

The Beginning of Wisdom

Leon R. Kass

The Beginning of Wisdom approaches the book of Genesis not as religious doctrine, but as a philosophical classic, precisely in the same way a reader would study Plato or Nietzsche. Its basic premise is in the title: Genesis is the beginning of wisdom.

The book falls naturally into two sections. The first shows how the universal history described in the first 11 chapters of Genesis, from creation to the tower of Babel, conveys, in the words of Leon Kass, "a coherent anthropology"—a general teaching about human nature—that "rivals anything produced by the great philosophers." Serving also as a mirror for the reader's self-discovery, these stories offer profound insights into the problematic character of human reason, speech, freedom, sexual desire, the love of the beautiful, pride, shame, anger, guilt, and death. Something as seemingly innocuous as the monotonous recounting of the ten generations from Adam to Noah yields a powerful lesson in the way in which humanity encounters its own mortality. In the story of the tower of Babel are deep understandings of the ambiguous power of speech, reason, and the arts; the hazards of unity and aloneness; the meaning of the city and its quest for self-sufficiency; and man's desire for fame, immortality, and apotheosis—and the disasters these necessarily cause.

Against this background of human failure, Part Two explores the struggles to launch a new human way, informed by the special Abrahamic covenant with the divine, that might address the problems and avoid the disasters of humankind's natural propensities. Close readings of the lives and educations of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jacob's sons, says Kass, reveal eternal wisdom about marriage, parenting, brotherhood, education, justice, political and moral leadership, and of course the ultimate question: How to live a good life.

Connecting the two "parts" is the book's overarching philosophical and pedagogical structure: how understanding the dangers and accepting the limits of human powers can open the door to a superior way of life, not only for a solitary man of virtue but for an entire community—a life devoted to righteousness and holiness. This extraordinary book shows Genesis as a coherent whole, beginning with the creation of the natural world and ending with the creation of a nation that hearkens to the awe-inspiring summons to godliness.

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CHAPTER ONE: AWESOME BEGINNINGS: MAN, HEAVEN, AND THE CREATED ORDER

The fifty chapters of the book of Genesis tell a continuous story, beginning from the beginning of our world and ending with the children of Israel settled in the land of Egypt and with the death and mummification of Israel's favorite son, Joseph. After the opening chapter, we will have what looks like a historical narrative of early human life. In chapters 2-11, with stories from the Garden of Eden (through Cain and Abel and Noah and the Flood) to the tower of Babel, we will be shown the beginnings of human life in general, as human beings live largely on their own and without instruction, prior to the election of Abraham and the founding of God's new way. In chapters 12–50 (the so-called patriarchal narratives), we will be shown the beginnings of Israel's life in particular, as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob struggle to establish God's new way, despite—or perhaps by means of—trials and tribulations with their families, their neighbors, and with God. But the story told in chapter 1 (completed by the first three verses of chapter 2) is different. It is

not an account of human life or even of human beginnings, but rather an account of the whole world and its creation. Man is included, to be sure, but neither he nor his world is seen from the ordinary human point of view.

The uniqueness of the first chapter—the so-called first creation story—is shown in many ways: in its elevated and majestic tone, in its repetitive and paratactic style [in which phrases or clauses are strung together without conjunctions], and above all in its content. Here, the big cosmological and metaphysical questions—about the status of the lofty heavens, the being of the whole, and its ultimate origins and first causes—are answered without even being asked, seemingly disposed of once and for all. With these matters apparently settled in the beginning, we readers can hereafter devote ourselves instead to more urgent human concerns: the character of human life and the question of how to live.¹

Yet if the text were simply interested in getting us started on ethical and political subjects, it could have begun in the Garden of Eden and skipped the first chapter entirely. But here it is, right at the start, with its endlessly fascinating cosmological suggestions and assertions. Moreover, whether it intends to or not, the account gives rise to almost as many speculative questions as it answers—for example, about creation *ex nihilo*, a constant theme of latter-day theological speculation.

Why, then, this kind of beginning? Is it logically or pedagogically necessary for what comes next? How is the cosmological or metaphysical related to the ethical or political? Does the acceptability of God's later commandments depend on first recognizing God's power as creator? Regarding speculation, if the story of creation is really intended to close off cosmic wonder and inquiry, why does it in fact provide such speculation with a partial license by putting cosmological matters first? Finally, regarding pedagogy, does either the content or the manner of this beginning account gain the reader's trust and persuade him to keep reading? Do the content and manner of the story of creation initiate us into the proper spirit and manner of reading? Regarding all these questions, we have no alternative but to read and ponder, thoughtfully.

If we are to read in the spirit of thoughtful engagement, suspending disbelief and seeking reasons to trust, the text's pedagogic way, perhaps more than its substance, must draw us in. Perhaps even more than with most books, the beginning of this text must gain the interest and goodwill of the reader and dispose him to pay attention, to learn, and to care. How might it do so? Partly, of course, by making plausible to him its teachings about the world and his own place in it. But the text can also inspire trust to the extent that it addresses not only the reader's mind but also his desires, passions, and concerns: for example, his curiosity and wonder about the world, as well as his anxiety and restlessness about his own existence within it. Should it succeed in providing a mirror for his own reflection, the text may lead the reader to heightened self-awareness. Finally, the reader's own experience of reading and considering the story might itself provide testimony in support of the text's teaching about man's special place in the world order. Should this occur, the reader's perspective on the world might be altered. His focus may even be moved from what is first for him to what might be first in itself.

¹ There is a midrash that explains why the Bible opens with the letter bet: "Just as bet is closed on three sides and open only in front [that is, to the left, in the direction of the ensuing text, Hebrew being written from right to left], so you are not permitted to investigate what is above [the heavens] and what is below [the deep], what is before [the six days of creation] and what is [to happen] after [the world's existence]—you are permitted only from the time the world was created and thereafter [the world we live in]." Genesis Rabbah 1:10, from *The Book of Legends: Sefer Ha-Aggadah*, ed. Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, trans. William G. Braude (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 6.

To interpret the first chapter of Genesis, open to such progress of understanding, we will need at least three readings. The first and most naïve reading stays right on the surface and attempts imaginatively to visualize the unfolding events of creation in their seemingly temporal order.

AT FIRST GLANCE: THE VISIBLE CAST OF CREATURES (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Unfortunately for those who demand clear pictures, the text's account of the very beginning is shrouded in mystery:

In beginning, God [*'elohim*] created the heavens and the earth.²

The first sentence of Genesis majestically summarizes the entire story and states its main theme and thesis: creation, by God, and creation by God. The heavens and the earth, the high and the low, were created, and created by God. Yet there is much in this verse that is hard to understand: in beginning³ of what? (Of time? Of everything? Of God's creative activities?) What is "creating"? And who or what is this creating being, God? To some of these difficulties—especially creation—we shall return. But even now, with our incomplete understanding, we grasp a major point: the assertion of creation by God emphatically denies important competing alternatives. Right from its beginning, Genesis, by speaking about the origins of heaven and earth, denies the eternity and, *a fortiori*, the divinity of the visible universe: neither the heavens—the lofty celestial vault with its sun, moon, stars—nor the earth, the fertile, teeming source of life, are gods. They are, rather, creatures, creations of God. Perhaps more important, Genesis denies the alternative of generative beginnings: the sky did not beget upon the earth; our world is not the result of sexual (or warring) activities of gods and goddesses. In denying that the world comes to be through giving birth—that is, in rejecting cosmogony and, all the more so, theogony—Genesis begins by rejecting the necessity of polytheism. The coming into being of our world does not imply or demand more than one god.

The Bible does not polemicize against these alternatives. As [the Italian rabbi and noted biblical scholar] Umberto Cassuto remarks, "the controversial note is heard indirectly, as it were, through the deliberate, quiet utterances of Scripture, which sets the opposing views at naught by silence or by subtle hint." Still, one cannot exaggerate the importance the Bible attaches to rejecting these alternatives.⁴ Numerous peoples of the ancient Near East—and elsewhere—regarded the heavenly bodies as divine. In the course of Genesis, we shall meet—as alternative and rejected ways of life—the Babylonians, who looked up to the heavens, and the Egyptians, who worshiped the sun and other nature gods. Because every people (and also every person) is defined ultimately by what it (or he or she) admires and reveres, the Bible wastes no time in denying the standing of other peoples' candidates for the divine. The reason for this urgent rejection is a matter to which we shall return.

The second verse is even more mysterious than the first:

And the earth was unformed and void and darkness [was] over the face of the deep, and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.

² The translations here and throughout this chapter are my own.

³ The Hebrew lacks the definite article; thus, the popular translation, "In the beginning," is incorrect.

⁴ Curiously, these alternatives are rejected also by modern cosmology: the cosmos is not eternal; the sun is not a god, and neither is the cosmos; the coming to be of the universe is not by sexual generation. Whatever their differences on "creation," Genesis and modern science agree on these most significant matters.

The terms here translated "unformed and void"—tohu vavohu—are notoriously hard to translate and understand.⁵ Mysterious too are the meanings of "the deep," "the spirit [or breath] of God," and His hovering. Yet some impressions are conveyed.

Apparently describing the situation before the first creative act, this verse focuses on a primordial earth—to be distinguished from the Earth that is the dry land and that appears later, on Day Three—above which were only darkness and the spirit (ruach: literally, "wind" or "breath") of God. The primordial earth was, to begin with, watery, formless, chaotic, mobile but lifeless, undifferentiated stuff; out of this, everything (or nearly everything) else will come to be, through a process of demarcation, distinction, separation. God, the separator and distinguisher, appears Himself to be separate from the watery stuff. But the origin of the primordial chaos is absolutely unclear; there is no explicit assertion of its creation out of nothing. The ultimate beginnings—and even the status quo ante, before God's creative acts—are shrouded in mystery.⁶ And well they should be, for neither of the two options—"came from nothing" and "it was there always"—can we human beings picture to ourselves. We may be disappointed in the text's lack of clarity, but we are at the same time grateful that the account leaves mysterious what cannot help but be mysterious. In this sense, at least, we believe that the text tells the truth: we already suspect that there is no way for us human beings to visualize clearly or to understand fully the awesome coming into being of the world. We begin to trust the text.

Happily, the accessibility of the account improves in the sequel (starting in verse 3), once we are introduced to the cast of particular creatures, beginning with light and ending with man. Here they are, in their familiar order of appearance:

DAY ONE: light, and the separation of light and dark, named Day and Night (1:3–5)

DAY TWO: the firmament, that vault of the sky, named Heavens, which separates the waters above and the waters below (1:6–8)

DAY THREE: (a) the separation of gathered terrestrial waters from the emerging dry land, respectively named Seas and Earth, and (b) vegetation—grass, herbs, and trees, each after its kind—put forth by the Earth (1:9–13)

DAY FOUR: the lights in the Heavens—the greater, the lesser, and the stars (1:14–19)

DAY FIVE: the fish of the sea and the birds of the open sky, after their kinds (1:20–23)

DAY SIX: (a) the terrestrial animals, after their kinds, and (b) man, made in God's image, male and female (1:24–30)

The account, though comprehensive, has an earth-centered focus. Though it speaks about what we call, in nonbiblical language, the universe or the cosmos, it addresses us, as terrestrial beings and as seeing beings, looking around and about and, especially, up. It begins with what we recognize and trust: the visible world we see above and about us. It shows us the articulated world of our native experience, as it manifests itself to sight.

All the beings mentioned are known to us in ordinary experience: There are no mythical beasts and no gods and goddesses. The main regions of our world are present—land, sea, and air—with their appropriate inhabitants, divided into recognizable kinds or species. And the overarching, star-studded, watery blue vault of heaven that beckons our gaze is present almost from the start, preceded only by light, in the absence of which nothing at all could be

⁵ Alter, who translates them as "welter and waste," points out that this pair of words "occurs only here and in two later biblical texts that are clearly alluding to this one.... Tohu by itself means emptiness or futility, and in some cases is associated with the trackless vacancy of the desert." (Genesis, 1:3)

⁶ About this, too, modern cosmology cannot help but agree: "What was there before the big bang?" "God only knows." Despite all our sophistications, the utter mysteriousness of the ultimate beginning and its source or cause cannot be eradicated.

distinguished or gazed upon. By addressing human beings exactly as they experience the world, especially through sight, Genesis begins with what is both familiar and first for us, and for all mankind at all times.

But in the course of appealing first to our familiar point of view, the story in fact calls that viewpoint into question. Although addressed to our experience, the account of Genesis 1 does not simply accord with our experience; indeed, some of the peculiarities of the account induce perplexities about the way we ordinarily encounter the world.

First, there are peculiarities related to time: the creatures do not just come in order, they come sharply separated in a day-by-day sequence. But what does this mean? As early as the Middle Ages, Christian scholars pondering this matter debated whether creation was largely instantaneous (a mere six days) or whether it was gradual (it took time); in this debate, everything depends on the nature and meaning of time—a subject that we shall, mercifully, not entangle ourselves with. But our ordinarily sure sense of temporality—tied to the daily "motions" of the sun—is called into question by this simple fact: we have day and night, and the marking of what appears to be time, on Day One, well before we have the sun, which is created only on Day Four. The forced explanation that creation days are not solar days merely avoids the difficulty and prevents us from recognizing the risks of trusting too much our notions of temporality.

The order of creatures poses other challenges to our ordinary perceptions of things: there is light in the absence of the sun or of any other light-giving heavenly bodies; and there is terrestrial vegetation (Day Three) before the sun (Day Four). In short, although all the beings are familiar, the order of their appearance does not square perfectly with facts of ordinary experience.

What are we to make of these difficulties? We could try to rationalize them away. For example, we know at least one source of light that does not require a luminous body, namely, lightning (though it does require clouds, earth, and so forth). Also, the appearance of plants with the earth and before the sun might be due to the fact that the earthbound and earthborn character of vegetation is more impressive to the naïve observer than is its dependence on sunlight. But what if these incongruities should not be rationalized away? What if they were intentionally arranged incongruously, out of the expected order? What if the text intends, in this way, to challenge, or at least correct, certain aspects of our naïve, untutored perception of our world, a perception that relies mainly on sight and that tacitly holds that seeing is believing?

This suggestion gains force when we notice that the sun is the common feature of all the peculiarities: light without the sun, days or time without the sun, earth and vegetation without the sun. In keeping with its rejection of the belief in cosmic gods, Genesis depreciates the importance of the primary being in the world of our common visible experience: the sun, source of light, warmth, and sustenance, that luminously beautiful, seemingly everlasting being, which moves with perfect regularity in perfect circular motion.

This striking demotion of the status of the sun leads us to suspect that the author of Genesis is engaged in teaching something besides what came first and what came next, that the sequence of creatures may not be primarily an effort to tell a historical or temporal story. Instead, the apparently temporal order could be an image for the ontological order; the temporal sequence of comings into being could be a vivid literary vehicle for conveying the intelligible and

hierarchic order of the beings that have come to be and are. We need a second, and different, kind of look at the biblical sequence.⁷

LOOKING WITH THE MINDS EYE: INTELLIGIBLE HIERARCHY

We begin our second glance at the order of creatures with the following observation: the six days of creation are organized quite clearly into two parallel groups of three: Days One to Three and Days Four to Six (see Table 1). Day One brings light; Day Four, the heavenly lights. Day Two brings heaven, separating, waters above from the waters below; Day Five, the living creatures—fish and fowl—that live in the waters below and that fly before the blue heaven. Day Three and Six have, in parallel, double creations, giving them pre-eminence in their respective triads. Day Three: first, the earth or dry land; and second, the plants, put forth by the earth. Day Six: first, the land animals; second, man.

TABLE 1
The Creatures, Day by Day

1. light	4. lights (heavenly)
2. heaven* (separating space between waters	5. fish and fowl below and waters above)
3. (a) earth (dry land)	6. (a) land animals
(b) including plants (makers of fruits)	(b) including man*

* Not said to be "good."

This observation prepares the next: the second three days bring creatures that all have locomotion: the heavenly bodies, the fish and fowl, the land animals and man all move. None of the creatures of the first three days can move. Moreover, the mobile creatures are arranged in order of progressively greater freedom of movement: the heavenly bodies move in fixed orbits and cannot change their paths; all living things—fish, fowl, beasts—can change their paths, though they move in set and prescribed ways, governed, as we would say, by largely fixed instincts; man alone moves in paths and ways that he can set for himself (at least in part).

Having begun to attend not to the temporality but to the logic—or intelligibility—of the sequence, we are in a position to discern the utterly logical and intelligible structure of the entire account.

The main principles at work in the creation are place, separation, motion, and life, but especially separation and motion. Places are regions necessary for the placement of separated kinds of beings and backgrounds for the detection of their motion, whereas life may be looked at—at least at a first glance—as a higher and more independent kind of motion. Further, one can treat locomotion as a more advanced kind of separation, in which a distinct being already separated from others also separates itself from place. Thus, we could say that the fundamental principle through which the world is created is separation. Creation is the bringing of order out of chaos largely through acts of separation, division, distinction.

⁷ I owe this new way of reading Genesis 1 largely to the writings of Umberto Cassuto and Leo Strauss, on which the next section of this essay heavily depends. See Cassuto, *ibid.*, 7-70, and Leo Strauss, "On the Interpretation of Genesis," *L'Homme XXI*, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1981), 5-20. This remarkable essay informs my entire reading of Genesis 1. It has been recently collected in a posthumous volume of essays by Leo Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures Modern Jewish Thought*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997) 359-76.

This view is strongly encouraged by the language of the text: the word "divide" or "separate" (from the root b-d-l) occurs explicitly five times in the first chapter (verses 4, 6, 7, 14, 18). And the idea is implicitly present ten more times in the expression "after its kind" (verses 11, 12 twice, 21 twice, 24 twice, 25 thrice), which implies the separation of plants and animals into distinct and separable kinds or species. Separating or dividing is the means of addressing and holding at bay the twin unruly conditions of the beginning-before-the-beginning: darkness and the watery chaos. In verse 4, God divides the light from the primordial darkness; in verses 14 and 18, it is the heavenly lights that divide day from night, light from darkness. The firmament, or vault of heaven, that great separator, divides the waters above from the waters below (verses 6 and 7); it keeps back the chaotic waters above heaven and prevents them from restoring the original chaos through flooding. In contrast to the divisions produced by such intervening deeds of separation, the division that exists "after its kind" refers to the higher and more stable sort of distinctiveness that is embodied in plant and animal species. These creatures manage, by themselves and without the aid of external dividers, to maintain their own distinctness through species-preserving reproduction, each after its kind.

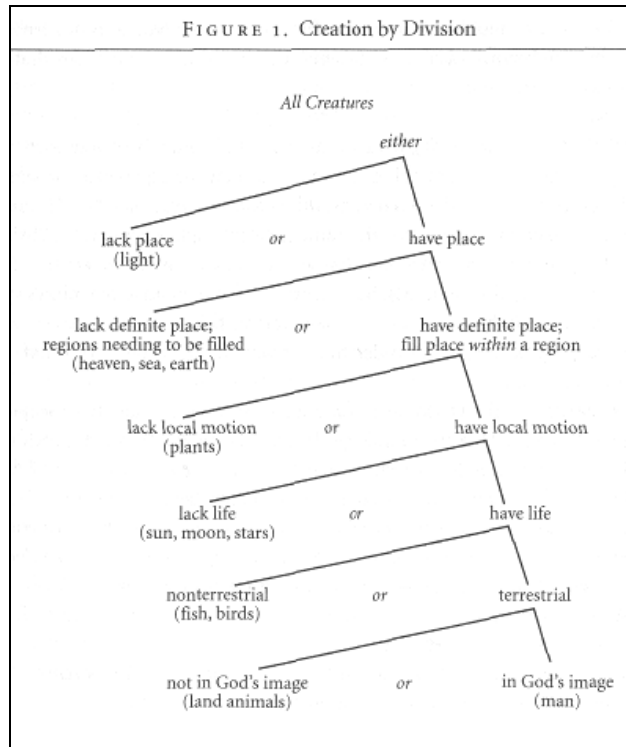
Here is how Leo Strauss summarizes the sequence of creation in the first chapter, showing the principle of separation at work:

[F]rom the principle of separation, light [which allows discernment and distinction]; via something which separates, heaven; to something which is separated, earth and sea; to things which are productive of separated things, trees, for example; then things which can separate themselves from their places, heavenly bodies; then things which can separate themselves from their courses, brutes; and finally a being which can separate itself from its way, the right way....[T]he created world is conceived to be characterized by a fundamental dualism: things which are different from each other without having the capacity of local motion and things which in addition to being different from each other do have the capacity of local motion. This means the first chapter seems to be based on the assumption that the fundamental dualism is that of distinctness, otherness, as Plato would say, and of local motion....The dualism chosen by the Bible, the dualism as distinguished from the dualism of male and female, is not sensual but intellectual, noetic, and this may help to explain the paradox that plants precede the sun.

In short: we have an intelligible account of a cosmic order based on noetic or intelligible principles, not mythic or sensual ones. Like the experience- or sense-based view of the world that it corrects, this account is accessible to all human beings as human, that is, as rational. Granted, the intelligible principles of being (such as separation and motion) are less immediately evident than are the visible beings (such as fish and fowl). But once they are presented to the mind's eye, by means of carefully wrought speech, any human being can appreciate them. When we grasp the intelligible order, the text that bespeaks and reveals that order gains our trust.

The creation of the world, in accordance with these intelligible principles, proceeds through divine acts of intelligible speech. Creation through speech fits creation by separation, for speech implies the making and recognition of distinctions. To name something presupposes (mentally) seeing it distinctly, both as the same with itself and as other than everything else. To predicate or combine words in speech is to put together what mind has first seen as separate. Separation, otherness, distinction—or if you prefer, the principle of contradiction, that A is other than not-A—is the very foundation of the possibility both of speech and of an articulated world.

