

LAW AND SAUSAGE
Being four stories:
Ancient, Medieval, Modern and Post-Modern

by E. Q. Manson
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The author of the Book of Life is the Mother Earth.

Or not.

The author of the Book of Life is the suffering sacrifice.

Or not.

The author of the Book of Life is Nature, all encompassing, immanent, and universal.

Or not.

The author of the Book of Life is the anthropomorphic personification of Love,
War, Beauty, Art, the Sun, Thunder, and all wonders seen and mysterious.

Or not.

The author of the Book of Life is consciousness.

But whose?

The author of the Book of Life will grant endless suffering to those who live and breathe and do
not hold the correct conception of what the author is.

We hope not. We can ask.

The author of the Book of Life will hear what we say.

Or Not.

Or perhaps the author of the Book of Life simply does not answer.

The Ancient Story

I

Prologue: A Philosopher

City of Athens

225 B.C.

*Six years after end of first war between Rome and Carthage
Seven years before beginning of second war between Rome and Carthage
A period of peace in the Mediterranean.*

With every step Chrysippus was reminded he was no longer a young man. Limbs once supple and spry ground together like dry, squeaking cart axles.

After completing the day in discussions and lecturing of students at the Colonnades of the Agora, the old man strolled through the diminishing bustle of the ground level city, lost as always in thought, barely noticing the majestic gates to the Highest City, bathed in the setting sun. At his side was student and acolyte Automenos, tall, beardless, and doe-eyed. Like the other crop-haired sons of citizens, he led a life of learning free from toil.

Several times Chrysippus had stood on the walls of the Highest City, looking down on gray slate roofs of irregularly spaced, box-like mortared stone buildings, which included his own house. He was a *metic*, an immigrant to the Athens city-state, thus he could not own property. In recognition of his distinction as master Stoic philosopher and teacher, he was granted a modest house, with a small garden and two slaves. The house, thank the gods, was downwind of an adjoining property where rose petals were soaked for their perfume; and upwind of the dung collector's cart-house. He paid his citizen landlord an annual nominal tribute, one drachma.

He composed lines as he walked, in his mind. He would set them down at the writing table.

The eternal wall.

Chrysippus and Automenos traversed a worn network of streets, a labyrinth of stone and human activity, towards their two homes. Automenos' father, a citizen of course, and also his mother, had recently passed to the underworld. The young man, not yet ready to assume his station keeping his father's vineyard outside the city walls, was completing his growing years in the house of an uncle. The countryside was no place for a citizen's son. The city walls shut out the foot-soldier, the wild forest cat, the human brigand, all of whom could strike without warning, would strike without compunction.

Ephemeral human life.

The route home zigzagged from east to west to east again before a sudden turn south, the streets following no geometrical pattern upon the hilly residential areas. At one turn, he beheld the Areopagus, where votes took place, in which he could not participate.

In this quarter of the city at this hour, other *metics* were laying down tools of their trades. Slaves wound up work nurturing vegetables, husbanding animals, cooking and maintaining

households. Wives and girl children put down their weaving and candle making until sunrise.

Turning onto another street, they passed a familiar section of decorative trees. Outside the city walls, on the road to the old Academy, such trees would be as just a few bricks in the living wall of pines, olives and oaks, rich with greenery, shielding eyes from all but the noonday sun. Here, the sky was wide, the horizon visible.

The eternal earth beneath the forest. The ephemeral forest. The cycles of germination, growth, harvest and decay.

Automenos, properly deferential in walking slightly behind the old man and letting him set the pace, forgot for a second his student role should be played only in school. He interrupted the old man's rivulets of thought. "Master, will you explain what it is about your proposition of heat and fire, that makes it distinct from Aristotle's."

Chrysippus stopped. He tired of the questions of others. He had enough questions of his own, when not fielding them at the Colonnades. His own life cycle approached closer to death than to birth; time grew scarce.

