

While Adam slept

Another look at the strange nocturnal doings that brought forth 'woman'

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What is the "rib" from which woman was created according to the Bible? Was man really first created as an androgynous being, only later separated by God into two separate beings?

According to the story of creation as it appears in Genesis 2:21-22, God caused a deep slumber to fall on Adam, and while he slept, God took "one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place, and made a woman, and brought her to man." Thus was the first bride led under the canopy, with God as matchmaker and "best man." (This is how the ceremony is described in the midrash in Breishit Rabbah.)

The match, at least at this point, seemed a success—for the "groom's" response was one of joy and exultation: "This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called 'woman,' because she was taken out of man!"

What exactly is this "rib" from which woman was created, and how did Adam look before God conducted this "operation" on him? Why did God need to create woman in this manner rather than in the way He had created Adam previously, from the "dust of the ground," into which God breathed in "the spirit of life" (2:7)?

As for the definition of the word *tzella*—"rib," it is not entirely clear from the Bible that this word refers to what is normally referred to in Hebrew as a rib—as defined in the dictionary and as used in the Mishna, although some exegetes have gone as far as to pinpoint exactly which rib was used (for example in the Jonathan Targum, it is claimed that it was the third rib on the right!). This would imply that God "cut" a rib from Adam's body, and after doing something to it, created a woman from it.

Fifteenth century Spanish exegete Don Isaac Abrabanel adds that if this is so, one would have to conclude that God created man with an extra rib (for if not we would have to assume that all men to this day are missing a rib, and are therefore, alas, handicapped). Ralbag (Rabbi Levi ben Gershon (1288-1344) even saw fit to describe this rib as a kind of placenta containing flesh from which "God later made woman."

Beyond the fact that the entire matter seems somewhat bizarre, it is also offensive to women (although this cannot be a proper consideration in discussion of the literal meaning of the Biblical text). And indeed, those who have not been disturbed by the obvious inferiority of woman implied in this text have been gratified to conclude that it implies that man is the "reason for her existence" (of woman, that man is the source, and only because of him was she created; see Ralbag).

Philo Judaeus went as far as to explain that woman was created from the rib of man to stress her inferiority and so that she would never demand equality in the future. Although some sages did suggest less misogynist views, others took the view that the rib was in fact a source of nutrition for Adam. Other midrashim have taken even more bizarre routes, most developed later, in the Middle Ages. They (apparently following two different versions of the creation of man) determined that two women were in fact created for Adam. One was apparently created together with him, and like him, was formed from dust. However, she—Lilith—was, perish the thought!, a "feminist" (she refused to accept Adam's authority over her), and was a shrew. She

was so ill-tempered that she ran away from Adam. She brazenly agreed to accept an unusually harsh punishment, that "100 of her sons" be killed, as long as she did not have to return to accept the domination that Adam imposed on her. Following this unfortunate episode, the disappointed Adam appealed to God to create him a different woman, one who would be more agreeable. Then Eve, the second wife, was created from the rib. For some reason, Adam became so enthusiastic when he saw her that he said, "This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh."

Christian Biblical scholars also took this path, except that they adapted the interpretation to fit their worldview. Augustine, in "City of God," discusses the question of whether woman will rise when the dead are resurrected in the future as a woman or whether she will rise as a man. His conclusion is that she will rise as a woman, but that she will not have the same intrinsic inferiority as today, that she will not have need of sex or to have children, for at that future time, sexual lust will have been eliminated from the world. He then goes on to ask why God saw fit to create woman from the rib of man, and he concludes that this act contains intentional symbolism: When Jesus hung on the cross, a spear was thrust into his rib. From that wound flowed the blood and water upon which the church rituals were based. He takes this to imply that from "that rib," the church will later be built. That is why, opines Augustine, the Bible says, "And God built the rib" (Gen. 2:22) using the word "built" rather than "created."

Some, on the other hand, interpreted the creation of woman from the rib as a sign of equality between the sexes. They explained that God had to take the rib from the body of man as the basis for the creation of woman to show how similar to man woman is (see Sforzo). However, if we consider that when the word *tzella* is used in the Bible, it generally refers to "side" (as in "the second side of the tabernacle" Exodus 26:20; "the side of the mountain" Samuel II 16:13;) the interpretation of the entire issue may take a completely different course. Thus, for example, in *Breishit Rabbah* (8,1, pages 45-55), an interesting interpretation is presented concerning this matter by Rabbi Jeremiah ben Eliezer, who lived in the beginning of the fourth century in Eretz Israel. "When God created Adam, he made him androgynous, for it says, 'male and female He made them' in the same creature." This surprising interpretation for the creation of woman is easier for us to accept, for according to this view, woman was not created from an obscure superfluous rib of man, but rather, there was an equal division between two parts of one primordial body which contained both man and woman. In the same vein, Rabbi Shmuel Bar Nahman, who lived a bit earlier, even clarifies what type of androgyny is referred to here. "When God first created man, He created him with two faces, and then he cut him in half and created two backs, one in each direction."

This myth was undoubtedly old and well known during the time of the Second Temple, as well. This can be proved from the fact that Philo also refers to it, although he has a somewhat different interpretation of events. In his opinion, Adam was created twice, and only the first time was androgynous. These legends are so similar to certain parts of Plato's "Symposium," that it is difficult not to accept the views of certain scholars who believe that the sages actually used ancient Greek sources (although, strangely enough, Y. Baar, in "Israel Among the Nations," believed that both Philo and Plato drew their versions from ancient Hebrew sources).

In the Symposium, Aristophanes explains the source of the power of Eros in the world. He then provides a description of the ancient species of humans who lived on earth. "First there were three sexes, rather than two, as now, male and female. There was a third sex, made of these two; now only its name remains as a memory, but it has completely disappeared. For then, there was an androgynous sex, whose form and name was composed of these two. And now, it no longer exists, and its name has become an invective."

Then Aristophanes goes on to describe the form of ancient man. "Secondly, every man was completely round; his back and chest were rounded, and he had four hands, and the same number of feet as hands. On his round neck were two faces, equal to each other in every way. And these two faces looking in two opposite directions were joined to one head, and it had four ears, and two sets of genitalia."

This unusual creature, who was our primeval ancestor, would have remained thus to this day if not for the fear of the gods that because of its great puissance and arrogance, the creature would attack the gods. They consulted one another and arrived at the conclusion that there would be no point in destroying it because they had need of its sacrifices. Consequently, they decided to weaken the creature by sawing it into two parts. From then on, man would walk on two feet. But the most important result was that from that point on, each half would miss and long for its twin, "and they would embrace one another in their arms and stroke one another.") And when one half longed for the other—the twin—the longing was so great that a mate had to be found, "whether it happened to find a half that was a female—from now on be called 'woman'—or whether it was a male half."

And Zeus introduced a very important modification by moving their genitalia to the front, thus enabling them to mate and to produce offspring directly (and not as previously, when man would lay eggs into the ground "like the crickets." "And when they embraced—if a man found a woman, then they would reproduce and maintain their seed, and if a man found a man, their joining would at least bring them satisfaction (because of those intense and constant cravings), and then they would depart one from the other and concern themselves with the other needs of life."

True, there is a great difference between the original Greek myth and the version adopted by the Hebrew midrash. The midrash omits the fear by the gods of rebellion of man and the "punishment" involved, using only the idea of the "androgynous" to solve the problem of the contradiction between the two versions of creation (see E.E. Urbach, "The Sages"). But most intriguing in the process of the "conversion" of the myth is its kabbalistic development, which is eventually presented as a comprehensive theory known as "The Secret of the Sawing" (see, for example, Ramkhal—Rabbi Haim David Luzatto—"The Book of Rules"). And in the spirit of the explanations provided in these matters by Rabbi Avraham Hacoheh Kook, his student, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, recently offered his students the following interpretation (which echoes of Buber), and which in my opinion has today a decisive effect on the perception of the structure of the Jewish family unit in the eyes of many yeshiva students.

According to Aviner, a person's match is predetermined and the couple getting married—without being aware of it—underwent some kind of previous "sawing"—or separation—before coming into this world. At the time of their marriage, they rejoin once again to form one body. This primordial divine "sawing" was performed by God for the benefit of man, to enable him to perform the labor of searching and the toil which is the reason for his descent into this world. (for man still has a dim and unconscious memory of what was before the "sawing," and he aspires to realize it, thus providing the erotic element in life).

This rejoining, which after searching and much effort is called "face-to-face," leads, according to this explanation, to an emotionally profound encounter with one's "primordial" mate. On the other hand, in the former, primordial state of joining, known as "back-to-back," (a form of life of some people who are unable to comprehend the full depth of things and for whom the erotic aspect of life is not sufficiently developed to maturity), there is no choice. Instead, there is a powerful instinctive attraction, fundamentally no different than the casual coupling of animals.

Heads and tails

Misogynist sages diminished the status of women in order to 'put women in their place'

Admiel Kosman

Is it permitted or forbidden for a man to walk behind a woman? In our previous study, in which we discussed the myth of the androgyny of Adam, we saw that in the midrashim of the sages that suggested that primordial Adam was an androgynous being, there was a tendency to grant woman a position close to that of man in the hierarchy of creation. This article will attempt to show that this approach was only one aspect of the picture, and on the other side of the Talmudic Beit Midrash, there was no dearth of misogynist sages who used new interpretation to diminish the status of women, and reinterpret the myth in order to "put women in their place."

It will be recalled that the Eretz Israel myth (which drew, directly or indirectly, on the Greek myth from Plato's Symposium) by Rabbi Jeremiah ben Eliezer said: "When God created Adam, he made him an androgynous being, for it says, 'male and female He made them' in the same creature (Genesis 5:2)." And Rabbi Shmuel Bar Nahman, said, "When God first created man, He created him with two faces, and then He cut him in half and created two backs, one in each direction." There was of course also another view among the sages that held that woman was indeed created from Adam's *zella*—side or rib—as can be understood from a literal reading of the verses.

However, when this homily reached Babylon, the tendency there increasingly leaned toward diminishing women's status. One of the views presented in the Babylonian Talmud is that God created woman from the tail that Adam once had (Tractate Eiruvim 18a), which God removed and used as raw material for Eve. It is difficult to assume that a woman created from the tail of man could ever feel completely comfortable, or equal to him. Consequently, as we shall see further on, she is required to "tail" behind him, and not only in the metaphorical sense of the word.

An additional—even more misogynist—midrash can be found in another Eretz Israel source: After God created woman from the zellah of Adam, the opening left in Adam naturally had to be closed up, as it says, "God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and He took one of his sides and closed up the flesh in its place" (Genesis 2:21). Concerning the "closing," Rabbi Hanina Bar Yitzhak makes the following surprising comment, "God made the place of the closing comely, creating the buttocks, so that man would not be in the degrading position of animals, whose anus is exposed." (Breishit Rabba 17, p. 157).

And if that were not enough, the following approach comes to claim that not only did God concern himself with beauty and aesthetics of the body while closing up the opening in Adam, but also made the place from which woman was created comfortable to sit on. A woman created from the most inferior part of the man's body is obviously inferior according to these midrashim.

But even the second view—based on the androgynous myth, which ostensibly views woman created on a level equal to man, and according to which the Divine "operation" actually cut the double creature into two separate beings—also underwent intriguing changes after arriving in the Babylonian Beit Midrash. It seems that the sages there were quite troubled by this concept, because it could lead to the inevitable conclusion that man and women were created equal!

The Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Eruvin 18b) asks about this directly: If we assume that the original "Man" was created as a double male-female body-face, then which one walked in front? And the answer according to Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak (a fourth-century Talmudic sage) is not difficult to predict: "It seems that the man walked in front." And what argument does Rabbi Nahman use to prove his point? "Because we have learned that a man never walks behind a woman, even if she is his wife. If a man happens to encounter a woman on a bridge, he should hurry to take his place ahead of her, and anyone walking behind a woman on a river has no place in the world to come."

This determination is certainly based on a number of elements: The prohibition against walking behind a woman on a river is certainly a cautionary rule of modesty, intended to prevent men from ogling women required to lift up their dresses as they cross in the water. But the general prohibition against walking behind women cannot be based only on rules of modesty, for men were prohibited against walking behind their own wives, as well. Therefore, Rashi interpreted this as a way of distinguishing status, explaining that it is degrading for a man if he does not walk ahead of women.

This matter carried such weight with them that Rabbi Yohanan found it necessary to formulate it even more forcefully: "It is preferable to walk behind a lion, rather than behind a woman." Rabbi Nahman apparently assumed that that primordial androgynous being was also familiar with this halacha, and that the female half of the being already then showed proper respect for the male half, thus practically and symbolically determining the direction their shared life should take.

As a general comment on the background of these comments, it should be noted that the ancient world attributed great significance to various hand and body movements, because the precise hierarchy in society was of supreme importance (as it still is in the army to this day). Thus, by way of illustration, fifth-century Greek historian Herodotus comments that in Persia of the fifth century BCE, every meeting between two individuals was accompanied by a regular ritual of body movements, whose only role was to symbolize the social status of each of the participants, with members of the same class kissing each other directly, while a certain kind of bowing was common in meetings between members of different social classes. And here, we can see that this halacha of not walking behind a woman has been preserved until recent times, particularly in oriental Jewish communities.

One of the greatest Iraqi rabbis at the turn of the twentieth century, in response to the query concerning exactly what the precise distance between a man and a woman should be if a man should encounter a woman on the way, answered that it should be at least four cubits (about 2 meters), because each four cubits represents a separate "domain." According to this response, the distance between a man and a woman cannot be minimal, a man must make sure not to allow a woman to walk ahead of him, and when he passes her, he must maintain a distance of four cubits from her, because only then can he be defined as being in a separate "domain," having no contact, physical or otherwise, with the female domain trailing behind. Apropos this law, Yehoshua Bar Yosef writes on page 355 of his novel, "Enchanted City," "Her husband is ashamed to be even seen with her in the street...; he always runs a few cubits before her." But the real reason is not shame, but rather strict adherence to this law.

Unlike the oriental Jewish communities, the Jews of Europe could no longer keep this law, apparently because of improvements in the status of women in Ashkenazi society in general. In the 19th century, we already have evidence of this in the book *Leket Yashar* by Rabbi Joseph Ben Moshe of Bavaria, who comments in the name of his rabbi that "a man may walk behind the wife of another man or behind his mother, because at this time we are no longer cautioned against walking behind a woman."

This, then, is an unusual and daring reform in the status of women using the argument that the times and circumstances have changed, and that what the Talmud says is no longer valid! Rabbi Joseph Ben Moshe even adds practical evidence: "And I recall that his daughter-in-law Redil used to walk before a certain old man named Reb Yudil Sofer in the home of the Gaon, where most of the other members of the household used to walk."

And if this was the state of affairs in certain places in Europe of the Medieval Ages, then certainly this prohibition can no longer be observed in modern times. This is because it would seem peculiar and also because people no longer felt it necessary to behave in this manner. But the rabbis were at odds as to how to explain this dispensation, for couples to walk together in the street, which had become common even among many rabbis. Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg and the late Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach—considered by many the greatest rabbinical decider of our generation—explained this puzzling matter. Rabbi Auerbach, who although he headed a number of prestigious rabbinical institutions, was exceedingly modest in his personal behavior and used to travel by bus. This engendered an understandable question that arose in a conversation between him and Rabbi Waldenberg. "In one of our meetings some time ago, he asked me: What is the precise definition of the prohibition against walking behind a woman, and does it include the boarding of a bus? It sometimes happens that the wife of a great man is also waiting for the bus—should one avoid granting her respect by boarding the bus before her because of the prohibition of walking behind a woman?"

Both base their response on Leket Yashar in order to allow it, but this "reform" is strange to them, as well. One of the suggestions they offer holds that "In earlier times—in the time of the Talmud—women were not accustomed to walking in the streets of the city, and would remain in the hind part of the home. Therefore an encounter with them and walking behind them may arouse sinful (sexual) thoughts. This is no longer true because reality has changed—women no longer remain at home as they did in ancient times, and we are accustomed to seeing women in the streets. Today, therefore, there is no longer fear of sexual thoughts while walking behind a woman, as the case was then."

This is a very interesting psychological approach. What it is saying is that ultimately, sexual practices, after they have become deeply rooted, determine halachic norms as well.

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The creation of Adam as hermaphrodite — and its implications for feminist theology

Azila Talit Reisenberger

Biblical accounts of creation endorse female equality. However, patriarchal interpretations have subordinated the female role to a position of inferiority. The Bible presents two narratives of creation. Narrative A states that God created a male and a female. Narrative B states that God created a female from one side of Adam's body. In translation, 'side' has been portrayed as rib. The idea of Eve's inferiority to Adam was established as Eve was no longer presented as an equal partner but as a helpmate. Dr Azila Talit Reisenberger is the Head of Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department at the University of Cape Town. She teaches and publishes in the field of Bible and Hebrew literature with a focus on gender issues and the South African experience. For the past 15 years, she has served as a spiritual leader of the Jewish Progressive Community in East London, South Africa. She lives in Cape Town with her husband and three children. This article was published on September 22, 1993, in *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*.

WHEN WESTERN FEMINISTS TRIED TO SHAPE their theological credo into a unified logical corpus and mould it on the Bible, they felt alienated. The main reason for their difficulty is the way in which women are depicted in the Bible. However, when one deals with the Biblical text, one must make a distinction between Biblical records dealing with historical affairs, and Divine Theology. As long as the text deals with the events of a particular period in history, one can associate oneself with or distance oneself from the story without any feeling of alienation from the Religious Spirit; i.e., if one does not approve of certain actions of King David, one does not necessarily have to feel alienated from God or Judaism.

The portrayal of women in the various books of the Bible differs as greatly as humans can differ. In most cases, they are portrayed in a more positive way than are their male counterparts. Very few feminine characters are evil (e.g., Jezebel and Athalya), as opposed to an abundance of male evil-doers. Even if an account of a particular female protagonist in the Bible may not appeal to women readers, it can be read as an individual account of a particular episode in a specific era.

Feminist theologians, therefore, should have no qualms about the behavior of Biblical heroines, including prophetesses, as they represent individuals in history. However, this method of understanding the Biblical text cannot be applied to the creation account, as this is the record of a direct intervention made by the Divine Power *ex nihilo*, setting the eternal order of the Universe. God initiates an act out of His Divine Will, not as a reaction to, or in the context of, world events; He acts personally; and He puts his direct mark on the events, as in the primeval history in Genesis 1-2. As long as Eve was the passive creation of God, she would embody the physical attributes and expectations which the Divine would have had of all women, as she would have been in God's total control. Only after she had assumed her own existence, would she no longer represent God's plans for her but her own individuality, as an expression of her free will.

Therefore, any principle of theology which strives to understand the Divine expectation of the world, and the understanding of the place of the human being in a meaningful religious universe, should be drawn from the direct actions of the Divine as recorded in the Creation Epic in Genesis 1-2.

Creation Epic—Genesis 1-2

It is apparent that there are two main accounts of the creation. The first one is to be found in Genesis 1:1-2:3, and will be called Narrative A. The second one is to be found in Genesis 2:4-

2:25—Narrative B. In addition to the variety of styles, overlapping themes and numerous factual differences, even the reader who has not heard of the Documentary Hypothesis will have noticed the different uses of the names of God (YHWH, Elokim) and the two apparently different theologies. However, ancient Semitic writings did not necessarily have to refrain from duplicating themes—sometimes they engaged in detailed elaboration, often with variation. Repetition was consonant with the stylistic principles of ancient poetics. They might have been conceived with a unity which eludes us,¹ and, however foreign it is to our concept of literary texts, it is we who must come to terms with the existing complex unity.² It is easier for Jewish readers to accept the Bible as a unitary document, as this is the central element of the heritage of mainstream Judaism (though it evolves from a religious sentiment rather than from a literary one), and this attitude is instilled in them from their earlier experiences of reading the text.

Feminist theologians, who deal with the parallel accounts of the creation in Genesis, will have to deal with two aspects concerning this Epic as it appears in Genesis 1-2:

- 1) How does each of the two existing creation narratives portray the woman?
- 2) What concept or idea did the Bible try to convey and how did it derive this idea?

The First Aspect: The Portrayal of the Woman

Reading the Biblical creation story, as two narratives existing side by side, feminists should not feel alienated:

1) Narrative A clearly states the equality of the two sexes: "A male and a female created He them" (Gen 1:27).

2) Narrative B states that the solitude of the first created human was unsatisfactory and he needed an *ezer kenegdo*—a compatible partner (assistant and/or protector at his own level), and therefore God put him to sleep and removed one side of his body to establish each sex as an independent entity, who in turn provided company for the other. This attitude of total equality is reinforced in the record of Adam's line. Gen 5:1-2 states:

"...when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God; male and female He created them, and called them humans."

The Second Aspect: The Idea Which the Bible Tries to Convey.

While some scholars trace the origins of the two narratives in Genesis 1-2 to poetic traditions in antiquity which were forged into a supporting unified basic tradition³ (even some Jewish orthodox scholars accept this),⁴ asserting and tracing the original sources of Biblical passages is not the purpose of this paper. The final form—the unitary document—is used as it appears in Genesis 1-2. The Torah contains the two creation narratives side by side because each of them represents a different perspective of the creation, and both versions are of value to the People of The Book.⁵

Understanding the motivation behind the writing of both creation stories presents no difficulty for feminist theologians, as both narratives do not reveal any inequality between the sexes

¹ Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), pp. 17-36.

² Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, John H. Marks, tr. (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 72; Kikawada and Quinn, *Op. cit.*, pp. 9-36.

³ Rad, *Op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁴ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part 1*, Israel Abrahams, tr. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), pp. 72-3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 72-73.

whatsoever. Yet, feminist readers feel enraged on reading the creation epic because, when they read the Bible in translation, the choice of the words describing the creation of the first woman perpetuates a denigration of the female image:

a. The feminine part taken from Adam is not translated as a "side," but rather as a (small) "rib."

b. The Woman is no longer described as a "compatible partner," but rather as a "helpmate."

The idea that God took a rib out of the first human and formed it into a woman is a reading error which, unfortunately, is repeated in all translations. A check in any Biblical Lexicon will reveal that the word *zela* means a component, or, more often, a side-wall, or simply a side, as in: a side-wall of the Temple in Ezekiel 41; Exodus 25, 26; I Kings 6:5; etc.; similarly, the mountain side in 2 Samuel 16:13; wood panel of certain trees in I Kings 6; etc., and, in our case, one side of the first human being.

The meaning of the Hebrew words, *ezer kenegdo*, in any Biblical Lexicon emphasizes the protective aspect, as in: "My *ezer* is from the Lord," Psalms 121:2, or "...for the God of my father ... was my *ezer*, Exodus 18:4, etc.; and *kenegdo* emphasizes twice the equality: firstly—in the preposition *ke*—which is an abbreviated form of the Hebrew word *kemo*, "the same as," and secondly—in the word *negdo*—which means corresponding, equal and adequate to him.