With this in mind, we look again at the order of creation, as it is called into being through acts of speech. I again quote Strauss (see Figure I):



[T]he first thing created is light, something which does not have a place. All later creatures have a place.... [T]he things which have a place either do not have a definite place but rather fill a whole region, or [are] something to be filled—heaven, earth, seas; or else...they do not fill a whole region but [fill] a place within a region, within the sea, within heaven, on earth. The things which fill a place within a region either lack local motion—the plants; or they possess local motion. Those which possess local motion either lack life, the heavenly bodies; or they possess life. The living beings are either non-terrestrial, water animals and birds, or they are terrestrial. The terrestrial living beings are either not created in the image of God, brutes; or in the image of God—man. In brief, the first chapter of Genesis is based on a division by two, or what Plato calls diarsis.

It should not escape our notice that this highly intelligible account of the world, though presented in a religious text, is in substantial agreement with the world as we experience it and as we reflect on it. Our world is indeed an articulate world, with distinctly different kinds of beings occupying different kinds of places, and moving with varying degrees of freedom—some in fixed courses, some in fixed ways, and some (human beings) in ways partly of their own devising. A formed world is necessarily a world of distinction, a world of forms ordered along intelligible lines, a world whose ordered divisions can be made articulate in intelligible speech, a world that is fittingly founded upon intelligibly articulate speech. Wonder of wonders, the text's articulate speech, reporting to us God's creative speeches, makes it possible for us intellectually to participate, long after the fact, in God's creation of the world. Through our understanding, we are, in a sense, present at the creation.⁸

⁸ We are present at, or participate in, the creation only by way of understanding, not by way of deed. For the divine speech, as reported to us, is not merely intelligible: it is active, it is performative, it is creative. It goes beyond recognizing and appreciating already distinctive kinds; it brings them into being. It is not theoretic speech, in which "letting be" means an appreciative "Leave it alone to be what it is," but a performative speech, in which "letting be" means a formative "Call it into being so that it may reveal

The order of the cosmos is not only supremely intelligible; it also appears to be hierarchic. The work of creation is completed by living things, created on Days Five (fish and fowl) and Six (land animals and man).⁹ Living things are higher than the heavenly bodies, by virtue of having greater freedom of motion, man most of all. Like the heavenly bodies, every animal has its proper place—in the waters, above the earth before the firmament, or on the earth—as well as a form of motion appropriate to its place (freer on land). Unlike the heavenly bodies (but like the plants), animals are formed according to their kinds, with powers to re-produce themselves (to "be fruitful and multiply") according to their kinds (or species). Significantly, unlike the heavenly lights, living things also have powers of awareness—especially hearing—which are implied in the receipt of God's blessings; they can recognize the distinctions that are manifest in the world, and ultimately, at least one of them—man—can convey and understand these and other distinctions as they are conveyed in speech. Finally, living things are characterized also by neediness and vulnerability—indicated by the remarks about food (1:29–30)—which may be what makes them in need of God's blessing. But if animals have needs, they also have appetites, that is, inward and felt awareness of their lack coupled with an impetus to act in order to remedy the lack. From this germ of appetite, present even in lower animals, eventually emerge desire, feeling, and a rich inner life, a badge of distinction for the higher animals and man. Life, precisely because it is perishable, has aspiration for what is eternal.

The phenomenological characterization of life implicit in Genesis 1 is remarkably rich and remarkably apt: need and appetite for food from the world, openness to the world through sensory and intellectual awareness, power to move in the world and to alter it through action, activated by desire, passion, and will. Living things are higher than nonliving things; and among living things, some are more alive than others—that is, their powers of awareness, action, and desire are more fully developed. Who could disagree?¹⁰ The special powers of human beings make the case most boldly.

itself." We shall later in this chapter take up the subject of creation; in the next, we shall consider the difference between divine and human speech. For now, we simply wonder about the words we are reading, and their relation to the acts of divine speech that they describe: is the text of Genesis 1 itself performative and revelatory, an instance of the kind of speech that lets things appear and reveal themselves?

⁹ In this account, the plants (created on Day Three, before even the heavenly bodies) do not count among the living things, because they are not the lively things, the beings that move around on their own. In Hebrew, as in many other languages, the words for "life" (*chai*) and "animal" (*chayah*) are cognate (compare Latin *anima*, "soul" or "life," and *animalia*, "animals").

¹⁰ Evolutionary theorists might disagree. Or rather, they would resist entering into the argument about hierarchy altogether. In his notebooks, Darwin wrote an exhortatory note to himself, "Never use higher or lower," but he could not keep himself from doing so; the terms are all over *Origin of Species*. Insofar as evolutionary theory offers any standard for higher and lower, that standard could only be a standard of success, namely, most surviving offspring—in which case, at least in Chicago, the cockroach would be the highest being. Because evolutionary theory does not deal with the beings and the character of their lives, but only with their coming into being, it can in principle never fully appreciate theoretically the different degrees and grades of being present that are manifestly here on earth.

But one point bears emphasis: the biblical assertion—I would say the fact—of hierarchy is not incompatible with the fact of evolution, or even with evolution by natural selection. It is only incompatible with orthodox evolutionary theory, which refuses to notice it as hierarchy and which cannot at present explain it. This ought to make us wonder about the hierarchy-blind character of present evolutionary theory.

THE HIGHEST CREATURE AND HIS PLACE IN THE WHOLE

In the cosmology of Genesis, human beings clearly stand at the peak of the creatures. To dramatize the point, the text announces their appearance on the scene in high, poetic style:

And God created the human being [*ha'adam*]¹¹ in His image [*betsalmo*], in the image of God [*betselem 'elohim*] He created him, male and female He created them. (1:27)

Man is the ultimate work of creation: he is the last of the creatures listed in hierarchic order, and once he appears, the work of creation is complete. Man himself is not said by God to be good—a point to which we shall return. But once man is present (and blessed), "God saw *all* that He had made and behold, it was very good" (1:31), by which, I take it, is meant that the all or the whole was now complete, lacking in nothing. Blessed with dominion or rule over the other animals, man is the most godlike or godly of the creatures: man alone is said to be in the image of God.

This teaching about the place and special dignity of man is today on the defensive. It has been attacked as both false and dangerous. Some say it expresses merely an anthropocentric prejudice, vulgarly called "speciesism" by some advocates of animal rights. Others, appealing to evolutionary theory, allege that far from being godly, man does not even differ fundamentally from other animals: since all life is in the same business—survival and reproduction—man's apparent difference is merely superficial, a difference not of kind but only of degree. Still others, with moralistic purposes, blame this allegedly self-promoting thesis of man's special place for man's ruthless and smug exploitation of his planet and his animal relations, and even, indirectly, for the smugness that leads—so they argue—directly from self-preference and hierarchic thinking to racism and sexism.

I believe these charges are all mistaken and that the text, properly read, can answer them. Human beings really are different from and higher than the other animals; and only the human animal could be called god-like. To make the case, one needs to understand the meaning of "image of God," no small task. It is probably safest to begin with the term "image" itself and to consider its meaning in the local context provided by the text.

The Hebrew word translated "image" is *tselem*, from a root meaning "to cut off," "to chisel"; *tselem*, something cut or chiseled out—in the first instance, a statue—becomes, derivatively, any image or likeness or resemblance. Any image, insofar as it is an image, has a most peculiar manner of being: it both is and is not what it resembles. The image of my granddaughter that smiles at me out of the picture frame on my desk is my granddaughter—not yours. But it is not really she—just a mere image. Although being merely a likeness, an image not only resembles but also points to, and is dependent for its very being on, that of which it is an image. Man, like any other creature, is simply what he is. But according to the text, he is—in addition—also something more insofar as he resembles the divine. What could this possibly mean?

To see how man might be godlike, we look at the text to see what God is like. In the course of recounting His creation, Genesis 1 introduces us to God's activities and powers: (1) God speaks, commands, names, blesses, and hallows; (2) God makes, and makes freely; (3) God looks at and beholds the world; (4) God is concerned with the goodness or perfection of things; (5) God addresses solicitously other living creatures and provides for their sustenance.

In short: God exercises speech and reason, freedom in doing and making, and the powers of contemplation, judgment, and care.

¹¹ The Hebrew word is *'adam*, often translated "man," denoting a member of the human species. Though the noun is male in gender (a grammatical fact, merely), its meaning is sex neutral, like *anthropos* in Greek.

Doubters may wonder whether this is truly the case about God—after all, it is only on biblical authority that we regard God as possessing these powers and activities. But it is indubitably clear—even to atheists—that we human beings have them, and that they lift us above the plane of a merely animal existence. Human beings, alone among the creatures, speak, plan, create, contemplate, and judge. Human beings, alone among the creatures, can articulate a future goal and use that articulation to guide them in bringing it into being by their own purposive conduct. Human beings, alone among the creatures, can think about the whole, marvel at its many-splendored forms and articulated order, wonder about its beginning, and feel awe in beholding its grandeur and in pondering the mystery of its source.

These self-evident truths do not rest on biblical authority. Rather, the biblical text enables us to confirm them by an act of self-reflection. Our reading of this text, addressable and intelligible only to us human beings, and our responses to it, possible only for us human beings, provide all the proof we need to confirm the text's assertion of our special being. Reading Genesis 1 performatively demonstrates the truth of its claims about the superior ontological standing of the human. This is not anthropocentric prejudice, but cosmological truth. And nothing we shall ever learn about how we came to be this way could ever make it false.¹²

But the text does not exaggerate our standing. Man may be, of all the creatures, the most intelligent, resourceful, conscious, and free—and in these respects the most godlike—but he is also the most questionable. In fact, Genesis 1, read with an eye for the fine print, provides this teaching as well. Man may have powers that resemble divinity, but he is also at most merely an image; man, who quite on his own is prone to think of himself as a god on earth and to lord it over the animals, is reminded by the biblical text that he is, like the other creatures, not divine. Though brought into being by a special creative act, man appears on the same day as the terrestrial animals; though in some respects godlike, man belongs emphatically to the world of animals, whose protective ruler he is told to be. As the later verses about food remind us, we are, like the animals, needy and vulnerable. Man is the ambiguous being, in between, more than an animal, less than a god. This fact—and it is a fact—makes man a problem, as the Bible, even in this celebratory chapter, subtly teaches.

After nearly every act of creation, God looked at the creature and "saw that it was good." There are two striking exceptions: neither the firmament (or heavens), on Day Two, nor man, on Day Six, is said to be good. What bearing, if any, might these omissions have on the place and status of human beings?

Now, one might say that there is no need to see or say that man is good; after all, he is made in God's image and that might make man "better" than good. Moreover, once human beings are present, the whole is said to be very good: does this not imply that each part—man especially included—is good? Perhaps. But what if the omission were intended and meaningful? What if it were very good that the creation contain a creature that is himself not—or not yet—good?

"Good" as used throughout Genesis 1 cannot mean morally good; when "God saw the light that it was good," He could not have seen that the light was honest or just or law-abiding. The meaning of "good" seems rather to embrace notions like the following: (1) fit to the intention; (2)

¹² Once again, modern science should have no real difficulty with this conclusion. The sempiternal heavenly bodies may outlast and outshine us and move in beautiful circular paths; or if you prefer a modern equivalent, matter-energy may be virtually indestructible. But only we, not they, can know these facts. Not until there are human beings does the universe become conscious of itself—a remarkable achievement, well appreciated by first-rate scientists. I was once present when the Nobel laureate physicist James Cronin was asked by a skeptical high school student whether he believed in miracles. "Yes," said Cronin, as the student's jaw dropped. "That there should be physics is a miracle."

fit to itself and its work, that is, able to function for itself and in relation to the unfolding whole; and especially (3) complete, perfect, fully formed, clear and distinct, and fully what it is. A being is good insofar as it is fully formed and fully fit to do its proper work.

A moment's reflection shows that man as he comes into the world is not yet good. Precisely because he is the free being, he is also the incomplete or indeterminate being; what he becomes depends always (in part) on what he freely will choose to be. Let me put it more pointedly: precisely in the sense that man is in the image of God, man is not good—not determinate, finished, complete, or perfect. It remains to be seen whether man will become good, whether he will be able to complete himself (or to be completed).

Man's lack of obvious goodness or completeness, metaphysically identical with his freedom, is, of course, the basis also of man's moral ambiguity. As the being with the greatest freedom of motion, able to change not only his path but also his way, man is capable of deviating widely from the way for which he is most suited or through which he—and the world around him—will most flourish.

The rest of the biblical narrative elaborates man's moral ambiguity and God's efforts to address it, all in the service of making man "good"—complete, whole, holy. That account does not really begin in earnest until the tale of the Garden of Eden in the next chapter; Genesis 1 does not dwell on man's work or his duties¹³ and does not speak at all about good and evil. Yet even while presenting its majestic cosmology and locating human life as highest in the context of the whole, Genesis 1 subtly hints at the reasons why man is existentially and morally so troublesome.

In this sense, the first chapter of the Bible prepares the rest. It not only tells of the temporal beginnings, answering our questions about ultimate causes; it not only uses the temporal account to convey the intelligible order and the hierarchy of being; it also begins the moral education of the reader.

It seems, then, that Genesis 1 is guided overall by a moral intention, that it is in fact an ethical text at least as much as it is a cosmological one. We need a third look at the text from this point of view.

LISTENING MORALLY: AWAY FROM THE HEAVENS

The cosmology of the creation story is discussible entirely within the confines of the first chapter itself; but properly to discern the moral intention of this beginning requires reading ahead in Genesis. Nevertheless, in anticipation of such further reading, we can find the appropriate clues present already from the start. Indeed, much of the relevant evidence has already been presented and needs only to be recollected.

A main teaching—perhaps the main teaching—of Genesis 1 is the nondivinity of the cosmos, and in particular of the sun, the moon, the stars—in short, of everything connected with heaven. Heaven and its occupants are not eternal, they come into being; there is something temporally before, causally behind, and ontologically above the cosmos; the Hebrew word for heaven, *shamayim*, is grammatically plural (actually, dual), not singular; the account begins focused on a primordial earth, and there is no primordial heaven; the heavenly bodies are not living gods but lifeless creatures; they are not even named by God; they are presented as merely useful for the earth, and their rule extends only over day and night, not over the earth and man. The special demotion of the sun—regarded by other peoples as a god—has already been well documented:

¹³ A certain imprecisely specified work is assigned to him (to rule the animals) and a certain kind of duty is placed upon him ("be fruitful and multiply").

light, time, and even vegetation are presented as not requiring the sun. Not heaven but man has the closest relation to God; heaven is not said to be good. Heaven, the enduring vault of the cosmos, the stunning star-studded sphere that ceaselessly circles above and to which ancient peoples looked with awe and fear, wonder and admiration, is, according to the Bible, not deserving of such respect.

Why such an effort to demote the dignity of the cosmos, and especially of heaven? And could there be some connection between the fact that heaven is not said to be good and the fact that man is not said to be good?

These questions may strike the modern reader as odd. Not for centuries has Western man seriously flirted with nature worship or pantheistic belief.¹⁴ In modern times, the antipantheistic teaching of the Bible has been reinforced by the antianimistic teaching of science, which also denies special dignity to sun, moon, and stars, indeed, to the universe as a whole. Moreover, we no longer live in ways that inspire interest in or concern for the heavens. Thanks to urbanization and artificial lighting, fewer and fewer people are even aware of the wonders of the night sky, and thanks to modern science, almost no one is moved to ponder the movements of the fixed and wandering stars; astronomy is no longer regarded as an indispensable part of liberal education. And thanks to our nature-mastering technologies, fewer and fewer people live in awe of the power of the heavens: we don't pray for rain, we practice irrigation; we don't dread the full moon, we travel to it. Thus, we must exert a major effort of imagination to reacquire the natural human attitude and to adopt the posture of human beings standing before the open world and the big sky, filled, on the one hand, with curiosity and wonder, on the other hand, with anxiety and dread. By contrast, this attitude, these passions, and the beliefs about nature and the heavens that go with them are well known to the biblical author. We must consider why he regards them as primary.

Human beings, left to their own devices, naturally incline to the worship of nature. Based on their experience of the world, and the knowledge to which their senses lead them, they look up to the powers that be, and pre-eminently to the heavens. They cannot help but notice the stars, shining steadily, fixed in constellations that circle uniformly and endlessly. They cannot help but wonder at other "stars"—our sun and its planets—that circle endlessly but nonuniformly, each wandering independently through the constellations—the very word "planet" is cognate with the Greek for "wanderer"—but each in a recurrent pattern whose sequences can be counted and measured. They cannot help being perplexed by the waxing and waning of the moon. And they cannot help being overawed by the sun. Because of its permanence; its regular, ceaseless, perfect circular "motion," its power and its beauty; and above all, its importance for human life as the source of light, warmth, and the growth of crops, the sun is always and everywhere the prime candidate for natural divinity.

These are not just primitive or foolish notions. Whether among the ancient Babylonians or Egyptians or Persians, or among Native Americans or modern-day Buddhists, we find human beings looking up to nature as something divine—not only from reasons of theory but also for purely practical reasons. Because human life is precariously dependent on sun and rain, the effort to appease, propitiate, and control the cosmic forces through worship and sacrifice and the reading of signs is a nearly ubiquitous feature of early human life, and certainly in the ancient Near East.

¹⁴ Such attitudes are, however, making a comeback in the environmentalist movement. Its fundamentalist wing, believers in so-called deep ecology, speaks of nature in reverent terms and even refers to Mother Earth once again as a goddess (Gaia).

Thus, according to the Bible (as we will later see), the first to offer gifts to the divine—gifts not invited by God—was Cain, fittingly a farmer, no doubt concerned with rain and the appeasement of heaven. Noah, on getting off the ark, builds an altar and roasts up some of his animal charges, again without instruction, perhaps in gratitude, but perhaps also in an effort to assure no more floods. And most clearly, Babel, the universal human city, founded on reason and the arts, centers around a tower, like the ziggurats of the historical Babylon, the place where human beings first began to count the celestial happenings; in these ziggurats the priests, watchfully yet apprehensively, conducted measurements of the heavenly motions, on the basis of which they sought knowledge useful for the life of the city—forerunners of the astrological aspiration that persists to the present day.

If these inferences do not persuade, the Bible makes the point explicit. In Deuteronomy, Moses exhorts the Israelites to remember the divine voice they heard at Mount Horeb:

Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves—for ye saw no manner of likeness [*temunah*] on the day that the Lord spoke unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire—lest ye deal corruptly, and make you a graven image, even the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the heavens, the likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth, *and lest thou lift up thine eyes unto the heavens, and when thou seest the sun and the moon and the stars, even all the host of the heavens, thou be drawn away and worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath allotted unto all the peoples under all the heavens.* (Deuteronomy 4:15-19, emphasis added)

Absent special revelation—indeed, absent the special revelation of the exodus and the giving of the law at Mount Sinai—human beings would naturally be led to the worship of heaven.¹⁵ Their natural and astronomical turn is further linked, according to this passage, to idolatry: the creation and worship of visible images and likenesses. Absent hearing God's word, human beings would follow their eyes, upward. Human beings, free and hence indeterminate, would on their own try to find their way in the world, based on their ordinary experiences; they would ultimately be led to orient themselves by the cosmic "gods" (and their anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations). This perfectly natural human tendency the Bible seeks to oppose, and right from the first verse, by denying that the heavens—or any other natural beings—are worthy of human reverence.¹⁶

¹⁵ One does not have to take this on biblical authority. In this famous passage from his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle makes a similar point, reporting on a tradition that was already ancient in his time: "The ancients of very early times bequeathed to posterity in the form of a myth a tradition that the heavenly bodies are gods and that the divinity encompasses the whole of nature. The rest of the tradition has been added later as a means of persuading the many and as something useful for the laws and for matters of expediency; for they say that these gods are like men in form and like some of the other animals, and also other things which follow from or are similar to those stated. But if one were to separate from the later additions the first point and attend to this alone (namely, that they thought the first beings to be gods), he might realize that this was divinely spoken." (1074b1-11, translated by Hippocrates G. Apostle, with slight changes [Indiana University Press, 1966], 208–9)

¹⁶ The point has been beautifully made by Harvey Flaumenhaft:

"Scholars nowadays give evidence that the ancient myths of many peoples are vestiges of records made before the time of written records; tales that recount the counting that makes up the stories in the sky, tales sometimes embodied more solidly in temples—in lines of sight those buildings furnish, or in the numbers of their bricks and modules. All over the world, special numbers strangely recur; strange details

And what, one may rightly ask, is wrong, ethically speaking, in looking up to cosmic gods, or more simply, in trying to orient human life on the basis of knowledge of nature? After all, philosophers as diverse as Aristotle and Lucretius seem, at first glance, to have taught the life lived according to nature.

Astronomy, according to Aristotle, is the foundation of mythology. He believes that the additions made later for ethical and legal purposes, however salutary and useful, represent deviations from the truth.

The Bible's answer—a teaching it shares with modern scientific dogma—would seem to be this: nature¹⁷ is morally neutral. The heavens may, as the Psalmist sings, declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1), but they say not a peep about righteousness. Not only is nature silent about right and justice; absolutely no moral rules can be deduced from even the fullest understanding of nature. Knowing even that man is the highest creature, because free, does not lead to any clear guidance about how his freedom is to be used. Worse, man's awareness of nature's cosmic indifference to his needs and aspirations will likely lead him into fatalism and despair—if, that is, he knows of no supernatural divinity.

Perhaps the philosophic life, the life of contemplation, for a few private individuals, could be a life lived according to nature. Arguably, it might even be endorsed by the biblical cosmology,

related to those countings of what happens in the sky are found in accounts that do not seem to be related to the sky, or related to each other. Before the people of the book, it seems that cosmic bookkeepers did their work, impressing in the memories of men their celestial accountancy.