"I will answer that, but then we must make haste to reach our houses before light departs." Speaking with gestures, he went on. "The wood burns; its fire is hot. That is the true proposition. If the wood does not burn, or the fire is not hot, or neither is so, the proposition fails. Aristotle says, conversely, that the wood burns and the fire is hot, therefore burning wood is hot. With the same logic you may also say the wood burns and the fire is cool, therefore burning wood is cool. One can create a false proposition that follows Aristotle's rules. In his logic the emphasis is on rules of constructing propositions. In ours, on their truth."

Speech and gestures concluded.

"Yes, I see," the young man lied. He was still confused, unable to think beyond the objects themselves, of what he knew about wood and fire.

"Very well. Enough working the jaws. Let us give power to our legs."

Presently they turned on to the last street, their feet careful to avoid sharp rocks sticking up and holes dipping down. On road's edge grew a handful of hyacinths, daring passing sandals to trample them.

The eternal rocks. The ephemeral flowers. The cycle of day and night.

The two men moved through the chill early autumn evening air now in silence, save the rustling of their stiff white robes and the shuffling of sandal against gravel. Few sounds emerged from the houses they passed. The season's plentiful southbound sparrows, too, had retired their song until break of the next day.

Man. Bird. Flower. All which live follow a cycle: birth, then experience, then death.

Dusk gave way to night. The old man paused to twirl his right ankle, then his left, trying to shake off new irritations. As he did so, he pointed his nose skyward.

The first light in the moonless sky, a tiny prick of whiteness, became large enough for the old man's still sharp eyes to perceive. "The wandering star Zeus," Chrysippus pronounced aloud,

recognizing it rising near the same abundant oak it had hovered over in previous days. Automenos heard and hushed a snicker. All others, though Greek, years ago adopted the Roman name Jupiter for the wandering star.

Minutes later the two arrived at the garden fronting the old man's small house. Not yet ready to dismiss his companion, Chrysippus stared skyward again. Another twinkling light had appeared on the horizon, this one red. "The red second wandering star," the old man observed. He then explained to the young man that yesterday evening the tiny red light hung closer to the horizon than Zeus. This evening it was further.

While the student waited to be dismissed, the old man pondered.

All celestial lights move. They rise in the night over the Temple of Zeus, like the sun in the day, and set over the Highest City, like the sun in the evening. But consistent positions they maintain not in relation to each other. There are nights when two wandering stars are in the same sky. There are entire years when they never occupy the same sky.

The old man spoke. "Consider, Automenos, the white wandering star Zeus and the red second wandering star. We know not if they maintain the same distance from our world. Should they travel in the same ring, as athletes do at the games, they might collide. One wandering star creeps across the sky slightly ahead of the other, slightly faster as well. They may not meet for a very long time. As a fast runner at the games may circle the track and overtake a slow runner, one of the wandering stars could overtake another. Only then, if they meet in the sky but pass without impact, would we be sure they move not in the same orbit."

Heavenly bodies. Eternal or Ephemeral? Constant or subject to cycles?

The young man commented, "Another of my teachers likewise concerns himself with the stars. He speaks poetically. He notes the stars rise in the east, always fighting against the wind from the west. He speaks of the pictures formed by lights in the sky. He sees them as beautiful, not solely as things to be measured and diagrammed."

Chrysippus, a little bit offended, and snubbing without another word, waved Automenos off into the night, then entered his house. Closing the door behind him, he entered a soft glow, his maidservant standing by with food.

"Did these lights in the sky have a beginning?" he said. "And where were they, in relation to our world, in that beginning?"

Almost every day, he posed questions which had no answer. His servants had standing permission to speak what mind they possessed. She stood back, replying as she always did when the master spoke perplexing words.

"Apollo may make it known, one day."

As he sat to dine, Chrysippus found that the pain in his feet had subsided.

Pain comes. It goes. Pain is a cycle.

Finishing his repast of bread, wine and roasted bird, Chrysippus bid his maid fetch writing equipment to his table. "Off with you," he said when it was provided, not looking up. She

gathered plate and cup, then retired to her closet-sized room and took to her pile of straw.

He began to write his lines. Nightly he wrote, up till only enough unburned candle remained to show him the way up the stairs to his bedchamber.