Examining what Jewish scholars and students of the Bible have had to say about this story is, of course, of importance: The earliest insight comes from the midrashic Targum Yonatan, which says that the *zela* from which the woman was created was the 13th rib on the right side.

Philo, who lived in Alexandria in the 1st century C.E., and was greatly influenced by Plato, sees Adam in the two creation narratives as an allegory of the ideal man, who initially possessed a pure soul, but was later augmented by earthly materials and senses represented by the woman. Rabbi Jeremiah son of Elazar Hatanai (i.e., the mishnaic scholar) in Bereshit Rabbah (8:1) said that "Adam was created as androgynous." And Rabbi Samuel Son of Nahman added (there) that "when God created the first human, he gave him two faces, connected back to back," and the two sexes were separated in order to enable them to face one another and to relieve their loneliness.

Rashi, the great medieval exegete, accepts the androgynous (or hermaphrodite) view, while Nahmanides (13th century), accepts the "rib" view. Abraham ibn Ezra, the linguist and Biblical commentator (in the Golden Era in Spain), avoids the issue, saying only that: "becoming one flesh" is written in the past tense (*vihayu*), to emphasize about every union between man and woman: "Let them be as Adam and Eve once were." Similarly, Rabbi Jacob the son of Asher, author of the law code, the Tur (14th century), says that "they should be of one flesh as they were at the beginning of creation." Both scholars use the idiom, "one flesh," which may mean that the woman was taken out from a rib or side. Isaac Abravanel (the 15th century commentator, a refugee from the Spanish persecutions), reads it literally. He writes that, when man was created, he had an additional "side" that was not vital for the functioning of his own body, which God turned into the woman.⁶

The 19th century commentator, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, referring to Genesis 1:27, says that "Only the two sexes together form the complete [human] conception." Woman must join in man's efforts for her direction and sphere in life. Man chooses his own profession; the woman receives it in joining her husband. Referring to Genesis 2:21, Rabbi Hirsch says that God formed (later) one side (not rib) of man into woman. Man was divided from one individual into two "and thereby the complete equality of women was forever attested."

⁶ As cited in Genesis (Artscroll edition).

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik sees the two stories as two views of man, each a part of his character and mission: one is man, the passive, religious personality; the other is man the active, creative personality.⁷

Umberto Cassuto, an observant Jew, who was an academic Biblical scholar, cites⁸ the hermaphrodite theory, quoting B. Berakhot 61a; B. Eruvin 18a; and Genesis Rabbah 8:1, which is based on "Legends in the Ancient World." But he relies on "...He created them" (Gen 1:27), in the plural form, for the correct interpretation. His explanation for the existence of the two versions is that the first account, Narrative A, is to place man and woman in the broad context of the sequence of created beings without telling us whether they were created simultaneously or successively. In Narrative B, we learn that it was successive, with woman being formed from man's rib. However, Cassuto sees the rib story as an allegory, to emphasize the qualities of what he conceives as a good wife: to stand at man's side and be a "helper-counterpart."

Modern linguists also dwelt on the problem, and came up with a similar concept of Adam as being bisexual,⁹ though some have suggested that the text be corrected in order to suit their theory, which is unacceptable.¹⁰

Facts Underlying the Rationalization of These Ideas

The hermaphrodite theory: When one reads the Bible literally, and accepts the text as a unitary document, Narrative B—which follows Narrative A—seems to be a recapitulation of details of the earlier narrative. Therefore, the sexual duality, of which one is informed in Narrative B, seems to have existed from the beginning of the process. This indicates that the first human being was bisexual, i.e., a hermaphrodite.

The Rib theory: The word *zela* does not exist in the Biblical vocabulary with the meaning of "rib." This understanding, and therefore the idea that Eve was created out of Adam's rib, could have been suggested by a superficial reading of the following verse: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones" (Genesis 2:23a), because a rib is a bone.¹¹ However, this verse (Gen. 2:23b) continues: "and flesh of my flesh...." However, "bone of my bones" and "flesh of my flesh" is a poetic way to describe the woman as a very real physical part of the original whole, as in the other six occasions in the Bible, when this idiom is used, each of which describes blood ties and close kinship.¹² The word "bone" in verse 23 cannot be accepted as a physical bone and cannot support the idea of "a rib" because then, the idiom "flesh of my flesh" should also be read in a physical way, in which case there is a support for the idea of a component, a side of a body: flesh and bones together.

The Allegorical explanations: These come from philosophers whose religious commitment clashed with their philosophical concept of the world, i.e., accepting the Biblical text as a unitary document written by the Divine makes them uneasy about criticizing disturbing details like: why there should be two creation narratives or why there are factual inconsistencies.

⁷ J.B. Soloveitchik, *Man of Faith in the Modern World* (Vol. II), adapted from lectures by Abraham R. Besdin (Hoboken: Ktav, 1989), pp. 38-48; see also his "The Lonely Man of Faith," *Tradition*, Summer, 1965.

⁸ Cassuto, *Op. cit.*, pp. 57-58, 89-90, 132.

⁹ Friedrich Schwally, "Die biblischen Schöpfungsberichte" in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, Vol. IX (1906), pp. 159-175.

¹⁰ Schwally, for example, tried to change the text in order to fit his theory (*Ibid.*, p. 170).

¹¹ Cassuto, *Op. cit.*, p. 134. See also the commentary of Abarbanel, *ad loc.*

¹² Genesis 29:14; Judges 9:2; 2 Samuel 5:1 and 19:13,14; 1 Chronicles 11:1.

The Implications for Feminist Theology

Feminist theologians must distinguish between the core and the periphery. Their theological credo must be shaped in terms of the Bible, which is the core, and not necessarily within the traditional outlook as represented by the different commentators, which form the periphery. The Biblical primeval history includes two narratives of the creation of the world in general and the creation of man in particular. When read separately, each of the accounts maintains the equality of the sexes. Narrative B actually propounds the importance of the woman to the well being of man, thereby accentuating the ties between the sexes as superseding any other relationship. When Narrative B is read as a recapitulation of Narrative A, it establishes that the female element is a full component of the original whole which was created by the Divine.

As for the commentaries: Any commentary is a subjective expression of the person who conceives it, and of the way in which he (or she) personally reads the Bible. These commentaries are but reflections of the intellectual output of the individual writer, his cultural background together with contemporary social attitudes. Therefore, they should not influence any theological credo, but should rather be studied as evidence for the historical evolution of Biblical study, and as examples of the developmental process in the field of Biblical interpretation.

Unfortunately, the Biblical account of creation, which should promote equality between the sexes, has been misinterpreted by societies in which women were subservient to men. The wish to perpetuate women's inferiority, by ascribing it to the Divine, led to the erroneous translation of the word *zela*, which means a side, with its significance of equality, turning it into the less important "rib," indicating inferior status. Continuing to teach the creation of woman as being from a rib is an attempt to perpetuate the lesser importance of women.

There has been a shift in the present world away from prejudicial stereotypes towards ideas of non-racist, non-sexist equality. Words convey ideas and ideas influence attitudes. It is hoped that future translators of the Bible will be more careful in general, and that they will stop translating the story of the Divine creation of the first woman as being out of man's rib, in particular.

Technology and responsibility: reflections on Genesis 1-3.

S.D.N. Cook

The book of Genesis requires human beings to apply their power of moral judgment in the exercise of their technological powers. After acquiring the power of moral judgment upon eating from the tree of knowledge between good and evil, human beings have become burdened with the responsibility of judging the moral value of their technological works. They are called upon to be fruitful and to multiply, yet required to maintain order and subdue discord. Dr. S.D.N. Cook was a professor of philosophy at San Jose State University when this article was published in *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*, September 22, 1996. His primary research and publications are in the areas of philosophy of technology and applied ethics.

Should the emancipation and secularization of the modern age, which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but from a god who was the Father of men in heaven, end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creatures under the sky?—Hannah Arendt¹

Technology and responsibility are not among the most common themes associated with the creation and Eden myths of Genesis. They are, however, inescapable themes of contemporary life: what we take our responsibilities to be in exercising our power to shape the earth, now amounts to deciding whether life on this planet will flourish or die. Yet, in the face of this, even the most contemporary eye can discover in the opening chapters of Genesis, the first of all Jewish texts, an account of technology and responsibility as suitable to the modern condition as any to be found. And to Jewish eyes, whether religious or secular, these ancient myths can offer a contemporary and realistic understanding of what it means to "heal the world."

The following is an interpretation and commentary on the creation and Eden myths.² Its aim is to show that they can be seen to depict our relationship to nature as intimate and dependent; to characterize our technological practices as limited, not by the scope of our powers, but by what is required for the sustenance of nature as well as ourselves; and to define human beings as moral agents with the responsibility to look after the needs of nature, in no small way by gauging the moral worth of our technological works.

2. Our Relationship to Nature

The opening chapters of Genesis describe the relationship between humans and nature as intimate and mutually dependent. In the creation story humankind is made literally "from the dust of the earth" [2:7].³ This connection with the material stuff of nature is emphatically underscored at the end of the Eden story when humans are told that they were taken out of the ground and will return to it: "you are dust," God says, "and to dust you shall return" [3:19].

The closeness of this relationship is given symbolic power by the sharing of a name between humans and the earth. The name "Adam" in English comes from the Hebrew *Adam*, which is

¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 2.

² I have benefited from Professor Dvora Yanow's work in appreciating the value of myths in understanding current social issues. See Dvora Yanow, "Silences in Public Policy Discourse: Organizational and Policy Myths," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (October 1992).

³ The numbers in brackets refer to the chapter and verse in the text. The translations given here are syntheses of those of the Jewish Publication Society, the King James, and Standard Revised versions, and, in particular, Everett Fox's delightful and poetic rendering (Fox, Everett, *In the Beginning: A New English Rendition of the Book of Genesis* [New York: Schocken Books, 1983]). I am also indebted to Professor Dvora Yanow for guidance on the translation of several key words and phrases. However, in all instances I assume responsibility for the specific English used.

the word used in the passages dealing with the creation of humankind—when, for example, God says "Let us make *Adam* in our image, after our likeness" [1:26]. The word used for the earth out of which *Adam* was made is *Adamah*. They are the same noun: *Adam* is the masculine form, *Adamah* is the feminine. We are literally earth-creatures. There is a sense of this connection also in English in the cognate relationship between the words "human" and "humus." (The identification of the earth as feminine and humans as masculine reflects the traditional agricultural or poetic characterization of the earth being, like woman, the receiver of seed and bearer of fruit.)

In the first three chapters of Genesis, the creation story is given in two complementary parts, each with its own focus on the creation of humans. The account of the seven days describes the creation of humankind as a whole. The Eden story tells of the creation of human individuals. In the first part, humankind is created as a species. After God says, "Let us make Adam in our image, after our likeness" [1:26], the text goes on to say, "male and female, God created them." The passage is not about the creation of an individual. This is seen, as well, in parallels of language between this passage and the passages immediately before dealing with the creation of the other animals. When God creates the creatures of the sea, air, and land, the words used for them are, in Hebrew, singular collective nouns—words that take the singular form but that can refer to collectives, like the English words fish, fowl, and cattle. The word *Adam* can also be a singular collective noun, meaning Humankind.

So the sense of these passages is one of the creation of many species of animals, one of which is humankind. Our relationship to nature here is in terms of our being one species among many, particularly among many species of animals of the earth. This account of the creation of humankind has something of the flavor of the scientific understanding of our appearance on the earth as a species through evolution. It also runs counter, as Hannah Arendt points out, to Augustine's contention that God created the animals collectively, while creating a first human individually.⁴ Any distinction Augustine wishes to give humans over wildlife on this score would seem to require that we ignore this first account of human creation.

The Eden myth, however, speaks of the creation of human individuals. The first human is made from the dust of the earth, again suggesting our connectedness to the physical stuff of nature. The reference to the individual is clear enough—the text reads: "the Lord God formed this human [*et HaAdam*] from the dust of the earth. God blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human [*HaAdam*] became a living being" [2:7]. A living being, not living *beings*.

The first human is put in the Garden of Eden and told to till it and tend it (and not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). Then God says, "It is not good for the human to be alone, I will make a fitting helper for him" [2:18]. "Alone" underscores the text's shift from the species to the individual. This observation ultimately leads to the creation of a second human, but not immediately. In fact, the very next thing the text tells us is that "the Lord God formed from the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought each to the human, to see what he would call it; and whatever the human called it as a living being, that became its name" [2:19]. Significantly, these animals, like humans, are created "from the earth," and are created after the humans, not before as in the first part—a narrative sequence which runs counter to seeing humans as God's final product, the "crown of creation."

Now, this episode gets names for all the animals, but this is not all that it is about. It is also a lesson in biology, one dealing with the biological creation of individual beings through sexual reproduction. In naming the animals, the human identifies each species. Each one is distinct

⁴ Arendt, 1958, p. 8.

from the others (just as God through much of the early part of the creation story made distinctions between light and darkness, water and dry land, etc.). The animals are not all of a piece, they exist in kinds. By naming them, the human identifies those kinds, establishing a biological taxonomy that recognizes one form of orderliness in nature (themes I will return to shortly).

After the animals are named by kind, the text says: "but for the human no fitting helper could be found" [2:20]. Once the notion of animal kinds is established and an order to the animal kingdom laid out, we see that there are no living beings "corresponding" or "fitting" to the human. From the beginning of the creation story on, all manner of living things, animal and vegetable, are described as reproducing "after their own kind." There is a deep concern in these myths with an orderly constitution and sustenance of kinds. The human cannot reproduce with any of the other animals. It is in this sense that they are not "fitting" or "corresponding."

So, the story of the creation of the second human focuses on biological creation of "fitting" individuals through sexual reproduction. Here the text reads: "So the Lord God caused a deep slumber to fall upon the human, so that the human slept; God took one of the human's ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. The Lord God fashioned [built, crafted] the rib taken from the human into a woman and brought her to the human. And the human said 'This one at last is it! Bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh! She shall be called Woman for from Man she was taken!' Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" [2:21-24].

The myth is both poetically and didactically a basic lesson in the biology of sexual reproduction. One need not be much of a Freudian to see in the "deep slumber" the "sleeping together" of a sexual union. The rib is not only a phallic symbol, but also a symbol of the seed that the male contributes to a sexual union. "Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone" underscores the fact that humans are biologically of the same flesh, they reproduce after our own kind. At the end, the passage moves from the level of the individual to the level of the generations: in leaving their fathers and mothers and clinging to fitting helpmates, humans leave the "flesh" of the generation that gave them life and "become one flesh" in establishing a new generation that can continue the generations of human life. This part of the story sets the status of humans as a species reproducing its individual members sexually after its own kind, and thereby marks humankind's intimate relationship to the biological stuff of the earth, which is just as much part of nature as the "dust" or the material stuff out of which our species was made as a whole.

We are related to nature also through our biological genders. In the Eden story, the human who is made out of the dust of the earth and the breath of life from God is ultimately identified as male. His origins are material and divine: the earth and God. So the male represents our relationship to the material part of nature: the earth from which we were made or evolved, which is depicted as a source of life, although not itself living. At the end of Chapter 3, this is emphasized when God directs explicitly to Adam, the male, the remark "you are dust, and to dust shall you return."

The sources of the woman, on the other hand, are human and divine: the rib of the human and the handiwork of God. This reflects a powerful symbolic role associated with the woman throughout the story. The female represents our connection to the biological stuff of nature, including our ability to sustain that life. At the end of Chapter 3, the text reads: "The human called his wife's name Eve, for she became the mother of all the living" [3:20]. In Hebrew "Eve" is Chava, which can be translated "Life-giver." In a particularly evocative sense, the mother of all the living draws her own being from biological and divine sources, from life and the source of life. Again, at the end of Chapter 3, just as God turns the remark "to dust shall you return" toward Adam, God can be seen deliberately to turn the remark away from Eve out of deference

to her status as "mother of all the living," as a bearer of life. While the character of Adam represents our individual return to dust, the character of Eve represents our enduring ability to sustain the life of our kind as part of the biological life of the earth.

Both sexes also derive from the divine. If we infer that Adam is male, then in his creation, the earth (*Adamah*) plays the female role, while God plays the male, providing the breath of life, symbolizing the seed. Conversely, in the creation of the woman, the human plays the male role, through the symbolism of the rib, while God plays the female role, in taking the symbolic seed and bringing forth from it a human being. Our biological genders are the bases for our sexual reproduction; they also link to the divine through our ability to create life.

I note in passing that no individual in Genesis is explicitly identified as being of a particular sex until the creation of the woman. In the second part, we may infer that Adam is male because that is the biological gender he has later. In the creation of the woman, the text "And the Lord God fashioned the rib that he had taken from the human into a woman" [2:22], is the first reference to an individual explicitly in terms of sex. The Hebrew word used here is "*ishah*," in English "woman." In the next verse, when the human says "She shall be called Woman [*ishah*] for from Man she was taken" [2:23], this is the first use of the Hebrew word for man, "*ish*." Biological genders do not appear in this myth until the creation of the woman; they are, in a respect, born of her.

In all this, there is nothing that requires us to see the divine origin of human life as setting humans above the other animals or placing humans somehow beyond nature.

3. Technology and Nature

The creation and Eden myths depict our relationship to nature as profoundly technological. The text even defines human beings explicitly in terms of a technological role, that of caretakers of nature. More broadly, the treatment of our relationship to nature here includes a technological characterization of both human nature and the human condition—particularly when "technology" is understood to include both our instruments and our ability to deploy tools and techniques.

In the first Chapter immediately after humans are made, God's first instructions to them, the first commandments in the text are: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it! Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over all living things that crawl about upon the earth!" [1:28]. This is often taken to mean that humans are in a superior or dominant position in the worldly scheme of things; that our role is to dominate the earth and its wildlife, to do with them as suits our purposes. But the passage says nothing of the kind. Throughout Chapters One and Two, our actions toward nature are not defined in terms of domination and exploitation, but in terms of caretaking, especially the safeguarding of nature's orderliness.

The term used in the text is not "to dominate" but "to have dominion" (the Hebrew "*v'yirdu*" suggests "to rule over" or "to take care of"). The distinction is important: having dominion over something is a matter of having it in one's charge, of needing to see to its needs, stability and orderliness. There is a model for this early in Chapter One where the creation of the sun and moon is described: "God said: Let there be lights in the dome of the heavens, to separate the day from the night, that they may be for signs—for set-times, for days and years, and they shall be lights in the dome of the heavens to provide light upon the earth! It was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light for ruling the day and the smaller light for ruling the night, and [God made] the stars" [1:14-16]. The sense here of the sun ruling over the day and the moon over the night is not that they can do with them as they please; rather, they represent the orderliness of nature in the passage of days, seasons and years: they are signs for set times. And the term used in Hebrew "*l'memshlet*" suggests "to govern."

The concern for orderliness is a basic theme throughout the creation story: at the opening of Genesis, God creates the heavens and the earth by bringing them out of chaos, establishing order out of what the text tells us was "without form and void" (or "wild and waste") [1:2]. So when God says humans should "subdue" the earth and have dominion over it and its wildlife, there is a model already established for this in God's actions: our relationship to nature should be one of attending to its stability and care, safeguarding orderliness over chaos. This concern with the dialectic of order and chaos is carried over to the social or public sphere beginning in Chapter 4 with the establishment of civil settlements.

In the Eden myth, the text says the human was put in the Garden "to till it and tend it" [2:15]. "Tilling" points to our working of the earth to derive our own sustenance from it. "Tending" suggests our looking after the Garden's well-being, tending to the needs of nature itself. In Hebrew, "*u'l'shamrah*" suggests "to keep it" or "to preserve it vigilantly."

In comparison to the origin myths of many other cultures, the creation and Eden myths of Genesis are distinctively technological in character. Many origin myths are, quite understandably, biological in character: a god or goddess, or many of them, or some great mythical being gives birth to the world and its creatures. The creation myth of Genesis, by contrast, is technological: the god of Genesis does not beget the heavens and the earth, but rather makes them. Likewise God makes the living things of the earth, including people. The god of the first three chapters of Genesis is a craftsman, a technologist akin to Stephen Daedalus's "old artificer." God is also lawgiver and judge, but in these chapters of Genesis that role seems almost secondary to that of technologist. In fact, much of the work God does in these chapters is specifically craft-like, for it entails giving form to raw materials.

The opening passages of Genesis are often taken as an account of God creating the heavens and the earth out of nothing. Yet, the text does not require an *ex nihilo* interpretation at all. The opening reads: "As God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void, darkness was over the face of the deep, the spirit of God wafted over the face of the waters—And God said: Let there be light! And there was light" [1:1-3].

The references to the earth being formless and void do not describe what God created, but the state of things at the time of creation. God did not make a formless and void earth, but began to create by giving form to that preexisting stuff, much as a potter gives form to clay.⁵ God sets about to do just this in a number of ways. God makes things distinct from one another: light from darkness, water from water, land from water, etc. This is a process of pulling out of the formless, chaotic void something that has a discernible form (as suggested above, it is a matter of "subduing" chaos by bringing forth order). God also creates the animals out of the pre-existing dust of the earth, and humans out of pre-existing material and biological stuff. The text speaks (in both English and Hebrew) of God creating in productive, craft-like terms: God "made" the sun and the moon, the beasts and the human species of the first telling; in the second chapter God "formed" Adam and "fashioned" or "crafted" Eve.

In these myths, humans are also seen as craftsmen. This is evident in our being made in the image of God: God is technological, so are we. And being makers of things is not simply a matter of humans mimicking the divine, nor is it merely something we happen to do. It is intrinsic to human identity and human nature. When God first states the intention to create humankind, God says, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness. They shall have dominion over the fish of the sea," etc. [1:26]. Humans are imagined and defined as a species with the

⁵ A possible exception is the creation of light. Yet light, both symbolically and scientifically, is perhaps the exemplar of the insubstantial in the physical world.

craft of being caretakers and shapers of the world. A few lines later, immediately after humankind is created, the first thing God says to them is, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it" [1:28]. We are given the charge, the commandment, to follow the example of God in establishing order.

When the man and the woman departed from Eden, they entered the human condition. Before that, they were living under circumstances quite different from ours. Leaving the garden is a mythical answer to the question, "How did the human condition come to be?" And the answer suggests that the human condition itself is a technological one. At the beginning of their departure from the Garden, upon eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the first thing the man and the woman did was to begin making things: they made clothes. Later, when God scolds Adam at their exit from the garden, God defines, in part, the human condition: "By the sweat of your brow shall you procure bread to eat" [3:19].

The role technology plays in our relationship to nature is intimately part of the human condition, ours is a technological relationship: we draw our very sustenance from the earth through the technics of agriculture. In the creation and Eden myths, both human nature and the human condition are essentially technological. They treat technology not as something we happen to do, but as something intimately bound up with who we are within the world in which we find ourselves. We are essentially technicians, shapers of the world and of ourselves.