“That is why the Bible says in the beginning that what shines forth from up above is not divinities themselves but mere creations of divinity. What the heavens recount is the glory of that unique divinity which made them, we are told, and the worship of what shines forth in the heavens is the lot of all the peoples other than the recipients of this instruction given in the Bible. In the biblical instruction, idol worship is associated with the worship of the stars. Both are forms of what is rejected by the biblical instruction with its awesome either-or. Divinity, seen by some as everlasting beauty, to others rather is benevolent power. For some, an image of divinity is a statue, a graceful, static form to look at. For others, divinity is rather found calling out from fire—ever lively in its formlessness, but having power to transform; what calls is not something to look at but to listen to, its word recorded in a book for those to read who, lively though perishable, are made in the image of the one whose glory is recounted by the shining in the sky.” (“Quest for Order,” *Humanities*, Jan./Feb. 1992, 31)

We shall in the next chapter explore in detail the so-called second creation story, the Garden of Eden, which explicitly examines the structure of human life and calls most profoundly into question the goodness of the human inclination autonomously to choose for oneself how to live. In that story, the knowledge to be avoided is knowledge of good and bad rooted in nature—the tree—and always within reach (at the center of our garden) through our immediate experience, once reason—the conversation with the serpent—has emancipated us from obedience to fixed ways. Suffice it to say that the second story even more radically supports the first, showing the folly of the human animal's inborn propensity to freedom and independence, to find its own way by the lights of reason and experience. But our willingness to suspect that our powers might be inadequate to the task of righteous living has been provided at the start, in Genesis 1's challenge to our native presumptions about the dignity and divinity of our given world.

¹⁷ This is a good place to repeat that there is no biblical Hebrew word for “nature.” The idea of nature, both in the sense of a unified, self-moving totality and in the sense of the essence of a being, belongs to philosophy, not to the Bible. Accordingly, we run the risk of distorting the biblical teaching by referring anachronistically to the Bible's view of “nature,” or indeed by using the term at all in this volume. Nevertheless, we shall do so, albeit nervously, in order to bring our study of the biblical text into conversation with other wisdom-seeking activities. We shall, no doubt, have later occasions to visit this question of nature. For now, let the reader beware.

which begins with light, which is ordered on strictly intellectual principles, and which concludes with man as the one godlike being who can behold and appreciate the order of the world and ponder its source. Maybe so. But this attempt to reconcile Scripture and speculation seems forced: in presenting man's difference, Genesis stresses more his freedom of motion and action, less his theoretic intellect.

And regarding action, society, and politics, the point is incontestable: the cosmos can have nothing at all to say or teach about all the important questions of human beings living with other human beings. Not even the basic prohibitions against cannibalism, incest, murder, and adultery—constitutive for virtually all human communities everywhere and always—can be supported by or deduced from the natural world. From the point of view of righteousness, indeed for all practical purposes, cosmic gods are about as helpful as no gods at all.¹⁸ The doctrine of creation, whatever else it accomplishes, seems crucial to the Bible's moral-political intention: to bring righteousness and holiness into the center of human life.

We must return to look at the question of creation. Because we are interested ultimately in the truth of the matter, we shall not make things easy for ourselves. As we consider the question of creation, we shall deliberately keep before us modern science's great challenge to the biblical account, the theory of evolution. When the Bible was first written and read, its readers were summoned to do intellectual and moral battle with the ancient naturalism of the Mesopotamians; today its readers find themselves embattled intellectually and morally with the modern naturalism of the Darwinians. We read with our eyes and our minds open, suspecting that the stakes are very high.

CREATION AND EVOLUTION

We pause for a moment to retrace our steps. Our attempt at a literal and philosophical reading of the first chapter of Genesis has shown how its apparently temporal account conveys what we might call an ontological or metaphysical order of the entire world, beginning with all the familiar beings that appear universally in human experience. Moving us to think beyond our experience, Genesis discloses the immanent, hierarchic order of our world and its intelligible principles, both of them accessible to human beings as human beings, on the basis of reason alone. We see how this ontological account serves an overall moral intention, namely to show, in small print, the incompleteness and ambiguity of the human, and in bold print, the nondivinity and moral irrelevance of the entire visible cosmos.

None of these biblical teachings needs to be retracted because of the findings of evolution. The nature, rank, and dignity of the various beings of the world remain unaltered, independent of the process by which they all came to be. In particular, the ambiguous metaphysical and moral status of human beings—in between, in some respects godlike yet not good, and morally indeterminate—can still be affirmed, taking men as they have been and are, evolutionary origins or no evolutionary origins.

¹⁸ Nothing in our modern science, including our theory of evolution, requires us to abandon this biblical teaching. Indeed, as I pointed out at the start, modern science altogether shares the Bible's view of the nondivinity of nature, the silence of nature regarding the human good, and therefore the insufficiency of human efforts to find our way of life by thinking about cosmic nature. Yet whereas evolutionary theory suggests no alternative to nature, the Bible begins beyond nature with its divine Creator and moves throughout to supply our defect of ethical knowledge with its own stories and instructions regarding how to live. Though most of that moral instruction comes later in the Bible, the assertion of creation by God at the very start of the story seems crucial to its moral intent and to its hope of ultimate success.

Furthermore, if the major intention of the first chapter is not historical but ontological, ethical, and theological, Genesis is not the sort of book that can be refuted—or affirmed—on the basis of scientific or historical evidence. This is, I repeat, not because it is myth or poetry, but rather because its truths are metaphysical and ethical, not scientific or historical, because it teaches mainly about the status and human meaning of what is, rather than about the mechanism by which things work or came to be.

But surely, someone might say, I have skirted the main point of the entire first chapter: creation, and creation by God. The perfectly intelligible cosmology, accessible to human reason, is overarched by an assertion regarding divine creation (with God as the ultimate cause), an assertion for which the Bible offers no direct evidence or argument. Indeed, the passage from Deuteronomy quoted above suggests that, absent hearing the voice of God, and by extension, absent the revealed speech of the Bible itself, human beings would not readily come to the conclusion of creation, would not readily understand that there is an invisible, intelligent source of the visible and intelligible world. The intelligibility of the created order may be known by man as man, but about the createdness of the intelligible order—and all the more, about its creator—we readers know only by biblical assertion, that is, only by revelation.

Perhaps we should leave it at that. Yet because today's controversy concerns precisely the matter of creation, and because science and evolutionary theory do pose some challenges to the letter of the Genesis account as it is ordinarily read by many people, we should carry the analysis somewhat further—not least because such important matters are at stake.

To recapitulate: Creation, according to Genesis 1, is the bringing of order out of primordial chaos, largely through a process of progressive separation, division, distinction, differentiation. If there is to be a world, it must be articulated into distinguishable beings; if there are to be living beings, capable of self-perpetuation, each individual must belong to a kind or species that by and large breeds true, that is, after its kind. (Of this, more soon.)

At this level of generality, the biblical account is perfectly compatible with the fact of a slowly evolving cosmos, with life arriving late, beginning in the sea and only later emerging on earth, progressively distinguished into a variety of separated kinds.

Further, since the separations, actually made or appearing in the world, were all beforehand makable, one might even conclude that the biblical creatures—or at least the broadly possible kinds of creatures—were present potentially in the world, even before they were called forth into being (that is, created).

With this addition, one sees how one might find in Genesis 1 elements of a doctrine of evolving or unfolding creation, or conversely, how certain evolutionary accounts of the emergence of living forms are compatible with the Bible's account of a graded and sequential unfolding of the cosmos, through progressive acts of separating out implicit, or at least latent, possibilities.

True, evolution through the unfolding of latent possibilities is not the same as evolution through the natural selection of accidental variations—it is more Lamarckian than Darwinian. But leaving aside such questions of mechanism, creation and evolution might be perfectly compatible, at least in principle; everything depends on what is meant by each notion.

I do not yet fully understand these notions; and I rather suspect that evolution *solely by natural selection*—orthodox Darwinism—cannot be simply squared with the biblical account. But if the question about creation and evolution is to remain open for further reflection, we need to challenge some common assumptions—especially about the biblical text—that usually lead people to see them simply as opposed.

First, *evolutionists deny the primacy and even the intelligibility of natural kinds or species*. Some of them ridicule as typological or essentialist thinking the focus on natural species, characteristic not only of Genesis 1 but also of common human experience. Evolutionary theory, like natural science in general, shares the Bible's teaching regarding the intelligibility of the cosmos, but the intelligibility it seeks comes in the form of universal laws of natural change, rather than the specific forms of the separable natural beings. Indeed, the whole point of Darwin's researches was to discover the natural processes by which new species emerge from pre-existing species, through descent and modification.

Yet the transformability of species does not refute the status or importance of species as a natural category; even Darwin's own title (*Origin of Species*) pre-supposes the reality of species or natural kinds. Moreover, species remain a principle of intelligibility, maybe not for how the animals came to be the way they are, but certainly for *what* they are and *do*. In reproduction, like still mates with like, and the progeny are, for the most part, always like their parents in kind. Genealogy may explain lines of descent or kinship of genotypes, but existent organisms behave largely true to their type. Is not your average rabbit much more impressed by the difference between a rabbit and a fox than he is by the fact that they have the same genetic code or that they are mutually descended from a common mammalian forebear? Species, however mutable, still make sense.

Second, evolutionists, rejecting the notion of fixed species and insisting that life, like the universe, is constantly in flux, oppose this view to the Bible, which they assume *proclaims a static world, created once and for always the same*.

Yet the account in Genesis, contrary to popular belief, does not assert the eternity or fixity of the species. On the contrary, Genesis asserts—along with modern science—the non-eternity of the species: like the entire visible universe, each species had a beginning in time. More important, there are several subtle indications in the biblical text that invite us to think that God's created order is, in fact, subject to considerable change, on its own.

Consider, for example, the fact that God's creatures, at the start, all had their distinct place or habitat: sea, air, land. Where, then, were the amphibious ones? Did God not make frogs and crocodiles? Could they be later creatures, evolving out of an exclusively watery niche? Since frogs and crocodiles were surely known to the ancient Israelites, is the text perhaps raising questions about the propriety of beings that cross boundaries and upset the distinctions that constitute the order of the world? Later, in Leviticus, all such ambiguous creatures will be declared unclean.

The possibility of organic change is more strongly supported by explicit evidence from Genesis 1 itself. After the creatures have all appeared, God speaks to man about food:

And God said: "Behold I have provided you with all seed-bearing plants which are on the face of all the earth, and every tree which has seed-bearing fruit; to you I have given it as food. And to every living being of the earth and to everything that creepeth upon the earth which has a living soul in it, I have given every green herb as food"; and it was so. (1:29-30)

All the animals were to have been what we call vegetarian. Keeping to this diet would barely disturb the order of creation. Yet we must imagine that man and the animals as created were capable of eating meat. (The alternative is that meat eaters evolved, later.) That they needed to be told what to eat is perhaps a sign that, left to their own devices, their appetites would naturally lead them to incorporate one another—disturbing the terrestrial order and giving rise to what we now call powerful pressures for natural selection.

In this subtle way, the text hints that the harmonious and ordered whole contains within it a principle—life, or if you will, appetite, and eventually omnivorousness and freedom—that

threatens any original order of the whole. Life is, in principle, destabilizing; man is so in spades. God's created order is not immune to change—indeed, as subsequent chapters relate, by the tenth generation all the earth (including the animals) has become corrupt and has erupted into violence and fury (Genesis 6:7, 11-12); the return through the flood to the watery chaos of the beginning completes the dissolution into chaos that life—and freedom—itsself had wrought.

Life and freedom are only the most obvious principles of disordering and change. A scrupulously close look at the text suggests even more fundamental principles of change. First, there is the formless, watery chaos out of which everything came to be. How well does it accept form and order? Are all its native entropic tendencies abolished by the process of separation to which it is subjected? Or does its chaotic character persist beneath the forms of the world, making any order unstable? Does Genesis 1 subtly teach what was once known as the recalcitrance of matter?

The text speaks twice of each creative act, once to call forth ("Let there be"), once to report the act as performed ("And there was"). Only in the case of the creation of light is the report of the creative act letter-for-letter perfectly identical to the call for the creative act: "Let light be" and "Light be."¹⁹ Only in this case is God's speech precisely and perfectly efficacious in its mode of creative and revealing "letting be." In all other cases, there is a clear difference between command and performance. For example, God asks the earth to "grass grass,"²⁰ but the earth instead "put forth" [*totse*] grass (1:11-12)—leading the rabbis long ago to remark that the earth was first in disobedience. A second example: God, perhaps now mindful of the earth's recalcitrance, later asks the earth to "put forth" [*totse*] the terrestrial living creatures (1:24), but it turns out that God has to "make" [*asah*] them Himself (1:25).

In fact, resistance to order may be present even earlier: at the very start, after God has fully separated the light from the dark, calling the one Day and the other Night, the text reports that there was evening and there was morning: the separated Day and Night, quite on their own, had drifted partially back together, blurring the boundaries between them.²¹ The recalcitrance of matter, like the mischievous propensities of life, promise massive changes, even for God's created order.

Third, evolutionists insist that the world and life emerged, and that change proceeds, by wholly natural processes, and they reject, in particular, creation ex nihilo. But as I read Genesis 1, creation need not mean ex nihilo. The text says nothing to require such a notion; in particular, it is silent about the origin of the primordial watery chaos. And if, as I suggested, the watery stuff offers immanent resistance to the coming and persistence of intelligible order, there may even be said to be some biblical evidence against the kind of divine omnipotence that creation ex nihilo would require. And if there is not creation ex nihilo, then what is called creation could very well proceed through perfectly natural—even evolutionary—processes.

Can creation proceed through natural processes, or must creation mean something supernatural, something miraculous, that is, something that defies the ordinary workings of

¹⁹ In the original, the words that precede and follow the "and" are identical—*yehi 'or*. English requires a change from "Let there be" to "There was," but because of a peculiarity in the use of Hebrew tenses no change is needed.

²⁰ Hebrew makes frequent use of the cognate accusative construction; English uses it rarely (as in "dance a dance"). The construction suggests an intimate link between activity and object, between the working and the work. In this case, God had asked the earth to grass grass, in seamless activity, the way a scalp sprouts hair. The earth did not—or could not—do so.

²¹ I was first made aware of these deviations by Robert Sacks, St. John's College, Santa Fe.

nature? What help, if any, does Genesis 1 provide on this question? What, when we finally come down to it, is the how of creation according to Genesis 1?

The Hebrew word "create," *bara'*, is applied only to God; it occurs five times in the first chapter: once in the first summarizing sentence, once regarding the sea monsters, three times in connection with man. But this word is used, apparently synonymously, with another word, *'asah*, meaning "to make or do." *'Asah* occurs seven times in the first chapter and three more times in the first three verses of chapter 2 that conclude the first creation account. The last words of the story (2:3) assimilate *bara'* and *'asah*: "which God in creating had made." Curiously, two of the ten uses of *'asah* refer not to God but to trees, to the trees "making" (or bearing) fruit. Is it possible that one could learn something about creation altogether by learning about the natural process of fruit trees making fruit? Here, once more, is Leo Strauss:

The fruit tree making fruit, what kind of making is this? The fruit is originated almost entirely by the tree and, as it were, within the tree. Secondly, the fruit does not have the looks of a tree. Thirdly, the fruit is a complete and finished product. And last, the fruit can be separated from the tree. Perhaps creation has a certain kinship with this kind of making as distinguished from the following kinds of making: first, the making of something which does not originate almost entirely in the maker, artifacts, which require clay and so on in addition to the maker; secondly, the making of something which looks like the maker, the generation of animals; third, the making of something which is not complete but needs additional making or doing, the eggs; and finally, the making of something which cannot be separated from the maker: for example, deeds, human deeds, cannot be separated from the man who does them.

If creation through separation were, in fact, more like a tree making fruit than say, like a man making pottery, could it, just possibly, be an entirely natural process?

I have perhaps gone too far. If the analogy is strictly applied, creation becomes a process of God's fructification, out of God's own substance; and the distinction between God and world on which the text manifestly and vigorously insists would be lost.

But it has been useful to have pushed the account of creation this far in the naturalistic direction, for we can now turn the tables and put a hard question back to the evolutionists. Let us assume that creation is evolution, and proceed: solely by natural processes. What is responsible for this natural process? What is its cause? What is the ultimate source of the intelligibility of the natural order or of the actual intelligence that emerged within it with the coming of man? Can a dumb process, ruled by strict necessity and chance mutation, having no rhyme or reason, ultimately answer sufficiently for life, for man, for the whole?

Darwin himself was utterly baffled by how life first arose; in the last words of the last edition of *Origin of Species*, he repairs to "the Creator" as the ultimate source of the first breath of life. Descartes before him had understood that if the human *mind* is thoroughly determined by physical causes there can be no such thing as scientific truth; he therefore was compelled to invoke God as the source of man's rational powers. And when we finally allow ourselves to come face-to-face with the mystery that there is anything at all rather than nothing, can we evolutionists confidently reject the first claim of the Bible—"In beginning, *God* created the heavens and the earth"?

BEYOND CREATION, BEYOND MORALITY

Our three readings of the text—visual-historical, intellectual-metaphysical, moral-theological—have not yet finished the job. The six-day story of creation as told in the first chapter is incomplete. It has a coda, related in the first three verses of chapter 2:

And the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God [was] finished [with] His work which He had made; and He abstained [or ceased or

rested: *vayisheboth*] on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it [*vayeqadesh*], because in it He abstained [or ceased or rested: *shabbath*] from all His work which God in creating had made.

Six days of work are followed by a seventh day of abstention from work, a day of rest, which completes (or perhaps transcends) the "merely" finished work of creation. The principle of separation, crucial to the whole account of creation, is here further enshrined in the distinction between work and rest. God hallows the seventh day and, in so doing, sanctifies the principle of distinction by making distinction the principle of holiness: *qadesh*, the root of the verb "to hallow," means something separated, set off, apart. Curiously, the metaphysical principle of separation will become incorporated in human affairs in the transmoral principle of holiness, for which the observance of the separated and sanctified Sabbath day is crucial, even paradigmatic.

The sanctification of the seventh day continues and completes the critique of beliefs in celestial divinities. The Mesopotamians (Babylonians and Assyrians), before the coming of the Bible, already reckoned seven-day cycles, connected with the phases of the moon. They set aside the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of the lunar months; they had their own Sabbath, *sabattu* or *sapattu*, the day of the full moon.²² Among the Babylonians, these days—especially *sabattu*—were fast days, days of ill luck, days on which one avoided pleasure and important projects. In contrast, the seventh day among the children of Israel was completely independent of all ties to the heavens, save to the Creator of heaven. It established a calendar completely dissociated from the cycles of the heavenly bodies, commemorating instead their Creator, one who stands above and beyond their ceaseless motion. In Israel, the seventh day will become a day of rest and benison, a day of joy and refreshment, a day on which man would rise above the need for toil, becoming like God, separated from the changing world He created, at rest, apart, hallowed. As Cassuto puts it:

Every seventh day, without intermission since the days of Creation, serves as a memorial to the idea of creation of the world by the word of God, and we must refrain from work thereon so that we may follow the Creator's example and cleave to His ways. Scripture wishes to emphasize that the sanctity of the Sabbath is older than Israel, and rests upon all mankind.... [T]he commandments concerning the proper observance of the Sabbath...devolve only upon Israel. Thus in the Ten Commandments is it said, REMEMBER the seventh day to keep it holy.

The natural order of the cosmos thus acquires a more than natural significance. God not only creates, He also blesses and hallows. Three blessings are given, two for creatures, the third for the seventh day: to the fish and the fowl for fecundity ("Be fruitful and multiply"; 1:22); to man for fecundity and rule over other living things ("Have dominion"; 1:28); and to the seventh day, not only blessed but separated, hallowed, made holy (2:3). Three blessings: for life, for rule, and for holiness, or as we scholars might say, the natural, the political, the sacred—an ascending order that is imitated in the Torah's unfolding account of human life. The blessing of the fish and fowl is directly quoted; not only are the blessings of the man and woman directly quoted, but God's speech is explicitly said to be addressed to them (verse 28). In contrast, we have only the text's report of the blessing of the seventh day, not the actual words. The seventh day and its holiness are, to begin with, beyond the human realm altogether. A major concern of the subsequent

²² The cycle of seven was not consecutive; the seventh day of a new moon cycle comes either eight days (in a defective, twenty-nine-day month) or nine days (in a full, thirty-day month) after day twenty-eight of the previous lunar month.

biblical teaching will be to bring the human into relation to the holy and the holy into everyday human life. But for now, the holy is altogether mysterious.

The story thus ends, as it began, with mystery capable of inspiring awe. We have seen not only the created order but also the order *as created*, not only the intelligible separations and forms but also the largely mysterious source of form, separation, and intelligibility. We can discern the distinctions in things, but we have not made them separate. Neither have we made that power of mind that registers the articulations of the world and permits us to recognize distinctions. Attentive to this majestic story, addressed not through his trusting eyes but through his respectful ears, the rational man discovers, as the text proclaims, not only that he is godlike but also that he is only an image. Brought by his mindful appreciation of formed order before the mystery of form, order, and mind, the reader must bow his head—as he alone can—to powers greater than human reason. The upright animal, his gaze uplifted and his heart filled with wonder and awe, begins to suspect that he may in fact stand tallest when he freely bows his head. Our moral and spiritual education has begun.

Genesis: The Beginning of Desire

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg

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BERESHIT: The Pivoting Point

The mystery of creation

"We live," writes [the Russian-Jewish existentialist philosopher] Lev Shestov, "surrounded by an endless multitude of mysteries. But no matter how enigmatic may be the mysteries which surround being, what is most enigmatic and disturbing is that mystery in general exists and that we are somehow definitely and forever cut off from the sources and beginnings of life."¹

Bereshit bara Elohim: "In the beginning, God created heaven and earth" (King James translation). Boldly and lucidly, the originating words and acts of God are described. The narrative tells of an ordering and a goodness that shapes all the categories of creation. Smoothly, powerfully, and seamlessly, the text (Genesis 1:1-2, 4), through formal devices of sequence, repetitions of key words, and the leitmotif of "Let there be...and there was..." produces "several theological meanings: that Elohim, alone, 'at the beginning,' created a good ordered world; that He 'separated' and hierarchically ordered the primordial mass into a 'good' pattern; that the created world of nature is, as a result, a harmony; and that Elohim is Omnipotent and without rival."²

The clarity of this account of "the sources and beginnings of life" seems to leave no room for the existential sense of "mystery in general" that Shestov describes. And yet Rashi, the foremost of the traditional commentators on the Torah text, begins his great work with these words: "This text is nothing if not mysterious" (lit., this text says nothing but "Explain me!"). What Rashi claims, in effect, is that the opening sentence tells us nothing about beginnings, nothing about sequence, that it means little more than "When God created heaven and earth..."