Apokatastasis
(that is, Restoration)

We may divide both objects and states on heaven and earth between the eternal and the ephemeral, between the fixed and the movable. Ephemeral movable objects run in cycles with beginnings and endings. Ending restores the state of the beginning.

At the beginning there is peace, then war, then conquest, then relaxation of conquest. No war can last forever. Peace is restored.

At the beginning the land is fruitful, beasts plentiful and there is enough food. Famine comes with war and wind, then goes. A cycle ends with plenty restored, as it was in the beginning.

In the beginning, the air is chill. Soil holds no life. Then the air becomes warm. The earth brings forth life. Flowers bloom. Crops mature, and then Demeter decrees the harvest. The cycle ends with ground strewn with dead shells of crops. Only hard seeds remain. The beginning cold time is restored as it was at the beginning.

Certain plants live on year after year without new planting. They are partly eternal. The asparagus and the poppy grow each year from the same stem. Other plants begin each year as seeds. The pepper the beet and melon. When these prepare to die only new seeds remain. Again, their state is that which existed at the beginning.

The maid turned in the crackling straw behind her curtained chamber door. She may have a child some day. She, like all, would someday die.

I am a man. I had a beginning in the belly of my mother. Like Adonis in the hands of Aphrodite I will someday fall into the hands of the earth. When I began I was helpless without sense or intellect. When I am about to die I will be old, as helpless senseless and thoughtless as at the first. Plants that arise from seeds are restored to their original state, as seeds without stem, leaf or fruit.

The cycle of seasons may be sensed in many ways, not only by warmth of the air. Birds are in or not in the trees. Flowers have their

comings and going. Stars in or not in the sky denote time of year. On the winter solstice Orion passes at midnight. Orion cannot be seen in the summer solstice, when the Archer is in its place.

A dog, or wolf, bayed at the sky. Chrysippus was momentarily distracted, and took this opportunity to step out into the garden to relieve himself. Again he found his eyes fixed on the wandering stars, further along in their climb.

Are all heavenly bodies eternal? Or are some ephemeral? We see in the sky the sun the moon the stars and also we see the aster planetes (that is, wandering stars).

Helios the sun, and his sister Selene the moon, travel alone. The stars eternally move, but do so as an army marches, in formation. The sun moon and wandering stars, unlike the stars, move as individuals. Each has its cycle. Yet they rise with each cycle. At cycle's end they are restored to their state at the beginning.

Helios travels across the sky each day. Selene each 28 days. The wandering stars Zeus (which the Romans call Jupiter) and Aphrodite and the red second one (which the Romans call Mars) have never been timed as to the days of their cycles.

All ephemeral things have a beginning and an end. As such the sun moon and wandering stars each had beginnings. All bodies in the heavens had a position from which their movements began.

As the stem of asparagus or poppy stay on in the same position without seasonal planting, the stars are eternal. Like the pepper beet and melon need to be replanted each cycle, the wandering stars are ephemeral. They change their places, like rogue soldiers breaking ranks.

So the wandering stars when they reach their original positions, if they are like the pepper beet melon or man, there will be the end of them.

All will be known at the time of restoration (in Greek, "apokatastasis") when all return to the state that existed at their beginning.

The old man glanced at the candle wax: thin as a fingernail. He must cease and retire. He hurried to write one last line, lest the thought be chased away in sleep.

We may take comfort that pain is ephemeral. It has a cycle. Pain has a beginning, is experienced, and ends, though the end may be death. No pain can last eternally.

The leather upon which he wrote lay upon the table overnight, for the ink to dry hard. His servant would clear it from the table before the morning meal. The next night the old philosopher would add the next day's thoughts, and so on, until there was no more room for alpha, beta, gamma or omega. And then a new sheet of leather would begin its service.

Chrysippus lived twenty additional years, writing extensively on many subjects. His original writings were lost in the savage foolishness of wars, but his ideas survived through scholars in Rome.

The author of the Book of Life ended the story of Chrysippus. The Book of Life continued for those who survived him.

