spiritual progress offered by Protestantism, a religion which stresses (as did Blake) man's utter inability to fulfill the demands of the moral law and his consequent need for divine Grace (which Blake rewrites as the forgiveness of sins). It is particularly prominent in Calvinism, where it may prove a dead end out of which the believer cannot escape. Blake certainly knew of the case of Cowper, who believed that he had been singled out by God as "a sign & terror to all who behold."<sup>33</sup> From this situation Enitharmon seeks escape by what any Protestant would recognize as an error—the reliance on good works. She hopes that she and Los can escape punishment for their sins by offering the product of their labors as "sacrificial offerings, ransoms for their sins,"<sup>34</sup> and begs him to make

... forms sublime  
Such as the piteous spectres may assimilate themselves  
into  
They shall be ransoms for our Souls that we may live  
(90:22-24, E 370)



An error, to be sure, but a necessary one, for the work they undertake is part of the divine plan to redeem man which they, like Urizen, are in fact working to fulfill, though they cannot recognize it until after the event.<sup>35</sup>

It is the Divine Hand who directs their labors, whose full significance can only be seen from the perspective of Eternity:

... Then Enitharmon erected Looms  
in Lubans Gate  
And call'd the Looms Cathedron in these Looms She  
wove the Spectres  
Bodies of Vegetation Singing lulling Cadences to drive  
away  
Despair from the poor wandering spectres and Los loved  
them  
With a parental love for the Divine hand was upon him  
And upon Enitharmon & the Divine Countenance  
shone  
In Golgonooza Looking down the Daughters of Beulah  
saw  
With joy the bright Light & in it a Human form  
And knew he was the Saviour Even Jesus & they  
worshipped

(100:2-10, E 372)

From one point of view the creation of this world of Generation is, like Urizen's creation of the material universe, a disastrous consequence of the fall; but both are equally part of the divine plan to redeem that fall. The labors of Los and Enitharmon provide the medium for incarnation, forming "a Vast family wondrous in beauty & love" which appears as "a Universal female form" (103:37-38, E 376):

And Enitharmon nam'd the Female Jerusa[le]m the holy  
Wondring she saw the Lamb of God within Jerusalems  
Veil  
The divine Vision seen within the inmost deep recess  
Of fair Jerusalems bosom in a gently beaming fire  
(104:1-4, E 376)

As the choric sons of Eden recognize, viewing events from the perspective of Eternity, with this incarnation the process of redemption has begun in earnest:

We now behold the Ends of Beulah & we now behold  
Where Death Eternal is put off Eternally  
Assume the dark Satanic body in the Virgins womb  
O Lamb divin[e] it cannot thee annoy O pitying one  
Thy pity is from the foundation of the World & thy  
Redemption  
Begun already in Eternity Come then O Lamb of God  
Come Lord Jesus come quickly

(104:11-17, E 377)

Their recognition prompts an extreme expression of submission to the workings of providence:

Now we know that life Eternal  
Depends alone upon the Universal hand & not in us  
Is aught but death In individual weakness sorrow &  
pain

(104:8-10, E 376)

From this point on Blake is in effect retelling the Christian story of the incarnation and the passion in his own way, having already retold the temptation and fall. For Blake, of course, the true sacrifice of Christ is the Incarnation itself, the taking on of "the dark Satanic body;" Christ dies an eternal death for man precisely by entering into mortal life.<sup>36</sup> But Blake also offers a version of the crucifixion, and to understand it we must consider how the divine is able to enter the world of the Zoas.