The mystery of the beginning is based, for Rashi, on syntax: How does the opening sentence hold together? What is the grammatical form of the very first word? "Bereshit" is the construct form, meaning "In the beginning of God's creation of heaven and earth." Heaven and earth, he argues, were not created first. "You should be ashamed of yourself" if you try to argue that this is a chronological description of the order of creation, for, strangely, the water appears in the second verse with no account of its creation. So the water, it seems, is already there when the account of beginnings begins.

What emerges from Rashi's provocative statement ("The text does not reveal anything regarding the sequential order of creation") is a sense of the gaps, the unexplained, the need to

¹ (Lev Shestov, Athens and Jerusalem (Simon and Schuster: 1968), 75.)

² Michael Fishbane, Text and Texture (Schocken: 1979), 8.

examine and re-examine the apparently lucid text, with its account of a harmonious, coherent cosmology. There is a tension between the benevolent clarity and power of the narrative and the acknowledgment of mystery that inheres in the very first word and that develops as the implications of the beginning are realized.

Primal disintegrations

For six days, the process of creation continues, seen from the viewpoint of God, who speaks, sees, and names His work in its increasing complexity. Essentially, the original binary reality of "heaven and earth" is split into smaller binary, contrasting units: darkness and light, the lower waters and the upper waters, seas and dry land, sun and moon. The act of *havdalah*, "separation," is central. Unlike the other days of creation, which are summed up by reference to their place in sequence—"a second day," "a third day"—the first day is simply "one day": "And there was evening and there was morning, one day." Rashi takes this as a reference to primordial unity. God was alone, *yachid ba'olamo*. The concept of "firstness" would have no relevance to that day; the main business of that day was the radical transformation of reality from the encompassing oneness of God to the possibility of more-than-one.

Even the angels, in Rashi's narrative, are not created until the second day. The angels play a complex and often adversarial role in the midrashic versions of the creation narrative; this culminates in Rashi's classic understanding of God's decision, "Let us make man" (1:26). "We learn of the humility of God from here. Since Man was to be in the likeness of the angels and they would be jealous of him, He consulted them (*nimlakh*)....He asked permission of His court."

The role of the angels is to suggest a "many-ness" of viewpoints, a spectrum of opinions, that God has to convince, placate, ultimately to "receive permission." And what is God's main argument in favor of creating humankind, in Rashi's version? "He said to the angels, 'You exist in the upper worlds after My likeness. If there is to be no one in the lower worlds after My likeness, then there will be jealousy among the works of the beginning.'" In other words, God desires a proliferation of His image in lower as well as upper worlds, a mitigation of His oneness, even, in a sense, of His greatness. God, as it were, submits (*nimlakh* is the passive form of the verb "to be king," "to rule") His greatness and seeks permission from those smaller than He.

This imagery of consultation and proliferation is employed, as Rashi notes, even though its associations are obviously disconcerting to a monotheistic theology. Despite the unwelcome resonances from the discussions and disputations that accompany creation in pagan mythologies, the Torah uses a plural verb to communicate a moral teaching: "In spite of the license given to heretics by this formulation, the text does not restrain itself from teaching the virtue of humility: the great one should consult with, request permission from the small one. For if the text had said, 'Let Me make man,' we should not have learned that He spoke with His angelic court, but merely with Himself."

The text, then, according to Rashi, risks heretical interpretation, in order to make a point of vital importance for human life. The point has to do with the One, the Great One, who begins on Day One alone in the Upper Worlds and then engages in an activity that apparently compromises His Oneness and His Greatness.

From a midrashic perspective it seems that *havdalah*—separation, specialization, the formation of difference and opposition—is generally achieved at some sacrifice. When, for instance, the lower waters are separated from the higher waters on the second day of creation,

the lower waters are described in midrashic sources³ as weeping: "We want to be in the presence of the King." The essential act of this second day is this act of division: "He divided His works into different groups and reigned over them."⁴ From now on, the notion of the sovereignty of God will depend on the differences and many-ness of His subjects. But the idea of separation and difference has a tragic resonance: gone is the primal unity of "God alone in His world." New possibilities, new hazards, open up. The primary image of such separation, the division of the waters and their weeping expresses the yearning of the split-off parts of the cosmos for a primordial condition of unitary being.

With division begins alienation, conflict, and yet, paradoxically, a new notion of divine sovereignty. In this new perspective, God is recognized as King only by that being who is most radically separated from Him. Man, created on the sixth day, is foreshadowed by the splittings and differentiations of matter that begin on the second day; his freedom to perceive and to act is founded on those primal disintegrations.

Nature comes into being

God's will to divide the waters is expressed in the fiat of *yehi*: "God said, Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water....And it was so" (1:6-7). The word of God effectively achieves His will: "Let there be" division, definition. Rashi quotes the Jerusalem Talmud⁵ on the force of this willing word of God—*yehi*—"Let there be...."

"Let there be": Let the separation be strengthened. Even though the heavens had already been created on the first day, they were still liquid. They crystallized on the second day, in response to God's rebuke: "Let there be a separation." This is what is written, "The pillars of heaven tremble, are astounded at His rebuke" [Job, 26:11—my translation]. All that first day, the pillars of heaven [*amudei shamayim*—lit., "that which the heavens stand on"] were trembling, but on the second day, they were astounded at His rebuke, like a man who is stunned and frozen in place [*omed*—"stands still"] under the rebuke of one who intimidates him. (Rashi, 1:6)

The Jerusalem Talmud, Rashi's source, extends the kinetic, tactile basis of the imagery. "Rav said, 'Let there be a separation'—let the separation strengthen, let it crystallize, let it freeze, let it consolidate." "To be" is represented as a sort of jelling process, as the formless liquid primary substance finds its limits in space, solidifies, assumes its proper form. Previously, the waters are described in Rashi's prooftext from Job as "trembling" (*y'rofefu*). Ibn Ezra traces the root to two sources, one denoting weakness, the other movement. In the primary state of unachieved being, there is a slackness, an uncontrolled motion. (See Ralbag's comment, too: "They move and they shudder" [Job 26:11].) In midrashic language, the root, *rofef*, is used to describe the failure of milk to curdle—it quivers⁶; the form, *rifref*, indicates a fluttering, vacillating mode.⁷ To come into real being is to be strengthened, hardened into specific form: "They stood in dryness and strength—like a man who is astounded and stands [*omed*] in one place" (Rashi, Job 26:11).

³ Bereshit Rabbah 5:3. Other sources are quoted in the commentary of Rabbenu Bahya on Leviticus 2:13. R. Hutner bases a discussion of the problematics of human free choice on this midrash (Pachad Yitzchak, Rosh Hashanah 13:1).

⁴ BT Rosh Hashanah 31a: "The Psalm assigned to the second day of the week is Psalm 48, beginning, 'The Lord is great and much acclaimed,' because on the second day He divided up His works and reigned over them."

⁵ JT Berakhot 1:5.

⁶ E.g., Va-yikra Rabbah 14:9.

⁷ E.g., Bereshit Rabbah 20:17: "The woman in childbirth vacillates about the costs of her sexual role; she therefore is obligated to bring a 'fluttering' sacrifice [birds]!"

Finding one place to stand: this is Rashi's definition of being. As we have seen, the midrash insists that this is not achieved without tears. Being is achieved in the cosmos by the power and terror of God's word; "Let there be...." A kind of fascination takes hold of the waters: necessity constrains them. They must be.

What I have called the jelling process in the creation of the heavens continues in the rest of Rashi's account. The waters are "suspended in the air" above the expanse—they "depend on the word of the King" (Rashi, Genesis 1:7). This is the consummation of God's making (*asiyah*); Rashi defines *asiyah* here as *tikno al omdo*—He fixed, completed it in its position (*al omdo*—lit., on its stand). This stage of creation is definitively completed only on the third day, with the movement and containment of the lower waters and the exposure of dry land. Only then, Rashi remarks, can God see "goodness": the unfinished, that which has not achieved full being, cannot be called "good."

The model of coming-to-be that is suggested by Rashi's commentary here pictures a primary fluid stage, followed by the transformative thrill of God's word. There is a firming, a finding of proper place, a new density and rigor. The effect of God's word is constraint. We are close to the notion of Necessity, as Aristotle understood it. "Cry halt before Necessity"—*Ananke stenai*. Nature cannot argue with the word of God. "Necessity does not allow itself to be persuaded."⁸ Natural phenomena can only freeze into place, assume their necessary posture in space.

The belfry daydream

Kenneth Burke suggests that the six days of creation may be considered as six major classifications of reality.⁹ The narrative translates these classifications into terms of temporal sequence. Man comes last, not merely in temporal terms: he culminates, he dominates. These are the terms in which he is conceived by God: "Let us make man, in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on the earth" (1:26). God's first words, when He blesses man, are: "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on the earth" (1:28). Man is to rule, to dominate all categories of created reality, even those that he cannot physically control—that is, creatures of the sea and the air, who do not share his habitat. He is to evolve strategies to overcome physical barriers and make himself master of nature.¹⁰

What does share his natural habitat—all animal life on earth—is described as crawling (*romessef*). This is rather an unexpected use of the term, which had answered previously to one specific form of animal life—small, swarming creatures of water, air, and land (1:21, 24, 25). The related term *sheretz* is defined by Rashi as "any living being that is not higher than the ground—like flies, ants, beetles, worms, rats, mice and all fish" (1:20). Rashi's definition seems to consist of the height criterion only. Yet a few lines later, he adds another factor, to define *remess*: "insects that are low, crawling on the ground, and look as though they are being dragged, because their movement is not clearly perceived" (1:24). There is a quality of movement that characterizes the *remess-sheretz*, as well as a quality of height—"not higher than the earth." This is an unwilling, unindividuated movement—these creatures move in crowds, driven by instinct. They wheel and swerve in a way that is perceived by man as irrational. The word

⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1015a, 32.

⁹ Kenneth Burke, "The First Three Chapters of Genesis: Principles of Governance Stated Narratively," in *Genesis: Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. Harold Bloom (Chelsea House: 1986), 17.

¹⁰ See Ramban and Radak on 1:28.

remess is strangely used, then, to describe all animal life on earth. It is as though Man is conceived of as towering physically over all animal life.

This conception, which is inherent in the blessing of domination, is figured by an image of verticality. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard, the French philosopher of art, writes of what he calls "belfry daydreams," in which one watches others "running about . . . irrationally, like ants...the size of flies." This is a "dream of high solitude"; the dreamer enjoys "an impression of domination at little cost.... From the top of his tower, a philosopher of domination sees the universe in miniature. Everything is small because he is so high. And since he is high, he is great, the height of his station is proof of his own greatness."¹¹

The insistence of the Creation narrative on man as vertical (high, therefore great) comes always in a context of horizontal spread: "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule" (1:28).¹² The blessing of fertility, the instinct of what Elias Canetti calls the "increase pack" ("to be more"), is first given to fish, fowl, and animal life (1:22; 8:17). To proliferate is, in a sense, the *sheretz* modality, as Ramban, following on the Targum, translates the term (1:20). Here is Canetti's account of the phenomenology of the increase pack:

Characteristic of the pack is the fact that it cannot grow. It is surrounded by emptiness and there are literally no additional people who could join it. It consists of a group of men in a state of excitement whose fiercest wish is to be more....Density within the pack is always something of an illusion. Men may press closely together and enact a multitude in traditional rhythmic movements, but they are not a multitude; they are a few, and have to make up in intensity what they lack in actual numbers.¹³

Canetti's reading of the pack phenomenon is informed by the despair and vulnerability of the few fevered by the desire to be more. When God blesses Adam and Eve, or commands Noah and his few survivors after the Flood, the imperative of density—"to be more"—is poignantly recognized: "Fill the earth....abound on the earth [lit., swarm] and increase on it" (9:7). Surrounded by emptiness, man seeks the animal faculty of increase. What man is blessed-commanded to do is not simply to propagate; the process is one, in Canetti's terms, of transformation:

Early man, roaming about in small bands through large and often empty spaces, was confronted by a preponderance of animals....Many of them existed in enormous numbers. Whether it was herds of buffaloes or springboks, shoals of fish, or swarms of locusts, bees or ants, their numbers rendered those of man insignificant.

For the progeny of man is sparse, coming singly and taking a long time to arrive. The desire to be more, for the number of people to whom one belongs to be larger, must always have been profound and urgent, and must, moreover, have been growing stronger all the time....Man's weakness lay in the smallness of his numbers....In the enormously long period of the time during which he lived in small groups, he, as it were, incorporated into

¹¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Beacon Press: 1969), 173.

¹² See 9:1-2, 6-7: "God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, 'Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the birds of the sky—everything with which the earth is astir [*tirmoss*]—and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hand....Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; For in His image, did God make man. Be fertile, then, and increase; abound [*shirtzu*] on the earth and increase on it.'" The Rabbis (see Rashi, 9:6) define this as both a blessing and a commandment—the imperative of "*après le deluge*." Even the word *sheretz*, with its specifically reptilian quality, is now incorporated into the imperative of human fertility. But here, too, the proliferation motif is set beside the motif of man's godlikeness.

¹³ Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (Penguin: 1973), 109.

himself, by transformations, all the animals he knew. It was through the development of transformation that he really became man; it was his specific gift and pleasure.¹⁴

Canetti goes on to discuss the rites of the Australian aborigines, whose ancestors are treated as having a dual nature, both animal and human at once. Each ancestor embodies a particular animal as part of his being. These Canetti sees as products of transformation. A successful and established transformation became a kind of endowment: it signified a connection with the *numbers* of the animals incorporated into the human identity. Man desired the increase of the animals, since they were connected with man: "When they increased, he also increased; the increase of the totem animal was identical with his own." Plants, as well as animals, even insects, scorpions, lice, flies or mosquitoes can be designated as a totem: "it can only be their immense number which attracts them; in establishing a relationship with them he means to ensure their numbers for himself."¹⁵

Canetti's model of the increase pack and the process of "transformation" that achieves the desired animal numerousness provides us with a way of reading the connection in the Creation narrative between increase and domination. For man is told in the same breath that he is to proliferate and to rule. His motion is to be swarmlike, horizontal, attached to the earth, and to necessity, blindly following the instinct to be more, to fill the emptiness; and, equally, it is to be Godlike, concentrated, vertical, affirming an all encompassing vision of the world. As in the belfry daydream described by Bachelard, part of the human experience is the "dream of high solitude....From the top of his tower, a philosopher of domination sees the universe in miniature."¹⁶

The vertical and the horizontal

Here is an essential paradox of the human, as God conceives, blesses, and commands His culminating creation: he is to live on the horizontal and vertical plane at once. He is to transform himself into a creature preoccupied with swarming, proliferation, incorporating the strength of the animal world. He is at the same time to rule, to conquer. Rashi's comment here is evocative: the word for "rule," *ve-yirdu*, can be read as a play on the alternative meanings of "rule" and "descent." "If he merits, he will dominate [*rodeh*] the animal world, if he does not merit, he will become low (*yarood*) before them and they will dominate him" (1:26). The necessity for a kind of philosophical detachment, the solitude of higher and larger perspectives, creates an implicit tension with the imperative blessing of increase. To spread over the earth, to fill the earth, to know the urgent rhythmic passion of increase is to be invested in the immediate, the experienced, the contingent.

It is in these terms that we can read God's final statement of disappointment at the outcome of the human creature:

When men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, the divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives among those that pleased them. The Lord said, "My breath shall not abide in man forever, since he too is flesh; let the days allowed him be one hundred and twenty years." It was then, and later, too, that the Nephilim appeared on earth—when the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown. (6:1-4)

¹⁴ Ibid., 126.

¹⁵ Ibid., 128-29.

¹⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 173.

Here are the themes of giant size and increase over the face of the earth. But some essential misarticulation affects these two modalities. In the midrashic accounts, the Nephilim are giants who wear the sun around their necks,¹⁷ their heads disappear into the heavens, they command the rainfall—and, in accordance with their name, they "fall and bring the world down with them" (Rashi, 6:4). The monstrous excess of the vertical leads to a shattering destruction.

Many centuries later, as the Israelites roam the wilderness, they send spies to the Holy Land. The spies return with eyewitness reports of giants: "All the people that we saw in it are men of great size; we saw the Nephilim there—the Anakites are part of the Nephilim—and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so we must have looked to them" (Numbers 13:32—33). There, too, the two modalities are disastrously polarized. The spies are filled with awe before the invulnerable, the vertical; they sense themselves as humiliated at their own grasshopper dimensions, their *sheretz* reality.¹⁸ This splitting-off, the incapacity to bear the tension of their own equivocal existence, leads to a real despair, an acceptance of the lowest human profile—"And so we were in their eyes" (Numbers 13:33). The spies see themselves reflected in the eyes of the fantasy giants: an intimate vision of self is corroborated at every turn.

The catastrophe of the narrative of the spies is conveyed through the imagery of "falling." They complain of a destiny, in which any claim to vertical stature will be doomed ("Why is the Lord taking us to that land to fall by the sword?" [Numbers 14:3]). Moses "falls on his face" (Numbers 14:5) in despair. And God decrees, "In this very wilderness shall your carcasses drop....But your carcasses shall drop in the wilderness . . . until the last of your carcasses is down in the wilderness" (14:29, 32, 33). In the words of *Midrash Y'lamdenu*: "The spies fell to the ground [in hysterical fits]—they would stand on their feet and make themselves collapse in front of their families" (14:3).

The narrative of the spies is one of failure to contain a radical tension. The vertical being is assailed by the vertigo of his dual nature. His origin and ultimate destiny are in the earth, the issues of fertility, increase, and survival dominate his experience. And yet he knows himself invested with a singular Godlike power. From his vantage point, he can see immense perspectives, come to conclusions far beyond the contingencies of the moment; yet he is a participant in the driven, spawning multitudes he can observe so splendidly from his metaphysical solitude.

This is the essential dilemma of man, as God conceives of him, blesses him, and charges him with imperative of his duality. How to deal with the unthinking conformity of the increase pack, the vision of men as "bugs, spawn, as a mob"? These are Emerson's terms, in *Self-Reliance*, which Stanley Cavell calls a "study of shame": "How do we, as Emerson puts it, 'come out' of that? How do we become self-reliant? The worst thing we could do is rely on ourselves as we stand—this is simply to be slaves of our slavishness: it is what makes us spawn. We must...transform our conformity."¹⁹

The problem is implicit in the blessing: we are to spawn, and we are to rise upwards. Hamlet has his tortured view of the dilemma: "Get thee to a nunnery! Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were

¹⁷ Bereshit Rabbah, 26:16; BT Sotah 34b.

¹⁸ Ibn Ezra explains the name Nephilim as a reference to the dejection (the "fallen heart") experienced by those who are dumbfounded at their stature.

¹⁹ Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (University of Chicago Press: 1990), 47.

better my mother had not borne me....What should such fellows as I do, crawling between earth and heaven?"²⁰

To breed, to crawl, these are the acts of the *sheretz*. At one pole of failure, the midrash imagines men as grasshoppers, who compulsively "climb up and fall back down" into their jar, are incapable of learning from experience.²¹ To be trapped in the reality of "crawling between earth and heaven" is to be doomed to repeat irrational patterns of the pack, the rhythmic movements generated by the blind urge simply "to be more." And, on the other hand, there is the "terror of standing upright," which Kafka describes in one of his letters to Felice, responding to a dream of hers: "Had you not been lying on the ground among the animals, you would have been unable to see the sky and the stars and wouldn't have been set free. Perhaps you wouldn't have survived the terror of standing upright. I feel much the same; it is a mutual dream you have dreamed for us both."²² There is a violence, even a guilt, inherent in the posture of greatness, of power. Kafka expresses the dream conviction that to lower one's profile is to preserve innocence and, perhaps, even to see more of the sky.

Greatness and procreativity

The paradox of the vertical and the horizontal is fleshed out in the midrashic narratives of Creation. Two things are called "great" in the Biblical text: the lights ("God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars" [1:16]) and the great sea monsters (1:21). The lights are great, and they dominate: the two concepts clearly cohere. But in both cases, the lights and the sea monsters, the midrash opens up tantalizing perspectives on the problematics of greatness.

Responding to the apparent textual contradiction—both lights are great? Only one is great?—and the defective spelling of *me'orot* (lights), the midrash deciphers a hidden narrative: "They were created equal, but the moon was diminished, because she complained, 'It is impossible for two kings to wear one crown.'" (Rashi, 1:16) The moon knows that inherent in the idea of greatness is singularity. Two cannot be called great, since to be great is by definition to dominate, to loom over, to see a world from a unique perspective. In Rashi's source, therefore, God tells the moon, "Diminish yourself."²³ Here is a voluntary act of self-diminishing, an acceptance of the small rather than the great role, which is compensated for by the many hosts of stars that will now accompany the moon.

Maharal, in fact, offers an arresting reading of "diminishment": the moon becomes, not smaller, but a being capable of waning—to the point where the sun remains truly alone—that is, truly great—in the sky.²⁴ The moon yields up her eternal and transcendent being and accepts a role of contingency, mutability, and proliferation. There is a powerful suggestion of a relation between greatness and solitude, on the one hand, and smallness and increase, on the other. The moon experiences both loss and gain.

The sea monsters, too, are great; they, too, are spelled defectively (the plural indication lacks a *yod*). This is Rashi's version of the midrashic tradition: "This is the Leviathan and its mate. God created them male and female, and killed the female and salted it away for the righteous in the world to come. For if they had been fertile and increased, the world could not have survived

²⁰ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, i, 121-29.

²¹ Tanchuma, Noah, 18.

²² Quoted in Elias Canetti, *Kafka's Other Trial* (Penguin: 1982), 68.

²³ BT Chulin 60a.

²⁴ Gur Arye, 1:16.

in their presence" (1:21). (In the midrashic source, the male Leviathan is castrated to ensure that its destructive powers of procreation—or even of sexual relations—are totally neutralized).²⁵

In this extraordinary midrash, what commands our attention once again is the theme of greatness and solitude. To have a partner, while remaining in the mode of greatness, is an existential impossibility. The world as we know it would cease to exist. Only in the world-to-come, in a different (and presumably richer) version of reality can the righteous flourish on the free play of greatness and procreateness.