II Physicians

**Palestine
43A.D.**

Ten years after the death of Christ

The poor woman pulled the dark, coarse-threaded veil over her head; sat to haul straps over both shoulders; and, standing, hoisted her six year old son as high on her back as the straps would take him. In her hand was a sack, in it a live dove, flapping insistently every minute or so.

The road to the Temple from Bethpage, on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, was never a pleasant journey. But postpone any longer she could not. The wound on her son's arm, inflicted by the Roman soldier, was still bleeding after two days. It mattered not that her son had made off with a few morsels of the soldier's food. It mattered not that the sun beat upon the rocks and sand as if to cook them into flatcakes. It mattered only that his wound must heal and the fever be kept at bay. The mother feared another affliction, such had taken away her daughter.

She trudged away from the clay huts of the village, bled white by seasons of dust and drought, passing fields gleaned of all but paltry scraps of grain. Her way was blocked by a herd of goats, crossing from their grazing on the slopes of the Mount, and crying at each other like babies in want of midnight milk. The poor woman knelt to take the weight off her feet while the livestock passed, taking care to bow her head, not in devotion but to avoid the eyes of the goatherd. All contact with men was to be avoided. With the goat bleats diminishing as their makers continued down the path, she had to step carefully, as they had unloaded on the road as though having planned it.

The way seemed indescribably steeper than she remembered from her many trips to the Temple and market place in Jerusalem. Her son moaned, sounding like a partridge, adding care to her burden of toil, heat and fear. Reaching the summit, she found a stump upon which she could sit, resting her pack. The sky was cloudless, the air a desert dry, and the terrain below a patchwork of dead stone and hardy fruit trees. She took a moment to view the impressive walls of Jerusalem below, rising and falling in conformance to the land below them, proud once and destined to be proud again.

She persevered down the jagged slope. At bottom, her travel was once again interrupted, this time by a squad of twelve Roman soldiers. A Centurion called orders in a sort of song, in Latin, that tongue the poor woman had heard many times but refused to learn. The words themselves, all of them, she shunned as evil. Like a serpent creeping unnoticed, the Romans hoped to conquer not so much the richness of the land, but the soul and faith of the people of Abraham, of David. To install their own idols in places of worship.

Crossing southward along the Kidron creek road, the soldiers gleamed in their chest-plates, shone in their polished headgear. Their leather greaves swayed as powerful legs marched in strict rhythm. Once more she averted her gaze, although the soldiers had no temptation to look at her.

The humble, solitary date tree, which marked the final approach to the gates, shaded two beggars. One apathetically raised a cupped hand. She could not help. Her son would be fortunate if she could even help him.

The gates were opened wide. The market place within swirled with cattle, sheep and birds. She was met with animal smells, which competed with the aroma of men, some with bare chests, who corralled animals hale or puny, for sale or spoken for. Around the ill-defined boundaries of the bazaar, all manner of city dwellers, Jewish pilgrims, foreign tradesmen, and watchful-eyed Romans milled about in a densely packed, noisy throng.

Only moments after she passed into the walls of the city, the first of many hucksters vied for her attention. "Woman! Buy a chance on this afternoon's pigeon race! The winner is here in my hand!" Most vendors took note of her obvious poverty and wasted no breath on her, but not all. She was offered wine, perfume, fine cloth, toys, anything she should desire, at prices unknown to her dreams. The poor woman answered none of them, wanting only to get to the Temple to plead for help. On the outside of the towering Temple walls, sailors cursed in Greek, bandits scouted for loose purses, and the ever-present sun soaked her robes with salty moisture.

The courtyard of the Temple held few people, it not being the Sabbath. There was, however, a line of supplicants at the bottom of the stairs leading to the main portico. She, and the injured son she carried, would have to linger further. At least the line formed in the shade of a columned facade, shelter from the unrelenting heat. The calm of the courtyard was also a relief after the frightening market place clamor.

In time, she reached the head of the line. Standing at the grand entrance was one young man, barely more than a boy, dressed in a colorful tunic and ceremonial coat. He would escort the poor woman to the High Priest, when her turn came. As she waited, a Temple servant swept dust and sand out of the building and onto the promenade, brushing a shoulder by the poor woman like she was not there.