A number of additions in the early part of the manuscript concern the role of Jesus in assuming the garments of Luvah. The long "Council of God" passage explains that when "those in Great Eternity . . . behold as one . . . that one Man / They call Jesus the Christ" (21:1, 3-5, E 310-11). Jesus is produced as a historical agent when "The Family Divine" elect

the Seven Eyes of God & the Seven lamps of the  
Almighty  
The Seven are one within the other the Seventh is  
named Jesus  
The Lamb of God blessed for ever

(19:7, 9-12, E 312-13)

To redeem the Man Jesus must enter into him, and here the role of Luvah is crucial. We may reasonably speculate that in Blake's original scheme Urizen was the aggressor and Luvah the victim who, in the form of Orc, was to resist and defeat Urizen. The experience of the late 1790s and 1800s could not but have called such a resolution into question for Blake. On the political plane Urizen is England and Luvah is revolutionary France; by 1800 Blake's myth must have seemed all too prophetic as the revolutionary Luvah was revealed as the Orc of Napoleon, "the child and champion of Jacobinism."<sup>37</sup> In the war between Urizen and Orc it was no longer possible to see a clear confrontation of good and evil; instead there emerged "a Shadowy hermaphrodite black & opaque" (100:34, E 374), a deadly hybrid of revolutionary energy and imperialist ambition that terrifies Urizen, though its production is in fact his real victory over Luvah. When Blake interpolates his "standard narrative of the Man's first fall"<sup>38</sup> at a late stage in the composition, he presents Urizen and Luvah as jointly responsible, conspiring to usurp power from the Man and wield it themselves, while each plans to doublecross the other (21:19-22:39, E 311-12).<sup>39</sup> In this game it is Urizen rather than Luvah who wins, in that by Night the Eighth Urizen has fixed his fallen rival in the serpent form of Orc entwined around the Tree of Mystery, placing him firmly within his religion of sin and retribution. But actually everyone has lost, in that having left his rightful place Luvah has effectively been destroyed.

Blake solves his dilemma here by recourse to the doctrine of "states," so important in the later prophecies. Los assures Rahab that "when Luvah in Orc became a Serpent he des[c]ended into / That State call'd Satan" (115:26-27, E 380). Luvah can only be redeemed by the



intervention of the Lamb who acts as Luvah's *locum tenens*, so to speak, preserving the "state" of Luvah vacated by Luvah's descent. The appearance of Luvah in two places at once causes Urizen understandable perplexity:

When Urizen saw the Lamb of God clothed in Luvahs robes  
Perplex'd & terrif'd he Stood tho well he knew that Orc  
Was Luvah But he now beheld a new Luvah. Or One  
Who assum'd Luvahs form & stood before him opposite  
But he saw Orc a Serpent form augmenting times on times  
In the fierce battle. . . .

(101:1-6, E 373)

Having assumed Luvah's robes of blood the Lamb must now die in Luvah's place. There are potent ironies in the assault on the Lamb by his enemies. Luvah's own emanation, Vala, identifies him as Luvah's murderer by the evidence of the bloody robes, and the Synagogue of Satan is prepared to condemn him either for being Luvah or for being an impostor indifferently. The Synagogue of course includes the Christian church, which Blake regards as perpetuating the crucifixion. Urizen and his allies are quite right to recognize the Lamb as their real enemy, however inconsistent their rationalizations, though by sacrificing him on the Tree of Mystery they are in fact carrying out his plan and bringing about their own destruction. If mortal life is death to the Lamb, mortal death is life eternal, and by taking on and then putting off "the dark Satanic body" the Lamb has given that "proof of life Eternal" that Enitharmon had demanded of Los (87:22, E 369).

This is not quite how Los and Jerusalem see it, for they (the Joseph of Arimathea and Mary of Blake's version of the passion) believe that the Lamb is dead and bury him in a sepulcher:

And Los & Enitharmon took the Body of the Lamb  
Down from the Cross & plac'd it in a Sepulcher which  
Los had hewn  
For himself in the Rock of Eternity trembling & in despair  
Jerusalem wept over the Sepulcher two thousand Years  
(110:30-33, E 385)

The "two thousand Years" are the period of the Christian Church which has actually made the dead body of Christ its object of worship. In so doing it has been worshipping its own death; the Lamb is buried in the very tomb that Los had prepared for himself. The resurrection of Christ should free men from the fear of death, but Los and the others, like the Church, fail to recognize the living saviour:

And Los & Enitharmon builded Jerusalem weeping  
Over the Sepulcher & over the Crucified body  
Which to their Phantom Eyes appear'd still in the Sepulcher  
But Jesus stood beside them in the Spirit Separating  
Their Spirit from their body. Terrified at Non Existence  
For such they deem'd the death of the body.  
(117:1-6, E 386)