The problem of man

All this is a preamble to the problem of man. Although he is to dominate creation, Man is not called "great," because he is, from the very outset, to be many. ("Be fertile and increase...." [1:28].) Yet there is ambiguity in the account of his origins. He was formed from the clay of dust and water, of earth and heaven, in one whole "image of God"; yet immediately, he is described as a plural being: "And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (1:27).²⁶ The narrative later describes the removal of one of his ribs to make woman. And the midrash, in Rashi's version, resolves the question of unity and duality in one striking image: "God created him first with two faces, and separated them" (1:27).

One of Rashi's sources narrates a previous stage of the process, which Rashi does not quote: "At first, God intended to create two separate beings, but in the end man was created as one being."²⁷ God's first thought represents an ideal reality. The decision to create man as one androgynous being ("in the image of God He created him") then seems inscrutable, especially since there is an almost immediate return to the original plan: man is split into the two entities of God's first intention ("male and female He created them"). The splitting-off is prefaced by a thought of God: a soliloquy—perhaps the first "God said" that has no direct effect on reality. God thinks: "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him" (2:18). Rashi comments: "So that people should not say, 'There are two powers; God is alone in the upper worlds, and has no partner, and this one is in the lower worlds, without a partner.'"

The association of aloneness with power, greatness, is clear here. To have a *ben zug*, an equivalent Other, with whom one must reckon, who limits the grandeur of one's solitude, with whom one speaks and struggles and brings offspring into the world—all this is the very definition of the not Godly, the not great. One who has a *ben zug* is yoked to contingency, lives on the horizontal plane, whose blessing and imperative is increase.

God is without a *ben zug*; angels are not fertile and do not increase—unlike men, animals, and demons (who share also the facts that they eat, drink, defecate, and die!)²⁸; the Leviathan is deprived, for the duration of present time, of his partner; the Sabbath has no *ben zug*, and complains as the other days of the week pair themselves off—in the end, God matches her, matchless as she is, with Israel; the tribe of Dan is described as a lonely, independent warrior—"as one of the tribes of Israel" (49:16): "like the solitary One of Israel who needs no help in war," and his emblem is the snake, who goes alone: "All the beasts walk in pairs, while the snake travels alone."²⁹ "God said to Israel, All that I have created, I created in pairs: heaven and earth,

²⁵ BT Baba Batra 74b. See also Gur Arye on 1:21.

²⁶ See, too, 5:1-2.

²⁷ BT Ketubot 8a. See also BT Berakhot 61a and BT Eruvin 18b.

²⁸ BT Chagiga 16a.

²⁹ Bereshit Rabbah, 99:12.

the sun and the moon, Adam and Eve, this world and the next. But My glory is One and unmatched in the world."³⁰

In view of all this, man's aloneness is "not good": it lends itself to a misconception about the nature of man. What he requires is a "fitting helper." This arresting description (lit., a help against him) draws an equally arresting comment from Ramban: it was important to realize man as two matched creatures, rather than as one androgynous being (even if he were capable of procreation), because "God saw that it was good that his helpmate should stand in front of him [*kenegdo*, translated here as "fitting," has confrontational implications], so that he may see her, and separate from her, and unite with her, according to his will" (Ramban, 2:18). For Ramban, man as alone and autonomous is "not good," because he would live a static, unchanging, and unwilling life. Man needs to live face-to-face with the Other, dancing to the choreography of his own freedom.

The splitting-off of man is, however, achieved not by the pure word of God. This remains "private," a reminder to the reader that God's original idea of the human good has not yet been implemented. It is achieved only when man himself comes to recognize the pains of solitude. Only after he has named the animals does the text insert into Adam's consciousness the search for the Other: "And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found" (2:20). Who was it who sought and could not find? The midrash fills the gap. Rashi says, "When God brought the animals to Adam, He brought each species in pairs, male and female. Adam said, They all have a *ben zug*, a partner. Only I have no partner. Immediately, he fell asleep."

The powerful implication here is that God's original intention can be consummated only by Adam's free perception and desire. Only when Adam comes to feel the solitude of the angelic, unitary existence is he split into two separate beings. He must, in a sense, diminish himself, come to know the rightness of a more complex form of unity. That is, God sets aside His original vision, creates man alone and great, complete in himself—a plausible version of the human reality, but one that will be undermined by the restless experience of "he could not find a fitting help" (literal translation of *lo matza*). "Not to find" is the purpose of man's lone creation. He knows in his pain and searching both that "For my sake the whole world was created"³¹—he dreams of belfries, and of "monuments of unaging intellect"—and that his humanity requires the "sensual music"³² of horizontal relationship, the fusing and parting, the changing reflections of face meeting face.

Man's greatness, therefore, his creation in the image of God, his dominating the sensual swarming landscape, locks in an inescapable tension with his participation in that world of proliferation and change, of waxing and waning. He is attached to two mutually exclusive ways of being, called in the shorthand of the midrash "the upper worlds" and "the lower worlds."

In his creation, for the first time, the word *vayyitzer* is used—"He formed man from the dust of the earth" (2:7). The doubling of the yod in *vayyitzer* suggests the surplus of possible meanings and identifications that man is endowed with. Unlike the cattle, which "do not stand to be judged" (Rashi, 2:7)—that is, which are not accountable for the choices and conflicts inherent in a paradoxical existence—man is formed both of the dust of the whole earth (the four corners of the earth), so that he will be accepted for burial in whatever part of the globe he dies, and of the dust of the sacred center, Jerusalem: "God took his dust from the place of which it is said, 'You

³⁰ Devarim Rabbah 2:22.

³¹ BT Sanhedrin 37a.

³² W. B. Yeats, *Sailing to Byzantium*.

shall make an altar of earth for Me—I wish that he may gain atonement, and that he may be able to stand" (Rashi, 2:7).

There is a striking pathos in God's wish for man: "Halevai!—Would that it might be so!" The difficulty of man's situation is focused here: the material of his body (only at the next stage, God animates him with His spirit-breath) comes both from the four corners of the earth, from all the instincts and processes of the horizontal, from the dust into which he will disappear, and from the place of unity, the sacred spot of original creation, the *axis mundi*, where this world intersects with the higher worlds. There is an "opposition between space that is sacred—the only real and really existing space—and all other space, the formless expanse surrounding it."³³ And man, in the midrashic view, is the meeting point of the two kinds of dust, of the one and the many.

The Talmud puns on the agony of the dilemma: "Woe to me, because of the One who formed me [*yotzri*]! Woe to me, because of my unruly desires [*yitzri*]!"³⁴ In the very fibers of his being, he belongs to both dimensions at once.

Kafka expresses a similar torment of irresolubility:

He is a free and secure citizen of the world, for he is fettered to a chain which is long enough to give him the freedom of all earthly space, and only so long that nothing can drag him past the frontiers of the world. But simultaneously he is a free and secure citizen of Heaven as well, for he is also fettered by a similarly designed heavenly chain. So that if he heads, say, for the earth, his heavenly collar throttles him, and if he heads for Heaven, his earthly one does the same. And yet all the possibilities are his, and he feels it; more, he actually refuses to account for the deadlock by an error in the original fettering.³⁵

Man is chained to incompatible universes of being; and yet within his chains he feels unaccountably that all the possibilities are his. There is no error; yet he cannot live comfortably in either heaven or earth, while he is a "free and secure citizen" of both.

The hands of God

The two sources for human dust are given, in Rashi's version, as alternatives. But, in a source midrash, the two are aligned into one narrative: in the first hour of the sixth day of creation, God gathered dust for man; in the second hour, He molded him in a pure place, at the very umbilicus of the world, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.³⁶ That is, man has his origins in both kinds of space, in the dust of the Many and the One.

But here it is the image of molding man that is arresting. Man alone in creation is described as formed out of a clammy combination of earth and water. "A flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth" (2:6). Rashi comments: "For the purpose of creating man, the depths released a vapor that seeded the clouds and moistened the dust, so that man was created—like this baker, who adds water to his dough and then kneads it! So here, first there was a moistening and then, 'God formed man.'"

The audacity of the image is reinforced by another comment of Rashi: "'And God created man in His image': Everything else was created by an act of speech; only man was created with the hands of God, as it is said, 'You placed Your hands upon me" (Psalms 139:5) (1:27).

³³ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trusk (Harvest: 1959), 20.

³⁴ BT Berakhot 61a.

³⁵ Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes* (Schocken: 1975), 31.

³⁶ *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, chap. 11.

There is an imagining here that cannot be glibly dismissed under the rubric of anthropomorphism. What does it mean, to be created by the hands of God, rather than by His word—"Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water"? Man comes to be differently, it seems. Even before God breathes the breath of life into him, the circumstances of his physical making are radically different. It is no longer a matter of the water's swarming spontaneously with new life (1:20), or of the earth's "bringing forth" animal life (1:24), in response to God's word, "Let it be...."³⁷ As we noticed before, the creative fiat induces a spasm of realization of new forms in the rest of nature. There, God's word is all-powerful: it constrains chaotic possibilities into the desired shape and posture. In such a hegemony of the word, it would be absurd to conceive of rebellion, or even of dialogue: "Necessity does not allow itself to be persuaded."³⁸

Quite different is the imagery of the potter and his clay (or the baker and his dough). For here, the midrash dares to make a statement about the Frankensteinian nature of all creation. True, the potter has total control of his material. As in the famous image in Jeremiah 18, "if the vessel he was making with clay in the potter's hands was spoiled, he would make it into another vessel, such as the potter saw fit to make" (18:4). Like God, the potter "sees" and "makes." But there is another truth in the relationship of potter and clay:

Then the word of the Lord came to me: O House of Israel, can I not deal with you like this potter? says the Lord. Just like clay in the hands of the potter, so are you in My hands, O House of Israel! At one moment I may decree that a nation or a kingdom shall be uprooted and pulled down and destroyed; but if that nation against which I made the decree turns back from its wickedness, I change My mind [*venichamti*] concerning the punishment I planned to bring on it. At another moment I may decree that a nation or a kingdom shall be built and planted; but if it does what is displeasing to Me and does not obey Me, then I change My mind [*venichamti*] concerning the good I planned to bestow upon it. (Jeremiah 18:5-10)

Here is surprise, rather than the inevitability of God's power. In all creative work (the word *la'asot*, "to make," is central in this passage), there is play between the artist and his material. The characters of the novel begin to talk back, to declare their own reality and destiny. Thomas Mann intended his Joseph cycle to be a short story: it grew into a long novel that took ten years to complete. Edward Hopper says that for him painting is about a vision, yet when he makes a painting he reluctantly surrenders the vision to what he has made.³⁹ Erich Neumann writes of the "autonomy of the unconscious": the artist lives within the tension created by his consciousness and the unconscious that "often breaks through with a 'will of its own,' which by no means coincides with the will of the artist."⁴⁰ This tension in the experience of the creative person is precisely evoked by the passage in Jeremiah, and by the midrashic image of the baker kneading his dough. For God indeed "diminishes" His solitude and His power in order to create man. He responds to man's autonomous motions, to his "turning back," with a "change of mind":

the spirit of re-creation which masters this earthly form
loves most the pivoting point where you are no longer yourself.⁴¹

³⁷ See *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, 11, note 38 (Radal).

³⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1015a, 32.

³⁹ *New Yorker*, 17 December 1990, 48.

⁴⁰ Erich Neumann, *Art and the Creative Unconscious* (Princeton University Press: 1973), 193.

⁴¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (Touchstone: 1986), 95.

Ambiguities of independence

In the Creation narrative, God "changes His mind" about the work of His hands—and destroys the world. Just before the Flood, "the Lord regretted [*va-yenachem*] that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened" (6:6). The anthropomorphism here is most poignant: but it is an organic outgrowth of the imagery of the artist, who projects but cannot control this one part of his work that is made *ba-yadayim*—"with His hands." Rashi's comment makes the connection clear. What is the meaning of *va-yitatzev* (translated here as "He was saddened")? "He mourned the loss of the work of His hands." There is a relation of the hands to the work, which is the contrary of everything abstract and detached. It is the relation of loving involvement, the mutual vulnerability to surprise and failure, the power and the risk of making.

When Adam sins, God's response, according to the midrash, is not verbal; rather "He laid His hand upon him and diminished him."⁴² God "mourns for the loss of the work of His hands." Rashi's translation of *vayitatzev* (6:6) is precisely related to the meanings that Rashi attributes to the word *etzev* (translated here as "sadness") where it first appears, in God's response to Eve's sin: "I will make most severe your pangs in childbearing [*itzvonekh*]" (3:16). Rashi veers away from this obvious meaning of *itzavon* ("pain of childbearing") and quotes the Talmud: "This refers to the pain of bringing up children."⁴³

One might say that the difficulty in rearing children has to do with the ambiguities of independence. The child must separate from the parent; the parent must allow the child to discover his or her own reality. Where there was one, there must be two. But this separation, though necessary, is a complex and often tormented experience. The relationship between separation and loving attachment has to be negotiated each time afresh. There is no theory that can totally guide the parent or the artist. No belfry can house this kind of experience. In the act of creation, there is perhaps inevitable sadness, as the work works itself loose from the vision.⁴⁴

The original verb, *vayyitzer*—"And He formed [man]" (2:7)—expresses this mystery of formation, of transformation. Wherever hands are involved, wherever there are "*les traces des mains*," even in the kneading of dough, there is the surprise of becoming: the viscous mixture of flour and water becomes the fragrant loaf of bread, the clay of dust and water becomes man. And it is this mystery, of how man becomes real, that is central to the midrashic vision of the narrative.

Standing upright

At this point, I would like to quote a passage from *Nine Talmudic Readings*, by Emmanuel Levinas. He describes his approach to those rabbinical sources in which the psychology and intentionality of God are central.

⁴² BT Sanhedrin 38b.

⁴³ BT Eruvin 100b.

⁴⁴ The word *etzev* occurs again in this early part of the biblical narrative, when Adam is punished: "Cursed be the ground because of you; by toil [*beitzavon*] shall you eat of it" (3:17). Rashi's comment stresses the unpredictable, willful nature of the earth's response to man's curse. Man will be compelled by necessity to accept the "thorns and thistles" that the earth will offer him, after he has invested his best resources in it. This doom is reflected again later, when Noah is born, and there is new hope for "relief from our work and for the toil [*itz'von*] of our hands, out of the very soil which the Lord placed under a curse" (5:29). There, again, Rashi reiterates his theme of *itzavon* as the frustration of the worker who sows wheat and reaps thorns and thistles. There, *itzavon* is clearly associated with the "hands-on" involvement and risks that are confronted by creativity.

My effort always consists in extricating from this theological language meanings addressing themselves to reason....[This] consists, first of all, in a mistrust of everything in the texts studied that could pass for a piece of information about God's life, for a theosophy; it consists in being preoccupied, in the face of each of these apparent news items about the beyond, with what this information can mean in and for man's life.⁴⁵

If we are to speak of God's sadness, of His restraint in listening to and observing the freedom of man, of His frustration and sense of mourning, and, above all, if we are to unpack the imagery of God's hands, making and unmaking, molding and reducing man, then our effort will be toward an understanding of what this "can mean in and for man's life." Man knows himself created and freed from constraint. He feels himself as full of possibilities, and yet mysteriously cross-chained. He has had God's hands upon him; they created him whole, and he struggles to free himself from their total hold.

Like the child, like the vessel, he must find a space of separateness, in order to be; but to separate from God is to cut the ground of being from under his feet. For however one understands the nature of the sin that turns Adam and Eve out of Eden, its effect is to undermine their standing in the world. The tension between the vertical and the horizontal was once successfully accommodated by Adam and Eve. They could hold their ground in the presence of God. This, essentially, is the meaning of being—*kiyyum*: to rise up (*la-koom*), to be tall (*koma zekufa*) in the presence of God. To be banished from the Garden is to lose a particular standing ground.

To be banished, as Cain is later much more totally banished, is to have the earth cursed under one's feet: "You have banished me this day from the soil, and I must avoid Your presence and become a restless wanderer on earth" (4:14). Cain's connection with the earth is disrupted. Ramban emphasizes that restlessness is an inner quality of Cain's being, an essential character of his "curse": "His heart will not rest nor be quiet enough to stand in one place." Cain's protest focuses on this subjective torment: "Since I am to be a restless wanderer, I cannot stand in one place—that is what banishment from the soil means—I have no place of rest. 'And I must avoid Your presence'—for I cannot stand before You to pray." In Ramban's reading, prayer, or sacrifice, is a profound expression of the existential stance of man-in-the-presence-of-God, able to hold ground and rise vertically, between earth and heaven.

In this context, the motif of Adam's "standing" acquires great resonance in midrashic sources. One of the essential stages of his creation, which is charted over the course of the hours of the sixth day, is when God "stood him on his legs."⁴⁶ This is Adam's first experience, after God has filled him with the breath of life—an experience of "standing on his legs":

He looked upwards and downwards, and his stature [*komato*] extended from one end of the world to the other...and he saw all God's creatures. He began to glorify his Creator's name, saying, "How many are Your works, O God!" He stood on his legs and looked like one made in the image of God. The creatures saw him and were afraid, thinking that he had created them. So they all came to worship him. He said to them: "You have come to worship me. Come, you and I, let us go and put on clothing of majesty and strength and make Him King over us, who created us all." So then Adam went by himself and was the first to make God King. And all the creatures followed him, while he said, "God reigns: He is clothed in majesty." (Psalms 93:1)

The imagery in this passage is potent with paradox. Adam stands on his legs; and his stature (*komato*—as in English, the words "stature" and "stand," are related) extends from one end of

⁴⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Indiana University Press: 1990), 14.

⁴⁶ Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, 11. There is a number of different versions of the timetable of the sixth day—see, for instance, BT Sanhedrin 38b.

the world to the other. Because of his height, he can see both vertically and horizontally, to the full extent of empirical reality. There is, in fact, an ambiguity about the "end-to-end" image: whether it indicates a horizontal grasp of the world or an earth-heaven range.⁴⁷ But clearly, Adam is depicted as possessing both powers, and the meaning of his stature is that he can see to the full extent of both planes, the vertical and the horizontal. That is, unlike Kafka's dreamer, lying on the ground in a refusal of the erect position (the "terror of standing upright"), Adam occupies a vantage point from which he sees not only the stars, but all created beings on earth. He can see downwards as well as upwards, he is rooted in a reality which he can perceive and map.

Nothing is said to indicate that he sees the animals as minuscule, but clearly they see him as awesome in his verticality. They assume, indeed, that he is their creator. That is, man knows himself as conspicuous, self-conscious, not an indigenous part of the world of nature. There is danger and fear in the loneliness of this position, the hazard of hubris. For what the animals perceive is something truly Godlike. In standing, he is the equivalent, in the lower world, of the angels. Sardonicly, Canetti writes: "We always overrate the man who stands upright... Because standing is...the antecedent of all motion, a standing man creates an impression of energy which is as yet unused."⁴⁸ The reserves of possibility signified by the standing position may be something of an illusion, Canetti suggests. We see Adam's godlikeness, here, from the viewpoint of the adoring animals.

But the authentic greatness of Adam emerges in his response. He abandons his belfry grandeur and proclaims a common identity with the animals as created beings who owe adoration to an invisible Creator. And he does this in no obsequious humility but in a paradoxical perception that "to stand in the presence of God" is precisely to achieve full "majesty and strength." In voluntary acknowledgment, firstly of the vast gamut of created life ("How many are Your works, O God!") and then of the ultimate coherence under God of this "pied beauty," Adam becomes most Godlike. He makes common cause with the animals (lit., I and you, let us go put on majesty), but he, in fact, goes first and alone.

The paradox consists of Adam's diminishing himself—surrendering a speciously Godlike role and assuming an authentic one. The paradigm for this is the enigmatic rabbinic statement: "Wherever you find the greatness of God, there you find His humility."⁴⁹ Power and humility are both implicit in this vision of Adam standing in the presence of God: "man in his wholeness wholly attending."

This is a posture that he does not hold for long, however. It is striking that midrashic accounts of the sin that deforms his posture are so often cast in the imagery of the "incapacity to stand." We have already noticed the wistful tone of God's wish: Halevai—"Would that he might be created from the place of the altar and have standing."⁵⁰ Before the sin, Adam could "hear God speaking and stand on his legs...he could withstand it."⁵¹ After the sin, he hides; the midrash imagines Adam and Eve as shrinking, essentially pretending not to be.⁵² In another midrash, God says, "Woe Adam! Could you not stand in your commandment for even one hour? Look at

⁴⁷ BT Sanhedrin 38b.

⁴⁸ Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 451.

⁴⁹ BT Megilla 31a.

⁵⁰ JT Nazir 7:2.

⁵¹ Bamidbar Rabbah 11.

⁵² Bereshit Rabbah 19:16.

your children who can wait three years for the fruit tree to pass its forbidden stage [*orlah*]."⁵³ This is a strange analogy: the capacity to wait seems to be the issue here, to hold ground, in spite of tensions of various kinds.

Another version of the same image is found in *Shemot Rabbah*. God reproaches the Israelites after the sin of the Golden Calf: like Adam, the people were destined to live for ever, but "when they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel!,' death came upon them. God said, 'You have followed the system of Adam, who did not stand the pressure of his testing for three hours....' 'I said, "You are gods...." But you went in the ways of Adam,' so 'indeed like Adam you shall die. And like one of the princes you shall fall' (Psalms 82:6-7)—you have brought yourselves low."⁵⁴

The midrash uses the imagery of the Fall, with a perfect consistency. The sin, as such, is not mentioned. Instead, what Adam, and again the Israelites, represents is a kind of spinelessness, a vapidity. A splendid being decomposes before our eyes. The word that is used in Sanhedrin 38b to describe the sin is *sarakh*, which implies exactly this aesthetic offensiveness: it holds nuances of evaporation, loss of substance, and the offensive odor of mortification. "O my offense is rank, it smells to heaven."⁵⁵ It signifies a failure to stand in the presence of God, to maintain the posture of eternal life. "You have brought yourselves low": man, the midrash boldly implies, does not really want full and eternal being. He chooses death, lessened being. What looks like defiance is an abandonment of a difficult posture.