God also serves as a model of a maker of things as God creates by way of proclaiming. This is seen in the formula familiar in the text: "And God said X, and it was so." God speaks things into existence. Once again, this is not creating something out of nothing, but proclaiming that a form is to take shape out of pre-existing substances. Clearly, we cannot bring form to substance by speaking. But we do create the world of meaning and relationship through language. When the human proclaims the names of the animals, he is making orderly distinctions among them and creating a relationship with them by way of establishing "kinds," just as God makes orderly distinctions between light and dark, water and dry land—which God then also names. Language for us is both a distinguishing factor of our kind and one of our most powerful tools.

There is a further point that can be mentioned in this connection. The passage concerning the naming of the animals says, "whatever the human called it as a living being, that became its name." Why is the phrase "as a living being" in the text? Perhaps this is to suggest that the human's act of naming was not an act of creating life. The creation of life is solely done by God. Among the peoples of the ancient Levant, giving and intoning names often carried important powers, including the determining of one's character and destiny. The text here may be taken to emphasize that humans, though having the power of establishing order and relationship through speech, do not have the power to create life—humans can sustain the life of our species, but cannot create another species "as a living being." (This is, of course, an issue to ponder in the face of recent advances in genetic engineering.)

4. Technology and Responsibility

The man and the woman were expelled from the Garden of Eden because they sinned by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Seen in another way, they entered the human condition by acquiring the power of moral judgment. Whether sin or not, the myth defines us as *knowers* of good and evil, and calls upon us to bring this knowledge to bear on the exercise of our technological powers.

God told Adam not to eat from the tree, under penalty of death [2:17]. The serpent told Eve that if they ate from the tree they would become like gods, knowing good and evil [3:5]. The serpent was right. It is through this act of the woman, through her initiative, that humans

become like gods in becoming moral judges. That is, it is through woman that humans are "born" into the human condition.⁶

Maimonides says that the story of the tree tells us why we possess the ability to make judgments of value (moral, aesthetic, etc.). Prior to eating from the tree, he argues, the only power we had was rationality, and that alone is insufficient for dealing with our many appetites and pleasures, especially in a world filled with so many things appealing to the senses.⁷ Acquiring the power of moral judgment was necessary to balance human nature, given the human condition.

The two most prominent characteristics of the human condition in the creation and Eden myths are our having the power of moral judgment and our being makers of things. There is an important connection between the two. Throughout the account of creation (which culminates in Shabbat, the seventh day of rest), at the end of each day's tasks, God judges the work to be good. If we are to presume to emulate God in being makers of things, these myths tell us that we should "become like gods" as well in being judges of the moral worth of our technological works.

The text offers two guidelines for how this may be done. The first is our responsibility, when wielding our technological power in the interests of our own sustenance, also always to act as caretakers of nature, to tend and keep nature itself. The second is found in the theme of limits that appears throughout both accounts. The "expulsion" is associated with the man and the woman transgressing the only limit imposed on them in the Garden. After leaving the garden, God characterizes the human powers of self-sustenance within the human condition, not in terms of limitlessness, but as constrained by the pains of labor. For Adam, this is the sustenance of individuals, when God says "by the sweat of your brow shall you procure bread to eat" [3:19]. For Eve, it is the pains of her labor (literally) in sustaining the species by giving birth.

The theme of being able to draw sustenance from nature by following imposed limits is echoed throughout Jewish law and custom. The Jewish agricultural laws and practices are almost exclusively established by ways that entail the imposition of limits. One can work the soil every day, except one must rest on the Sabbath (when even one's animals are to be given rest!). Fields may be harvested, but not totally: a portion of the corners must be left for the gleaners, the needy. The land may be worked, but every seventh year it must be left to lie fallow. Every fiftieth year is a Jubilee during which not only is the land allowed again to rest, but, quite symbolically, each landholder is to return possession of that land to the previous owner. Ultimately this is to be done, God says "... for the land is Mine; you are but sojourners and residents with Me" (Leviticus 25:23). A similar expression is found in the line from Psalm 24, "The earth is the Lord's as is the fullness thereof." Such passages ought to give some weight to countering the prevalent notion that the message conveyed by the Hebrew Bible is that the earth is a human possession.

In this interpretation of the creation and Eden myths, our relationship to nature is seen as intimate. We are depicted as earth-creatures who depend on the earth for our very sustenance, individually and as a species. Human nature and the human condition define us as technological beings, working the material and biological stuff of the earth so to be fruitful and to multiply. Yet, we also have the responsibility to be subduers of chaos, guardians of order, and

⁶ There are important suggestions here, both in the characterization of the powers of the woman and in the symbolism of the fruit and the snake, of the incorporation of goddess myths, as is found in traditional literatures and current Jewish feminist studies.

⁷ Moses Maimonides, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

always to act within limits. Our ability to fulfill this responsibility rests with our having become knowers of good and evil: we are empowered by this to judge the moral worth of our technological works.

Never in human history has *Tikun Olam*, the healing of the world, as the essential tenet of Jewish responsibility, carried a greater sense of urgency with respect to our relationship to nature than it does today. And never have the creation and Eden narratives, the first of all Jewish texts, been a more fitting guide.

The two Adams

Joseph B. Soloveitchik

The first two chapters of Genesis report on the creation of two very different human prototypes, Adam the First and Adam the Second. Neither one is sufficient to carry out God's purpose. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, 20th century philosopher and talmudic scholar, was known to his many followers simply as "the Rav," underlining his status as *the* leader of Modern Orthodoxy in America. This essay is excerpted from his *The Lonely Man of Faith*, copyright ©1965; published by Doubleday.

The two accounts deal with two Adams, two men, two fathers of mankind, two types, two representatives of humanity, and it is no wonder that they are not identical....

Let us portray these two men, Adam the first and Adam the second, in typological categories.

There is no doubt that the term "image of God" in the first account refers to man's inner charismatic endowment as a creative being. Man's likeness to God expresses itself in man's striving and ability to become a creator. Adam the first, who was fashioned in the image of God, was blessed with great drive for creative activity and immeasurable resources for the realization of this goal, the most outstanding of which is the intelligence, the human mind, capable of confronting the outside world and inquiring into its complex workings. In spite of the boundless divine generosity providing man with many intellectual capacities and interpretative perspectives in his approach to reality, God, in imparting the blessing to Adam the first and giving him the mandate to subdue nature, directed Adam's attention to the functional and practical aspects of his intellect through which man is able to gain control of nature....

Man of old, who could not fight disease and succumbed in multitudes to yellow fever or any other plague with degrading helplessness, could not lay claim to dignity. Only the man who builds hospitals, discovers therapeutic techniques and saves lives is blessed with dignity. Man of the 17th and 18th centuries who needed several days to travel from Boston to New York was less dignified than modern man who attempts to conquer space, boards a plane at the New York airport at midnight and takes several hours later a leisurely walk along the streets of London. The brute is helpless and, therefore, not dignified. Civilized man has gained limited control of nature and has become, in certain respects, her master, and with his mastery, he has attained dignity, as well....

Hence, Adam the first is aggressive, bold, and victory-minded. His motto is success, triumph over the cosmic forces....

Adam the second is, like Adam the first, also intrigued by the cosmos. Intellectual curiosity drives them both to confront courageously the mysterious magnum of being. However, while the cosmos provokes Adam the first to quest for power and control, thus making him ask the functional "how" question, Adam the second responds to the call of the cosmos by engaging in a different kind of cognitive gesture. He does not ask a single functional question. Instead, his inquiry is of a metaphysical nature and a threefold one. He wants to know: "Why is it?" "What is it?" "Who is it?"

(1) He wonders: "Why did the world in its totality come into existence? Why is man confronted by this stupendous and indifferent order of things and events?"

(2) He asks: "What is the purpose of all of this? What is the message that is embedded in organic and inorganic matter, and what does the great challenge reaching me from beyond the fringes of the universe, as well as from the depths of my tormented soul?"

(3) Adam the second keeps on wondering: "Who is He who trails me steadily, uninvited and unwanted, like an everlasting shadow, and vanishes into the recesses of transcendence the very instant I turn around to confront this numinous, awesome and mysterious 'He'? Who is He

who fills Adam with awe and bliss, humility and a sense of greatness, concurrently...? Who is He whose life-giving and life-warming breath Adam feels constantly and who at the same time remains distant and remote from all?"

In order to answer this triple question, Adam the second does not apply the functional method invented by Adam the first. He does not create a world of his own. Instead, he wants to understand the living, "given" world into which he has been cast....He encounters the universe in all its colorfulness, splendor, and grandeur, and studies it with the naivete, awe and admiration of the child who seeks the unusual and wonderful in every ordinary thing and event....He looks for the image of God not in the mathematical formula or the natural relational law, but in every beam of light, in every bud and blossom, in the morning breeze and the stillness of a starlit evening....

Regarding the 'two' Creation stories

Umberto Cassuto

Born in Florence, Umberto Cassuto was educated simultaneously at the University of Florence and the Collegio Rabbinico Italiano. After being ordained rabbi, he continued studying at the rabbinical seminary and eventually became its director. He also served as rabbi of the Florence Jewish community until he resigned in 1925 to become professor of Hebrew language and literature at the University of Florence. In 1933, he received a similar appointment at the University of Rome. While there, he catalogued the Hebrew manuscripts of the Vatican Library. In 1939, he became a professor of biblical studies at Hebrew University. He brought a wealth of scholarship to bear on his work. His almost unrivalled knowledge of ancient Semitic literature, his authoritative understanding of all branches of biblical inquiry, and his outstanding critical acumen mark him as one of the great Bible exegetes of the last century. Cassuto argued the existence of an oral tradition and a number of ancient poetic epics, which were subsequently woven into the Torah and other biblical books. In this excerpt from his "A Commentary on the Book of Genesis," he sees remnants of two epic poems, but challenges the notion that two stories of creation exist here.

The question of the relationship between this [Genesis Chapters 1 and 2] presents a formidable problem and merits special attention.

At the very first glance it becomes apparent that the two passages differ in their use of the Divine appellations. In the story of creation, only the name Elohim occurs, and YHWH (Lord) does not appear once; in this—the second—section we almost always find the compound name YHWH Elohim.... This difference aroused long ago the suspicions of Bible students, and has served as the starting-point for all the learned writings and the protracted discussions ensuing through the years [since 1711]... on the question of the sources of Genesis and the succeeding books, and on the combination of the elements emanating from those sources....

[A]ccording to the documentary theory, which the majority of scholars have accepted, the difference in regard to the Divine names employed and a number of other divergences between the two sections prove that they belonged originally to two separate works: the first, which uses the appellation Elohim exclusively, formed the beginning of document P, according to which the name YHWH was not revealed until the time of Moses; the second was the opening passage of document J, which mentioned YHWH from the very commencement of the world's history. Each of these narratives told the story of creation from its respective viewpoint and in a different manner, and a later editor took over the two sections verbatim from their source-works and joined them together without paying heed to the fact that, as a result, in the composite narrative the creation account appears twice (it is customary to call the first part of our section "the second account of creation"). Nor was the redactor concerned that the two narratives differ from each other in character, style and the choice of God's names, and on a number of points even contradict one another.

According to this view..., we have here not two adjoining sections of a single unified work that follow each other in one connected sequence, but two excerpts from two separate compositions, which a later editor arranged consecutively by pure chance.

Is this view justified...?

The fact that the two sections differ from each other not only in the use of the Divine names but also in other respects is not in doubt. In the first section, we have before us a sublime picture of the totality of creation, depicted with great synthetic power and absolute simplicity of expression; the Godhead is revealed therein as a wholly transcendental Being, who abides in His own high sphere without contact with the creatures. The second section, on the other hand, gives us a graphic and dramatic story embellished with the marvels of the colorful oriental

imagination, which is addressed to the feelings rather than the intellect of the reader; and there we see God in definite communion with man and the other creatures of His world.

But these divergences still do not prove the theory referred to. They are easily explicable on the basis of my hypothesis concerning the existence of various epic poems, whose contents served as material for the structure of the Pentateuchal narrative in these two passages—an epic poem emanating from the circle of the “wise men”¹ being used for the story of creation, and a more popular epic for the story of the garden of Eden. Needless to say, the character of the two poems differed considerably; the first was suited to the intellectuals and philosophers, whilst the second was intended more for the broad masses of the people, and consequently made use of picturesque and vivid descriptions, which were apt to rapture the heart of the simple person. And it is self-understood that, although the Torah gave the two sections a literary form of its own, some residual elements of the original character of the two ancient poems were bound to remain discernible in both of these passages.

In this way, we can also explain the change in the Divine names. I...have already shown...that the variation in the employment of the two names, YHWH and Elohim, in the book of Genesis is subject to certain rules, which I have been able to determine and formulate with precision (the reader will find them in *The Documentary Hypothesis*, English translation, pp. 31-32).

These rules are based on the difference in the nature of the two names, for they are not of the same type; the name YHWH is a proper noun that denotes specifically the God of Israel, whereas Elohim was originally a generic term and became a proper noun among the Israelites through the realization that there is only One God and that YHWH alone is Elohim. Following are some of the rules governing the use of the two Names in the book of Genesis that emerged from my investigations:

(a) The Tetragrammaton occurs when Scripture reflects the concept of God, especially in His ethical aspect, that belongs specifically to the people of Israel; Elohim appears when the Bible refers to the abstract conception of God that was current in the international circles of the Sages², the idea of God conceived in a general sense as the Creator of the material world, as the Ruler of nature, and as the Source of life.

(b) The name YHWH is used when Scripture wishes to express that direct and intuitive notion of God that is characteristic of the unsophisticated faith of the multitude; but Elohim is employed when it is intended to convey the concept of the philosophically minded who study the abstruse problems connected with the existence of the world and humanity.

(c) YHWH appears when the Bible presents the Deity to us in His personal character, and in direct relationship to human beings or to nature; whereas Elohim occurs when Holy Writ speaks of God as a Transcendental Being, who stands entirely outside nature, and above it.

According to these rules, the name Elohim had necessarily to be used in the story of creation, for there God appears as the Creator of the material universe, and as the Master of the world who has dominion over everything and forms everything by His word alone, without there being any direct relationship between Himself and nature; and generally the description of creation given in that account is related to the tradition of the “wise men” as stated above....

In the narrative of the garden of Eden, on the other hand, God appears as the ruler of the moral world, for He enjoins a given precept on man, and demands an account of his actions;

¹ By this, Cassuto means the “sages,” as he called them, who also were the sources of the wisdom literature of ancient Israel, including such biblical works as Ecclesiastes and Proverbs. — Shammai

² Not the talmudic sages, but the ones responsible for the wisdom literature. — Shammai

that apart, stress is laid here on His personal aspect, manifested in His direct relationship with man and the other creatures. For these reasons the name YHWH was required in this section, and this is the name that we actually find. Its association, however, with the appellation Elohim, which is restricted to this one section of the entire book, is easily explained by Scripture's desire to teach us that YHWH, which occurs here for the first time, is to be wholly identified with Elohim mentioned in the preceding section; in other words, that the God of the moral world is none other than the God of the material world, that the God of Israel is in fact the God of the entire universe, and that the names YHWH and Elohim merely indicate two different facets of His activity or two different ways in which He reveals Himself to mankind. Once this truth has been inculcated here, there is no need to repeat it later; hence, in the subsequent sections the Torah employs either the Tetragrammaton or Elohim only, according to the context.

As for the exclusive use of Elohim in the dialogue between the serpent and the woman (3:1-5), the explanation is very simple: it was unfitting (a point already made by other critics) that the personal name of God, which is supremely holy, should be used by the creature that counsels evil, or by the woman holding converse with it.

[Two other main] reasons for regarding the two passages as separate accounts, namely, the existence of contradictions between them and the repetition of the creation story, are interconnected; hence it will be best to consider both of them together.

The discrepancies that the exponents of the documentary hypothesis have found between the first section and the second...are as follows :

(a) Instead of six days, as in the first section, the second section speaks of the creation of heaven and earth in one day (2:4: IN THE DAY that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens);

(b) According to the first section, the world to begin with was a mass of water (2:1), but according to the second the land came first (2:5-6);

(c) Ch.1:27 informs us that the two sexes were created simultaneously (male and female He created them), but the second section relates that first the man was formed (2:7) and afterwards the woman (2:21-22);

(d) In 1:11-12 we are told that the plants came into being on the third day, that is, prior to man who was created on the sixth day, whereas in section two it is said that before the creation of man no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up (2:5), and thereafter it is further stated that, after man had been formed, the Lord God made to grow out of the ground every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, etc. (2:9);

(e) Likewise the living creatures, which the first section declares were created before man (1:20-21, 24-25), were, according to the second section, created after, and for the sake of, man (2:19).

As far as the first point is concerned, the Scriptural use of the expression *in the day*... indicates that in cases such as this it does not mean in a day of twelve hours or in one of twenty-four hours, but generally *at the time, at the period*. [In other words, it is a literary expression, not a literal one.]

The third point (we shall deal with the second later) represents no incongruity at all. In the story of creation man is referred to as one of many creatures (see further on this subject below), and his creation is mentioned only as a link in the long chain of created beings; hence it was not possible to enter into details there without impairing the symmetry of the narrative. By stating, male and female He created them, the Bible merely records the fact that both sexes were created, without indicating the order of their formation; we are not told whether they were brought into being simultaneously or successively. In the second section, where the Bible

speaks of the creation of man at greater length, the details are explained, and we are informed that first the man was made out of dust from the ground and afterwards the woman was formed from the rib. In accordance with the prevailing method, a general statement is followed here by a detailed description.

Concerning the fourth and fifth divergencies, see further my exposition of 2:5, 9, 19, where I demonstrate, by careful analysis of the text, that the reference is not to the first creation of plants and animals, but to something else.

There still remains the second inconsistency. If we examine our section closely, we shall see clearly that in its present form it does not contain a cosmogony. Although it is possible that the ancient epos relating the story of the garden of Eden linked the beginning of its narrative with a reference to the creation of the world..., nevertheless in the passage before us there is no cosmogonic account at all. Not only is there no mention in it of the hosts of the heavens, or the sea and the fishes—other scholars have already drawn attention to this fact—but there is no reference even to the creation of the cattle; and of the entire vegetable world there appear here only the trees good for food of the garden of Eden and the particular species that are referred to in 2:5 and 3:18. And even in relation to these plants, and so, too, in regard to the beasts and the flying creatures (2:19), Scripture [here] does not necessarily speak of their original creation.

There is also another point. The creation of heaven and earth is likewise mentioned only incidentally..., as something already known, which is alluded to as a background to the scene to be described and as a prelude to the work to be accomplished.

From all this, it clearly emerges that there is no cosmogony here. When we read the Torah as we have it, as a continuous narrative, we find no discrepancy between the earlier statement that at first the world was a mass of water, and what we are told about the dry land at the beginning of the present section. Relying on the account of the first stages of creation given above, our section does not recapitulate the story; it depicts simply the position as it was at the closing phase of creation when man alone was wanting.

An incongruity presents itself only if we separate the conjoined passages and treat our section as an independent narrative; then, of course, we need to find in it the beginning of the creation story. The contradiction appears, therefore, only when we regard as proven what the contradiction is supposed to prove; a clear example of begging the question! The theory that the two sections are not a unity does not help us to resolve the inherent problem of the text, but creates instead an otherwise non-existent problem.

As for the repetition of the story of man's creation, which is told both in the preceding and in the present section, it should be noted that such duplications, although they may seem strange to those who are accustomed to the Hellenic process of thought, are not at all incongruous to the Semitic way of thinking. When the Torah made use of the two ancient poetic sagas, both of which described man's creation—the one in brief, general outline as an account of the making of one of the creatures of the *material* world, and the second at length and in detail, as the story of the creation of the central being of the *moral* world—it had no reason to refrain from duplicating the theme, since such a repetition was consonant with the stylistic principle of presenting first a general statement and thereafter the detailed elaboration, which is commonly found not only in Biblical literature but also in the literary works of the rest of the ancient East. In the Babylonian creation epos, for instance, it is related at the end of Tablet 3 (line 138), in terse, general terms, that the gods determined the destiny of Marduk; yet Tablet 4 reverts to the subject and describes the preparations made by the gods for the purpose of making this decision (lines 1–2), and thereafter it tells, in full detail, the manner in which the determination of Marduk's fate was carried out (lines 3–34). Ugaritic poetry provides further examples of this

literary method (see, for example, my Hebrew article in the Bulletin of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society, x, 1943, pp. 48–49).

An interesting example in the Pentateuch occurs in Gen. 28. In verse 5 of that chapter, we are told: Thus Isaac sent Jacob away; AND HE WENT TO PADDAN-ARAM TO LABAN, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, etc., and in the following verses (6-9) Esau's reaction to the incident is described; when this matter has been disposed of, the narrative returns to the subject of Jacob's journey, which is of especial importance, and describes it in detail (vv. 10ff): Jacob left Beer-Sheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon the place, etc.

The same principle applies in the case of the creation of man: after recounting the whole story of the birth of the world to the end, Scripture returns to the theme of man's genesis, which is of particular significance, and gives us a detailed description thereof.

At a later period, when the Jewish people had grown used to the Greek ways of thinking, the rabbinic sages became conscious of this duplication and expressed their surprise at it, but since they were not yet far removed from the ancient Semitic thought-processes, they found the correct answer to their query. In The Mishnah of R. Eliezer b. R. Jose the Galilean..., we read: "The listener may think that this is another narrative, whereas it is only the elaboration of the first."

Creation and redemption: towards a theology of creation

Bernard Och

The doctrines of creation and redemption are the fundamental basis upon which biblical theology and interpretation rests. The first doctrine provides 'a universal context for the meaning of everything' narrative in the Bible. The second doctrine, as the 'implementation of creation,' liberates mankind 'to live the life it was created to live.' This is illustrated in the accounts God's covenant with Noah and Abraham where he promised to save Noah from the flood and create a new people for himself, respectively. This article belongs with this chapter, even though it refers to events yet to come. Bernard Och is director of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation at Haifa University and the Technion. He has published several articles on biblical topics in *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*. This article appeared on March 22, 1995.

Creation and redemption are the two pillars upon which biblical theology rests. They define the parameters within which the drama of Divine/human encounter unfolds. In considering the relationship between these two doctrines, it is important to note that the concept of creation has been largely eclipsed, even ignored, in modern biblical theology. As a result, the biblical text has been interpreted for the most part from an almost exclusively redemption perspective: Genesis has been read in the light of Exodus, and creation has been understood in the light of redemption and the giving of the law at Sinai.

