man is the ark of God the mercy seat is above upon the ark
cherubims guard it on either side & in the midst is the holy
law. man is either the ark of God or a phantom of the earth &
of the water if thou seekest by human policy to guide this ark.
remember Uzzah II Sam I.

– William Blake, Annotations to Aphorisms, §533; E596

And when they came to Nachon’s threshingfloor, Uzzah put
forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the
oxen shook it.

And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God
smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.

– II Samuel 6.6–7

An ark or a phantom, a housing for divinity or a ghost of the earth,
such are the alternative visions that Blake presents for humanity. An
alternative and also a warning, ‘remember Uzzah’, which may well be
directed at Lavater’s own moral inquiries whose human policy risks
transforming man into a phantom:

I have often, too often, been tempted, at the daily relation of new
knaveries, to despise human nature in every individual, till, on
minute anatomy of each trick, I found that the knave was only an
enthusiast or momentary fool. This discovery of momentary folly [...] has thrown a great consolatory light on my inquiries into man’s
moral nature: by this the theorist is enabled to assign to each class and
each individual its own peculiar fit of vice or folly; and, by the same,
he has it in his power to contrast the ludicrous or dismal catalogue

M. J. A. Green, Visionary Materialism in the Early Works of William Blake
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with the more pleasing one of sentiment and virtue, more properly their own. (*Aphorisms*, §533)

Aphorism 533, Blake remarks, ‘seems to me to want discrimination’. The appearance of that word ‘want’, which we have seen before in his mother’s petition to the Congregation of the Lamb, again forms a crux of lack or need and desire, of the receptacle waiting to be filled. Lavater himself certainly seems to *want* discrimination in the second sense, to desire division and classification. Elsewhere Blake will praise Lavater for his powers of discernment, but here his severity of judgement has been misapplied and found lacking. The enthusiast, of whom Blake speaks sympathetically in Aphorism 605, is not the same as the knave for ‘knaveries are not human nature knaveries are knaveries’ (ibid.). Uzzah’s sacrilege, Blake would seem to imply, finds an analogue in those who would seek to take hold of human nature, to hold it fast through the anatomisation of a moral code. But with what kind of death specifically would such presumption be punished? The human policy outlined by Lavater is in fact not far removed from that mill in *The Marriage* that transforms the corpse, which we have identified with the human being in a state of nature, into ‘Aristotles Analytics’. Uzzah too died on a threshing floor and he did not rise again. Lavater’s ‘consolatory light’ is, Blake would therefore seem to be suggesting, not to be mistaken with that interiorised light that appears in the form of divine love and which occurs, for example, in the letters of Thomas and Catherine Armitage.

There are two deaths implied in the alternative visions of humanity that Blake presents, no less than two bodies. The phantom body of earth and water lacks the divine presence of the body as ark, whose death rests upon the mercy seat, site of propitiatory sacrifice, which in Christian iconography involves the putting to death of Christ and the resurgence of divine love. The second body, then, is that whose mortality participates in an incommensurate sacrificial exchange and an eschatological promise of rebirth. This body opens itself to Eternity without for that reason allowing itself to be abstracted from the flesh that gives it form. It is the phantom that is disembodied, not the ark, whose ornamentation itself defies the distinction between *sarx* and *soma*. Schuchard remarks upon Blake’s knowledge, which he may have acquired from Moravian sources, of the Kabbalistic tradition that the male and female cherubim guarding the ark ‘were entwined in the act of marital intercourse, thus forming an emblem of God’s joyful marriage with his female emanation, the *Shekhinah* (or Jerusalem)’ (*Why Mrs. Blake