In connection with this notion of flight from the demands of reality, there is an evocative sentence in the Vilna Gaon's reading of the story of Jonah. The central enigma of that story is the act that initiates the plot: Jonah flees from the presence of God. Much ink has been spilled on the theological absurdity of such a flight. The Gaon says simply: "Everyone flees from the presence of God; no one wants to stand in His presence."⁵⁶ In this allegorical reading, Jonah is Everyman, protesting at the paradoxical demands of his condition. "To stand in the presence of God" is to resist the temptations of flight, to bear the tensions of freedom and obedience, of a position where vertical and horizontal axes meet. No one, says the Gaon, chooses to be; it is normal to decompose, to evade the demands of a whole consciousness. Unlike the phenomena of nature, man cannot be shocked into being, by fear, by Necessity, by the fiat of God. His is a more complicated story. It is the story of the quest for *amidah*, for a solid reality on which to base his life. Adam could not hold his position long: "things fall apart; the center cannot hold."⁵⁷ And in his failure to be, the whole world loses solid specification.

The suspension of being

Here we approach the heart of the matter, an important, much-quoted midrash in which the narrative of Creation is undone, as it were, by the failure of Adam to stand. At the very end of the saga of Creation, just before the Sabbath (and therefore after Adam has begun to "evaporate"), the Torah says, "And God saw all that He had made and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day" (1:31). God reviews a work of art that now includes failure and death, and calls it—as never before—very good.⁵⁸ But the midrash that

⁵³ Ibid., 21:9.

⁵⁴ *Shemot Rabbah* 32:1.

⁵⁵ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, iii, 36.

⁵⁶ *Perush HaGra*, Jonah, 1:3.

⁵⁷ Yeats, *The Second Coming*.

⁵⁸ See *Bereshit Rabbah* 9:5: "In R. Meir's text of the Torah, they found it written: 'Behold it was very good'—behold, death was good."

Rashi quotes, in his commentary on the verse, gives us a sense of a world not really created at all:

"The sixth day": the definite article [*heh*] is added here [compare the conclusion of each of the previous days of creation—a second day, a third day] to teach that God had made a condition with all the works of the beginning, depending on Israel's acceptance of the Five [the numerical value of *heh*] Books of the Torah. Another reading: All the works of the beginning are suspended [lit., hanging and standing] until the sixth day of Sivan, which is destined for the Giving of the Torah.

Before we confront this midrash, however, the Torah text itself should provoke us to uneasiness. Why is the totality of things very good, since it now implicitly includes exile and shame, the flattening and dulling of the human body and face? "'And God banished him from the Garden of Eden': his stature was diminished, his light was dimmed, his food changed, he became a restless wanderer on the earth, and death was inflicted on him and on all generations to the end of time."⁵⁹ Some essential light has faded from man's face; his range of vision is stunted. Job cries to God about the hopelessness of man's fate: "You overpower him forever and he perishes; You alter his visage and dispatch him" (Job 14:20). "You dispatch him"—*va-tishalchehu*—the same word used for Adam's banishment from Eden—holds a terror of summary execution. The banishment of man is interwoven with his mortality; it is to be read in his face, in his body. He knows himself unable to stand where he stood before. Is this change irreversible, as Job asserts? And in what sense is this "very good"?

One suggestion is that banishment is a merciful alternative to the finality of immediate death, which was, indeed, the apparent punishment that God had decreed originally: "on the day that you eat of it, you shall die" (2:17). Instead of dying on the very day of his fall, he is punished with exile; he lives on for nine hundred and thirty years. "If it were not for Your mercy, Adam would have had *no standing* (*amidah*)."⁶⁰ The simplest reading of "standing" would be "survival." But, implicitly, both Adam and the world are in need of some Archimedean point of stability, in a situation in which disintegration threatens. Here, the Archimedean point is defined as the "mercy of exile"; in another midrashic text, it is called the "strength of the Sabbath, without which the world could not have stood."⁶¹ The main question facing man from now on will be precisely this quest for a foundation of being, for "one thing only which is certain and indubitable."⁶²

Man sets off on a journey in which no form of solid assurance of reality and sanity accompanies him. In Descartes' vision of this radical anxiety, the ultimate dread is of madness, the fear of waking from a self-deceptive dream world, of having "all of a sudden fallen into very deep waters," where "I can neither make certain of setting my feet on the bottom, nor can I swim and so support myself on the surface."

The instability, the tendency of the world to change, to wear out, to fall apart, will lead the descendants of Adam to beliefs and rituals whose common aim is to make the world strong and solid again. [The philosopher and renowned historian of religions] Mircea Eliade narrates many such rituals of renewal, which re-enact the creation, the original encounter of God and the world, and thus "repair" or "fix" the world:

In Kimberley, the rock paintings, which are believed to have been painted by the Ancestors, are repainted in order to reactivate their creative force, as it was first manifested in mythical times, that is, at the beginning of the World.... Among some Yurok tribes the strengthening of the World is accomplished by ritually rebuilding the

⁵⁹ Midrash Ha-Gadol, 3:23.

⁶⁰ Tanchuma, Massei, 11.

⁶¹ Midrash Ha-Gadol, 3:24.

⁶² Rene Descartes, *Second Meditation*.

steam cabin....[The priest] climbs a mountain. There he finds a branch, which he makes into a walking stick, saying: "This world is cracked, but when I pick up and drag the stick, all the cracks will fill up and the earth will become solid again." Going down to the river, he finds a stone, which he sets solidly in place, saying: "The earth, which has been tipped, will be straight again. People will live to be stronger." He sits down on the stone. "When I sit on the stone...the earth will never get up and tip again." The stone has been there since the time of the Immortals, that is since the beginning of the World.⁶³

Eliade's notion of the continual or recurrent need to participate in the original "right" creation of the world is one response to a common existential anguish. The response described in classic talmudic literature is radically different. For the beginnings, the sources of man's being are clear and solid (the heavens become strong, congealed, come to be) only until the point where he begins to be conscious, to name the world, himself and God.⁶⁴ From this point, it is a matter of hours till he has named his reality⁶⁵ in such a way that what remains is a world that is not really there, in which the whole creation story is subtly undermined.⁶⁶

The world decomposed and recomposed

In such a situation, no return to the firm splendors of origins is possible. Another, more difficult act of regeneration is required. Here, again, is Rashi's comment on God's final assessment of the already disintegrated world:

"The sixth day": the definite article [*heh*] is added here to teach that God had made a condition with all the works of the beginning, depending on Israel's acceptance of the Five [the numerical value of *heh*] Books of the Torah. Another reading: All the works of the beginning are suspended (lit., hanging and standing) until the sixth day of Sivan, which is destined for the Giving of the Torah. (1:31)⁶⁷

Rashi's source⁶⁸ reads like this: "The definite article is not necessary. Resh Lakish taught: God made a condition with the works of the Beginning—If Israel accepts the Torah, you will continue to exist; if not, I will bring you back to chaos."

The radical effect of this talmudic passage is to undermine all the clarities, the achieved articulations, the crystalline firmness of Creation. For the question of meaning remains unresolved: "to be or not to be" is a question that is "suspended and standing" till Mount Sinai. There is a provisional quality to the reality of the world, a rofef ambivalence about meaning, which no fearful utterance of God can shock man into crystallizing. The world, till Sinai, awaits its true creation; man feels the question hanging over him, nothing is solid in his consciousness until some essential point of equilibrium is discovered.

⁶³ Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (Harper & Row: 1963), 43-44.

⁶⁴ See Bereshit Rabbah 17:5 for an account of man's "wisdom" in naming not only the animals but himself and God, too.

⁶⁵ The pivotal role of language is stressed by Rashi. God asks, redundantly, "Where are you?" only in order that Adam's version of his experience should not be inhibited by fear. God's desire is to "enter into words with him." Adam's response is inadequate to the occasion.

⁶⁶ See the complex image of the cradle, in which man sleeps before Creation (Bereshit Rabbah 2:3). The earth-nurse watches the cradle with apprehension (*toha u-boha*); the sleeping infant is contained, at peace, in this primary reality. But a secondary reality is already implicit: the sleeping child will awake to his full powers and destroy both himself and the world.

⁶⁷ Another version of Rashi: On the sixth of Sivan, when Israel received the Torah, all the works of beginning were strengthened, and it was as if the world was created then.

⁶⁸ BT Shabbat 88a.

This is not simply a matter of a shotgun commitment being demanded of the people at Mount Sinai. Their standing at the mountain is an experience *in extremis* of the instability, the terror, and madness of the world. Here is the version of the narrative found in Pesikta Rabbati:

"Earth and all its inhabitants dissolve: it is I who keeps its pillars [*amudeha*, standing supports] firm" (Psalms 75:4). The world was in the process of dissolving. Had Israel not stood before Mount Sinai and said, "All that God has spoken, we will faithfully do [lit., we will do and we will listen (Exodus 20:7)] the world would already have returned to chaos. And who made a foundation for the world? "It is I--*anokhi*-who keeps its pillars firm"—in the merit of "I—*anokhi*—am the Lord your God who brought you out of the Land of Egypt."⁶⁹

On a first reading, it seems that what saves the world from decomposing is God and His Law, which the people obediently accept. ("It is I who gives solidity to the world, through My commandments, encoded in the opening word of the Ten Commandments, *anokhi—I...*") But there is another possible—and compelling—reading. Here, the *anokhi*, which gives substance and coherence to reality, is the "I" of human beings. Rashi reads the prooftext, the verse from Psalms (75:4), in just this unexpected way: "'It is I who keeps its pillars firm'—when I said, 'We shall do and we shall listen.'" The people are responsible for the "I" that "fixes," that congeals a dissolving reality. The world is saved by a human affirmation, a human "standing at Sinai," which halts the process of disintegration.

In an even more paradoxical version of this idea, the midrash quotes provocatively: "But now thus said the Lord—Who created you, O Jacob, Who formed you, O Israel': (Isaiah 43:1) God said to His world, 'My world, My world, I shall tell you who created you, who formed you. Jacob created you, Jacob formed you—as it is said, "Who created you: Jacob. Who formed you: Israel."⁷⁰

God speaks lovingly to His world—and assigns it another creator. It is apparently human consciousness, in all its contingency, that "creates the world." In this sense, God "becomes" the Creator of the world, only when the question of meaning has been decided by man.

The notion of "world making," which, according to Rashi, is the chief enticement of the serpent in the Garden ("You shall be like God'—Creators of worlds" [3:5]) is one that has become very familiar since the advent of cognitive psychology. Nelson Goodman's central thesis, for example, is that "what we call the world is a product of some mind whose symbolic procedures construct the world."⁷¹

Jerome Bruner offers a succinct account of Goodman's notion of the creation of realities, and the complex—and changing—symbol systems that allow for constant "transformation of worlds":

These constructions have in common that they take certain premises for granted, as stipulations. What is "given" or assumed at the outset of our construction is neither bedrock reality out there, nor an *a priori*: it is always another constructed version of a world that we have taken as given for certain purposes....So, in effect, world making involves the transformation of worlds and world versions already made.⁷²

This transformation is achieved when we

compose and decompose worlds, impelled by different aims in doing so....We weight and emphasize features of previous worlds in creating new ones....We impose order, and since all is in motion, the order or reordering we

⁶⁹ Pesikta Rabbati, 21 (100a).

⁷⁰ Vayikra Rabbah 36:4. I have slightly changed the play on words here, to make it accessible in English.

⁷¹ Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Harvard University Press: 1986), 95.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 97.

impose is a way too of imposing alternate stabilities....We deform the given that we took and create caricature, the caricature itself being principled rather than entirely fanciful....⁷³

Transformation as distortion of the given, as principled caricature: this is the core of Goodman's concept of world making. We recall the famous midrash that describes God Himself as "creating worlds and destroying them," before He achieved an opus that gave Him satisfaction.⁷⁴ The model for creativity sketched here is not remote from Goodman's model; constructions follow each other, each a "world," with its own givens, its "stipulations," decomposing world versions already made.

If we try to make use of this model, we can ask: what, in all seriousness, is the transformative moment of Sinai? In what sense is it true to say that Jacob creates the world, as he stands before the mountain, as he says, "We shall do and we shall listen"? Clearly, in making this resonant declaration (which is rather tidied away in the JPS translation: "We will faithfully do"), they are distorting the normal processes of cognition and action. It is common sense that first one hears, understands, and then one acts.

The Talmud, continuing from the passage we read previously about the conditional nature of God's creation, has a heavenly voice cry out, "Who has revealed to My children this secret the angels make use of, for it is written (Psalms 103:20): 'Bless the Lord, O His angels, mighty creatures who do His bidding, hearkening to the sound of His word'—They do before hearing."⁷⁵

To distort the order of doing and hearing is a secret of the angels. As Emmanuel Levinas points out, we are not dealing with "the consciousness of children," with an infantile concept of blind faith.⁷⁶ A rational world is decomposed here; what is composed, set in its place, is a possible world that only angels (who "stand upright") have represented until now. Levinas calls this the world of "any inspired act, even artistic, for the act only brings out the form in which it only now recognizes its model, never glimpsed before....[It indicates] a going beyond knowledge...[that] could not be the deed of an underdeveloped human nature. It is a perfectly adult effort."⁷⁷

We might, in fact, call the mode of action before knowledge a kind of spiritual virtuosity. Angels do what is complex and difficult with organic ease. In order to achieve the same effect of simultaneity, in which commands are transmitted from the brain to the nervous system to the muscles so fluidly that performance seems to precede input, human beings normally have to work very hard. But there is a triumphant moment when the normal laborious procedures of will and execution are short-circuited. In that virtuoso moment, a new world is created.

This is the experience of Jacob-Israel, as he discovers in himself the anokhi, the "I" of the world maker. He meets the anokhi of the World Maker and responds with the spontaneous energy of the unitary self. In that moment, a new map of reality is drawn—strange, imposing new stabilities. The "deep structure of subjectivity," as Levinas calls it, is acknowledged by human beings, when they encounter that same subjectivity expressed by God.

⁷³ Ibid., 102-3. Bruner here cites the famous "map," popularized by the physiologist Lord Adrian in his *The Basis of Sensation*, "depicting the monkey with each part of the body enlarged to correspond to its density of sensory innervation—its lips and tongue in this caricature grossly larger than its trunk and torso."

⁷⁴ Bereshit Rabbah 3:9.

⁷⁵ BT Shabbat 88a.

⁷⁶ Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 45.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 42.

It is the *anokhi*, the "I," that creates a foundation for the world. In the original Creation, there is no *anokhi*: there is Necessity, there is the fiat that freezes the world into its forms. When God says *anokhi* at Sinai, however, something very different happens; a process that had begun in the enigmatic "very good," of failure, exile, and death, reaches its culmination.

This culmination is described in *Shemot Rabbah*, 29:9:

When God gave the Torah, no bird sang, no fowl flew, no ox bellowed, the Ophanim spread no wings, the Seraphim did not declare, "Holy, Holy, Holy. . . ." The sea did not rage, people did not speak, but the world was in utter silence. And there came forth the Voice, "I am the Lord your God. . . ." It is written, "The Lord spoke these words—these and no more—to your whole congregation with a mighty voice...." What is the meaning of "these and no more"? When one calls out to one's friend, one's voice echoes; but the Voice that came out of the mouth of God had no echo. And if this surprises you, think of Elijah, who came to Mount Carmel, gathered all the priests of Baal, and told them, "Shout louder! After all, he is a god!" [1 Kings 18:27]. What did God do? He silenced the whole world, muted upper and lower worlds, till the world was again unformed and void, as though there were no created being in the world, as it is said, "There was no sound, and none who responded or listened" [18:26]. For if anyone had spoken, they would have said, "Baal answered us." How much greater was the silence of the world when God spoke at Sinai! Only so could God's creatures know that there is nothing aside from Him. And then He said, "*anokhi*—I am the Lord your God."

The extraordinary claim of this midrash is that the Torah is given when the process of decreation, the decomposition of the world, has reached its completion. In the silence of a time before Creation, before individuation and separation, none of the "stipulations," the found constructions of previous worlds exists. The question of meaning erodes all the facades of reality.

Mircea Eliade writes of an "archaic ontology," a "belief in an absolute reality opposed to the profane world of 'unrealities'; in the last analysis, the latter does not constitute a 'world,' properly speaking; it is the 'unreal' *par excellence*, the uncreated, the nonexistent: the void."⁷⁸ In "primitive societies," there is a profound sense that "everything that lacks an exemplary model is 'meaningless,' i.e., it lacks reality....[Man] sees himself as real, i.e., as 'truly himself,' only, and precisely, insofar as he ceases to be so."⁷⁹

"In the last analysis, [the world] does not constitute a 'world'": the midrash, too, is concerned with "the last analysis"; but it offers a different response to the despair of a world returned to ultimate unreality. The question inherent in Creation emerges with full force. This is the question that the angels are recorded as asking in so many midrashic narratives: "Why?...Why create man? And with him, for him, the whole complex environment that is the universe?" What the Israelites experience at Sinai is the devastation, the return to "unreality," of the world. Out of this emerges, not the primal *Yehi*, the first fiat, "Let there be," but instead, this time, simply the voice of God saying, "*Anokhi*—I am."

The terror of such an experience is palpable. "It has been clearly demonstrated to you that the Lord alone is God; there is none beside Him" (Deuteronomy 4:35). Rashi's comment emphasizes the visual-mystical experience of de-realization: "When God gave the Torah, he opened the seven firmaments, upper and lower worlds were torn apart, and they saw that He is alone; that is why it says, '[lit.] you were shown..'" In other words, what the people overwhelmingly see is that there is nothing, nothing to stand on. "If you do not accept the Torah, I shall return the world to chaos and emptiness."

⁷⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Harper and Row: 1969), 92.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

What saves the world, indeed what in a real sense creates the world, is the capacity of the people to encounter the terror of the anokhi. "It is anokhi, it is I who keeps the pillars—amudeha [lit., standing supports]—firm" (Psalms 75:4). What is the infrastructure that gives substance to reality? One perspective emphasizes the anokhi of God—the transcendent and only reality. But another—audacious and difficult—emphasizes the anokhi of human beings. It is man's ability to meet the voice of God out of the void, and to respond with his own anokhi: "We will do, we will make the world."

In this perspective, Israel creates the world, simply by finding a place to stand at Sinai. The giving of the Torah is, of course, idiomatically and commonly referred to as *ma'amad har sinai*—the standing at Sinai. To be able to stand "face to face" (Deuteronomy 5:4) with the God who alone exists and whose anokhi emerges from a vast silence is to take that immensity of the anokhi immediately within oneself. Analogously, perhaps, with the effect of great poetry, "an intimate call of immensity may be heard, even more than the echo of the outside world."⁸⁰

To "make" the world is the charge that God left man with at the end of the original creation process, when "God ceased from all the work of Creation that He had done." La'asot, translated here as "that He had done," is actually the infinitive form, "to do"; the world is created open-ended, open to the doing, the making of man. And the word that recurs in God's reproaches to Eve and the Serpent is precisely this verb, la'asot: "What is this you have done...? Because you have done this...." (3:13, 14) What a disappointing act this is! Immediately, the possibility of standing in the world is reduced.

At Sinai, a covenant is made both with a people "who are standing here with us this day before the Lord our God and with those who are not with us here this day" (Deuteronomy 29:19). This last group, says the midrash,⁸¹ refers to future prophets, yet unborn. Of them, the word omed, "standing," cannot be used, as it is used to describe those physically present at Sinai. For *ein ba-hem mamash*—the unborn "have no reality." Only those who are substantial, live within time and space and the contingencies of the earth, can be depicted as omed, as standing.⁸²

The people of Sinai affirm their ability to stand face to face with God. But what seems a static position is exposed, in a midrash quoted by Rashi, as a fulcrum of desire and fear, a point of equilibrium in the eye of the storm: "'And all the people saw the voices...and they moved backwards and they stood at a distance' (Exodus 20:15): they were repelled to the rear a distance of twelve miles—that is, the whole length of the camp. Then the angels came and helped them forward again." If this happened at each of the Ten Commandments, the people are imagined as travelling 240 miles in order to stand in place! The ebb and flow, the awe and the passion, are contained within a human "stance," that allows them to hold ground as anokhi encountering anokhi.

There may be something angelic about the capacity to say, "We shall do and then hear." But the people stand as human beings do, aware of tensions and countertensions. And, of course, they "fall" very soon after; "like princes you fall" (Psalms 82:6-7).

The Talmud makes an extraordinary observation about the paradoxes of "standing": "No man stands on [i.e., can rightly understand] the words of Torah, unless he has stumbled over

⁸⁰ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 198.

⁸¹ Shemot Rabbah 29:9.

⁸² The angels are of course the paradigms of "standing" beings. Their substantiality is not physical, but rather a matter of specific, unambiguous identity and role.

them."⁸³ To discover firm standing ground, it is necessary to explore, to stumble, even to fall, certainly to survive the chaotic vibrations of a world that refuses to be. The gelid certainties of the fully created world are immediately undermined; only because of death and failure is man impelled to create the world anew. "Tremble in His presence, all the earth! The world stands firm; it cannot be shaken" (1 Chronicles 16:30). One might read this by tuning the strings of paradox tighter: "Tremble in His presence—so that the world may stand firm and not collapse." For how can one stand at all, if one does not know the tremor?⁸⁴

The experiment in form

To stand in the presence of God is not, then, to be static: it is a kind of dance, invisible to the naked eye. Neither rigidity nor chaos is God's desire of man. What He desires is the human response of transformation. Erich Neumann writes: "For Satan as antithesis to the primordial living world of transformation is rigidity...but at the same time he appears as its opposite, as chaos....The smooth, undifferentiated fixity of the one is inseparable from the molluscular, undifferentiated chaos of the other....In the creative sphere, they give rise to a third term, which embraces and transcends them both, and this is form....[that] is menaced from both sides, by sclerosis and by chaotic disintegration."⁸⁵

When the first experiment in human form seems to have failed, and God contemplates the "loss of the work of His hands," He mourns as a human artist or father would mourn. "And His heart was saddened" (Genesis 6:6). Rashi here quotes a provocative midrash, which purports to deal with the theological absurdity of the anthropomorphism:

A certain skeptic asked R. Yehoshua ben Korcha, "Do you not believe that God foresees the future?" He answered, "Yes." "But it says, 'His heart was saddened'?" "Did you ever have a son born to you?" "Yes." "And what did you do?" "I rejoiced and made everyone else happy." "But didn't you know that your son would eventually die?" "In time of joy, there is joy; and in time of mourning, there is mourning." R. Yehoshua said, "That is the way of God. Even though it was revealed to Him that His children would eventually sin and be destroyed, He was not prevented from creating them—for the sake of the righteous who were destined to descend [lit., to stand up] from them."