This is in fact their final redemptive error, for in his terror and panic Los seizes the sun and moon and thus initiates the "Last Judgment" of Night the Ninth, which will lead to the restoration of all things. "Los appears for the moment as the Angel of Death destroying the universe. . . . In his agony he tears down the visible symbols of the Spirit and the Passions, not knowing that by destroying the symbols he is opening the way to their eternal reality," remarks Damon, adding: "But Jesus is the real Angel of Death" (*William Blake*, p. 391), the agent of a process of which Los is only the instrument.

There is certainly a difficulty in seeing how Los's actions bring about the apocalypse of Night the Ninth. The narrative structure of *The Four Zoas* encourages us to argue in terms of cause and effect, no doubt one reason why Blake eschews narrative structure in his later epics. A polemical motif in his marginalia and other writings concerns his rejection of a philosophy of cause and effect, and an insistence on the "spiritual causes" of actions.<sup>40</sup> If we accept this, we can hardly agree with Leonard Deen's assurance that Los and Enitharmon "make choices that decide the history and end of this struggle in the birth of Jesus and in the final apocalyptic renewal of heaven and earth."<sup>41</sup> It is easier to accept Frye's claim that "The Last Judgment . . . is not really the work of Los, though the opening action is ascribed to him" (*Fearful Symmetry*, p. 308).

When a writer like William Cowper rejects explanations in terms of second causes, it is in order to refer all events directly to the will of God, "the genuine cause of all."<sup>42</sup> Cowper's intention is clearly to subordinate human agency absolutely to an extrahuman providential scheme. Is this the point of Blake's attack on causation? I have been arguing that Blake does see human agency as dependent on the divine, but I would not go so far as to align him with Cowper. The notion of "spiritual agency" is hard to grasp, but it may be helpful to suggest that by it Blake is not so much asserting a divine compulsion over all events as insisting that we judge the nature of an act rather than its (supposed) consequences. Returning to *The Four Zoas*, we should therefore ask ourselves what it is that Los really does rather than how his act (or any comparable act performed by anyone else) is supposed to alter the "real" world outside him. To accept an absolute division between an agent and the "real" world outside him is to beg the question by denying "spiritual" agency



from the beginning.<sup>43</sup> Los is his world. I would propose that we read the Last Judgment of Night the Ninth (and the same would go for the climax of *Milton*, and possibly for that of *Jerusalem*) in the light of Blake's famous remark: "whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual" (*A Vision of the Last Judgment*, 84, E 562). Like the island of Pincher Martin, the apparently solid universe in which Los exists is his own creation, and it serves both to preserve his existence and to lock him out of Eternity. With the death of Jesus the last hope of salvation within that world has vanished, and although Los's seizing of the sun and moon may be an act of despair, it is also a recognition that that world is created and can be destroyed by his own strength whenever he chooses to exert it, and it is thus an embracing of truth.

But, as we have seen, Los's embracing of the truth is not easily to be separated from his repeated acceptance of error: "to be an Error & to be Cast out is a part of Gods Design" (*A Vision of the Last Judgment*, 84, E 562). As for the heroes of *The Faerie Queene* (whose chivalric fiction plays on the root meaning of "error"), so in Blake error both separates man from the truth and leads him to it.<sup>44</sup> It is in this sense that *The Four Zoas* embodies a theodicy. Critics who resist this conclusion do so because they are reluctant to see Blake as embracing such an orthodox view of the relationship between the human and the divine. But the shifting of gravity within the poem as it progresses undeniably moves it in the direction of Christian (more specifically Protestant) orthodoxy, as the generous use of Miltonic material suggests. Blake's relation to Milton here is one of dependence more than critique, and the result pastiche as much as parody. I have argued that the move to orthodoxy is imposed on Blake by the need to avoid the renunciation of community exacted in his original conception. When in his next prophetic work he turns his attention explicitly to his great predecessor and his version of the orthodox myth, he changes the rules of the game by making Milton one of the Eternals. Thus elected as it were to the Council of God, Milton causes as much disruption in Eternity as the incarnated Lamb did in the world of *The Four Zoas*. But the question of the relation between human and divine in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* is matter for another study.