Bernhard Anderson in his article, "The Earth Is the Lord's—An essay on the biblical doctrine of Creation," writes,

When we open the Bible and begin reading from Creation toward the call of Israel, we are really reading the story backward. The creation accounts at the beginning of the Bible are written from the standpoint of the meaning disclosed in the event of the Exodus. In a profound sense, the Bible does not begin with Genesis but with Exodus, not with God the Creator but with God the Redeemer. Only by reference to the crucial event of the Exodus did Israel know who God is and understand her calling as a people.¹

The centrality of redemption in biblical exegesis received paradigmatic expression in Gerhard von Rad's seminal essay, "The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrines of Creation."

Because of the exclusive commitment of Israel's faith to historical salvation, the doctrine of creation was never able to attain to independent existence in its own right. Either it remained a cosmic foil against which soteriological pronouncements stood out the more effectively, or it was wholly incorporated into the complex of soteriological thought.² [Soteriology is the branch of theology that deals with salvation as the effect of divine agency.]

The purpose of this essay is to correct the injustice done to the doctrine of creation and reassert its centrality in biblical theology and interpretation. I contend that the creation motif is not a "cosmic foil" of secondary importance, but is the fundamental theme which underlies the biblical text, providing it with meaning and substance. My argument will focus on the biblical text as it is written with Genesis as the point of departure. The very fact that the Bible begins with Genesis is, in my opinion, a literary fact of considerable theological significance. Scripture opens with a theology of creation and thereby provides a universal context for determining the meaning of everything that transpires in the entire biblical narrative. The opening chapters of Genesis provide a protology [the study of origins and first things] for the history of Israel, and place the

¹ Bernhard W. Anderson, *Interpretation* (January 1955), 3-20.

² Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh/London: Oliver & Boyd 1966), 131-143.

stories of the family of Abraham and of the people Israel within the framework of creation and world history. Accordingly, Exodus is to be understood in the light of Genesis, redemption and covenant as part of the unfolding drama of Divine creation.

Viewed from this perspective, Creation is not a self-contained, once-upon-a-time event but an ongoing dynamic reality which affects God's relationship to humanity throughout history. It marks the beginning, the *Urzeit*, the point of departure for all life and existence. The primary thrust of the creation account is to trace the origin and meaning of history and human existence back to the creative, sovereign will of God. By beginning with creation and primeval history, the Bible defines its scope. It points to a universalism that attributes to God everything that happens from the beginning to the end of time. It teaches that the God of the people of Israel is not limited by the boundaries of a specific people, but that God is the Lord of universal history, the Lord of the cosmos. Everything that subsequently transpires between humanity and God, and between Israel and God stands in this broad context. What begins at creation issues into Israel's history.

The creation of the world by God is no independent fact: creation is intended to be the opening of history. The Old Testament history of creation does not answer the question "How did the world come into being?" with the answer: "God created it," but answers the question "From where does the history of God's people derive its meaning?" with the answer: "God has given the history of His people its meaning through creation." In other words, creation in the Old Testament does not belong to the sphere of natural science but to the history of man.³

The biblical concept of Creation

The biblical creation account can be characterized as a process wherein God brings into existence or structures the order of creation. Through the imperative of command, primordial undifferentiated chaos is transformed into order and harmony by a series of separations and divisions. The first four acts of creation ordering the world into its time and space dimensions are described as separations. God separates light from darkness, day from night, upper waters from lower, water from dry land, and terrestrial light from darkness.

The process of creation is further delineated by the theme of limitation. Separation implies limitation, for the God who divides and orders the world into its component parts does so through the setting of limits and boundaries. God's infinite power enables Him to establish limits for all of creation, thereby assigning to each part its fixed place and proper function within the created world. It is only as these lines of demarcation are established that order and harmony are realized. Should these limits and boundaries be disrupted, either by God or man, the created order would collapse and revert to its original state of confusion and chaos. With this thought in mind, we move on to the supreme act of Divine creation: humankind.

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness....' So God created man in His own image, in the image of God, He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:26-27). The creation of human beings in the image of God is not a statement about the nature of humanity, but rather a description of their unique position vis-a-vis God: humankind is created so that something can happen between them and God. The *Imago Dei* describes the uniqueness of human existence by virtue of which the individual can enter into a relationship with God. The human being is regarded as God's counterpart on earth, the "You" who is addressed by God, and the "I" who is responsible to God.

³ Ludwig Kohler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Tubingen, 1936), 70.

This Divine/human affinity, not only determines the meaning of human existence, but also drastically alters God's relationship to the world. The creator God who has, heretofore, radically separated Himself from His creation now opens up the possibility of entering the world through His involvement with humanity. A Divine/human dynamic is set in motion which not only enables the Transcendent God to enter the time-space constructs of worldly existence, but also provides humanity with the means to transcend the finite and limited structure of creaturely existence. Ironically, this is both the blessing and curse of human existence. In all other areas of creation, the limits and boundaries of each created object have been incorporated into its very essence and determine its life and destiny. The human situation is entirely different, for humanity's essential nature is contradictory, a combination of both creatureliness and Godliness: creatureliness, which establishes the limits of human existence; Godliness, which enables humanity to break these boundaries in an attempt to overcome our essential creatureliness. The paradox of human existence is that the human being contradicts himself within the terms of his true essence of being both a creature and a bearer of the Divine image.

The creation of humanity is the final act of God's creation. It begins with an announcement of Divine intent, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," and ends with a proclamation of Divine approval, "and God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good." God is pleased with the totality of His creation, everything has turned out exactly as He had planned. This proclamation has a twofold thrust: it means that the basic structures and elements within the cosmos do not have to be redone or recreated in order to ensure the harmony and stability of nature. God's creation is a wonderful cosmic order, which is without defect and harmonious in all its parts. It also implies that everything God has created is equipped with all of the essential characteristics needed in the fulfillment of its destiny. Everything belongs where it should be and functions according to God's creational plan and purpose.

In the creation account, Genesis 1, God has set limits and boundaries for all the objects of creation except for humanity. Man, despite his createdness, still remains outside of the essential constraints of Divine limitation. The final stage in the process of human creation takes place in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2-3), where God attempts to define the limits of human existence through the imperative of command. Through His word, God created the world; through His command, God now sets limits to the supreme object of His creation. The purpose of the Divine prohibition in the garden is not to deprive humanity of any specific acquisitions such as knowledge, consciousness, moral judgment, or sexual awareness, but, instead, to establish the boundaries of human existence. The Divine command in its entirety does not say "no" but rather "up to here," for humanity is indeed destined to actualize its God-given qualities of creativity, freedom and dominion, but only within the Divinely appointed parameters of finiteness and creatureliness. God has drawn a symbolic line around the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, a line which man is unwilling to accept. Adam's disobedience is motivated by his unwillingness to acknowledge the finiteness and dependence of his situation, his inclination to grasp a power and security which transcend the possibilities of human existence, and his desire to replace God as the source and center of his life. The sin of man is that he wishes to make himself God.

Adam's act of disobedience disrupts the order and harmony of Divine creation and unleashes anti-creational forces which enmesh man and nature in an ongoing process of decreation. This is the tragic irony of the Garden of Eden: intended to be the place of harmony and blessing, it has become the locus of alienation and curse. The Eden drama is a paradigmatic presentation of the two opposing forces which are continuously at work in human and worldly existence. Creation: harmony/order/God-centered-blessing; Decreation: alienation/chaos/man-centered-curse.

Redemption as the Implementation of Creation

It is at this critical juncture of creation and decreation that the theme of redemption emerges as God's effort to repair the disastrous effects of human sin and disobedience. Redemption is the Divine activity that neutralizes and overcomes the anti-creational forces which threaten life and creation. It is an act of reconciliation and restoration: reconciliation between humanity and God, and restoration of the God-given potential of all objects in the created order. Redemption is understood as the implementation of creation and the actualization of the order and goodness of creation. Through redemption, God realizes those fundamental purposes for life and blessing inherent in the creation of the world. Redemption which was implicitly present in the wholeness of original creation now emerges as the counterpart to God's creational activity. Creation and redemption belong together as the obverse and reverse of the same theological coin; they are dynamically interrelated aspects of God's plan for the world. Creation is the end; redemption is the means. Redemption serves the creational goal by enabling humanity to live the life it was created to live. God's redemptive activity liberates humankind from the earthly forces of decreation so that humanity can re-engage itself in the realization of God's creational plan. Redemption frees the creation to become what God had originally intended.⁴

The basic theological supposition of this creation/redemption dynamic is that creation is an ongoing, open-ended reality. God rests on the seventh day, but He, by no means, withdraws from His creative activity. The goodness of creation and the underlying Divine intention to bring into being and to fruition all aspects of life presuppose a kind of continuous creativity: it is a *creatio continua*, which is directed not only towards the preservation of what was once created, but also towards the fulfillment of that promise which original creation represents in its very self. God's unremitting creative activity both preserves and innovates as it opens up new avenues of Divine/human communication and interaction.⁵

Although grounded in the original creation, God's ongoing creative activity must be distinguished from His initial creation. The *creatio originalis* is an exclusively Divine activity governed by God's will alone. The *creatio continua* is a joint enterprise between God and humanity, directed towards a future which is created by God and man in historical dialogical confrontation. Creation is, thereby, transformed from a cosmic act ordering the forces of nature into an historical event transfiguring the lives of individuals and peoples. Humanity enters upon the stage of history as God's partner/adversary, as the case may be, in an ongoing process of creation and redemption whose goal is the final reconciliation of humankind and God in creational harmony and blessing.

Noah and Abraham as precursors of Sinai

The climactic act of redemption takes place at Sinai where God creates a people who will serve as the model and conveyor of blessing to all humanity. At Sinai, the destructive forces of decreation unleashed by man in Eden are neutralized and brought under control by a Divine/human act of restoration and recreation. Eden and Sinai are parametric events which set up a historical continuum on which the drama of creation and decreation is played out. Sinai as the final event is preceded and prefigured by two prior acts of recreation: the Flood story and the Abraham cycle. Noah and Abraham are the two individuals chosen by God to reinstate the original creational blessings. The flood narrative is the classic example of the creation/decreation/recreation syndrome. As punishment for human violence and corruption,

⁴ Terrence E. Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Genesis," *Interpretation, A Journal of Bible and Theology* (1991): 354-365.

⁵ Jergen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 206-214.

God returns the earth to its primordial watery chaos. The boundaries and limits of creation are obliterated as the earth reverts to its original chaotic formlessness. Humankind, through violence and wickedness, destroys the fabric of human life and community; God completes the process of disintegration by destroying the structure of human existence. Ironically, man and God who were destined to be partners in creation have now become accomplices in decreation.

The flood story, however, marks not only an end but also a beginning, a new creation which is based on God's covenant with Noah. Anticipated at the beginning of the flood (Genesis 6:18) and established at the end (Genesis 9:8-17), the covenant provides a thematic bracket to the entire flood episode. The covenant is presented as the counterpoint to the flood: the life-giving restoration of the covenant is contrasted to the total devastation of the flood. Each act of recreation—Noah, Abraham, Sinai—is accompanied by an act of covenantal bonding. Covenant is the historical counterpart to the creational *Imago Dei*. They are parallel realities expressing the nearness of God and the unique relationship to God which is humanity's preordained destiny. The covenant is only possible within the framework of creation and serves a creational goal, the ultimate reconciliation of God and humanity. Just as the Creator committed Himself to humankind through the original creation, so He re-commits Himself through the covenant to certain individuals and a specific people.

Despite the fact that the flood disaster has had no effect whatsoever on human nature and behavior, God enters into a covenant with Noah. Man has not changed, God has! God promises that He will never again be provoked by human misbehavior to destroy the order and regularity of nature. God's promise is unilateral and reaffirms His commitment to creation without any reciprocal demand. The covenant with Noah is a covenant of restoration and anticipation, not reconciliation. It is directed towards the future: by restoring and maintaining the natural order, God guarantees a world in which His historical, redemptive activity can move on towards its ultimate goal of Divine/human reconciliation. The Noah covenant is the first step on a journey of redemption which will eventually lead to Sinai.

Humankind has not changed, and so the flood is followed by a resumption of the destructive forces of human behavior, culminating in the Tower of Babel episode which marks the final stage of decreation in the primeval period, and corresponds to the initial act of transgression in Eden. In both stories, the individual and humankind as a whole are guilty of overstepping the limits of human creaturely existence. The building of a tower, like the eating of a forbidden fruit, is an attempt to replace God as the center of human life by acquiring security and independence in separation from God. God responds to man's desire to attain autonomy and power by destroying the unity of humankind. God's punishment underlines the basic teaching of the primeval period: man must learn his limits; the unbridled drive for power and security is ultimately counterproductive and results in death, destruction and alienation.

The dispersion and confusion at Babel are the human counterpart to the chaos and confusion of the flood. Once again, the earth is in chaotic disarray. Once again, there is a breakdown of order and harmony, this time not in the realm of nature, but in the area of human life and existence.

The transference of chaos from the cosmic to the human sphere has a profound effect on God's subsequent behavior. In the aftermath of the flood, the order and regularity of nature were re-established by Divine decree. After Babel, the restoration of unity and harmony will no longer be an exclusively Divine prerogative, but will depend upon a joint Divine/human redemptive activity. God needs man as the agent through whom the goal of creation will be actualized in the context of human history and existence.

The Creation of Israel

With this purpose in mind, the biblical narrative moves on to the second stage of recreation and redemption. Out of the chaos of human existence, God chooses one individual to father a people whose mission will be the reunification of humankind through acceptance of Divine authority and obedience to Divine command. The history of Israel, therefore, begins with a command.

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, and be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves." (Genesis 12:1-3)

The call to Abraham is God's creational response to the process of decreation which has brought destruction and disunity upon humanity. It signifies a new step in the process of recreation which began after the flood. With Noah, God reinstated the blessing of procreation and re-established the ongoing structure of nature; with Abraham, God reinstates the original creational relationship with humankind based on Divine command and human obedience. For this purpose, God must create a new being who will serve as the mediator of blessing to "all the families of the earth." Benno Jacob in his commentary emphasizes the creation motif in God's charge to Abraham. "The words 'be a blessing' have been rightly seen as a command by God to history, in the manner of his words at creation. Through Abraham a new world is called into being."⁶

God's call to Abraham is formulated in words and arts reminiscent of the original cosmic creation. In both instances, creation entails an initial state of chaos out of which the created object emerges through acts of separation and differentiation. With Abraham, the original chaos is now applied to human existence, as Abraham is commanded to separate himself from all the ties and bonds which connect him to the chaotic confusion of human life after Babel. The call to Abraham is more than a test of obedience; it is a sign of his entrance into a new realm of being. At the age of 75, Abraham stands before God as a *tabula rasa*: a man without country, kindred or parental ties—a man without a past. Abraham removes himself from the natural time-space constructs of human existence so that he can enter into a new state of being, as the recipient of Divine promise and blessing. To all intents and purposes, Abraham has been reduced to a kind of "non-being" out of which he will be recreated by the command of God and refashioned in the image of God. Walter Brueggemann in his commentary on Genesis writes,

The purpose of the [covenant] call is to fashion an alternative community in creation gone awry, to embody in human history the power of the blessing. It is the hope of God that in this new family all human history can be brought to the unity and harmony intended by the one who calls.... The call to Sarah and Abraham has to do not simply with the forming of Israel but with the reforming of creation, the transforming of the nations.⁷

God's covenant with Abraham goes far beyond and fulfills His previous covenant with Noah. The Abrahamic covenant is one of reconciliation as well as restoration and signifies the re-establishing of communication between man and God. Taken out of the land of confusion and chaos, Abraham is placed on a road which leads to the land of reconciliation and reunification with God. The road from Haran to the land of Canaan symbolizes the return of humanity to

⁶ Benno Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible, Genesis* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1974), 86-87.

⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 105.

Eden and to God. Abraham and the promised land provide the counterpoint and answer to Adam and the Garden of Eden. In both instances, possession of the physical space granted to man depends entirely upon obedience and trust in God. Where Adam failed, Abraham succeeds, "And [Abram] believed the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). This pronouncement of belief expresses Abraham's complete trust in God and his acceptance of the Divine plan for himself and his people. The original relationship between God and humanity which was broken by Adam's disloyalty and disobedience is now restored by Abraham's trust and obedience.

Abraham occupies a pivotal position in the biblical drama of creation and redemption. He provides not only an answer to the broken relations of the past, but also a paradigmatic model for the future. The Abraham narrative presents a microcosmic description of the history and destiny of Israel and sets forth the basic characteristics of its existence before God. Like Abraham, the people of Israel will be taken from the family of nations and placed on a road whose direction and destination lie entirely in God's hands, a road which leads to a new land and a new existence. The Exodus from Egypt, like the "exodus" from Haran, unfolds within the parameters of creation and redemption and leads to the final act of Divine/human reconciliation at Sinai. The words addressed to Abraham, "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans" (Genesis 15:7) will echo forth from Mount Sinai, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 20:2).

Exodus/Sinai as the Renewal of Creation

Exodus/Sinai marks the moment and place God has chosen for His ultimate act of restoration and reconciliation. The Exodus from Egypt is to be primarily understood not as an act of liberation and redemption, but as an act of creation. Through liberating events (Exodus) and a covenant commitment (Sinai), God engages in a *creatio nova*, a new creation which is the culmination and consummation of His original act of cosmic creation. The creation of a people is the final event in a process of creation which began with the formation of heaven and earth. Israel is the historical counterpart and completion to cosmic creation. The Creator God now appears as the Redeemer God whose creative power extends into history, not for the purpose of redoing cosmic creation, but for the purpose of creating a people who will mediate the presence of God to the world.

The creation of Israel is modeled upon the original creation and describes how a people is created out of historical "nothingness." During the bondage in Egypt, Israel becomes a "no people"; a people divested of those elements which define and shape its identity: land, culture, history. The four hundred years of slavery represent a *reductio ad nihilum* out of which God creates a people through events as awesome and spectacular as the acts of cosmic creation (Exodus 15). This historical *creatio ex nihilo* is of crucial importance in defining the nature of Israel's relation to God and humanity. It elevates the people of Israel to a position of cosmic importance in God's overall plan for the world. Although the liberation of Israel is the focus for God's activity, it is not the ultimate purpose. The act of redemption is ultimately for the sake of all creation. What is at stake is God's mission for the world, which will now be realized through the life and history of one people. Israel is not only chosen by God to serve as the mediator of blessing to humanity; it is, in fact, created by God for this purpose. Israel's creation is its election. This is the uniqueness of Israel: a people whose essence precedes its existence; a people which has a reason for being before it has a being; a people that can never take its existence for granted, but must always evaluate its existence by its essence. The creation/election theme has its reverse side for it contains a veiled threat. Should Israel turn away from God, it would forfeit its right to exist as God's people and revert to the initial status of

a "no people." "And the Lord said, 'Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people and I am not yours'" (Hosea 1:9). By denying its essence, Israel forfeits its existence.

Surprisingly, yet significantly, the Exodus narrative does not begin with the enslavement but with an announcement of fruitfulness and greatness. "The descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong; so that the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:7). These words describe not only the fulfillment of Patriarchal promise but also the realization of God's creational intentions for all humankind, "And God blessed them, and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth'" (Genesis 1:28). What is happening to Israel in Egypt is nothing less than a microcosmic fulfillment of God's macrocosmic plan for the world. Israel is the starting point for the enactment of God's creational intentions for all humanity. Ironically, this act of blessing for Israel is an omen of disaster for Pharaoh. Pharaoh's decision to enslave the people has both an historical and creational impact. It is an attempt not only to restrain Israel's growth so as to avoid a future threat, but also, and primarily, an attempt to subvert God's creational work within the people of Israel.

Enslavement is chaos: it is life cut off from God's presence and subject to self-centered human will and domination. Egypt is to be seen as the historical embodiment of the forces of human decreation threatening to thwart God's creation. The Exodus drama is played out on both a historical and metahistorical level. Pharaoh appears not only as a human tyrant but also as the incarnation of those anti-creational forces which refuse to recognize God's supremacy and authority. He is the classic example of man's unwillingness to acknowledge his creatureliness and dependence upon God, and his consuming drive for a power and security which go beyond the limits of human existence. The Midrash speaks of Pharaoh's opposition to God and his subsequent punishment as a warning to all future tyrants:

Pharaoh never died and never will die. He always stands at the portal of hell, and when the kings of the nations enter, he makes the power of God known to them at once in these words, "Oh you fools! Why have you not learned knowledge from me? I denied the Lord God, and He brought ten plagues upon me, sent me to the bottom of the sea, kept me there for fifty days, released me then, and brought me up. Thus I could not but believe in Him."⁸

On the metahistorical level, the real issue is not slavery versus freedom, but human servitude versus Divine service—Who shall be the master of Israel? On this point, the biblical teaching is clear: servitude to man is the antithesis to service to God. Pharaoh himself presents the issue very succinctly, "Who is the Lord that I should heed His voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2). The opposition of Pharaoh is the archetypal opposition of human power to the claims of Divine sovereignty. Terence Fretheim in his commentary on Exodus writes,

The Exodus does not constitute a declaration of independence, but a declaration of dependence upon God. Exodus moves from one kind of slavery to another, from bondage to Pharaoh to the service of God. One cannot bypass Sinai on the way to the promised land. Only God can be Lord, can lay claim to life in such a way that true freedom is the result. Within such a relationship, as in every genuine commitment, there is real freedom. When this happens, creation becomes what God intended it to be.⁹

The battle lines have been drawn: man versus God, human tyranny versus Divine sovereignty, decreation versus creation. The conflict between God and Pharaoh involves human

⁸ Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968) III, 30.

⁹ Terrence E. Fretheim, *Exodus—A biblical Commentary* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 20, 30-31.

and nonhuman forces. God reacts to Pharaoh's anti-creational designs by unleashing forces of nature to punish and destroy. The moral chaos of human enslavement is countered by the natural chaos of Divine retribution.

Given the anti-creational forces incarnate in Egypt and Pharaoh, no simple local or historical victory will do; God's victory must be and is cosmic in scope. God, therefore, fights with "weapons" appropriate to the enemy; it is God's activity in creation—the use of nonhuman rather than human forces—that conquers chaos. God's redemption is an overcoming of anti-creational forces at every level including the cosmic.¹⁰

By effecting the deliverance of Israel through a series of natural disorders and disasters, God elevates His victory over Pharaoh into an event of cosmic importance, especially at the Red Sea where the enemy sinks to a watery grave in a miniature reenactment of the original flood catastrophe. Throughout the land of Egypt, the order of creation is disrupted as forces of nature and living things break out of their properly circumscribed boundaries. Water and blood intermingle, light and darkness are no longer separated, everything is spilling and swarming out of its proper category and number. The ten plagues symbolize a return to primeval chaos in that place on earth where God's creational intentions were moving toward realization. A pre-creational darkness has descended upon Egypt.