The colorful costumed doorman at length bade her step into the sanctuary. The huge room proclaimed the Lord's greatness with ostentatiousness, its red and gold wall rugs hanging from the ceiling six stories above, its menorahs rising tall as a full grown man, lit with scores of candles reflecting off the stone floor shiny as a mirror. In the rear, stairs ascended to a platform upon which the Ark rested, it was said, behind the thick curtain.

Standing at a burning font near the foot of these stairs was the High Priest, dressed even more splendidly than the woman's escort. More junior priests, three on either side, stood ready to do his bidding. Unlike the young doorman, the priests each sported flowing beards, as long as their faces were tall. The length, and the amount of grayness mixed with the dark, signified which was most elder. The middlemost gray beard wearer approached the woman.

"You may remove your veil. Is this your son you carry?" he asked softly.

"It is. He is wounded. It does not heal." The priest gestured. Two others lifted the burdensome pack from her shoulders.

"Have you brought with you an offering?"

"I have." She handed over the sack. He looked in to check its contents. Then he whispered something to another of the priests, who whispered to the next, on down the line. The last one intoned, "The High Priest Eloneus."

What happened next went by in a flurry, barely two minutes. The High Priest laid his hand on the son's head and sang something from a Psalm, in unrecognizable Hebrew. Then he simply walked off. The priest who had taken her dove explained that only the Lord's mercy could help the boy. He urged the poor woman to take the boy back home and recite ceremonious prayers for one week. The Lord would accept her sacrificial offering. If the Lord wished it, the boy would recover.

*“Blessed is he beyond any blessing or song, praise or consolation that are uttered.
May He give reign to His kingdom in your lifetimes and in your days.”*

Then he bid her go.

It was over before she could object. Having nothing else to do and nowhere else to go, she took upon her the pack weighted with her son and once more entered the madness of the beast market. The woman struggled to find comfort in the hope that the gift of a dove would bring forth mercies from the Lord.

At the Temple portico, the priest who dealt with the poor woman decreed an interval. He directed that any remaining supplicants be dispersed. But before the colorfully dressed doorman could finish making that announcement, the priest saw a woman in the line, recognizing her face. She held another boy's hand in hers. A quick whisper, and she was invited to accompany the priest. The other men and women were sent away.

In the sanctuary, the priest called out “Wait!” The High Priest and the others stopped short. “There is one more to be seen!”

The woman wore a loose mantle fashioned of fine green linen thread, a brown leather belt, and a sheer veil. Without being prompted for an offering, she produced two silver coins, but a pushing gesture from her escort directed she keep them. She explained that her nephew's leg had been cut deeply by a shard of ceramic jar. The woolen bandage, hastily tied around it, was wet with blood.

Eloneus recognized her as the wife of the spice merchant Menashe of Jericho, a wealthy owner of many camels, employer of their drivers; one who ran one of the most profitable businesses between Jerusalem and the Jordan River. The High Priest did not lay hands or pray this time, only nodded to his assistant and walked out of the sanctuary.

The closing of the doors to the main entrance reverberated from where the doorman stood. The priest beckoned to him.

“Take the boy to the scribe Jonathan ben Simon”.

Jonathan ben Simon, still blessed with robust youth, worked alone at a table in one room of the southwest wing of the Temple, lit by sunlight from high windows. His finger-length beard and hair were dark and groomed; his red and yellow raiments bespoke the priestly caste of his birth and career. His manner was severe yet quietly cordial, somewhat unusual for one of his conservative station. Both educated and cunning, speaking fluently and writing Hebrew and Greek in addition to the common Aramaic tongue, he had been schooled in copying and knowledge of the scriptures. Beyond these, he had sought out training and practiced the art of the physician, benefiting those who sought solace or refuge in the Temple, as well as for his family, and more rarely for other Jews. The disabled and indigent, when he had the time, he would administer to in exchange for small possessions. The well off were expected to compensate in coin.