<sup>1</sup>Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 34-35.

<sup>2</sup>*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, newly revised edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 612. References to this edition will be identified by E plus page number(s); references to *The Four Zoas* by page and line number(s).

<sup>3</sup>"Blake's Cities: Romantic Forms of Urban Renewal," in *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*, ed. David V. Erdman and John T. Grant (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 415.

<sup>4</sup>*William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (London: Constable, 1924), p. 146.

<sup>5</sup>*The Theology of William Blake* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p. 87.

<sup>6</sup>Frye seems to be attempting to accommodate the concept in his argument to the effect that a "prehuman God" is meaningless, that "if always human, God must have been plural," so that "Our present human society . . . has evolved out of a seed of life dropped in a dead world from a preceding eternal human society . . ." concerning whose origins we are not to enquire (*Fearful Symmetry*, p. 256). Frye's intention is to establish man firmly at the origin, and to make the Council of God nothing but a human community (which in one sense it is, as we shall see). He says and wishes to say nothing concerning divine providence except that "we find ourselves unable to conceive of anything superhuman in the direction of either design or power" (p. 36).

<sup>7</sup>*Blake: Prophet against Empire* (1954; rev. ed., New York: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 377, 379.

<sup>8</sup>Brian Wilkie and Mary Lynn Johnson, *Blake's Four Zoas: The Design of a Dream* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 29.

<sup>9</sup>*Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 19.

<sup>10</sup>See *William Blake's Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 2: 1722-23.

<sup>11</sup>*Energy and the Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 143.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. "Pity would be no more, / If we did not make somebody Poor: / And Mercy no more could be, / If all were as happy as we" ("The Human Abstract," E 27).

<sup>13</sup>John Beer points out that in the "original structure" of Blake's myth "the Eternal Man, as ultimate containing figure, would, on his awakening into unity, become isolated," appearing "as a super-Urizen, without context and therefore without possibilities of brotherhood" (*Blake's Visionary Universe* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969], p. 158). Beer argues that it was to meet such difficulties that Blake "introduced the idea of a council 'of God,' in Great Eternity, presiding over the whole scene," and he notes that in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* "Blake was able to learn from his experience here, and to include the 'Eternals' from the beginning as an essential ordering force" (pp. 158-59). (Beer however does not consider the problems that this conception itself presents.)

<sup>14</sup>Andrew Lincoln sees the Eternals of Night IX as "clearly closer to the Eternals of *Urizen* than to the providential Council of God" ("The Revision of the Seventh and Eighth Nights of *The Four Zoas*," *Blake*, 12 [summer 1978], 120). The distinction brings out the diversity of roles Blake requires his Eternals to play in *The Four Zoas*.

<sup>15</sup>E. B. Murray has observed to me that the passage quoted, in likening the Council to "one Man," "seems to put the genie back into the bottle—the Eternals into the Man." But the original Ancient Man is a member of the community of Eternals in a sense which goes beyond that in which the Zoas are his members; the "one Man" formed by the Eternals is a different bottle from the one Blake began the poem with.

<sup>16</sup>*English Blake* (1949; Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966), p. 18.

<sup>17</sup>Morton D. Paley notes that "In his divided condition, Albion takes on many of the characteristics assigned to Urizen-figures in Blake's earlier works" (*The Continuing City: William Blake's Jerusalem* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983], p. 198).

<sup>18</sup>Michael Ferber has discussed "the central importance of brotherhood" for Blake as "a correlate or 'contrary' of liberty that keeps liberty from veering off into individualistic megalomania and even tyranny or into atomistic withdrawal and solipsism" ("Blake's Idea of Brotherhood," *PMLA*, 93 [1978], 438).

<sup>19</sup>A marginal reference directs us to Ephesians 3.10: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God," a text whose relevance here is problematic. I would hazard that Blake means us to note that the "wisdom of God" is here described as "manifold," i.e., a unity formed of many, and that it is revealed "by



the church" (δια της ἐκκλησίας literally by means of the church), the collectivity of believers who compose this manifold unity.