Out of this chaos and confusion, Moses leads the people to the Red Sea, where God's final victory over Pharaoh takes place. And once again, creational and cosmic events dominate the scene. The crossing of the sea is a microcosmic reenactment of the original act of creation. In both events, the separation of waters and the emergence of dry land are part of the Divine process of creation, historical as well as cosmic. The Divine creative act in the sphere of nature sets up the framework for the liberation and creation of a people. In the final analysis, it appears poetically just that the waters through which the oppressed people is liberated are the same waters within which the oppressor people is destroyed. Even more, the drowning in the Red Sea as well as the killing of Egyptian males prior to the Exodus invert the earlier punishments inflicted by Pharaoh on the people of Israel. The victory of the pro-life creational forces over the anti-life decreational forces is now complete.

The Unique Relationship of God to Israel

In delivering Israel from bondage, God has not only created a new people, but also reestablished the original relationship with humankind which existed on the sixth day of creation. By separating the people of Israel from the other nations, God has set apart and sanctified Israel to stand before Him as His agent and representative to the world. The separation of Israel from the nations has the same cosmic importance as the separations through which God first brought order out of chaos. The words, "You shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from other peoples, that you should be Mine" (Leviticus 20:26) point to a unique symbiosis between God and Israel reminiscent of the creational bond which existed between God and man. Sanctified by acts of distinction and separation, the people of Israel assumes the role which was originally assigned to humanity at creation. The image of God corrupted by countless acts of disobedience and violence is now reinstated in the life of a people created by God for this specific purpose. "For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God, you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:45).

The bond between God and Israel is one of mutual exclusivity. Both God and Israel have been set apart from other nations; they now belong one to the other. "And I will make my abode among you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God and you shall be My people"

¹⁰ Fretheim, *The Reclamation of Genesis*.

(Leviticus 26:11-12). The implied corollary to God's demand that Israel shall have no other gods is God's commitment that He will have no other people. Through His accessibility to and involvement in the life of Israel, God has reentered the realm of human existence. God not only participates in but also becomes a part of the history of the people of Israel. This Divine/human symbiosis is strikingly described in a Midrash on the verse, "You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and I am God" (Isaiah 43:12): "That is, if you are My witness, I am God, and if you are not My witness, I am, as it were, not God."¹¹ God, "as it were," depends on the witness of Israel, without which His Divinity is not realized. The actualization of the full potential of God requires the testimony of His special people. Like the heavens above, Israel has been created to acclaim and bear witness to God. The creation of Israel is as fundamental to cosmic order and harmony as the original creation of heaven and earth.

God's commitment to Israel is grounded in the very schema of creation; it is as secure and inviolable as the changeless order of nature. "Thus says the Lord who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, 'If this fixed order departs from before Me, then shall the descendants of Israel cease from being a nation before Me forever'" (Jeremiah 31:35-36). The existence of Israel is not subject to the flux and fortunes of history, but is basic to the order of creation against which history plays out its drama, and derives its meaning. God's relationship to Israel is one of reciprocity: the people of Israel is witness to the existence of God; the created order is witness to the eternity of Israel. "His descendants shall exist forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established eternally, a reliable witness in the clouds" (Psalms 89:36-37).

Sinai as the Completion of Creation

The stage is now set for the final event in the drama of creation and redemption. The journey of man which began at the Garden of Eden moves on to its ultimate destination: Mount Sinai. The theophany at Sinai marks the culmination and fulfillment of God's creational plan. The encounter between God and Israel at Sinai can be seen as a return to beginnings, an iterative event which is a reenactment of the original encounter between God and man at Eden. For this purpose, God has created a new people to stand before Him at Sinai as Adam stood in His presence at Eden. What began at Eden is now completed at Sinai. At Sinai, the people of Israel are called on to become participants in the renewal and maintenance of the created order.

The Midrash in hyperbolic fashion states that the whole of creation was dependent upon Israel's acceptance of the Torah at Sinai.

God said to the objects of creation, "If Israel accepts the Torah, you shall continue and endure, otherwise, I shall turn everything back into chaos again." The whole of creation was thus kept in dread and suspense until the revelation at Sinai, when Israel received and accepted the Torah, and so fulfilled the condition made by God when He created the universe.¹²

The incompleteness of the original creation is fully resolved at Sinai with the constitution of a people bound to God in creational unity. The theophany at Sinai emerges not as the outcome of God's act of deliverance but, primarily, as the extension into human existence of God's cosmic plan and purpose.

The interplay of historical and creational themes permeates the entire Sinai event. God's call to Moses to ascend the mountain is preceded by a period of six days, which alludes to the six days of cosmic creation. "The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai; and the cloud covered it

¹¹ Sifre Deuteronomy, Reuven Hammer Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 359.

¹² Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, 52.

six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain" (Exodus 24:16-18). On the climactic seventh day, Moses ascends the mountain to receive the Torah which is referred to as the Tree of Life, "She is a tree of life to them that hold fast to her" (Proverbs 3:18), and corresponds to the original Tree of Life from which Adam and Eve were separated. This act of initial separation is now canceled by the Torah, which provides life and sustenance to the people of Israel. "See I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God..., then you shall live and multiply and the Lord your God will bless you" (Deuteronomy 30:15-16).

In another Midrash, the Ten Commandments are elevated to a position of cosmic, as well as historic, importance.

The Ten Commandments, which God first revealed on Mount Sinai, correspond in their character to the ten words by which the world was created. The first commandment: "I am the Lord thy God," corresponds to the first word of creation, "Let there be light," for God is the eternal light....Not only the words but also the very tablets on which they are engraved are of Divine origin. They were created by God's own hand in the dusk of the first Sabbath at the close of creation.¹³

The revelation at Sinai provides access to God and opens up creation for humanity. The Torah revelation is a new creation providing order and harmony within the social cosmos. At Sinai, a law is revealed whose purpose is to actualize creational order and harmony in historical time. At Sinai, the order of creation is given social and historical expression. Just as cosmic order was achieved through a series of separations that must be maintained if cosmic order is to continue, so also, human life and society are established with boundaries and separations that must be maintained if human chaos is to be avoided. The covenant law revealed at Sinai is the means by which the cosmic and human orders can be harmoniously integrated. It provides a blueprint whereby God's creational plan can be realized in all spheres of human life and existence. Israel joins God as a coworker in the ongoing actualization of creation. At Sinai, God has once again set the world in order; it is Israel's task to ensure that this right order will be maintained and renewed through obedience to God's laws and commandments.

Fretheim in his article on redemption and law describes this symbiotic relationship between the cosmic and social orders.

The law belongs to the sphere of creational thought. Negatively, an offense in the legal realm obviously has effects in the realm of nature (drought, famine) or in the political sphere (threat of the enemy). Positively, the law is a means by which the Divine ordering of chaos at the cosmic level is actualized in the social sphere, brought into closer conformity with the creation God intended. Thereby God's will is done on earth as in heaven, and the cosmic and social orders are harmoniously integrated. Israel by attending to its relationship with God and to the commands given at Sinai, grows towards God's intention for the human, indeed the entire world, laid out in creation....Sinai reiterates for those redeemed the demands of creation.¹⁴

¹³ Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 104-105, 119.

¹⁴ Fretheim, *Reclamation of Genesis*, 362-363. For a more detailed and elaborate study of the connection between the cosmic and social orders see Frank H. Gorman, Jr., *The Ideology of Ritual* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990). In her seminal study on pollution, Mary Douglas claims that biblical dietary restrictions are an attempt to reaffirm the fundamental structural boundaries and separations through which the act of creation took place, "keeping distinct the categories of creation."

The classic example of Divine/human interaction is to be found in the Sabbath command. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God..., for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day" (Exodus 19:8-11). The Sabbath is that point in time where God and man meet. On the seventh day of creation, God joined Himself and His eternal presence to His temporal creation, to the world of man. On the Sabbath day, man not only recalls but also participates in an act of cosmic creation. Through an act of *Imitatio Dei*, he experiences the original structuring of time within the microcosm of his own life. He brings the rhythm of his own life into tune with the rhythm of the cosmos. The observance of the Sabbath links humanity to a divinely ordained future as well as a divinely created past. Sabbath observance has cosmic implications: not only is it a foretaste of an eschatological future but also its effective cause. "If Israel were to celebrate only one Sabbath properly, the Messiah would immediately come."¹⁵ The Sabbath is a prefiguration of the final phase of Divine/human reconciliation. In pointing back to the beginning, it also points to what is yet to be, to the final destiny to which all creation is moving.

The Sabbath and the Exodus are the two paradigmatic examples of liberation found in the Bible. The Exodus from bondage is the symbol of external liberation; the Sabbath is the symbol of inner freedom. Observing the Sabbath means freeing oneself from the endless drive to remake the world in the image and likeness of man. It means acknowledging God as the source and center of human life. The Sabbath as a mimetic reenactment of the original seventh day proclaims the incontestable sovereignty of God, and the everlasting covenant between God and Israel. On the Sabbath day, creation and covenant intersect.

Say to the people of Israel, "You shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. Wherefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign forever between Me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested." (Exodus 31:13, 16-17)

At Sinai, Israel is separated from the other nations, restored and recreated in the image and likeness of God. Through the covenant at Sinai, God reaffirms the original blessings of life and prosperity which will now be realized in the life of a people dwelling in the land promised by God to its forefathers. The land of Canaan is Eden recaptured; a "paradise" on earth. It is a land "flowing with milk and honey," a place of abundance and plenty.

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs..., a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing....And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you. (Deuteronomy 8: 7-10)

Settlement in the land of Canaan has creational implications: the abundance of Canaan cancels the curse which God has placed on the earth as punishment for Adam's act of disobedience. The earth which was condemned to barrenness and infertility now reverts to its original state of fruitfulness and productivity. In all the earth, the land of Canaan is the place chosen by God to serve as the sacred center from which the creational blessings restored at Sinai will flow into the stream of human life and history.

Alienation and Reconciliation

Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 41-57.

¹⁵ Exodus Rabbah 25, 12.

The story line which moves from Creation to Sinai is, however, tragically flawed by an act of transgression which occurs at the very moment of Divine/human reconciliation. The revelation at Sinai is not only an event of restoration, but is also a reenactment of man's initial turning away from God. Once again, Divine creation is followed by human decreation. Once again, the very location chosen for Divine/human unification becomes the place of sin and punishment. The building of the Golden Calf like the eating of the forbidden fruit is but another example of mankind's never-ending drive to acquire Divinity by exceeding the limits of human, creaturely existence. At Eden, man wished to become like God by elevating himself to a position of independence and authority. At Sinai, the intention is the same but the direction is reversed. Rather than elevating itself, the people intends to bring God down to earthly proportions by reducing Him to an object created by man. The Golden Calf is a violation of the basic Creator/creature relationship, the Creator God has now become the created god. The Midrash points to the similarity between God's punishment for the Golden Calf to that for the forbidden fruit.

The worshiping of the Golden Calf had more disastrous consequences for Israel than any other of its sins. God had resolved to give life everlasting to the people that would accept the Torah, hence Israel upon accepting the Torah gained supremacy over the angel of Death. But it lost this power when it worshipped the Golden Calf....There is no sorrow that falls to Israel's lot that is not in part a punishment for its worship of the Golden Calf.¹⁶

The events at Sinai reveal the tragic paradox which underlies the Divine/human relationship. Man who seeks reunion and reconciliation with God inevitably succumbs to the temptation of separating himself from the Divine center to which he strives to return. The incident of the Golden Calf dramatically demonstrates the basic truth that reconciliation is not a gift that can be granted by God but a goal which must be constantly sought after by man.

Despite the gravity of the sin and the severity of the punishment, the overall thrust of the Sinai drama is one of hope and expectation for the future. Neither God nor Moses allows this act of disloyalty to break the creational bond which has been established between God and His people. Significantly, the incident of the Golden Calf occurs [in the Torah's narrative, which may not be chronologically accurate] precisely between God's giving Moses His instructions for the building of the Tabernacle and the actual construction. The building of the Tabernacle is the concrete reaffirmation of God's presence in the midst of a "stiff-necked," sinful people. "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Exodus 33:14). Israel can turn away from God and reject His Torah, but it cannot break the bond which was established at Sinai; it cannot change the fact that it was created to be God's counterpart in the conveyance of blessing to humanity. The people of Israel is God's sanctuary in the midst of a profane world; the center from which God's wondrous deeds will proceed.

And Moses said, "If now I have found favor in thy sight, Oh Lord, let the Lord, I pray Thee, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Thy inheritance." And He said, "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought (*nivra'ukh*) in all the earth or in any nation, and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord; for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you." (Exodus 34:9-10)

God reaffirms His covenant after the sin of the Golden Calf, using words, *nivra'ukh*, reminiscent of His original creation, *bara*. What God will do with Israel is as grand as what He

¹⁶ Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 120.

did at creation. These are acts of such an unprecedented nature that only the language of creation can adequately describe them.

The biblical drama of Creation has now come full circle: from the creation of the world to the creation of a people who will serve as the historical embodiment of God's creational plan for humanity. The people of Israel leave Sinai and resume the journey with God which began not with the Exodus from Egypt but with the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. At Eden, God placed a flaming sword at the entrance to the garden to prevent man and woman from reentering. The sword of fire signifies their separation from God, the unbridgeable gap between Divinity and humanity.

At Sinai, the people of Israel resumes its journey and, once again, there is an image of fire which stands between God and man. "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, that they may travel by day and by night...; the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people" (Exodus 13:21-22). The pillar of fire in the wilderness is, perhaps, a counterpoint to the sword of fire at Eden: not a fire which separates and divides, but a fire which signifies the nearness and direction of God; not a fire which prohibits, but one which protects.

Humanity is still on the move, but God is now its constant companion and guide. "Thou hast led in Thy steadfast love the people whom Thou hast redeemed, Thou has guided them by Thy strength to Thy holy abode" (Exodus 15:13). Humanity can never return to the Eden of the past, but there is now an Eden of the future. It is an Eden not created by God for man, but a joint Divine/human endeavor: to actualize God's creational plan for all humanity now encapsulated in the life of a people dwelling in its land. This is the goal adumbrated in the creation account and substantiated in the Exodus/Sinai drama. It is the goal to which God and Israel have committed themselves at Sinai. It is the essence of the people of Israel.

The Beginning of Wisdom, Chapter 2

Leon R. Kass

Although the two accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 differ widely, and although they even contradict each other if they are read as historical accounts, the two stories in fact complement each other and form part of a coherent whole. Indeed, there are good reasons for putting together the separate stories. Ordinary human intelligence, eventually culminating in philosophy, seeks wisdom regarding how to live—that is, it seeks “knowledge of good and bad”—through contemplation of the nature of things. The Bible, by marrying two creation stories into a unified text, opposes, from its beginning, this intention and this possibility.

FOLLIES OF FREEDOM AND REASON:

THE STORY OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN (I)

The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is perhaps the most famous story in Genesis, indeed, in the whole Hebrew Bible. Read simply and superficially, it tells the tale of man's disobedience and its doleful consequences: the loss of ease, innocence and psychic wholeness, the gain of a burdened and painful mortal existence. Read carefully and searchingly, with attention to all its details, it opens a window offering profound insights into our human nature and the human condition.

The Garden of Eden story presents a view of our humanity vastly different from the one offered in Genesis 1. This so-called second creation story (which begins in Genesis 2:4) departs from the first not only in content but also in tone, mood and orientation. It addresses or answers different questions and makes a different point, but as we shall see, a point complementary to that of the first story. If read historically, it shows how and when human life got to be so difficult. If read philosophically and anthropologically, it reveals the basic and often conflicting psychosocial elements of our humanity, thus making clear why human life is always so difficult. And if read morally, it enables us to see clearly and to experience powerfully the primary sources of many of our enduring moral dilemmas and much of our unhappiness. Like every truly great story, it seeks to show us not what happened (once) but what always happens, what is always the case. Like every truly great story, its truth may lie not so much in its historical or even philosophical veracity as in its effects on the soul of the reader.

Why a second creation story?

But, you may rightly ask, are there really two distinct creation stories? And more important: if so, why? These questions can be fully addressed only after the Garden of Eden story has been carefully expounded. Still, to encourage a wisdom-seeking approach to the story, it may be useful in advance both to demonstrate concretely how the two stories are different and to suggest how they might be related. By doing so, we may be able to counteract two opposing but equally misleading biases about this story: the prejudice of some pious readers and the prejudice of many biblical scholars. The pious readers, believing that the text cannot contain contradictions, ignore the major disjunctions between the two creation stories; they tend to treat the second story as the fuller, more detailed account of the creation of man (and woman) that the first story simply reported. On the other side, the scholars, though keenly aware of the differences in the two stories, have little interest in relating their content and meaning; practitioners of source criticism, they focus on the differences to prove that the two accounts came from different sources—the so-called P (Priestly) and J (Yahwistic) documents—that were subsequently redacted or compiled. They rarely consider why the redactor or compiler might have deliberately selected and juxtaposed these two somewhat contradictory versions.

The first creation story focuses on heaven and earth, on the entire cosmos; the second focuses on human beings in their terrestrial situation. In the first, the cosmic beginnings are watery and amorphous (1:2); in the second, the earthly beginning is dry (2:5). The first story ends with man; the second begins with him. In the first, the animals come first and man is to be their ruler; in the second, the beasts come after, as man's possible companions. In the first, man is to be the master of life on earth (1:28); in the second, he is to be the servant of the earth (2:5, 15). In the first, male and female are created together; in the second, they are created sequentially, male first (or alternatively, the first human being is, to begin with, androgynous). In the first story, man is made directly in the image of God (1:27); in the second, he is made of earthly dust and divine breath (2:7) and becomes godlike only at the end—"now the man is become like one of us" (3:22)—and only in transgressing. In the first, things are said to be "good"; in the second, there is a tree of knowledge of good and bad, nothing is said to be "good," and one thing—man's aloneness—is said (by the Lord God) to be "not good." In the first, the name for God is 'elohim, in the second YHWH 'elohim. In the first, plants are given to living things for food (1:29-30); in the second, man is to serve and keep the plants (2:15), but the fruit trees are given for food (2:16). In the first, in need of encouragement, man is given a positive injunction, for procreation and dominion (1:28); in the second, in need of restraint, he is given a negative commandment (2:17). In the first, God names and blesses (1:22, 28; 2:3); in the second, man names but God curses (3:14, 17). In the first story, God's first blessing concerns reproduction (1:28), and only later are there remarks about food (1:29); both are positive. In the second story, food comes before sex and reproduction, and each is tinged with ambiguity and sorrow: there are, first, generous remarks about eating, but with one restriction (2:16-17), followed by the emergence of sexuality, first without shame (2:25), later with it (3:7); only later in the story (in the "punishment") do we learn (for the first time) about childbirth, that it will be painful (3:16), and the truth about food, that it will come only with toil (3:18-19). In the first story, human freedom appears to be our badge of distinction; in the second story, human freedom is the source of our troubles.

The first story addresses the reader as a spectator and offers a cosmic vision, majestically presenting man's place in a cosmic whole. Though the viewer's vantage point is terrestrial, the scene viewed is remote and all-encompassing, and what is seen is eternal. Relatively open regarding man's work, the story addresses us mainly intellectually, providing "metaphysical" scope and knowledge, and it inspires in us wonder and cosmic awe. In contrast, the second story maintains a strictly terrestrial focus and addresses the reader as a suffering moral agent, presenting him a poignant account of why misery shadows human life. The perspective is close and earthy, the view is genealogical and human. It focuses on human work, in toil and generation, showing us both our complex nature and what is responsible for our life's being the way it is. It addresses us mainly experientially, personally, and emotively, with moral scope and knowledge, and (as we shall see) it inspires in us shame, fear and moral awe. The second story is not just a magnified version of the human portions of the first. It is, in fact, utterly distinct and independent, and reveals a different but equally true aspect of human existence.

Once we recognize the independence of the two creation stories, we are compelled to adopt a critical principle of reading if we mean to understand each story in its own terms. We must scrupulously avoid reading into the second story any facts or notions taken from the first, and vice versa. Thus, in reading about the origin of man in the story of the Garden of Eden, we must not say or even think that man is here created in God's image or that man is to be the ruler over the animals. Neither, when we try to understand the relationship of man and woman in the garden, are we to think about or make use of the first story's account of the coequal and coeval creation of man and woman. Only after we have read and interpreted each story entirely on its

own should we try to integrate the two disparate teachings. By proceeding in this way, we will discover why these two separate and divergent accounts have been juxtaposed and how they function to convey a coherent, non-contradictory teaching about human life. In the belief that an early glimpse at this teaching will encourage readers to follow the long argument more thoughtfully and fruitfully, I state the conclusion at the beginning—and beg the pardon of anyone who would rather have been kept in suspense.

Although the two accounts differ widely, and although they even contradict each other if they are read as historical accounts, the two stories in fact complement each other and form part of a coherent whole. Indeed, there are good reasons—both theoretical and moral—for putting together the separate metaphysical-cosmological and the moral-political stories.¹ First of all, reading theoretically, this separation and juxtaposition of the two stories is a way of indicating that the two aspects of our world, the natural-cosmic-metaphysical and the moral-political, although both true, are nonetheless also utterly disjointed. The first story, addressing us as seekers of natural-cosmic knowledge, documents an eternal, intelligible, and hierarchic order of the world, in which we human beings stand at the top of the visible beings; the cosmos itself is not divine, for it has a higher, invisible, and partly mysterious source. Man, not the sun, is godlike: sufficient proof is contained in our mental ability to grasp the cosmology offered in the text. But as the second story shows, addressing us as seekers of moral-political knowledge, human life, considered here on earth and in its own terms, is for the most part hardly godlike: it has a sorrowful content for which we sense that we are somehow responsible. A life of sinless innocence and wholeheartedness is virtually impossible for a human being, thanks to freedom, imagination, reason-and-speech, self-consciousness, and pride, and in the face of neediness, sexuality, ignorance, self-division, dependence and lack of self-command.

Second, reading morally-politically, we learn from these two separate stories that neither cosmic nature nor human reason will suffice to help us live well. Cosmic knowledge cannot heal our self-division or teach us righteousness, not least because—as we learn from the first story—the cosmos is neither divine nor a source of such moral-political teaching. And—as we will soon learn from the second story—our own native powers of mind and awareness, exercised on the world around us, are inadequate for discerning how to live happily or justly.

In short, the first story challenges the dignity of the natural objects of thought and the ground of natural reverence; the second story challenges the human inclination to try to guide human life solely by our own free will and our own human reason, exercised on the natural objects of thought. Ordinary human intelligence, eventually culminating in philosophy, seeks wisdom regarding how to live—that is, knowledge of good and bad—through contemplation of the nature of things (that is, for short, of heaven). The Bible opposes, from its beginning, this intention and this possibility, first, in chapter 1, by denying the dignity of the primary object of philosophy, the natural things, and second, in chapter 2, by rebutting the primary intention of philosophy, guidance for life found by reason and rooted in nature. God, not nature, is divine; obedience to God, not the independent and rational pursuit of wisdom, is the true and righteous human way.