The skeptic asks about God's "disappointment," in view of the doctrine of God's omniscience. He uses the idiomatic expression for "foreknowledge": "Does God see the *molad*, that which is already, barely born?" Within the frame of God overseeing the vistas of space and time—a transcendent God, who, in His "high solitude," knows what must be, as though it already were—within the frame of Necessity, what room is there for tears or for laughter, for hope or disappointment?⁸⁶

"Yes, of course," answers R. Yehoshua: that is an obvious frame within which to view God. But the question R. Yehoshua asks, instead of answering explicitly, has to do with human experience, with the irrational freedom to rejoice, to mourn, not as one at the top of a belfry, not metaphysically, or theoretically. *Theoria*, in Greek, suggests taking a view of a large stretch of territory from a great distance, and favors the idea of a vertical view downward. It rises above "the plurality of appearances in the hope that, seen from the heights, an unexpected unity will

⁸³ BT Gittin 43a.

⁸⁴ See Pachad Yitzhak, *Rosh Hashanah*, 7:10.

⁸⁵ Neumann, *Art and the Creative Unconscious*, 162-63, 196.

⁸⁶ Shestov quotes Spinoza as representative of the "Athenian" conception of a reality entirely constrained by Necessity: *non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intellegere*—"not to laugh, not lament, not to curse, but to understand" (*Athens and Jerusalem*, 195).

become evident—a unity which is a sign that something real has been glimpsed."⁸⁷ In place of the nolad metaphor, the foreknowledge of a necessary future, that is not yet, but that can be seen from the top of the belfry as "already born," there is the contingency of the live child, who will die.⁸⁸ It is this frame, of contingency and passion, that God chooses to inhabit. Just as a human father does, God assumes the risks of the live process of creation.

However, the analogy with human fatherhood breaks down on one essential point. Unlike the father, God did not have to create the problematic, volatile being who will sadden Him. It is not by free choice that the father brings his son into the world. Why does God, in His freedom and power, choose to create this admittedly doomed creature? To respond to this implicit question, Rashi adds his last sentence, which does not occur in his source midrash:⁸⁹ "He was not prevented from creating them—for the sake of the righteous who were destined to 'stand up' from them."

Here, Rashi answers the question implicit in the father-son analogy. The question, again, is "Why...? Why create man at all, why create a problem?" He was not prevented by His foreknowledge from engaging in the whole frustrating project—"because of the righteous"—*bishvil hatzaddikim*. The price to be paid for a *tzaddik*—a righteous man—is creation. The hazards and contingencies of the creative act are the loam out of which true form emerges. There is no way of achieving true form without opening possibilities of all manner of travesties. For to create is precisely not entirely to control. "If I create man," says God, in Rashi's second source midrash,⁹⁰ "wicked people will emerge from him. But if I don't create him, how will righteous people 'stand up' from him?"

To consummate creation with a free-standing *tzaddik*—that always was the point of the enterprise. We return here to the beginning, to that so-clear and structured and "real" description of unities breaking down into smaller and increasingly specific parts. "In the beginning, God created heaven and earth." Rashi says: "This verse is nothing if not mysterious [lit., This verse says nothing but "Explain me!"]—as the Sages said, 'God created the world for the sake of the Torah, which is called "*reshit*—the beginning of His way" (Proverbs 8:22) and for the sake of the righteous, who are called "*reshit*—the beginning of His produce" " (Jeremiah 2:3).

On no account, Rashi declares, can the opening verse be a description of the origins of the universe.

The text does not intend to teach the order of creation....And if you say that this verse teaches that heaven and earth were created first..., be ashamed of yourself! [lit., be surprised at yourself]. For the waters were already in existence, as it is written, "And the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters." Since there has not yet been any reference to the creation of the waters, they must already have been in existence before the earth and heaven were created. Clearly, then, the text does not propose to give a chronological account of creation.

⁸⁷ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press: 1989), 96.

⁸⁸ The skeptic asks: "Does God see the nolad—that which is born...?" R. Yehoshua answers: "Nolad? Was there born to you a son?" His retort brings the "philosopher" down to earth, to the existential knowledge of fathers of mortal children. It is here, and not in the sublime certainties of metaphysical knowledge, that human understanding of God begins.

⁸⁹ Bereshit Rabbah 27:4.

⁹⁰ The source for the ending is Bereshit Rabbah 8:9.

Significantly, Rashi opens his great commentary on the Torah with a response to the mystery of the words. He does offer a *peshat* reading—a straightforward contextual reading⁹¹—but only in second place. He draws his primary energy from the enigmatic midrashic decoding of the mystery. Bereshit, "In the beginning," describes not the clarities of origin and cause, but the potentialities of purpose. "For the sake of the righteous" means that all is open. There is no foundation; the beginning of a pathway glimmers. (*Bishvil*—"for the sake of"—but lit., on the path towards). In the future, at some time, in some place, a human being may create the world. God now authors the work that will go in search of authors. What is given at the beginning challenges man to the self-transformations that will allow him, in spite of everything, to stand in the presence of God.

Will transformation. Oh be inspired for the flame
in which a Thing disappears and bursts into something else;
the spirit of re-creation which masters this earthly form loves most the pivoting point where you are no longer
yourself.
He who pours himself out like a stream is acknowledged at
last by Knowledge;
and she leads him enchanted through the harmonious country
that finishes often with starting, and with ending begins.⁹²

⁹¹ Bereshit is the construct form of the noun. So, "In the beginning of the creation of heaven and earth...."

⁹² Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, second part, 12.

CREATION AND HUMAN BROTHERHOOD¹

By Rabbi Menachem M. Kasher

Translated by Rabbi Dr. Harry Freedman

The Biblical account of the creation of man seeks to teach one grand lesson valid for all times: The foundation of the world is belief in One God as Creator and Father, and its corollary, brotherly love, accompanied by a constant awareness that all human beings are of one human father (Adam). The prophet Malachi asked of us: "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?" (Malachi 2:10). Man's failure to realize this breeds misunderstanding, prejudice, and ill-will leading to fratricidal hate; it is the great illness which produces suicidal strife, ruin and desolation, and has brought us to our present all-too justified fear of total destruction.

This one fundamental idea is familiar to all; we know it well. Yet we are far from accepting it in practice. Our physical and material progress goes on apace with tremendous speed; but our moral progress lags woefully behind. It is our task to speak to the heart of man. This profoundly true principle which is so clearly enunciated in the Bible, and in the Prophetic writings, has been constantly studied and emphasized by our Sages. In the following pages I present the thought of our great teachers and scholars on this subject, as manifested in our Talmudic-Midrashic literature.

Talmud Jerushalmi, Nedarim, ch. 9, 41c, reports an interesting and highly significant discussion between two of its most outstanding scholars, R. Akiba and Ben Azzai. The former declared: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself (Lev. 19:18) is the greatest principle of the Torah." Whereupon Ben Azzai observed: "This is the book of the generations of Adam (man) (Gen. 5:1) is an even greater principle."

R. Akiba's statement is self-explanatory. Ben Azzai's, however, is not so self-evident. Nevertheless it lays down a fundamental tenet of Judaism. For in the verse quoted the scholar saw the basic declaration of human brotherhood: by tracing back the whole of the human race to one single ancestor, created by one God, the Bible taught that all men have one Creator—the heavenly Father—and one ancestor—the human father. Thus all men, notwithstanding differences and variations produced by external conditions, are brothers. If, then, R. Akiba saw in the command to love one's neighbor the prime motivation of Judaism, Ben Azzai went behind this precept, as it were, seeking the basis upon which it rests and the sanction which gives it validity, and he found it in this Biblical account of Creation.²

Korban Aaron comments: "A still greater principle is that all human beings have God for Father. The Holy Writ intends to say: This is the book of the Torah which tells of the generations of the first man, and teaches that all are the children of one Father, that they are all made in one

¹ This essay is a chapter of an unpublished manuscript of mine, *Israel and the Nations*, which deals at length with this topic.

² Ben Azzai also links this with the end of the verse, in the image of God made He him, on which he comments: "Do not say, since I myself have been put to shame, or am in an evil plight, I may treat my neighbor in like manner (for thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself does not imply that I am to be more considerate of him than of myself)." R. Tanchuma explains the connection thus: "For if you do act in this manner, know that you are degrading the image of God." (See Theodor's ed. of *Gen. R.*, chap. 24, p. 237 and commentaries *ad. loc.*)

image and one imprint, the form of God. Wherefore men should not be haughty towards nor hate one another."

R. Yehuda Gedaliah writes on the same passage (Gen. R., ed. Saloniki): "Our sacred Torah is a book for all the generations of man; for we all have one father (Adam), and the Holy One, blessed be He, created all human beings in His likeness and image. Therefore should all endeavor to cling to His attributes (lovingkindness, compassion, and justice); every man should love his neighbor even as his own self, and assist him to observe the Commandments and practice good deeds, and so attain to holiness."

A manuscript commentary on Gen. R. quoted by Theodor (p. 237) writes: "Since all nations are one, and all human beings are descended from one man, humanity is like a single body divided into many organs; as the organs of a body are mutually helpful to one another, so should all human beings be mutually helpful to each other. That is why one Sage held that This is the book of the generations of Adam is a greater principle."

Thus our Rabbis say: "For this reason was man created alone, to teach that whosoever destroys a single soul³ is as guilty as though he had destroyed a complete world; and whosoever preserves a single soul' is as meritorious as though he had preserved the whole world" (Sanhedrin 37a). It is hard to imagine a more emphatic assertion of human worth. From this it is a natural step to insist first upon peace and then upon the essential equality of humanity: "God created only one man at first. Why? Lest the righteous boast that they are the descendants of a righteous first man, whilst the wicked plead that their first progenitor was evil." (It is interesting to note how this ancestral equality is made to serve the cause of righteousness by depriving the wicked of the plea of a hereditary disposition to evil.) Another reason: "So that families should not quarrel with each other" (Sanhedrin 38a).

Thus the precept, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, follows as a natural corollary to this conception of a humanity united in and through a common ancestor. In keeping with this Hillel gave his famous reply to the heathen who wished to learn the whole Torah whilst he stood on one foot: "That which is hateful to thyself, do not unto thy neighbor; that is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary; go and learn it" (Shabbat 31a).

This, of course, was a paraphrase of the Golden Rule. Let us now examine the text more closely. Its significant words are "love" and "neighbor": what does love imply, and who is "thy neighbor"?

R. Israel Al-Nakawa (*Menorat Hama'or* IV, 305) points out that "thy neighbor" is in the dative instead of the accusative (*I'reacha* instead of *eht reacha*), so that the text actually reads, Thou shalt love for thy neighbor as for thyself; in other words, whatever you would love or desire for yourself, that you should desire for your neighbor too. The famous mediaeval moralist R. Bachya writes in a similar vein, but with more detail: "Inasmuch as a man associates with his fellow-men in all that pertains to social welfare, such as sowing, plowing and reaping, or in labor or commerce, he should make a spiritual accounting with himself, to what extent his own activities have contributed thereto. In all these matters he should love for his neighbor what he loves for himself; hate for others what he hates for himself; have compassion upon his fellow men and save them, insofar as it lies within his power, from aught that might harm them. That is the meaning of the Scriptural injunction, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (*Duties of the Heart*, on "A Spiritual Accounting," par. 22).

³ Such is the version in the Munich Manuscript. Dikduk Soferim maintains that this is the correct version in all the Talmudic agadot. The addition of in Israel was made by printers.

R. Bachya b. R. Asher points out that "thy neighbor" includes even the people at whose hands one has suffered injury. He proves this by referring his reader to Exod. 1:2: "Speak now in the ears of the people, and let them ask every man of his neighbor, and every woman of her neighbor," etc. Thus were the Israelites bidden before they departed from Egypt. The "neighbors" referred to were the Egyptians who, as their taskmasters, had embittered their lives with rigorous and cruel slavery. Yet they are called their neighbors. It should be noted that the Sages' conception of thy neighbor included the most wicked and contemptible, even those condemned to death. Their feelings and dignity had to be respected as far as possible even in the act of execution (Sanh. 45a).

The demand for such consideration and respect for human dignity stemmed from the Biblical conception of man as created in the image of God. Thus we read: "Rabbi Akiba said: Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of God. He is granted an exceeding great love, for he was created in the divine image. As it is said (Genesis 9:7), For in the image of God did He make man" (Avot 3:14). This has been explained thus: "The form in which man was made is called the image of God, to teach that it is the most excellent of all. In the same way the man honored above all men was called the man of God; the Temple, too, is called the House of God, since it is exalted above all houses for the acceptance of prayer....And in the matter of being created in God's image, all human beings are equal, the righteous as the wicked" (Simeon Duran in *Magen Avot ad. loc.*)

Tosefot Yom Tov (in Avot ad. loc.) writes the following on Rabbi Akiba's saying: "Rabbi Akiba applies this to all human beings. That is evident from the fact that in support of his statement he quotes a passage spoken to the children of Noah, and not to the children of Israel. Rabbi Akiba mentions all human beings favorably, not merely Israel, so as to attract their hearts to do the will of their Creator. When he says that they are beloved, for they were created in the divine image, he means that they can be educated and led to divine ways."

It was shown *supra* that "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" applies even to the sinner. Whence did this conception arise? It stemmed from the teaching that "God is long-suffering towards and patient with the sinner, desiring his repentance rather than his death"; indeed, therein lies His essential greatness. This led to the principle that we ourselves must not hate the sinner—a humanitarian principle that many find it particularly difficult to learn.

The former teaching is expressed with remarkable clarity in the following passage: "R. Joshua b. Levi said: 'Why were they (the members of the Synod convened by Ezra and Nechemiah) called the Men of the Great Assembly? Because they restored the crown (of the Almighty) to its pristine greatness. Now, Moses had described Him as the great God, the mighty, and the awe-inspiring (Deut. 10:17). When, however, the Temple was destroyed, the Prophet Jeremiah exclaimed: "Idolaters are dancing in His Temple! Where then is His awe?" Thus he omitted "awe-inspiring" as one of His attributes. Then came Daniel and complained: "Idolaters have enslaved His children: where then is His might?" And so henceforth he omitted "mighty." Then came the Men of the Great Assembly and taught: "On the contrary. Therein He shows His might and awe. He shows His might in suppressing His anger and in being long-suffering with the wicked. And He proves His awe-inspiring nature, for but for that, how could one nation (Israel) maintain itself among seventy nations?" Thereupon they restored the epithets, and decreed that He should again be thus described in the daily services'" (Yoma 69b).

It is of interest to observe that in this passage God is described as being long-suffering with the wicked heathens, to whom it refers. In that same spirit the Midrash Rabbah on Ruth (3:2) writes: "We have learned: When a person sees an act of idolatry performed, what must he say? 'Blessed be He who is long-suffering toward those who transgress His will.'" Again, in Berakhot 9:1 we read that when one sees the shrine of the idol Mercurius he should recite a similar

blessing. Maimonides formulates the ruling thus (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 10:9) : "When one sees a place where idols are worshipped he must recite this benediction: 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King of the Universe, who art long-suffering toward those who transgress Thy will.'"

"Come and behold the mercies of the Holy One, blessed be He!" exclaims a teacher in Exod. R. 12, 3: "Even in the hour of His anger He takes pity on the wicked and on their cattle."

Justice and social stability may demand that the wicked be punished, even destroyed; but the Almighty takes no pleasure therein. So He is pictured as rebuking the angels who sought to sing praises to Him when the Egyptians who pursued the Israelites were engulfed by the returning waters of the Red Sea: "My creatures, the work of My hands, are drowning in the sea, yet ye would utter song!" (Sanhedrin 39b).

In Megillah 10b we read: "R. Joshua b. R. Chananiah commenced his lecture with the text: And it shall come to pass, that as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the Lord will rejoice over you (*yasis*) to cause you to perish, and to destroy you (Deut. 28:63). (This occurs in the chapter of "Rebuke"—a prediction of the disasters which would befall the people in the event of disloyalty and national apostasy.) Does then the Lord rejoice over the fall of the wicked? Surely it is written, As they (the Temple singers) went out before the army they said: 'Give thanks unto the Lord, for His mercy endureth forever' (2 Chron. 20:21). R. Yochanan commented thereon: 'For He is good' is omitted here, though elsewhere it is used often in the expression of gratitude to the Almighty, as it says, Give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever (Ps. 106:1). Why then the omission here? Because the occasion of that thanksgiving was the defeat of the Ammonites, and the Holy One, blessed be He, does not rejoice in the fall of the wicked." Thus this contradicts our first text. The answer was given by R. Jose b. R. Chananiah: "He does not, indeed, rejoice Himself, but causes others to rejoice. For the Writ does not say *yasus*, which means, He will rejoice, but *yasis*, which can be regarded as the *hifil*, causative, and means, He will make others to rejoice."

In this last passage we have a concession to, or rather, a recognition of human weakness. Only those who rise to the loftiest spiritual heights will refrain from rejoicing at the downfall of the wicked; and alas! not many do reach those heights. Consequently God's punishment does cause the average man to rejoice. But one should seek to overcome this weakness, and in imitation of God (a vital principle in Judaism) suppress his desires for the destruction of the wicked, and rather pray for their repentance and reformation.

The three major festivals, known as the Three Pilgrimage Festivals (*Shalosh R'galim*) are Passover (commemorating the Exodus from Egypt) ; Weeks (the Feast of the First-fruits, also celebrated as the Feast of Revelation) ; and Tabernacles (the Feast of Ingathering—the Harvest Festival). The Sages observed that Scripture bids the Jew rejoice on the latter two festivals: ...and thou shalt keep the feast of weeks...and thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God (Deut. 16:10 f) . Thou shalt keep the feast of Tabernacles seven days...and thou shalt rejoice in thy feast...and thou shalt be altogether joyful (ibid. 13-15). But Scripture does not order rejoicing on Passover, although as the festival of Liberation it was certainly no less a joyous occasion than the other two. Why was this? Because it involved the punishment of the Egyptians. For the same reason the full Hallel is only recited on the first two days of Passover, but not after (for the Egyptians were drowned on the seventh day). As Samuel explained it, citing Prov. 24:27: Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth (*Pesikhta d'R. Kahana*, p. 189). We do not sing full praises, for human beings died, their enmity to us notwithstanding. (See T.S., v. 9, p. 136, for a lengthier discussion.)

Here we find a contradiction. Whilst Samuel, on the basis of Proverbs, emphatically repudiates rejoicing at the downfall of the wicked, Midrash Tehillim on Ps. 94 states: "David

composed 103 Psalms, yet did not say Hallelujah (Praise ye the Lord) until he beheld the fall of the wicked."

Seder Elijah Rabbah (chap. 18) long ago grasped the contradiction between the two views, which appears, moreover, in Proverbs itself. Thus this work observes: "The Writ says: When thy enemy falleth, do not thou rejoice. Yet further it says: When the wicked are destroyed, there is joyous song (Prov. 11:12). How can the two be reconciled? It seems to me that the joyous song mentioned in the latter verse, and the statement, Let the righteous one rejoice, for he has beheld vengeance, refer to the time when the event is taking place. But one should not set a festival for generations because an enemy has fallen. Perhaps that is the reason why the Sages preferred to ascribe the festival of Hanukah primarily to the miracle of the cruse of oil, rather than to the downfall of the Greek Syrians in the Maccabean war. On Purim we commemorate not so much Haman's downfall as the delivery of the Jewish people through Esther from the extermination which his evil machinations had sought to bring about.

The Talmud relates some actual instances. Wicked men living in the vicinity of R. Meir tormented him so grievously that he prayed for their death. But his wife Beruriah chided him: "Why do you pray for their death? Is it because Scripture writes, Let sinners (*chata'im*) cease out of the earth? (Ps. 104:35). But Scripture does not write *chotim*, sinners, but *chata'im*, sins, so that the verse reads: Let sins cease, etc. Consequently it continues, so the wicked shall be no more, for when sins cease they will automatically be wicked no longer. Rather, then, pray that they should repent." R. Meir did so, and they did indeed repent (Berakhot 10a).

A heretic used to vex R. Joshua b. Levi so much with his arguments on the Bible that he determined to curse him at a moment when a curse would be most efficacious....But when the propitious moment came he fell asleep. On waking he remarked: "This teaches that what I sought to do was improper, for it is written, The Lord is good to all; His tender mercies are over all His works (Ps. 145:9) ; and it is also written, There is punishment for the righteous too who is not kind" (Prov. 17:26) (Berakhot 7a).

In mutual love and harmony our Sages saw the well-being of Society; in dissension, schism, and mutual hate, its dissolution. They gave expression to this in some remarkable passages. As to the former, the following is instructive. In Avot d'R. Nathan, chap. 16, (ed. Schechter p. 64) R. Simeon b. Eleazar, commenting on the verse which we have quoted so often, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, observed: "This injunction was accompanied by a great oath, for it is immediately followed by, I am the Lord. This means, 'I, the Lord, have created him. I swear, if thou lovest him, I am thy faithful Employer to pay thee thy reward; but if thou dost not love him, I am a Judge to punish thee.' Hence we learn that we must not hate our fellow-creatures."

Intent on seeking the ethical purpose of the Torah, the Rabbis found sermons literally in stones. The Bible enjoins: Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto Mine altar, that thy nakedness be not uncovered thereon (Exod. 20:23). This would certainly appear to have no connection whatever with human relations, yet the Rabbis found even here a warning to respect human dignity and worth. By exposing his nakedness a man would fail in respect for the dignity and prestige of the altar. That the stones of the altar were consecrated did not prevent the Rabbis from commenting: "The stones of the altar have no consciousness of either good or evil, yet the Almighty bade us respect their dignity; how much the more must you show the fullest consideration for and avoid shaming your neighbor, who was made in the image of Him who created the world by His command!" (Mekhilta, Jethro Chap. 11).