<sup>20</sup>Blake used the last six words on the design for "To Tirzah" in *Songs of Experience* (E 30). The image had already been used by Enion in *The Four Zoas*: "As the seed waits Eagerly watching for its flower & fruit . . . So Man looks out in tree & herb & fish & bird & beast" (110:3, 6, E 385). The principle of the seed is teleological, directed towards the end that will transcend its present being.

<sup>21</sup>In "The Formal Art of *The Four Zoas*," Helen McNeil tries to see a rather different irony here, arguing that "Urizen's character has created his fate, and the Divine hand is an externalization of his impulse to continue to create, whatever the price. . . . Even if the Divine hand were considered a separate power, it would make a sardonic commentary on Christian determinism, since it would have led Urizen on a spiraling descent which created, among other horrors, the ironclad world which Blake designates as our own" (*Visionary Forms Dramatic*, ed. Erdman and Grant, p. 381). McNeil's argument ignores the fact that Urizen's creation was unironically providential in setting a limit to the fall (cf. p. 137 above).

<sup>22</sup>Wilkie and Johnson note the similarity between Urizen's journey and Satan's, which is said to be by the permission of Heaven (*Paradise Lost*, I. 211-15), and rightly note the difference of intention behind the permission in the two cases (p. 138).

<sup>23</sup>The saviour here watches over Urizen's sleep as earlier he had over that of the Man (18:13-15, E 310). That the saviour's action here parallels that of the Eternals as described above (p. 137) suggests that Urizen has become a synecdoche for the Man, a matter which is clarified by the Urizenic characterization of Albion in the later epics. The "seed" imagery here carries an extra charge of irony in that in Eternity Urizen is himself the sower, who casts souls into the earth in Night the Ninth in preparation for the universal harvest (125:3-14, E 394).

<sup>24</sup>I take "bended" here as equivalent to "violated" (cf. 74:31, E 351), though some commentators seem to read it as equivalent to "exerted" (see Michael G. Cooke, *The Romantic Will* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976], p. 129).

<sup>25</sup>Thomas J. J. Altizer argues that "A faith that recognizes itself as existing in opposition to the state of sin must give itself both to a negation of guilt and the Law and to a continual process of abolishing the consciousness of sin . . ." (*The New Apocalypse: The Radical Christian Vision of William Blake* [East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967], pp. 202-03). Blackstone on the other hand argues that in *Jerusalem* Blake wished to explore "the sense of sin which is so deep within Man that we have to regard it as an integral part of his innermost nature," though he does stress that Blake's concern was with "error that was understood as error and cast off" rather than with sin as Wesley or Whitefield might have understood it (p. 163, 185 n.). Michael Cooke points out that "Blake's version of the Joseph-Mary relationship [to be considered presently] builds on the idea of the *felix culpa*," but goes on to argue that "The passage further uses Jehovah's message to imply, beyond the forgiveness of sins, the unreality or delusiveness of sins . . ." (pp. 137-38).

<sup>26</sup>*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 27, E 45. See also *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* 8.10 (E 51) and *America* 8.13 (E 54). The phrase is used ironically in Enitharmon's song of triumph over Los, *FZ* 34.80 (E 324); see Michael J. Tolley, "Europe: 'to those ychain'd in sleep,'" in Erdman and Grant, eds., *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*, p. 123 n. 5.

<sup>27</sup>Blake's position on the question of sin might be clearer if we take it that he means not transgression against some absolute divine authority, but trespass or offense against other human beings, which is inevitable since one individual cannot live by the laws appropriate to another. Such offenses may be real infringements of their rights or simply affronts to their sense of moral values; in either case true brotherhood consists in forgiving others their trespasses.

<sup>28</sup>"Blake and Urizen," in Erdman and Grant, eds., *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*, p. 253.