¹ These terms—"theoretical," "metaphysical," "cosmological," "moral" and "political"—are, of course, not biblical; they come from philosophy. As many people have observed, the word "nature" does not appear in the Bible. Nonetheless, in a wisdom-seeking reading of the Bible, the distinctions here employed seem to be valuable and illuminating, and the insights afforded by their use may justify any possible distortions caused by importing these anachronistic and foreign terms.

Speechless innocence: the basic stratum of human life

Alerted to what is at stake, we turn now to the text and to this story's account of the primordial human being. The text's picture of man—his powers, his activities—comes to us sequentially, in layers built up in order from the inside out; for this reason, we must not ascribe human capacities to our "hero" before they are explicitly presented in the text. We can learn most from the story by regarding it as a mythical yet realistic portrait of permanent truths about our humanity, rather than as a historical yet idealized portrait of a blissful existence we once enjoyed but lost.

Every shrub of the field was not yet in the earth, and every herb of the field had not yet sprung up; for the Lord God had not yet caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man [*'adam*] to till [or serve: *la'avod*] the ground [*'adamah*]; but there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground [*'adamah*]. (2:5-6)

As our story opens, the earth is hard, dry and lacking in vegetation. Yet every shrub and every herb are, in fact, latently present, awaiting the right conditions to spring forth.² The earth's fruitfulness, we learn from the start, needs both the rain of heaven and the workings of man. The text hints that the future lurks in the present, not only for the earth but also for the human being. Even before we meet him, man is defined by his work: less the ruler over life, more the servant of the earth³, man will till and toil, needily waiting for rain, apprehensive about the future. The story begins convincingly, conveying a nearly universal truth about human life.

But why is this our life? What is responsible for its being so difficult? The sequel intends an answer.

Then the Lord God formed [or fashioned: *yatsar*] man [or human being: *'adam*] of the dust of the ground [*'adamah*], and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living creature. (2:7)

Human troubles are foreshadowed by man's dual origins: he is constituted by two principles, the first one low ("dust of the ground"), the second one high ("breath of life"). The human being here first comes to sight not as image of God but as formed and animated (or breathing) dust of the ground. Higher than the earth, yet still bound to it, the human being has a name, 'adam (from 'adamah, meaning "ground" or "earth," from 'adam, meaning "ruddy" or "tawny"), which reminds us (and perhaps him) of his lowly terrestrial origins. A groundling or earthling, man is, from the start, up from below.

Although formed from the ground, man is not alienated from it. On the contrary, simply as a living creature, he appears at first to be right at home, in a world that seems absolutely made for him.

And the Lord God planted a garden eastward, in Eden; and there he put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.

² The Hebrew original says, literally, "Every shrub of the field before it was in the earth" In this subtle way, the text suggests that what follows is an account that unfolds and reveals what is inherently always there, rather than an account that tells of a once-upon-a-time event. In the same way, we shall learn about the unfolding of man's character from its inherent and permanent roots. I am grateful to Yuval Levin for this observation.

³ The verb in the expression "to till the ground," 'avad, means "to work" but also "to serve." It is cognate with 'eved, "servant" or "slave." We shall have occasion in later chapters to examine the activity of farming and, in particular, whether it represents mastery of or subservience to the earth.

And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became four heads....⁴
And the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to work it [*or to serve it: le'avdah*] and to keep it [*or to guard it or to watch it: leshamrah*].

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From every tree of the garden thou mayest surely eat...."
(2:8-10, 15-16)

This prototypical human being, what is he like? The text does not explicitly tell us. Yet this very silence (as well as the contrast of this tableau with what comes later) suggests that he is a simple being, with a simple soul, living a simple life. In body he looks like one of us: upright, naked, and hairless. But in mind and heart he seems protohuman, more childlike (or maybe even animal-like) than godlike. He is ignorant, speechless, and (above all) innocent; as yet, he knows no complex or specifically human passions or desires: neither shame nor pride, anger nor guilt, malice nor vanity, wonder nor awe visit his soul. Very likely, he also lacks both fear of death and erotic desire. With his simple needs—for food, for drink, for repose—simply met (or largely so; there is as yet no tilling of the ground), he is content. Experiencing little gap between desire and its fulfillment, and feeling no opposition either from without or from within, he knows neither self-division nor self-consciousness. Solitary and independent, enjoying what Rousseau would later call "the sentiment of existence," he lives for himself, immediately and here-and-now, in a world that provides him peace, ease and the satisfaction of his basic needs.⁵

Read as history, the text fails to persuade the skeptical reader. Man probably never lived as a solitary or in an Edenic garden. But read anthropologically and morally, the story is both revealing and moving. For one thing, it conveys truly a permanent aspect of our being. Whatever else human beings are or become, they are, always and at bottom, also beings with an uncomplicated, innocent attachment to their own survival and ease, beings who experience and feel, immediately and without reflection, the goodness of their own aliveness. This stratum of all animal being—private bodily need, privately satisfied and enjoyed—is an ineradicable part of human being. All human beings know hunger, thirst and fatigue. No man, no matter how altruistic or saintly, meets his own hunger by putting food into someone else's mouth. Moreover, from the point of view of simple necessity—for food and drink—the world is a rather generous

⁴ At this point the text identifies four rivers, only the last two of which are clearly known to us: Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates. That the Garden of Eden is a purely mythic place—a mere *utopia*, literally "no place"—is indicated by the fact that there can be no single terrestrial place that could serve as the common source of these four widely separated rivers. True, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers do meet, but the lands the text associates with the first two rivers are clearly separated from the Tigris-Euphrates valley, the first to the north, the second to the south. (A similar device is used by Homer in the *Odyssey*, where he locates Ogygia, the home of Calypso, at "the navel of the waters.") What we learn through the use of this poetic trope is that this story of human beginnings applies universally: the elementary anthropological truths it discloses pertain to human beings who populate all the great rivers (and continents).

⁵ Readers who know Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality Among Men* will recognize its influence on the terms I use here to describe the primordial human being before the creation of woman (or, to speak non-historically, abstracted from his sexual nature). In this *Discourse*, Rousseau mounts a critique of civilization in the name of human freedom and happiness, using as a device a mythic portrait of solitary "natural man" living in the state of nature, a portrait that is, among other things, a remarkable philosophical interpretation of the Garden of Eden story and its sequelae. My philosophical reading of the biblical account of human beginnings not only takes encouragement from Rousseau's example; it is also indebted to Rousseau's profound appreciation of our basic psychic and social proclivities. As will be seen, however, I do not follow Rousseau in the moral and political uses he makes of the biblical text.

place; were it not for the depredations of civilized man, it would be so still. For many of our simpler relatives, including the primates, it remains in large measure a veritable garden; and it would still be so for us, had we never risen up from animality—or for that matter, from childhood.

The basic stratum of life, with its focus on satisfying life's basic needs, is never far from the surface of human life. We continue to experience its demands, we daily enjoy their satisfaction. Though we cannot remember our own infancy, we re-experience through caring for our children the phase of human life ruled almost entirely by animal necessity. From time to time we even make great efforts to re-experience in pure form the simplest pleasures of life: we go carefree into the woods to commune with nature; we pick berries, nuts, and mushrooms and we drink from a mountain stream; we sit down under a tree to eat and drink; we lie down under a tree to enjoy (we hope) a dreamless sleep.

For all these reasons, few adult readers can be emotionally indifferent to the inviting picture of "original man" in the Garden of Eden. No matter how sophisticated and civilized we have become, most of us respond to this portrait of our mythical remotest "past" with something that feels, in fact, like nostalgia. We experience the original 'adam as a grown-up child enjoying the pleasures of a childlike existence. With at least part of our souls, we long for a condition like his. We envy original man not only his contentment with life, but also and especially his simple innocence and goodness, his psychic wholeness and spontaneity, and his lack of troublesome self-division and corrosive self-consciousness. We envy his apparent being at home in the world, at one with and in command of his surroundings. Even though we probably would not, on balance, exchange our life for his (any more than we would willingly return permanently to early childishness), we are made poignantly to experience what we have lost and to wonder why. The text's answer is right before us.

Disturbing knowledge, dangerous freedom

The simple, primordial human being, because he is primordially human—or perhaps, instead, potentially human—is not quite simple. As the story already hints, there is something disquieting in his original nature. Some innate capacities or potentialities in the human soul dangerously threaten to upset the tranquility of man's simple and innocent life. Two possible sources of disturbance are subtly identified, metaphorically, in the form of the two special trees, trees that are distinguished from those "pleasant to the sight and good for food" (2:9), each an object of potential desire: the tree of life (in the midst of the garden) and the tree of knowledge of good and bad. Later, another source of trouble will be introduced, centering on man's aloneness and the remedies provided for it—sexuality and sociality. At this point, however, the elements under scrutiny are intrapsychic rather than interpersonal.

The tree of life, offering deathlessness, stands in the center of man's garden. As is true of any other animal, man's immediate attachment to his own life implies an instinctive fear of death, which, should it become active by becoming conscious as an actual fear, could—and does—greatly disturb man's tranquility. But unless and until the fear of death is accompanied by something like self-conscious knowledge of death as a badness, the creature will have no interest in trying to overcome death by seeking immortality from the tree of life. The original human being shows no interest in the tree of life; indeed, as we shall see, he never eats of it prior to his expulsion from the garden, presumably because concern with death does not penetrate the consciousness of his simple soul.

The more important threat to the contentment of elementary human life is represented by the tree of knowledge of good and bad, about which we shall soon speak at length. The tree stands as the object or goal of an (at least) latent tendency in the prototypical human being to seek a certain kind of knowledge or a certain kind of awareness. Once attained, this knowledge will

necessarily disturb the psychic peace and harmony of the living creature. In its presence the human being cannot without trouble enjoy his own existence. In its presence he cannot remain undivided within himself. To reinforce the threat that such knowledge poses to his own health and happiness, the danger is here revealed to human beings—both the one in the story and the ones reading it—by the highest authority. Not mere local custom, but the highest principle of Being attests to the trouble that comes with and from a certain kind of dangerous knowledge.

The warning the story puts in the form of a divine command.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From every tree of the garden thou mayest surely eat [literally, eating thou mayest eat]; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die [literally, dying thou shalt die]." (2:16–17)⁶

Generally overlooked in this commanding speech is its largely good news about food: the bounty of the entire natural environment is at human disposal; the world is, at least for the purpose of nourishment and self-preservation, a hospitable place. But the story's focus rightly falls on the one exception to God's generosity, and on the fact of commanded interdiction and limitation of human appetite.

We take it as an axiom that God is unlikely to waste His commandments and prohibitions, issuing them where there is no need.⁷ Thus, from the fact that it is here prohibited, we infer the existence of a human propensity that leads toward the tree. Man must be the kind of being that has at least a potential to seek the kind of knowledge represented by the tree. Man must be the kind of being for whom such knowledge is always in his vicinity, but an arm's reach away, so to speak. To see why a benevolent God might try to keep his creature from it, we need first to try to say what this prohibited tree is and why knowledge of good and bad might be deadly.

We note first that one should regard the knowledge it represents as knowledge of "good and bad" rather than the more familiar "good and evil." The Hebrew word translated "bad" has a much broader meaning than moral evil. Pain is bad, and so are sickness, ugliness, and disorder. It is therefore better to begin with this very broad, and not exclusively moral, understanding of "bad." Second, the tree of knowledge is obviously a metaphor; knowledge does not grow on trees. Nevertheless, the metaphor is powerful, as we can see by pondering it. Why does the Bible present knowledge as if it were embodied in a tree, obtainable by eating? "What, for openers, is a tree?"

A tree is a seemingly independent being, self-developing, self-sustaining, and apparently self-caused. But seeming is not being. God caused this tree to come out of the ground—like all trees. The tree's appearance of independence—its on-its-ownness—is deceptive. Though separate and distinct, the tree in fact belongs to the earth. Though it appears lofty to the human eye, it is in fact of lowly origins and contains no breath of life. A tree may be attractive to sight and tempting for food, but it is silent; it has nothing useful to teach about life. In short, a tree is a natural, terrestrial, low but seemingly lofty, attractive (to sight) but amoral being, seemingly—but only seemingly—autonomous and self-sufficing.

Consider next the name of our special tree. The phrase "knowledge of good and bad" is ambiguous. Some have held that it is an idiom meaning knowledge of all things, others that it means political knowledge, especially knowledge of how to rule. But on its face, the name

⁶ In contrast to the first creation story, the first divine speech in this story is moral, not creative. Further, in speaking to the human being, the Lord God does not bless, as He does in the first story; He commands.

⁷ An obvious if trivial example: God does not command man or the animals to breathe. A less obvious but nontrivial example: God does not command mothers to love their children.

suggests rather knowledge of how to live, of what we would call practical knowledge, including but not limited to moral knowledge. Yet it is unclear whether it signifies (a) knowledge only that there are good and bad or (b), in addition, also a concern with good and bad or (c), further, true knowledge of what good and bad really are. In the light of the sequel, I am inclined to think that the tree offers the human being not true knowledge of good and bad, but merely a concerned awareness of their presence and difference, coupled with opinions, not necessarily reliable, about which is which.

Putting together the generic characteristics of "tree" with this particular tree's name suggests that the tree of knowledge of good and bad stands for some autonomous knowledge of how to live, derived by human beings from their own experience of the visible world and rooted in their own surroundings (nature; trees in the garden). Once the potential for human freedom and choice emerges, human beings live by their own lights, learning solely from their own experience. It is precisely this natural and uninstructed human way that the Bible warns us against by having God attempt to prevent man from attaining, or even pursuing, that freedom and its correlative, autonomous knowledge. By means of the image of a divinely prohibited tree, the story means to make clear to the reader that human freedom—or, what is the same thing, human reason—is itself deeply questionable, and the likely source of all our unhappiness.

The point is even better made if we pursue a purely formal analysis, dealing not with the substance of the tree but only with the fact that it was prohibited. Man in this story is defined by his need for a prohibition; he is a free being, or rather a "too free" being. Accordingly, the crux of the story is prohibition and interdiction, which is to say—by negation—freedom and autonomy. The Bible knows that the only way to show human freedom as a problem is to come at it from its opposite: constraint. Here is how the story's logic works.

The man is told to obey a command. Obedience is called for, its opposite is proscribed. The opposite of obedience is non-obedience or disobedience, or in other words, choosing for yourself. Any free choice is, by definition, an act of non-obedience. To make this truth absolutely clear, the story makes free choice appear as disobedience to command.⁸

Free choice is tied to knowledge; free choice implicates reason. Whereas obedience means necessarily "no independent knowledge of good and bad," disobedience necessarily means, at least implicitly, independent or autonomous knowledge of good and bad. Any free choice implies reaching for and acting on our own knowledge (or opinion) of good and bad, better and worse. Every free choice implies some (at least) tacit judgment that the thing being chosen is, in some sense, good.

The meaning of the tree of knowledge of good and bad should now be clear: the knowledge prohibited is in fact the knowledge implied in violating all prohibitions, or in other words, the knowledge implied in any act of free choice. As everybody knows, the human being indeed chose to disobey, never mind why. He (they) chose therewith the principle of disobedience, which is to say, the principle of freedom and independence. The name that Genesis gives to the

⁸ It is, of course, true that someone might freely choose to obey a command(ment). Down the road, this is precisely what God and the biblical author will recommend. But rhetorically, the choice for willing obedience becomes more attractive if the reader first learns about the folly of non-obedience. And logically and psychologically, the only way to show that conduct has indeed been freely chosen is to show it in opposition to and in defiance of constraint—whether of law and command or even only of fixed instinct. From the outside, an act done because of obedience or necessity and the same act freely chosen are indistinguishable. Proof of freedom requires negation, requires explicit *dis*obedience.

principle of disobedience is "knowledge of good and bad,"⁹ knowledge freestanding and autonomous—that is, just like a tree.

In the story, the human being, in the act of disobedience, appropriates to himself—makes part of himself, incorporates (that is, eats)—knowledge of good and bad. But please note: to reach for the forbidden fruit is already to have tasted it. As we shall see, the woman, before she eats of it, has already made a judgment that the tree is "good for food and a delight to the eyes and to be desired to make one wise." The woman judges for herself, on the basis of her own autonomous knowing of good and bad, that to eat is good. Formally speaking, the eating merely ratifies, after the fact, the human way of freedom and autonomy.

Some will argue that the problem that God sought to address (or to speak strictly anthropologically, the problem at the heart of our troubles) is not freedom itself but rather only its abuse. On this account, freedom is itself a good, even a blessing, but a blessing that can be used for both good and bad. When it is badly used, the fault lies not with freedom or reason itself but with human appetite: or, alternatively, human pride distorts free will.

Supporters of this interpretation emphasize that the prohibition seeks to limit human eating, an activity born of desire. But the context shows that eating, by itself, is not the problem: God generously provides a whole gardenful of trees "good for food," and the tree of knowledge is clearly distinguished from the trees of nourishing.¹⁰ The text seems to imply not that freedom is corrupted by desire, but rather the reverse: natural desire and its satisfaction are threatened as a result of human freedom and reason and a certain kind of knowledge. Because we have free choice—that is, because our desires are not simply given by instinct—and because our reason, through its working on our imagination, influences and alters natural appetites, human appetite increases beyond what is necessary and good for us. Precisely because we are rational and, hence, free, we can freely desire things that are harmful to life, health, and well-being. Thus, a proscriptive limitation on human eating and human omnivorousness metaphorically (and perfectly) highlights the dangers freedom poses to healthy natural desire.

As an empirical matter, it is no doubt true that desire and pride can and do warp human choice. But our biblical text has a much more radical teaching about the problem of freedom. Every act of uninstructed free choice, the text seems to intimate, is an implicitly prideful act, presupposing as it does the possession of knowledge of what is good for a human being. Every act of choice implicitly expresses a judgment of good and bad, better and worse. Every act of choice presupposes that the human agent knows—or thinks he knows—what is good for him (or someone else), on which basis he chooses accordingly. On this interpretation of the text, the fact that God wants to keep man from the tree of knowledge of good and bad suggests that He wants man to remain an innocent, contented, and unself-divided being who follows instinctively the path to his natural good. Or better, reading morally rather than historically, through God's

⁹ This formulation, as well as the basic insights of this formal analysis of the prohibition, I owe to Leo Strauss's essay "On the Interpretation of Genesis," *L'Homme XXI*, no.1 (Jan.-Mar. 1981), 5-20.

¹⁰ The metaphor that lets prohibited eating stand for prohibited knowing is, however, pregnant. Eating is the incorporation of "other" and its transformation into "same." Eating the proper food maintains oneself and one's own wholeness. But eating improper food, food that cannot be assimilated, means taking in material that remains indigestible, that remains separate and alien. Taking in wrong food thus produces a certain duality and negativity within; it invites self-attention and judgmental self-consciousness, precisely the result (in our story) of the act of transgressive eating. On the nature of eating and on the problem of human omnivorousness, see my *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), Chapters One and Two.

command about the tree the text teaches the reader that it is his own freedom—and its implicitly yet necessarily disobedient character—that is the cause of all human troubles.

To sum up this formal part of the argument: For a human being, as for any human child, the possibility of choosing for oneself lies always within reach. To be a human being means that judgments of good and bad are always in one's mental garden, no more than a thought away. And as every parent teaches, and as we children learn painfully by ourselves much later, a free choice is not necessarily a good choice, not even for oneself. In the story, the generous God paternalistically seeks to keep man from sacrificing his simple and innocent happiness¹¹; yet the need for such a restraint shows that the autonomous source of trouble lies already deep within, at least potentially. Moreover, man's ability presumably to understand the prohibition, however partially, proves that he needs it: because he already has mind enough to distinguish the trees by name, he will soon enough have a mind of his own—just like the reader—and with it, the ability to make himself miserable.

It will not do, as some would have it, to blame God for our troubles.¹² To have created a human being means to have created a being with a tree of knowledge of good and bad necessarily in the picture. God did His best: He warned us of the problem and we did not hearken. The fault lies not with the world or with God but in ourselves—and not only once upon a time. By serving as a mirror, the story enables us to discover this truth also about ourselves.

The analysis of the meaning of the tree of knowledge of good and bad has so far focused in part on the metaphor and name of the tree, in part on the formal analysis of the mere fact that it was prohibited. But there is a third way of knowing about the tree of knowledge of good and bad: from the substantive consequences of eating, that is, by the kinds of knowledge acquired through partaking of the forbidden fruit. Even if it is true, as I have suggested, that the human beings have, as it were, already partaken of the tree in reaching for it, the full meaning of that choice—and of knowing badness—can be seen only in the material consequences of the transgression. The problem is not just that reason and freedom lead to bad choices, owing to ignorance. They also turn us into beings who are aware of, and self-consciously caught up with, the "badnesses" already present in our existence.

Regarding the consequences of disobedience we shall speak more fully later. But for the present, consider that the knowledge of good and bad is, to begin with, knowledge of nakedness. And not just the fact of nakedness, but its quality: nakedness is bad (3:7). The first human knowledge of good and bad is in fact knowledge of a badness, is a knowledge (or is it only an opinion?) of some defect within the human being itself, rather than of some badness in the world. A certain imperfection—a badness—of our own nature is the mind's first judgmental and shame-inducing self-discovery. Shame is the painful response to a self-consciously recognized gap between our idealized self-image and the truth about ourselves. True, the discovery is a social one: shame is manifest only before the other. But the object of that shame is something within the human being itself, a defect that embarrasses our self-flattering notions

¹¹ By this means the text also shows the reader the reason why he too no longer can enjoy a simple and innocent happiness.

¹² My students often say, "If God did not want man to eat of this tree, why did He put it there in the first place? And why did He tempt them to eat of it precisely by prohibiting it?" This is the sort of trouble readers make for themselves by reading the story as a historical event rather than a literary vehicle for conveying some permanent truths about the problem of human freedom.

of what and how good we are.¹³ What it is may become clear when we consider, in the next chapter, the meaning of sexual nakedness.

To sum up the discussion of the prohibition. The formal analysis and the substantive analysis agree in this: The knowledge prohibited is autonomous knowledge of how to live, found in or procured from one's own garden (nature), based on human experience of the visible world. The opposite of obedience, it is the kind of knowledge that is implicit in the act of violating a prohibition, indeed, in any act of choosing for oneself. But this autonomous knowledge of good and bad is not true knowledge of good and bad; human beings on their own will not find true knowledge of how to live. This must be supplied by what is later called revelation.

Knowledge and mortality

Completing the portrait of man in his primordial condition, is the ominous remark that accompanied the prohibition: "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Is it a prophecy, or a threat? What does it mean, both in itself and to its addressees—to 'adam in the story and to us, the readers? As I have pictured him, the original human being (or the primary, subrational stratum of life) lacks sufficient self-consciousness truly to understand this prophecy; a simpleminded soul could not know death. At most, "dying" to him would convey some vague kind of badness, or perhaps just the absence or loss of everything present. But beyond the puzzle of what primordial man could understand by it, there are also questions about the literal meaning of the remark and about its troubling assertion that the price of knowledge—or autonomy—is death.