But that was but a pastime for him -- his situation was scribe, maintaining the Temple library, its stacked scrolls piled upon each other like fruit at a market stand. He acquired from visiting gentile scholars (of all cultures who passed through Jerusalem) those bits of written and folklore knowledge which may be of use to the Temple, High Priest and the Jewish people. For the gentiles had efficient ideas of building, the trades, farming, managing the land and its water.

Gentiles carried writings with them, on the same boats and camel trains that bore letters, news of Roman conquests and the fates of Judean travelers. Not content with dumbly copying, Jonathan examined all manner of writings; separated the learning from its pagan taints, winnowing out that which was contrary to faith and Jewish tradition. Having mastered the Greek lingua franca, he endeavored at the present time, bit by bit to read and understand Latin. Thus he possessed the key, in these days of disquiet with occupying forces, to what amounted to espionage. His findings became both intelligence to feed priestly intrigues, and merchandise to be peddled.

However, Jonathan's motivations were not purely avaricious. He gave of his salary and profits the standard tithe. Wealth he considered a means of ensuring a prosperous future for his first born and only son Zerach, and children yet to be. With enough coin he could someday buy a house with outer walls, ostentatious it may be true, but a safe haven for wife and family to grow in the faith of the fathers, unfettered by those who would rob or harm. And when these familial aims were satisfied, wealth could then be shared, a coin at a time, with those Jews who had merit but less means. That time had yet come.

“Jonathan,” called the Temple doorman. “The son of Menashe seeks your healing arts.”

The busy scribe put down his reed pen, set aside the fresh scroll of finest leather and the material being copied, and turned from the table at his visitors. The woman was nearly as beautiful as his own wife, and the boy only a little larger than his own son. “Come closer,” he said. He removed his keffiyeh, that hood scarf ringed at the crown by a rope of golden silk, revealing his head of coffee-brown hair.

The boy was able to walk. Jonathan examined the wound, determining there was no foreign object wanting removal. Losing no time, he stripped to his lower tunic, removing his robes to the table. He whispered to the doorman, “From the kitchen, fetch me a small amount of goat fat, about enough to fit in the cup of your hand, and a spoon of honey.” Jonathan spoke words of assurance to the mother and son during the short interval before the doorman returned.

“Stay here,” he told them. Then to the doorman, “Fetch the lamp and accompany me.” They filed through a thick curtain, and down stairs lit by the doorman's oil lamp, to the southwest Temple wing's underground vault. There were kept Jonathan's knives and saws, kept shiny to chase away the fevers his teacher said was known to spread after surgeries. On a shelf above these metal implements were the medicines. He pointed out a small clay jar and two crystal bottles, took the lamp himself, and commanded the doorman to bring along those vessels.

Back in the writing room ready to play his physician role, with a beam of afternoon sun bright upon his young patient's leg, Jonathan wiped caked and fresh blood from the wound with a rag damp with vinegar. The boy winced in pain as it was applied. He then daubed on juice of figs to prevent further bleeding. With a clean cloth and vine he proceeded to dress the wound. “That will heal come the third Sabbath hence,” he told the mother, while he fashioned an ointment of goat fat, salt and honey, and scooped the mixture into a small leather pouch. Handing it to the mother, he directed it be rubbed on the boy's leg each night.

No money changed hands. There was a tacit understanding that the spice merchant Menashe would give with extra generosity this coming Sabbath.

Finished, he bade Peace of the God of Abraham be with his two visitors and sent them on their way; nodded to the doorman that he was free to go; dressed himself again in his colorful robe and keffiyeh; and returned to work, once again the Scribe.

Jonathan chanted the prayer for meals in a ringing baritone.

Father of all, God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob, receive our thanks for this food which you bring forth in your power and mercy.

“Thank you Lord,” said Jedidah, wife of Jonathan ben Simon, as her husband sat down in the early next morning to bread, milk and fruit, at his own table. Jonathan thought of the food as having been provided by himself, not the Lord, but bade it depart from his mind unspoken.

Their house was in the Upper City, where homes were stone, bars encircled windows, floors were smooth, furniture sanded, and flowers sprang out in colors. Over the ridge they could literally look down on acres of hump-shaped mud homes in the Lower City.