<sup>29</sup>As Mary Lynn Johnson and Brian Wilkie note, the Spectre's seeing of a providential purpose in the Tree of Mystery is not entirely erroneous; it is "very close to the Christian interpretation of the 'Law,' the old dispensation, as a divinely-appointed stopgap" ("The Spectrous Embrace in *The Four Zoas*, VIIa," *Blake*, 12 [summer 1978], 102).

<sup>30</sup>As John Beer notes, she is expounding "the Doctrine of the Atonement (a dogma abhorrent to Blake)" (p. 135). It should be noted that while Blake opposes such dogmas he also recuperates them by seeing them as historically necessary errors, implying a kind of theodicy of the development of human religious conceptions.

<sup>31</sup>John Kilgore claims that it is in Night VIIa of *The Four Zoas* "that we hear, for the very first time in all Blake's works, of the necessity of 'Self-Annihilation'" ("The Order of Nights VIIa and VIIb in Blake's *The Four Zoas*," *Blake*, 12 [summer 1978], 109). The passage in question may, however, be a late addition, posterior to parallel passages in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*.

<sup>32</sup>It is however going too far to claim, as do Johnson and Wilkie, that "If this husband and wife could forgive each other, they wouldn't need a Redeemer" ("The Spectrous Embrace," p. 104).

<sup>33</sup>It has been suggested that the Spectre of Los, who has a similar despairing conviction of sin in *Jerusalem* 10:37-59 (E 153-54), is at least in part a portrait of Cowper. See Morton D. Paley, "Cowper as Blake's Spectre," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 1 [1968], 236-52; and also his *The Continuing City*, pp. 246-50.

<sup>34</sup>Johnson and Wilkie, "The Spectrous Embrace," p. 103.

<sup>35</sup>Both Erdman (*Prophet against Empire*, pp. 381-82) and Paley (*Energy and the Imagination*, pp. 159-61) are rightly skeptical of the efficacy of these labors, and tend to see the error involved as Blake's (encouraged by the well-known autobiographical allusions in the passage). But in the context of the poem any human attempts to achieve salvation are seen as inefficacious, except in ways unforeseen at the time, and Blake is well aware of his characters' errors.

<sup>36</sup>For "Eternal Death" as Blake's term for incarnation, see Damon, *William Blake*, p. 141.

<sup>37</sup>This phrase was used by Pitt in 1800; see S. T. Coleridge, *Essays on His Times in The Morning Post and The Courier*, ed. David V. Erdman (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), i. 185 and n. 8.

<sup>38</sup>*The Poems of William Blake*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (London: Longman, 1971), p. 291.

<sup>39</sup>Urizen and Orc are "corporeal enemies but spiritually leagued in the state called Satan" (Paley, *Energy and the Imagination*, p. 166).

<sup>40</sup>See annotations to Lavater (E 601), to Bacon (E 626), and to Reynolds (E 656); *Descriptive Catalogue* (E 543-44); *Jerusalem* 26:44-46 (E 124).

<sup>41</sup>*Conversing in Paradise: Poetic Genius and Identity-as-Community in Blake's Los* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), p. 130. Wilkie and Johnson also wish to see Los as "an agent," though they note that he acts out of "reflex desperation," and concede that "His terrified struggle for life could be misunderstood as a sign that he has not absorbed the Blakean meaning of the Crucifixion as the ultimate act of the annihilation of the self"; the most they can finally say for Los is that "His resistance here to physical death is not an absolute error" (p. 211). But by now we should be able to see that for Blake no error is absolute.

<sup>42</sup>*The Task* (1785), 2: 205 (*Cowper: Poetical Works*, ed. H. S. Milford, 4th ed., rev., ed. Norma Russell [London: Oxford University Press, 1967], p. 150).

<sup>43</sup>Cf. "True causes for Blake are spiritual, though their consequences are to be read in the natural world. . . . Blake's poetry . . . insists on placing the full burden of consequence on every mental affect. . . . The whole history of consciousness seems at stake in every conscious moment" (Leslie Brisman, *Romantic Origins* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978], p. 226).

<sup>44</sup>"The way to truth in a fallen world is through error" (Deen, *Conversing in Paradise*, p. 217).