On one important matter, the logical connection between the remark about death and the prohibition, the text seems clear. The comment about death gives consequences, not reasons. Death, it is said, will be a consequence or result of transgressing; but avoiding death is not the reason that man should obey. As we have seen, obedience was commanded for its own sake, to address the dangers of human freedom, not to prevent death. Man should hearken to God's command because God commanded it, not because he wants to avoid a bad result. Mentioning the dire consequence simply provides an added incentive for promoting the desired obedience.¹⁴ But what precisely is the prophecy?

God cannot mean that the forbidden knowledge is itself poisonous, that acquiring it will be immediately lethal; for when man and woman later eat, they immediately experience shame, they do not die. God could be threatening to kill them directly if they disobey, but if so it is a threat He later fails to carry out. More likely, "thou shalt surely die" could mean that they will become mortal, rather than potentially immortal, beings; independence and loss of innocence are incompatible with immortality.¹⁵ As we learn later, human beings once in possession of the forbidden knowledge become subject to mortality—though the original human being, 'adam,

¹³ In the present instance, man might experience shame at the legacy of his animality (naked, not divine) or at the errors of his pretentious reason and inflated imagination ("I will be like God, knowing good and bad").

¹⁴ A misunderstanding of this point becomes crucial in the sequel. In her response to the serpent, the woman transforms the consequence into the reason; when the serpent then denies that the consequence will follow, the woman no longer has any reason for obeying. Transgression follows immediately. (See discussion of this matter below.)

¹⁵ This interpretation is encouraged by the text's explicit pairing of the two nonfood trees (2:9), one forbidden, the other not. That image strongly suggests that human beings necessarily face mutually exclusive and incompatible alternatives: either enduring life in childlike innocence (the tree of life without the tree of knowledge) or autonomous knowledge of good and bad coupled with mortality (the tree of knowledge without the tree of life).

lives for more than nine centuries (5:5). Still, from the fact that man and woman are expelled from the garden in order to prevent their tasting of the tree of life, we infer that man, formed from the dust of the earth, was mortal from creation. Thus, the dangerous result of gaining the forbidden knowledge is not mortality itself but the recognition of that inevitability, along with the dire consequences that flow from that recognition.

The subsequent narrative nicely fits this interpretation. Until the (transgressive) rise to self-consciousness, human beings evince no awareness of death and, hence, have no interest in finding the tree of immortal life. Once they are aware of their mortality, immortality becomes at once a conscious desire and a known impossibility. By placing a tree of life in our mythical original condition, and by showing original man's indifference to it, the Garden of Eden story speaks more to the impossible longings of its readers than of the desires of innocent man. Indeed, the Bible may even regard the human longing for (literal) deathlessness as mistaken, and limitless life as undesirable for a creature such as man.¹⁶

Such reflections suggest a fourth possibility: the death that follows transgression and enlightenment might best be understood metaphorically rather than literally. Eating from the tree certainly produces a death of innocence. Through judgmental self-consciousness, human beings become self-separated; the primordial childlike, unself-divided, and peaceful state of soul "dies." Thanks to reason and freedom, protoman becomes a different being—the old one dies. This death, repeated in every human life, we have all experienced for ourselves: the contented and carefree life that we knew as innocent children is in fact permanently lost to us, the inevitable result of our rise to self-conscious knowledge of good and bad.¹⁷

Speechless aloneness: weakness or strength?

So much for the picture of "original" solitary man, the poetic incarnation of the first and deepest stratum of human nature. Beginning in the immediate sequel, with God's comment on man's aloneness, the story becomes immensely complex. As a result, we face a difficulty about how to proceed. To this point, we have followed the narrative sequence, sentence by sentence; the simple story line served well the purpose of thematic exploration, revealing the first stirrings of human nature. But from now on, this approach will prove difficult. The story that follows concentrates on the transgression and its sequelae, which it narrates dramatically, in stages, through the following episodes: God's attempt to remedy man's aloneness, through the creation, first, of the animals and, second and successfully, of woman; man's first reaction to the woman; the woman's conversation with the serpent; the act of disobedience; the discovery, interrogation, and "punishment"; and the expulsion from the garden. But embedded in the narrative are deep and subtle clues to the next layers or levels of human nature.

In the course of the story, we are introduced to the higher and complicating elements of human existence, both psychic and social: speech, reason, and self-consciousness; desire, shame, and guilt; sexuality and sociality. On the psychic side, we encounter new dimensions of the human heart and mind and the growth of human reason and desire. On the social side, we

¹⁶ Later, in discussing the so-called punishment, I will argue that the expulsion from the garden, denying humans the tree of life, may even be an act of benevolence on God's part, setting a finite limit to the human prospects for misery and mischief. Could mortality for humanized—that is, noninnocent—human beings be a gift rather than a curse?

¹⁷ In another metaphorical reading, "you shall surely die" could be taken to mean being separated or alienated from God and the garden. This is certainly plausible, though there is no evidence that the human being consciously experienced (read: cares about) the presence of God prior to the transgression (read: until he comes to judgmental self-consciousness).

see the beginnings of human social relations, rooted in the relationship of man and woman, a relationship founded on sexual desire. In the narrative, all these elements are shown in their mutual interconnections, and properly so. In life, as in the text, human speech is as much tied up with sociality as it is with reason; sexual desire influences our perceptions of and pronouncements about the world, and conversely, our opinions about the world influence the direction of desire. In a true portrait of the human being in his full humanity, the intrapsychic and the interpersonal cannot—and need not—be disentangled. But this truth poses a terrible problem for philosophical exploration: it is difficult to see the elements clearly when they are all compounded together. Thus, for the sake of clarity and at the risk of some distortion of the story, I shall proceed thematically, separating out two crucial strands of our emerging humanity, the linguistic (or rational) and the sexual (or social). The latter will be treated in the next chapter. In the remainder of this chapter we shall follow the tracks of human speech, reason, and self-awareness.

Speech, you will recall, played a major part in the creation story of Genesis 1--divine speech. God entered the account speaking. In His first and most perfect (hence, paradigmatic) act of speech, God said, "Let light be," and light was called into being, letter-for-letter perfect and exactly as summoned. God also created everything else through speech, named a few of the creatures (the naturally ill-delimited ones: day, night, heaven, earth, and seas), pronounced on the goodness of the spoken-forth creatures, and spoke personalized blessings to the human beings. Man, created in God's image, said not a word. When we come, in the present story, to human speech we are invited to consider whether and to what extent human speech is like God's. Is human speech central to our being? Is it creative? Evaluative? Relational? Solicitous?¹⁸ Though the Garden of Eden story must itself be interpreted without reference to the previous story, the juxtaposition of the two accounts cannot help but raise such questions in the reader's mind.

The human being as we have met him so far in the Eden story has been silent. He offered no comment of any kind regarding the garden, his appointed task, or even the prohibition. Speech is no part of the fundamental human beginning, of the basic or lowest stratum of human life. Our basic engagement with life is speechless and subrational. In addition, the primordial human being is alone: what need is there to speak, and with whom? We will hear him speak only after the creation of woman; his speech on that occasion will reveal deep truths about the character of human speaking altogether.

The original human being is not only silent. He evinces no other clear evidence of the possession or exercise of reason. True, God appears to be addressing the man's understanding when He informs him of the plenitude of food and when He pronounces the prohibition. By implication, one could argue, the primordial plan must have sufficient reason to understand the prohibition. Fair enough. However, it is possible also to think that man in the original condition, being not yet fully free or fully human, lacks any active inclination toward the forbidden knowledge, which is to say his reason is still merely potential and dormant.¹⁹ To speak

¹⁸ A comparison of divine and human speech—including an exploration of these questions—is the subject of a superb paper, "Creation and Evaluation: Human Speech and Relationality in the Garden and at Babel," written for my 1997 class on Genesis by Kristen Dietrich Balisi, a graduate student in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. Several of the observations that follow I owe to Ms. Balisi.

¹⁹ Alternatively, as Bill Rosen has suggested to me, the man may have just enough reason to understand a command, but not enough to speak or think: "Even a dog can 'understand' a fairly large vocabulary of commands, particularly prohibitions."

anthropologically, in nontemporal terms, man could be formed in such a way that he embodies the prohibition, in at least part of his nature. The basic self-loving stratum (or aspect) of life, being nonrational, carries an inborn indifference, or even an aversion, to thoughts about good and bad; it carries, so to speak, the instinctive equivalent of the proscription. The inner core of human aliveness knows or senses that the forbidden knowledge is bad for enjoying life and for feeling immediately its sweetness.

Only when dormant reason begins to stir (as it has, of course, for every reader of the text) will the enunciation of the prohibition as a prohibition become important: only then will the prohibition be understood for what it is; only then will it become necessary. On the basis of this analysis, one can argue that human reason is, to begin with, merely potential. Or to say the same thing in nontemporal ways, the basic stratum of human life—represented in the story by the tableau of a solitary human being, before the coming of the animals and before woman—is nonrational and suspicious of or deaf to reason, even as reason sleeps alongside, waiting to be awakened.

We readers, unlike original 'adam, have enough reason to understand all this. Thanks to our reason and its ability to understand the speech of the text, the story can teach us about the trouble with reason and speech. We are now alerted to watch closely what happens when reason and speech finally appear.

The itch in his soul that could destroy his contentment is, as we have argued, not manifest to the simple human being. Neither is a second difficulty: his aloneness. It is not man (who as yet knows not good and bad) but the Lord God who notices: "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a help opposite him [*ezer kenegdo*]" (2:18). This observation sets in motion the rest of the story: it leads to and explains the creation of woman, which in turn leads to both sexuality/sociality and speech/reason, which in turn issue in the transgression, which in turn leads to and explains human life as we know it.²⁰ We need carefully to consider its meaning.

Why and for whom is man's aloneness not good? Is it not good for the man, or not good for the world around him, or not good for God? Is it not good because of present circumstances, or because of likely future possibilities? That is, might God be anticipating human death—which He had just mentioned as the inevitable consequence of gaining knowledge of good and bad—in response to which He will now provide the means of perpetuation? Or is it not good for the same reason that gaining knowledge of good and bad is not good: it invites the illusion of self-sufficiency? Much depends on how we understand the meaning of man's solitariness.

It is common and appropriate to think that "alone" means lonely or in need of assistance, that is, that aloneness is a badge of weakness. Weakness cries out for help, whether as companion, partner, or coworker; and God in fact offers to make a "help" for the human being. But "alone" could also mean self-sufficient or independent; it could be a mark of strength—real or imagined. Aloneness as strength and apparent self-sufficiency might be bad or dangerous in a variety of ways. For example, a solitary being, lacking a suitable mirror, might be incapable of self-knowledge. Or lacking self-knowledge and, hence, believing himself independent, the solitary man, though he dwelt in the Lord's garden, might have no real awareness of the presence of God.²¹ Or seemingly self-sufficient, he might be inclined to test the limits—like the hero Achilles

²⁰ Understanding the full implications of aloneness, and the meaning of the remedy provided for it, thus requires also the discussions of man and woman (see Chapter Three).

²¹ People who read the prelapsarian condition of solitary man in the Garden of Eden as a historical or ideal state of human blessedness insist that man before the coming of woman lived in company and harmony with God. But they do not take sufficiently seriously God's (Being's) own testimony that man

or like the original circle men in Aristophanes' tale (in Plato's *Symposium*) of the birth of eros—seeking evidence for or against his own divinity. For aloneness as strength, the proper remedy is weakening, caused by division, opposition, conflict.

Fittingly, God proposes an ambiguous helper. Man's helper is to be (in Hebrew) *neged*, that is, "opposite" to him, "over against" him, "boldly in front" of him, "in his face": the helper is to be (also? instead?) a *contra*, an opponent. Putting together "partner" and "opposition," God proposes to make man a counterpart. What is called for, whatever the reason, is not just another, but an *other* other—fitting and suitable ("meet"), to be sure, but also opposed. Company here comes with difference; and as we shall see in the next chapter, *la difference* will turn out to make a very big difference, both for good and ill.

Naming: The elementary use of reason

Though He promises to make man a counterpart, God does not do so straightaway. Instead, He makes the animals. For some reason, encountering the animals activates or creates the mental and emotional powers that permit man to recognize and receive his fitting counterpart.²² The result of man's first encounter with the animal others is remarkable.

And the Lord God formed from out of the ground [*'adamah*] all the beasts of the field and all the fowl of the air, and He brought them to the man *to see what he would call them*; and whatsoever the man called every living creature, *that would be its name*. And the man gave names to all cattle and to the fowl of the air, and to all the beasts of the field; but for the man there was not found a help opposite him [a counterpart]. (2:19–20; emphasis added)

When God brings the animals to the man to see what he would call them, human reason is summoned to activity, to its primordial activity, naming. Indeed, here the man acts for the first time: the prototypical or defining human act is an act of speech, naming. Encountering the nonhuman animals actualizes the potential of human speech, thereby revealing the human difference. For the ability to name rests on the rational capacity for recognizing otherness and sameness, for separating and combining. It requires reason's separating power, which sees each animal as a distinct unit, separate from all others; it requires reason's combining power, which sees also the samenesses that run through individual animals. Reason collects the same animals under their own singular idea, each idea corresponding to a singular species, each deserving and receiving its own general name, one common noun for each kind.

Human speech differs from the divine. God's speech, in the first creation story, had summoned the creatures of the world into being: "Let this named thing be."²³ In the case of the plants and animals, God had created them "after their kind," which is to say, after their distinctive species or names. Human speech, in contrast, does not create the creatures of the world. As the text indicates, the creatures themselves (the animals) are given; man creates only their names. The names he gives them—say, "camel" rather than "porcupine"—may be

was alone. Put in nontemporal terms, there is neither textual evidence nor sensible reason for thinking that a human being would have knowledge of or a personal relationship with the divine if he had no relations with other human beings.

²² These powers could include cognitive capacities for discrimination, reflective capacities of self-awareness (including the awareness of lack), and emotive capacities of desire.

²³ As we noted in the last chapter, the first instance of divine speech, the calling into being of light (1:3), was dramatically peculiar and unique: there was absolutely no difference between the utterance and the thing called for. In this one perfect case, there is a complete identity of the divine speech and the creation act that went with it: word and thing, word and deed are exactly the same. No human speech is like that.

arbitrary, but the distinctions between the creatures that the names recognize and celebrate are not: the camel and the porcupine, by their clearly different natures, clearly deserve and invite different names. Human naming is reason's fitting acknowledgment and appreciation of the ordered variety of an articulated world.

Yet human speech, even at its most disinterested, does not merely mirror the given world. For one thing, naming is selective and therefore partial. Names bear the same relation to things as map does to territory. A map, necessarily selective, is not a mirror image of the land; a truly complete map would be the territory. Like mapping, naming is always partial and incomplete. Less a passive mirroring, more an active choosing, even simple naming is a form of acting on the world. Even when it is born of appreciative wonder, it therefore represents the germ of appropriation and mastery.

Human acts of selection are shaped by interests. And interests spring from desire. The same is true of human speech, even of simple naming. Although the ability to name rests on the powers of reason, the impulse to name is rooted in desire or emotion. Bare reason is motiveless and impotent. Like every act of speech and thought, an act of naming is not only a cognitive response to the articulated character of the world. It is also an expression of some inner urge, need, or passion, such as fear or wonder, anxiety or appreciation, interest or curiosity. Just as every act of speech has a manifest logical content, so every act of speech reflects some (often hidden) motive that incites it. Even the most disinterested act of speech, such as naming the animals, is not an act of unmotivated reason; it is important to know one animal from the other, since some may be dangerous, others may be tasty, while still others may strike the human perceiver as amusing or awe-inspiring or potentially useful. To generalize: what A says about B always tells you something also about A. This does not mean that speech is necessarily arbitrary and distorted by passion. But it does mean that, as we listen to the content of speech, we should be attending also to the soul of the speaker.

The text tells us that the man gave names to all cattle, to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field, but unfortunately we are not told what those names are²⁴; we do not even hear him speak. Yet this unfortunate silence invites the reader to wonder what motivates the allegedly simple human acts of naming. For we do not know whether the name giving was primarily disinterested, reflecting, say, the look or activity of the animal, or primarily interested, reflecting human hopes and fears. We do not know, that is, whether the man called the horse "swifty" or "strong-backed," the elephant "thick skin" (pachyderm) or "ivory" (elephas, in Greek), the tiger "stripes" or "fang," the porcupine "thorny pig" or "don't touch," or the camel "humpy" or "burden-bearing" (gamal is from a Hebrew root meaning "to benefit or requite"). But as we shall soon see in the naming of the woman, human naming is hardly unmotivated.

Be all this as it may, this use of human speech is presumably neither dangerous nor objectionable to God, seeing that it was He who provoked the activity of human naming, and the names the man put forth became the names by which the animals are known.²⁵ Knowledge of the animals, in other words, is not part of forbidden knowledge. Yet as we shall soon see,

²⁴ There is one exception, though we learn of this only later (3:1), when the text introduces us to the *nachash*, the serpent. Since we are told here that "whatsoever the man called every living creature, that would be its name," we are free to suppose that *nachash*, "serpent," was a name given by man, not by God. We shall look at this name and this creature in the section that begins on p. 80 [Page 59].

²⁵ According to the text, God does not tell the man to name the animals; rather, he seems to assume that the man, because he is human, will have an impulse to do so, even if that impulse needs outside provocation to be called forth into activity.

human reason thus aroused will not stay innocently confined to the activity of naming. Indeed, there are potential difficulties in the activity of naming itself. Naming is not altogether innocent.

Human naming, while it does not create the world, creates a linguistic world, a second world, of names, that (partially and interestedly) mirrors the first world, of creatures. As the text indicates, human beings not only practice speech, they create it. Names are the first human inventions: although they point to the things named, they have a certain independence from them. Names (and other words) and the ideas they represent constitute a mental human world that is necessarily separated from the world it means to describe. The gap between the two worlds—the world of words and the world of things—raises the question of how well human speech can capture and reveal the truth about the world it attempts to bespeak: Are our words adequate to the things? To what extent is speech revelatory, to what extent obfuscating? These difficulties, which adhere even to the relatively disinterested uses of speech (like naming the animals), become magnified when reason's view of the world is colored by the presence of desires and passions. Under these circumstances, speech becomes a vehicle for projecting human wish and desire, even more than for mirroring the outside world. Down the road, the somewhat independent, somewhat interested realm of language can become the medium for human independence altogether. For human beings can productively imagine, with the help of the creative possibilities open in speech, a world different from the one they now inhabit. All that is required is the growth of the requisite self-consciousness.

The encounter with the animals, in fact, stirs the germ of human self-awareness, and with it, the germ of a new—that is, previously invisible—human desire. Man's naming of the animals reveals to him his human difference: he names the animals but they cannot name him. Man alone among the animals can name. Accordingly, man's powers of discernment turn back upon himself, and with feeling. He inwardly discovers: "I am not alone, but I am different from them. They are different from me, indeed, too different to satisfy my newly awakened desire for a mate. Now that I am not alone, I am beginning to feel lonely." To be accurate, this discovery is still latent in the man; it is only the text that notes, "But for the human being there was not found a help-opposite-him" (2:20). Why not? What was lacking among the animals? Was it speech and the possibility of conversation? Or was something else required in a counterpart that could properly remedy the problem of man's aloneness?²⁶

Predicating and self-naming: awareness of self and other

The suitable counterpart arrives in the immediate sequel:

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man [or human being: *'adam*], and he slept; and He took one of his ribs [*tse'la*] and closed up the place instead with flesh. And the Lord God built the rib which He had taken from the man [*'adam*] into a woman [*'ishah*], and He brought her to the man. And the man said:

"This one at last [literally, the time: *hapa'am*] is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;

this one shall be called Woman [*'ishah*], because from Man [*'ish*] this one was taken" (2:21–23)

The counterpart is created out of man himself; God builds a woman [*'ishah*] out of the man's [*'adam*'s] rib and brings her to the man. The psychosexual implications of this origin of woman, and of sexual duality in general, will be treated in the next chapter. We concentrate here only on the unfolding account of speech, reason, and self-consciousness.

²⁶ Insofar as that something else involves sexual complementarity, the rejection of the animals is tantamount to a rejection of bestiality. But as we shall see in the discussion of the serpent, this is not the whole story.

The appearance of the woman prompts the first full human sentence, indeed, the first speech of any human being directly quoted in the text. We therefore expect that this speech will be especially revealing, not only about the nature and uses of language, but also about the soul that is moved to speak.

In his paradigmatic speech, the human being is not only a namer, he is also a predicator, displaying an advanced capacity to see sameness within otherness.

Most significantly, he not only names the woman, he states a reason for the name he chooses: "This one shall be called Woman [*'ishah*] because from Man [*'ish*] this one was taken." The articulated explanations, as well as the linguistic structure, reveal the creative, world-ordering power of human speech and man's interest in rationally ordering his otherwise confused and confusing experience.²⁷

But there is more to human speech than creative dexterity. Man's counterpart stirs his soul to a new level of self-awareness. As she stands before and against him, he also sees himself for the first time. As a result, he now names himself: no longer (as God named him) *'adam*, earthling, generic human-being-from-the-earth, but *'ish*, individual male human being, man as male in relation to female woman. The woman's name, *'ishah*, like her origin, is derivative. Yet her place in this speech of self-discovery and self-naming is, in fact, first: only because the woman stands first before him and comes first to mind is he able to know and name himself and to recognize his maleness as a decisive aspect of his own humanity. This deep and far-reaching insight about complementarity and self-hood is beautifully conveyed by the text: in the man's speech, *'ishah*, although lexically derivative, is spoken first.

Whereas the appearance of the animals elicited names, the appearance of the woman elicits poetry. Human speech is not just neutral description; it also expresses human desire, a desire that had been stimulated by the encounter with the animals ("This one at last ..."). In fact, the man's entire speech seems to have been incited by desire, almost certainly by sexual desire: as the names indicate—"she Woman, me Man"—the appearance of woman makes man feel his masculinity, which is to say, his desire for her. Regarded as an expression of sexual desire, the speech may accurately reveal the state of the man's soul; but at the same time, the presence of powerful desire may distort his view of woman.