From that follows almost as an obvious corollary their dictum (Avot, chap. 4): "Who is honored? He who honors all human beings, as it says, For they that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be held in contempt" (1 Sam. 2:30). Now, the proof-text speaks of

honoring or despising not one's fellow-man, but God! Yet it is automatically applied to man. The implication is obvious (so much so that he does not even state it): honor or contempt of the Almighty is identical with honor or contempt of one's fellow-creatures.

The thought is clearly expressed and with more detail in the following passages:

And Jacob said unto them: 'My brethren, whence are ye?' (Gen. 29:4). From this the Sages learned: A man should always be sociable and affable towards his fellowmen, call them his brothers and companions, and be first to enquire about their health and well-being, so that the Angel of Peace and the Angel of Mercy may walk before him." (*Midrash Hagadol ad. loc.*; see also T.S. ad. loc. and comments thereon). Taking this teaching to heart, Abaye (a fourth-century teacher) was fond of repeating:

"A man should always be...soft of speech and seek to remove anger; he should speak peace with his brethren and relations, yea, with every man, even with the idolater in the marketplace. If he does so he will be beloved in heaven and on earth, and find favor in the eyes of all. It was told of R. Yochanan b. Zakkai that no man anticipated him in extending a greeting, not even an idolater, for he was careful always to be first to greet" (Berakhot 17a). Maharsha, a late commentator, linked this with a similar passage in Avot (3, 13) : "He in whom the spirit of his fellow-creatures takes delight, in him the spirit of the Omnipresent takes delight." From this it follows that a man's superiority depends not on birth or race, but upon his actions.

Recognizing that man's tendency, however, has always been to look down upon the stranger and to oppress him in greater or lesser degree (a tendency which, alas! history has all too amply proven), the Torah demanded not merely that he should be respected and protected against discrimination, but that he should be loved too: And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not do him wrong. The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the home-born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God (Lev. 19:33f).

This "love" was not to lose itself in the abstract, but to be given concrete expression in our daily dealings with the alien. Thus Sefer Hachinukh writes (Mitzvah 431): "We were commanded to love aliens. This means that we may not cause them to suffer hurt in anything, but treat them kindly with acts of benevolence, even as is seemly and as lies within our power. Moreover, this noble commandment exhorts us to have compassion on any human being who is not in the city of his home and birthplace, or in the dwelling-place of his parents or family. When we find a stranger alone and far from those who might help him, we must not mislead him on the way, for the Torah has commanded us to have compassion on anyone in need of assistance. If we carry out this commandment faithfully we shall be privileged to enjoy His mercy too, and the blessing of Heaven will rest upon our heads.

"The Holy Writ has indicated the reason for this commandment: For ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. It reminds us that we ourselves have been seared by the great torment which befalls every person who finds himself among a strange and alien folk. We must bear in mind the depth of anxiety and distress pertaining to this condition, for grievously has our nation experienced it, until the Almighty delivered us in His love and favor. Since this is so, we should feel warm pity for any human being in that condition."

Such love stems from a passionate inability and refusal to brook injustice, against whomsoever directed. Maimonides, one of the greatest Jewish philosophers that ever lived, finds in this the source of prophecy, which is the highest spiritual state to which man can attain. He writes: "The beginning of prophecy is this: Divine help begins to accompany a man, and this compels and urges him to great good deeds....This compulsion did not forsake Moses from the time he arrived at man's estate. Therefore he was aroused to kill the Egyptian, and to restrain

the guilty one of the two who quarreled. Fearing Pharaoh's wrath, he fled to Midian, where he was but a miserable stranger. Nevertheless, when he saw an injustice he could not control himself and had to remove it, for he could brook no injustice. Thus it is said: And Moses arose, and helped them" (Jethro's daughters) (*Guide of the Perplexed*, II, 45; T.S., Exodus, ch. 2, par. 144.)

These noble sentiments, so lofty and in advance of their time (for many peoples and nations are still very far from them), need not surprise us, when we consider that since its earliest days Judaism has emphasized the rights even of dumb creatures. (Kindness to animals as a recognized and avowed obligation is little more than a hundred years old even amongst civilized nations.) Thus the Ten Commandments, Humanity's Charter, not only thinks of the lowly slave, but extends its protecting care even to animals: ...but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, neither thou, nor thy son, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle....(Exod. 20:10).

Why was Moses chosen to lead the Israelites, and how did the Almighty test his fitness for this task? In a passage brimming with love for the dumb creatures the Sages in Exod. R. 2, 2 give the answer: "Moses too was tested by the Holy One, blessed be He, by his love and care for his flocks. While he was tending the flocks of Jethro in the desert, a kid ran away from him. Moses pursued and overtook it at a pool of water, where the kid stopped to drink. 'I did not know that you ran away because you were thirsty,' he cried out; 'you are tired.' And so he carried the kid back on his shoulder, and rejoined his flock. The Holy One, blessed be He, then said: 'Thou hast shown compassion on the flocks of one who is flesh-and-blood. So, by thy life, wilt thou tend My flock Israel'" (T.S. loc. cit. ch. 2, par. 2).

One of the outstanding scholars and leaders of the Talmudic age was the Patriarch R. Judah the Prince, the editor and compiler of the Mishnah. Yet the Talmud did not hesitate to ascribe his physical sufferings through an internal illness, and his subsequent recovery, to the lack of pity he showed for a dumb animal at first, and his compassion later on:

The sufferings of R. Judah the Prince came to him on account of an incident, and they departed on account of an incident.

They came on account of an incident. A calf which was being led to the slaughter escaped, and sought to hide under the Rabbi's cloak, whilst bleating piteously, as if to say, 'Save me.' But the Rabbi said to it, 'Go; for this you were created.' They said (in Heaven), 'He does not pity a fellow-creature; let suffering come upon him.'

And they departed on account of an incident. Once his maidservant, who was sweeping the house, was about to sweep away some small kittens lying there; said the Rabbi to her, 'Let them be. It is written, And His tender mercies are over all His creatures' (Ps. 145:9). They said (in Heaven), 'Since he pities his fellow-creatures, let us have pity upon him.' Thereupon he was healed" (Baba Metzia 85a).

Sefer Chasidim (ed. Berlin 1891, p. 63, par. 138), reads: "A man will be punished for any suffering he may have caused his fellows; yea, even for needless suffering to animals. He will be held to account if he puts a burden on a beast heavier than it can bear, or goads it with a whip when it cannot move. An exhortation against cruelty to animals is found in the angel's rebuke to Balaam: 'Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times?' (Num. 22:32). Because Balaam raged against his ass, saying, 'I would there were a sword in my hand, for now I had killed thee' (Num. 22:29), he perished by the sword, as it is said, And Balaam the son of Be'or they slew with the sword" (Num. 31:8).

Unwittingly, that very Balaam, who had come to curse Israel but had remained to bless, furnished the lofty opening of Israel's daily devotions: How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy dwellings, O Israel! (Num. 24:5). For from the tents and dwellings of Israel, from their houses of

prayer and houses of study, have issued humanity's essential teachings of universal brotherhood and universal love.

Mankind's oneness becomes more and more evident—a unity of all humans which is paralleled and strengthened by a growing realization of a basic oneness in nature as well. Science has taught us that time and space, hitherto regarded as separate and distinct, are one indissoluble concept. And now scientific thinking is on the verge of adding that energy too is an integral part of the single concept of time-space.

Thus, in the natural world which surrounds him, and in the universal community of humans among whom he lives, man must realize ever more intensely and irrevocably the fundamental oneness, which mutely attests to one Creator and one human ancestor. This is Israel's fundamental teaching to humanity—the reality of universal brotherhood, which will eventually bring the Messianic Era and the kingdom of God on earth.

The beginning

Jon D. Levenson

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The Book of Genesis begins with a passage that is austere and majestic in tone and highly schematic and formulaic in structure (Genesis 1:1-2:3). The austerity appears in the absence of sensory descriptions, the lack of detail, that is, about how the things mentioned—including God—look, sound, and feel. Whereas Psalm 104, another account of creation, speaks, for example, of God as wearing a glorious robe of light, spreading out the heavens like a tent cloth, and riding on the winds, the opening passage in Genesis tells of a God Who speaks, makes, and forms, in ways that are literally unimagined—"without image." And not only the Creator but His creation, too, is presented with enormous abstraction, as it is experienced by God, perhaps, and not by the eyes and ears and hands of human beings.

In structure, Genesis 1:1-2:3 is ordered toward the Sabbath, which is its finale (2:1-3). The passage is divided into a set of seven days: six of creative labor and one of repose. The organization of this text around strings of seven and its multiples extends far beyond the sequence of days in the primal week itself. For example, seven times we read that "God saw that [it] was [very] good," but contrary to the first impression of many readers, He does not see this on every day in the seven-day sequence. Missing on the second and seventh days, this clause occurs twice on the adjoining third and sixth days in compensation (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Similarly, the word for "God" occurs thirty-five times, and that for "earth" twenty-one. Thirty-five is also the number of words in the Hebrew original of 2:1-3, the passage about God's observance of the primordial Sabbath, with which this haunting text draws to its fitting close. The Sabbath is, in fact, the apex and culmination of the opening passage of Genesis, and by threading numerous sets of seven and its multiples into the text, the author has powerfully underscored the preciousness of the Sabbath and its divine origin. It is worthy of note that most biblical allusions to creation do not mention a seven-day sequence (e.g., Psalm 104) and most allusions to the Sabbath never mention creation (e.g., Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

In the first three of the other six days of creation, God creates in generalities—light on the first day (1:1-5), the sky to separate the waters below from the waters above on the second (vv. 6-8), and the dry land and seas on the third day (vv. 9-13). Then, in the second set of three days, He creates specific beings that correspond to these more general things and in the same order—heavenly lights on the fourth day (vv. 14-19), birds to fly in the sky and sea animals to occupy the waters below on the fifth (vv. 20-23), and animals and human beings to populate the dry land on the sixth day of creation (vv. 24-28). Note that on the last day of each set of three, God performs two creative acts and thus twice pronounces the results good (vv. 9-13, 24-31). The last product of His creative labors is human beings—male and female together—whom He appoints as His royal commissioners, charged with a divine mandate to rule over creation (vv. 26-28; cf. Psalms 8:4-9).

It has often been thought that the opening passage of Genesis reports that God created the world out of nothing. Whatever else can be said for this important traditional doctrine, it is difficult to square with the account of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3. For there we find no report of God's creating water or darkness, which are already present when He begins His creation with words "Let there be light" (1:2-3; cf. Isaiah 45:7). "Heaven" and "earth" are not created before this pronouncement, but afterward, on the second and third days, respectively (vv. 6-8, 9-10).

The notion of primordial waters (Hebrew, *tehom*, "the deep," "the abyss," 1:2) recalls other ancient Near Eastern accounts of creation, especially the Babylonian poem known as *Enuma Elish*, in which the omnipotent god Marduk does battle with the violent sea goddess Tiamat and creates the world after splitting her body in half. The idea of creation through combat near or with the waters, including the splitting of the sea, is widespread in the Bible, too (e.g., Exodus 14:1-15:21; Isaiah 51:9-11; Psalms 74:12-17; 89:6-15). Against this background, the placidity of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3 is remarkable, for there God is unopposed, and even the great sea monsters are His own creations, first appearing not when He divides the primordial waters (1:6-7), but only on the fifth day (v. 21).

In the opening text of the Book of Genesis, it is not only that God dominates, ordering the world according to His sovereign and unchallenged will; there He is the only one who acts at all. When He says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," He is probably addressing a council of other deities, but, if so, we never hear their reply (vv. 26-27). He acts in lonely and lordly majesty. What He acts against should not be conceived as "nothing" in the sense of a vacuum but as chaos: radical, godless disorder and moral evil. His acts of creation are equally acts of redemption, and they constitute a stupendous moral triumph.

When He has finished His work of creation, the primordial realities of darkness and water remain, but radically transformed. Now darkness must alternate with light, and water, no longer unbounded, is confined to the seas (cf. Psalms 104:9). Acting like an ancient Israelite priest (cf. Ezekiel 44:23-24), God in Genesis 1:1-2:3 separates things into their proper categories, pronounces on their fitness, and blesses and sanctifies the Sabbath. His finding all that He has made to be "very good" (1:31) does not, however, imply that the radical evil symbolized by darkness and the primordial abyss has disappeared or that reality in its entirety has been rendered inherently good. The world, rather, is neither a part of God nor His enemy. It is something much more ambiguous; it is His creation, and so are human beings, who owe their existence to Him and His mysterious purposes. Their special character, their being made in His image, obligates them to His service, even if it also tempts them to rebel and replace His commandments with their choices.

There is abundant evidence in the Bible that the radical transformation recounted in Genesis 1:1-2:3 was thought to be reversible. By refusing to respect the boundaries that God has decreed, by indulging in wicked behavior, human beings can undo creation and plunge a fragile reality into chaos again (Genesis 6-7; Jeremiah 4:23-28). But neither the ambiguous reality established by God's original acts of creation nor the chaos it replaced is the last word. For, in the end, the primordial sea monster and the cosmic evil he symbolizes shall be vanquished (Isaiah 27:1); the day shall come that never yields to the terror of night (Isaiah 60:19-20; Zechariah 14:6-7); and there shall be a new heaven and a new earth, which so unlike the current heaven and earth, will be a source of everlasting joy (Isaiah 65:17-25). The hopes for the end time are patterned upon the varying reports of the beginning. In the in-between time represented by human history, both God and evil are alive and indescribably potent.

THE CREATION CHAPTER

Rabbi J.H. Hertz¹

Genesis 1:1-2:3, is a worthy opening of Israel's Sacred Scriptures, and ranks among the most important chapters of the Bible. Even in form it is pre-eminent in the literature of religion. No other ancient account of creation (cosmogony) will bear a second reading. Most of them not only describe the origin of the world, but begin by describing how the gods emerged out of pre-existent chaos (theogony). In contrast with the simplicity and sublimity of Genesis 1, we find all ancient cosmogonies, whether it be the Babylonian or the Phoenician, the Greek or the Roman, alike unrelievedly wild, cruel, even foul.

Thus, the Assyro-Babylonian mythology tells how, before what we call earth or heaven had come into being, there existed a primeval watery chaos—Tiamat—out of which the gods were evolved:

When, in the height, heaven was not yet named,
And the earth beneath did not bear a name,
And the primeval Apsu (the Abyss), their begetter,
And Chaos (Tiamat), the mother of them both,
Their waters were mingled together,
Then were created the gods in the midst of heaven.

Apsu, the Abyss, disturbed at finding his domain invaded by the new gods, induced Tiamat and Chaos to join him in contesting their supremacy; he was, however, subdued by the cunning of Ea; and Tiamat, left to carry on the struggle alone, provides herself with a brood of hideous allies. The alarmed gods thereupon appoint Marduk as their champion. With winds and lightnings, Marduk advances; he seizes Tiamat in a huge net, and “with his merciless club he crushed her skull.” The carcass of the monster he split into two halves, one of which he fixed on high, to form a firmament supporting the waters above it. In the same grotesque way, the story continues to describe the formation of sun, moon, plants, animals and man. Many moderns feign to believe that this is the source from which Genesis 1 is taken. But a thoroughgoing Bible critic like the late Dr. Driver² admits, “It is incredible that the monotheistic author of Genesis 1 could have borrowed any detail, however slight, from the polytheistic epic of the conflict of Marduk and Tiamat.”

The infinite importance, however, of the first page of the Bible consists in the fact that it enshrines some of the fundamental beliefs of Judaism. Among these are:

GOD IS THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE. Each religion has certain specific teachings, convictions, dogmas. Such a dogma of Judaism is its belief that the world was called into existence at the will of the One, Almighty and All-good God. And nowhere does this fundamental conviction of Israel's Faith find clearer expression than in Genesis 1. When

¹ The late chief rabbi of the British Empire and compiler of one of the most popular *chumashim* used in synagogues to this day (and also the first rabbi to be ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary). This essay is drawn from his “Additional Notes to Genesis” section.

² Hertz's reference here is to SAMUEL ROLLES DRIVER, an English Christian Hebraist, was one of the foremost champions of Higher Biblical Criticism. Driver always took a conservative view, but not in a dogmatic way; for this, he was often attacked both from the Left and the Right in his field.

neighboring peoples deified the sun, moon and stars, or worshipped stocks and stones and beasts, the sacred river Nile, the crocodile that swam in its waters, and the very beetles that crawled along its banks, the opening page of Scripture proclaimed in language of majestic simplicity that the universe, and all that therein is, are the product of one supreme directing Intelligence; of an eternal, spiritual Being, prior to them and independent of them....

The second teaching of this chapter is,

MAN IS THE GOAL AND CROWN OF CREATION. He is fundamentally distinguished from the lower creation, and is akin to the Divine. Man, modern scientists declare, is cousin to the anthropoid ape. But it is not so much the descent, as the *ascent* of man, which is decisive. Furthermore, it is not the resemblance, but the *differences* between man and the ape, that are of infinite importance. It is the differences between them that constitute the humanity of man, the God-likeness of man. The qualities that distinguish the lowest man from the highest brute make the differences between them differences in kind rather than in degree; so much so that, whatever man might have inherited from his animal ancestors, his advent can truly be spoken of as a specific Divine act, whereby a new being had arisen with God-like possibilities within him, and conscious of these God-like possibilities within him. Man is of God, declared Rabbi Akiba; and what is far more, he *knows* he is of God.

Nor is the Biblical account of the creation of man irreconcilable with the view that certain forms of organized being have been endowed with the capacity of developing, in God's good time and under the action of suitable environment, the attributes distinctive of man. "God formed man of the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7). Whence that dust was taken is not, and cannot be, of fundamental importance. Science holds that man was formed from the lower animals; are they not too "dust of the ground"? "And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature"—this command, says the Midrash, includes Adam....

The thing that eternally matters is the breath of Divine and everlasting life that He breathed into the being coming from the dust. By virtue of that Divine impact, a new and distinctive creature made its appearance—man, dowered with an immortal soul. The sublime revelation of the unique worth and dignity of man, contained in Gen. 1:27 ("And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him"), may well be called the Magna Carta of humanity. Its purpose is not to explain the biological origins of the human race, but its spiritual kinship with God. There is much force in the view expressed by a modern thinker: "[The Bible] neither provides, nor, in the nature of things, could provide, faultless anticipations of sciences still unborn. If by a miracle it had provided them, without a miracle they could not have been understood" (Balfour). And fully to grasp the eternal power and infinite beauty of these words—"And God created man in His own image"—we need but compare them with the genealogy of man, condensed from the pages of one of the leading biologists of the age (Haeckel)

"Monera begat Amoeba, Amoeba begat Synamoebae, Synamoebae begat Ciliated Larva, Ciliated Larva begat Primeval Stomach Animals, Primeval Stomach Animals begat Gliding Worms, Gliding Worms begat Skull-less Animals, Skull-less Animals begat Single-nostrilled Animals, Single-nostrilled Animals begat Primeval Fish, Primeval Fish begat Mud-fish, Mud-fish begat Gilled Amphibians, Gilled Amphibians begat Tailed Amphibians, Tailed Amphibians begat Primary Mammals, Primary Mammals begat Pouched Animals, Pouched Animals begat Semi-Apes, Semi-Apes begat Tailed Apes, Tailed Apes begat Man-like Apes, Man-like Apes begat Ape-like Men, Ape-like Men begat Men."

Let anyone who is disturbed by the fact that Scripture does not include the latest scientific doctrine, try to imagine such information provided in a Biblical chapter.

JUDAISM IS OPTIMISM, is the third teaching of this chapter. No less than five times is the refrain, “And God saw that it was good” repeated in the Creation Chapter. The world is not something hostile to God or independent of Him. All comes from God and all is His handiwork; all is in its essence good, nor is there anything absolutely evil. Israel acclaim God as the sole “King of the universe, who formest light and createst darkness, who makest peace and createst all things” (*Authorized Prayer Book*, p. 37). Though Nature seems to be indifferent to man's sense of compassion, the world is good, since goodness is its final aim: without struggle, there would be no natural selection or adaptation to changing surroundings, and therefore no progress from lower to higher. “And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold it was very good”—even suffering, evil, nay death itself, have a rightful and beneficent place in the Divine scheme, is the Rabbinic comment on this verse.

THE SABBATH CONSECRATES WORK AND HALLOWS MAN'S LIFE, is the culminating teaching of the Chapter. The institution of the Sabbath is part of the cosmic plan, and therefore intended for all humanity. The Sabbath is a specifically Jewish contribution to human civilization....The ancient Babylonians had “a day of cessation”, which they called by a name somewhat similar to ‘Sabbath’, and it was observed on the 7th, 14th, 19th, 21st, and 28th days of the months Elul and Marcheshvan. These were considered unlucky days, and on them the king was not to offer sacrifice, nor consult an oracle, nor invoke curses on his enemies. Quite other is the Jewish Sabbath. It is not merely a day of cessation from toil. On the one hand, it has its positive aspect as a day of spiritual recreation; and, on the other hand, it is a day of joy, and is greeted in the Synagogue in the words “Come, my Beloved, to meet the Bride, Queen Sabbath.” It banishes toil and sorrow—a symbol of immortality, of that Life which is wholly a Sabbath; see on Exod. 20:9-11.

God the Creator and Lord of the Universe, which is the work of His goodness and wisdom; and Man, made in His image, who is to hallow his weekday labors by the blessedness of Sabbath-rest—such are the teachings of the Creation chapter. Its purpose is to reveal these teachings to the children of men—and not to serve as a textbook of astronomy, geology or anthropology. Its object is not to teach scientific facts; but to proclaim highest religious truths respecting God, Man, and the Universe. The “conflict” between the fundamental realities of Religion and the established facts of Science is seen to be unreal as soon as Religion and Science each recognizes the true borders of its dominion.