Though he acknowledges the woman's otherness (she gets her own name, different from his), the man is much more impressed by her similarity; indeed, because of his desire, he exaggerates and treats similarity as sameness: "This is my flesh and bone; this is mine; this is

²⁷ As Kristen Balisi observes:

The reason [given for the name "woman"] reveals as much about the structural potential within language as it does about any supposed connection between word and thing....Perhaps this is a singular case in which an English translation actually mirrors the resonances of the Hebrew words (*'ish*, man; *'ishah*, woman); in each language there is a palpable linguistic connection between the names of the two humans. The names are a form of wordplay, demonstrating the way in which language contains patterns and links concepts to each other....As much as it refers to the realm of external reality, language establishes its own internal structure. 'Adam's second act of naming demonstrates the human impulse to use language to create a conceptual order out of experience ... to use speech as an organizational principle on its own....[H]umans do indeed create through their speech but ... their creation is unlike what has been seen before in the text. Human speech does not bring elements or lifeforms into being; it does not establish a physical order within the cosmos. Rather it creates linguistic "beings" and a grammatically ordered realm within which the terms relate to each other: a secondary, humanly constructed vision of reality layered upon the physical and cosmological order....[S]uch language use is central to human nature. ("Creation and Evaluation," 9-10. See p. 71 n. 18.)

me."²⁸ In naming the woman with reference to her derivation from himself, the man is not just neutrally playing with his words; he is defining the woman in the light of his possessive desire for her. The name, like the desire it expresses, is a form of capture, a taking-hold of her, a verbal act of (anticipatory) appropriation. As if to underscore his self-centered outlook, the text makes clear that he is speaking not to her but only about her. Human speech is dangerous not only because it can reconstruct the world through language, but because any such reconstruction will likely carry the distortions born of human passion and human pride.

The animals had been brought to the human being for the purpose of his naming them: "to see what he would call them." In naming them, the man both reflected and created a separation between himself and the animals. Indeed, his naming may be regarded as an early form of mastery. But woman, clearly his proper counterpart, was simply brought to the man—"and He brought her to the man"—and, by implication, not for the purpose of naming. Perhaps the sought-for remedy for man's aloneness was to have been found in sexual union rather than in speech. Or perhaps a different kind of speech—genuine conversation—offered a possibility of communion not available in naming. But the man nonetheless chose to name her—rather than speak to her—just as he had named the animals, and the woman, though capable of speech, does not speak to the man—not here, not ever.²⁹ Human speech does not guarantee a meeting of minds and hearts; on the contrary, insofar as it becomes an instrument of self-interest and self-regard, it may even exacerbate our aloneness. Even before the transgression, the careful reader who attends to the nuances of the text will not simply be celebrating man's powers of speech and reason.

Questioning and answering, false and true: The road to independence

After the private acts of naming, expostulation, and predication, human speech and reason rise to the level of dialogue, propelled by acts of asking and answering. These are displayed in the discourse between the woman and the serpent, presented as the Bible's first quoted conversation and begun by the Bible's first question. The voice of developed reason, sibilant and seductive, comes from the mouth of a snake.

Now the serpent [*nachash*] was more cunning [*or subtle or shrewd or crafty: 'arum*] than any beast of the field which the Lord God [YHWH '*elohim*] had made. And the serpent said unto the woman, "Indeed, [or Could it be that] God ['*elohim*] hath said, 'Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'"

And the woman said unto the serpent: "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said: 'Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.'"

And the serpent said unto the woman: "Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods [*'elohim*], knowing [*yod'ey*, plural participle] good and bad." (3:1–5)

²⁸ In the next chapter, we shall revisit this speech as a speech of primordial sexual desire, looking precisely at its selfish character.

²⁹ Indeed, in speaking about her, the man "lump[s] her together with the animals he has previously encountered: 'This one at last ... ' His response is to provide her with a humanly constructed identity.... Sadly, no conversation takes place; the text records no speech of the woman. 'Adam's first speech thus provides a foreboding beginning which anticipates the fact that the woman and the man will never have a conversation in this text; the woman will speak to the serpent, the man will blame the woman, and at the end (in an ambiguous moment) he will rename her." Balisi, "Creation and Evaluation," 12. Many of the observations in this paragraph I owe to Ms. Balisi. The woman's silence as a possible clue to her sexual desire—and to sexual asymmetry in general—will be discussed in the next chapter.

We have here a paradigm of conversable speech, interrogative speech, and responsive speech. On display is the human willingness and ability to answer—that is, to look within oneself for a response to—a question. Also evident is reason's capacity to negate and contradict, to consider opposed alternatives, and to think that things need not be as they seem or as they are.

Needless to say, the presence of a talking serpent is something of a mystery. Nevertheless, here he is, seemingly out of nowhere, and we must not try to get much beyond this surface fact. Two other facts about the serpent may be inferred. First, the serpent in this tale shares with human beings not only speech but perhaps also upright posture (only later is he cursed to crawl on his belly), long associated with the theoretical attitude and the possibility of disinterested viewing of the natural whole. This makes it all the more plausible to regard the serpent as an externalized embodiment of certain essentially human, rational capacities.³⁰ Second, the serpent was presumably among the animals that were rejected as a suitable counterpart for the human being. If this is correct, three further inferences follow. First, the rejection of the serpent despite his ability to speak and think implies that suitability, for the human counterpart, means something other than rationality: a sexual counterpart, not a fellow dialectician, is what is required. Second, though he is one of God's creatures,³¹ the serpent, because he is rational, acts entirely on his own, displaying that dangerous independence to which he will lead the human being. Third, the serpent's rejection (by God and man) as an appropriate partner could motivate his desire to punish the man for choosing woman instead of himself—for preferring sex to philosophy. It would explain also his clever decision to do so by corrupting the woman, and precisely through the use of subtle speech.

People wonder why the temptation comes from a serpent rather than another animal. Serpents are, of course, prominent in many myths of the ancient Near East, and they are widely regarded as both attractive and dangerous. This duality appears in the Hebrew word for serpent: *nachash*—the name, by the way, given by *'adam*—appears to come from a root meaning both "shiny" and "enchanted." But both the basis of man's fascination with serpents and their symbolic meaning are in dispute. Some treat the serpent as raw (or insidious) male power (a phallic symbol); they see here a tale of the sexual seduction of woman. Others, on the contrary, treat the serpent as fundamentally feminine, as serpents are in many ancient myths—they belong to the earth, and they possess what was regarded as a female power of rebirth and self-renewal (the recurrent shedding of their skin); these interpreters see here a tale of (female) nature's rebellion against (male) reason and law. Further, serpents are often used as images both of voracity and of hyperrationality. For the serpent is a mobile digestive tract that swallows its prey whole; in this sense the serpent stands for pure appetite. At the same time, the serpent is cold, steely-eyed, and unblinking; in this respect he is the image of pure attentiveness and icy calculation. His slithering, sinuous, and utterly silent movements also suggest cunning and wiliness. Plausible as the previous suggestions may be, our text singles out only this last characteristic. We are dealing here with some manifestation of cleverness.

The text says the serpent "was more cunning [*or subtle, etc.*] than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made" (3:1). The word "cunning," in Hebrew *'arum*, echoes and puns on

³⁰ The Hebrew Bible's only other talking animal is Balaam's ass (Numbers 22:28-30), whom, we are explicitly told, God caused to speak. Not so the serpent, who speaks entirely on his own—as unaided reason naturally does.

³¹ The text makes clear that God made the serpent; he is not some independent demonic or divine being. There is no textual basis for identifying the serpent with Satan. Indeed, there is no mention of Satan in the Hebrew Bible before the book of Zechariah (3:1) (or if one reads the Bible in the Christian order, before 1 Chronicles).

'*arumim*, "naked," which appears in the preceding sentence: "and they were both naked [*'arumim*]" (2:25). The root sense of '*erum*, "naked," is "smooth": someone who is naked is hairless, clothesless, smooth of skin.³² But as the pun suggests, someone who is clever is also smooth, a facile thinker and talker whose surface speech is beguiling and flawless, hiding well his rough ulterior purposes. As we shall see, the serpent is indeed a smooth speaker, his true intention craftily hidden beneath his silky speech. He asks the first question, initiates the first conversation, and challenges God's benevolence and truthfulness. He implies that knowledge of good and bad will provide immunity against death; he challenges hearsay, the oral tradition, and law, implicitly counseling that one should see and experience for oneself; and he beckons the woman to unite with natural knowledge. All these are further reasons for an allegorical reading of the serpent: an embodiment of the separated and beguiling voice of autonomous human reason speaking up against innocence and obedience, coming to us as if from some attractive source outside us that whispers doubt into our ear. In making his rationalist mischief, speech is the serpent's only weapon.

And the serpent said unto the woman, "Indeed [*or Could it be that*] God hath said, 'Ye shall not eat [*lo' to'khlū*] of any tree of the garden?' " (3:1; emphasis added)

What kind of question is this? Surely not a question seeking the truth. Rather it intends to call into question—authority, opinion, law. It seeks to make simple obedience impossible, in this case by challenging the goodness of the commander. The serpent's question implies that God is a being who is, or might be, not only arbitrary but also hostile to human beings: God is the sort of being who could have put human beings into a fruitful garden but denied them access to all the trees. Says the serpent, "Is it really true that God has denied you all sustenance?" The serpent's question is a perfect example of mischievous speech.

The radical effect of the serpent's question does not, however, depend on his subversive intent. The question itself is deeply disquieting. Like any question, it intrudes upon silent and unself-conscious activity, disturbing immediate participation in life and forcing introspection and reflection. Like any question, it puts thoughts before the mind, thoughts that collect and stimulate feelings: just as the question as asked had meaning for the questioner apart from its logical content, so the question as received gains meaning from interacting with the addressee's desires and concerns. Questions are more than verbal interrogatives: questions stir the soul.

The particular question put by the serpent is perfect for provoking self-reflection. In order to answer it, the woman must rise to self-consciousness about food and eating, about God's commands and the world's hospitality to her needs, and about herself in relation to her needs, to God, and to her world. As long as any need is easily and simply satisfied, it goes virtually unrecognized; in the absence of obstacles, food is taken for granted and eating proceeds mindlessly. By raising the prospect of opposition to human eating, the serpent's question brings felt need into consciousness, against the imagined possibility of its denial. And by blaming (albeit falsely) this denial on a nay-saying God,³³ it stirs a sense of precarious selfhood pitted against an inhospitable world and threatened by outside imperatives. The woman is forced to discover

³² In this very subtle way, the text may be suggesting the inadequacy of human perception and naming. For the man who named it *nachash*, the serpent was shiny, attractive, and enchanting. For the text, however, the crucial thing about the serpent is that he is clever, cunning, smooth, and beguiling, a creature whose shiny surface hides and belies a nakedness that is, to say the least, dangerous.

³³ The serpent introduces God to the woman not as a benefactor but as a naysayer and a denier: In Hebrew, the first word that the serpent puts into God's mouth is "not" [*lo*], and the first speech is "Not you-shall-eat" [*lo' to'khlū*]. The importance of negation in the emergence of human reason and freedom will be discussed shortly.

that she has needs independent both of God's power to command them and of the world's ability to satisfy them; pondering the question, she begins to feel both her vulnerability and her independence.

Self-awareness grows largely through the encounter with error and opposition. As long as experience seems reliable and appearances go unchallenged, human life proceeds with a childlike trust in the truthfulness of things. By asking the woman about the veracity of God's alleged speech, but imputing to Him words God did not say, the serpent's question introduces the issue of truth and falsehood and, what's more, provokes the desire to correct error. The mind opens up by discovering—and caring about—the gap between the false and the true, between what merely appears to be so and what truly is. Appearances (and utterances) are scrutinized, judged, and corrected. In the space between the apparent and the real, the human imagination takes wing. As a result, the mind will soon be able to project a gap between what is and what might be; affirmation and denial will give rise to deliberate pursuit and avoidance. The free play of imagination and thought will soon direct the free exercise of choice. All that is required is a more developed sense of self, one that recognizes itself as thoughtful and free. This, too, the serpent's question generates.

Questions about oneself necessarily summon one to reflect—to look back—upon oneself and to discover oneself as a being that thinks. By forcing thoughts about her food and eating, the serpent's question creates a doubleness in the woman's soul: her awareness of her belly is separate from her belly, her thoughts about hunger are not rumblings in her stomach. By focusing on her body's need for food, the woman awakens to herself as mind. She discovers that she herself is not simply identical to her needy body. She experiences herself not only as a being with desires, but also as a being with thoughts, a being that can inquire into the truth about her desires (and about much else).

This momentous act of self-discovery is liberating not only for thought but also for action. For to think about appetite is to cease to be its slave. It becomes possible freely to decide whether to eat or not to eat, whether to obey the imperatives of necessity (*or nature or Being or God*). In time, imagination and reason can even create new objects for human desires. In short, facing the serpent's question means discovering and exercising one's autonomy.

The woman's answer clearly reveals her emerging and risk-filled freedom of mind:

And the woman said unto the serpent: "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said: 'Ye shall not eat [*lo' to'khlū*] of it, neither shall ye touch [*lo' tig'u*] it, lest ye die.'" (3:2-3)

The woman's response implicitly denies the serpent's tacit accusation against God, but she does not in fact explicitly reaffirm God's generosity. In answering, "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat," she forgets to remember that this is part of God's bounty; she treats it instead as a matter merely of human freedom and choice. Now aware that the imperative behind her eating resides within her belly rather than with any outside authority, she does not say, "God said that we may eat." Following the lead of the serpent, she too has God speak only as a naysayer. Indeed, she goes the serpent one better, making God into a double naysayer ("Not ye-shall-eat"; "Not ye-shall-touch"), albeit confining His negations to a single tree (where the serpent had made God deny all).³⁴

³⁴ There is a sense in which the woman's answer does not deny, but rather affirms, the serpent's view of God as the opponent of human desire: in denying them access to one of the trees, God is, in fact, denying them unlimited access to all. Such would be the likely conclusion of independent reason or freedom, which tends to regard the denial of total freedom as the total denial of freedom. (I owe this

The woman's answer also demonstrates another danger of speech: the problem of mistake and misunderstanding. The woman says the thing which is not, albeit in innocence. Eager to correct the serpent's error, she herself commits multiple errors of speech. She answers not the question that the serpent asked (to which the right answer was simply "No"). She says more than was called for. She misidentifies the forbidden tree as the one "in the midst of the garden"; that one was the tree of life (2:9). She adds "neither shall ye touch it" to the prohibition and, most important, she converts the predicted dire consequences of disobedience—"for in the day thou eatest thereof, dying you will die" (2:17)—into the reason for obedience: "ye shall not eat of it ... lest you die" (3:3). She does not remember that it was to be avoided because it was forbidden and commanded, not in order to avoid the deadly consequence. To put the matter universally: exactly because she is expanding her newly emerging freedom of thought, she (predictably) has no use for obedience.

The addition "neither shall ye touch it" exemplifies one or another of some common yet misleading uses of speech. It might represent a protective addition, born of solicitude, provided by the man, in communicating the prohibition to the woman (who had not heard it in the first place); or it could be an addition, born of fear, advanced by the woman herself. Or it could be a simple misunderstanding that arose in the transmission, as happens so often in the children's game of telephone. In any case, such additions show both the tendency toward, and the benefits and dangers of, the practice of "building fences around the law": on the one hand, fearing even to touch, the woman will be less likely to eat; on the other hand, should touching produce no bad effect, the woman will then be encouraged to eat. Be this as it may, sloppy speech is itself a corruption of law, and it opens the door to corruption in deed.

In the serpent's rejoinder, he exploits the fact that the woman respects the prohibition solely to avoid the bad consequence of death. He appeals to her awakened pride in her own powers of understanding.

And the serpent said unto the woman: "Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods [*'elohim*], knowing [plural participle] good and bad." (3:4-5)

In one short speech, the serpent manages both to impugn God's veracity and His motives and to provide the inducement for disobeying Him. By insisting, "You won't die," the serpent implies that God is a liar. By offering reasons for what God said—implicitly claiming, as reason frequently does, to know more than what is at the surface of things—he goes behind God's explicit words to expose (so he thinks) their hidden meaning and motive. By asserting that God knows that the forbidden knowledge will make you godlike, the serpent implies that the prohibition stems from God's jealous and self-protecting wish to avoid sharing His special privileges with human beings. By suggesting the existence of many gods (through the use of the plural participle *yod'ey*), the serpent encourages a belief in the possibility of apotheosis. Most remarkable, by his implicit chain of reasoning, the serpent clearly suggests that knowledge makes one not only godlike but perhaps, therefore, also immune to death. In this sense especially, the serpent is like a protophilosopher, one who respects no authority but the truth and who promises that knowledge gives one a share in immortality. We see here, perhaps, the reason why the serpent was passed over as a possible counterpart for the human being.

Crucial to the serpent's successful seduction of the woman is the rational power of doubt, opposition, negation, and contradiction: in the Hebrew text, the first word of the serpent's final

point to Yuval Levin: "By prohibiting something, God has not permitted everything, and therefore He indeed prohibited everything.")

response ("Ye shall not surely die") is "not." The idea of "not" is essential to human speech and reason.³⁵ It also anchors the human imagination in its abilities to go beyond appearances, both its creative ability to conjure images and its ability to recognize an image as merely an image, not the true thing. These powers the serpent in fact displays in this final speech. For he shows his cunning not only as a protophilosopher but also as a poet, creating the Bible's first metaphor: "Your eyes shall be opened," meaning, "You will have insight." Finally, in combination with this power of nonliteral speech, reason's assertion of the possibility of "not so" liberates the imagination to picture new alternatives for what is or could be "so": not only may things not be what they seem—even better, things need not remain as they are. Thus, speech and reason contribute to disobedience not only negatively, by undermining authority, but also positively, by conjuring new possibilities for choice.

In an even more profound way, contradiction lives at the heart of the serpent's speech. His utterances—like almost all of ours—offer a mixture of "yes" and "no," of the true and the not true. For truth be told, the serpent does not exactly lie; but neither does he tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. As many readers of the sequel have noticed, man does not die on the day that he eats. Also, just as the serpent announces, his eyes are indeed opened upon eating. Most impressively, God Himself verifies the serpent's prediction, namely, that the man, as a consequence of transgressing, "has become like one of us, knowing good and bad" (3:22). Yet as Yuval Levin points out:

All of these are only partially true, as the story demonstrates in every case. Man does not instantly die, but he will die, and now he knows it. Death has entered his life. Man's eyes are opened, but they show him only his own weakness. Man has become God-like in one way, but not in countless others (not the least of which is that he will die). Reason has given man answers that—like the serpent—seem glowing and attractive, but are dangerous. These answers present themselves as verifiable, and when they are verified man tends to accept them in total, not imagining that they might be only part of the answer. Humanity, seeing that there is some truth in the words of the serpent, acts on those words and gets itself into trouble.

Human reason, generally content to let its necessarily partial truths masquerade as truth entire, leads human freedom astray.

Freedom and enlightenment: the melancholy rise of man

The force of this first conversation, begun by the Bible's first question, is to call into question authority and obedience. By challenging the beneficence and the truthfulness of the author, by denying the announced consequences of disobedience, and by suggesting attractive alternative benefits of transgression (that is, goods beyond food and sex, namely, god-likeness through knowledge), speech and reason completely erode the force of the prohibition. Once the prohibition is undermined, once reason awakens, simple obedience—whether to God or to fixed instinct—becomes impossible. With alternatives now freely before her, the woman's desire grows on its own, partially enticed by the serpent's promise of wisdom, mostly fueled by her own newly empowered imagination. Having heard the voice of serpentine reason, the woman now sees the world through eyes imaginatively transformed by what was said:

³⁵ The centrality of negation to rationality was noted in the first chapter, in our discussion of creation through speech: the principle of distinction is identical to the principle of contradiction, that A is fully other than—is the negation of—not-A.

And the woman *saw* that the tree was *good for food*, and that it was *a delight to the eyes*, and a tree *to be desired to make one wise*, and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat. (3:6; emphasis added)

Independent reason, having mentally eroded the force of the prohibition and suggested new possibilities, now takes control also of action. Speech issues in the momentous and transforming act of free choice. Thanks to the growth of human mental powers, the woman "sees" in a new light; mind and desire both color and reflect the new powers of a liberated imagination.³⁶ In ascending order, she looks to the tree for meeting animal necessity ("good for food"), for aesthetic pleasure ("delight to the eyes"), and for enlightenment, insight, or judgment ("desired for wisdom"). True, as the text tells us in the immediate sequel, her imagination did not get it right: when their eyes are opened, the human beings discover not that they are god-like, as the serpent had promised, but that they are naked. Nevertheless, the human beings in transgressing display the powers of rational choice, distinctive of our humanity, based upon a conscious and autonomous (even if mistaken) judgment of what is good. Their eating merely ratifies (or symbolizes) the autonomous act of choosing to eat, a free act of choice that was based on the self-generated belief that eating would be good. Only a being who already distinguishes good and bad, and who has opinions about which is which, can make such a choice.

Traditional interpretation, especially Christian, refers to this act of transgression as signaling the "fall of man"—though the expression nowhere occurs in the text. But if we read anthropologically, and in a wisdom-seeking spirit, what we have here instead is in fact the rise of man to his mature humanity—to be sure, in all its pathos and ambiguity. Such a reading was offered already by Kant, commenting precisely on our passage (but without any reference to God, whose commandment appears in Kant's version to be rather the voice of built-in natural instinct):

So long as inexperienced man obeyed this call of nature all was well with him. But soon reason began to stir. A sense different from that to which instinct was tied—the sense, say, of sight—presented other food than that normally consumed as similar to it; and reason, instituting a comparison, sought to enlarge its knowledge of foodstuffs beyond the bonds of instinctual knowledge (3:6). This experience might, with good luck, have ended well, even though instinct did not advise it, so long as it was at least not contrary to instinct. But reason has this peculiarity that, aided by the imagination, it can create artificial desires which are not only unsupported by natural instinct but actually contrary to it. These desires, in the beginning called *concupiscence* [a longing of the soul for what will give it delight or for what is agreeable especially to the senses], gradually generate a whole host of unnecessary and indeed unnatural inclinations called *luxuriousness* [unrestrained gratification of the senses]. The original occasion for deserting natural instinct may have been trifling. But this was man's first attempt to be conscious of his reason as a power which can extend itself beyond the limits to which all animals are confined. As such its effect was very important and indeed decisive for his future way of life. Thus the occasion may have been merely the external appearance of a fruit which tempted because of its similarity to tasty fruits of which man had already partaken. In addition there may have been the example of an animal which consumed it because, for it, it was naturally fit for consumption, while on the contrary, being harmful for man, it was consequently resisted by man's instinct. Even so, this was a sufficient occasion for reason to do violence

³⁶ Without even thinking about it, she mixes together what she heard (that is, what mind says) with what she sees. This is how we permit reason to convince us to accept as wholly true its partial and hasty opinions.

to the voice of nature (3:1) and, its protests notwithstanding, to make the first attempt a free choice; an attempt which, being the first, probably did not have the expected result. But however insignificant the damage done, it sufficed to open man's eyes (3:7). He discovered in himself a power of choosing for himself a way of life, of not being bound without alternative to a single way, like the animals. Perhaps the discovery of this advantage created a moment of delight. But of necessity, anxiety and alarm as to how he was to deal with this newly discovered power quickly followed; for man was a being who did not yet know either the secret properties or the remote effects of anything. He stood, as it were, at the brink of an abyss. Until that moment instinct had directed him towards specific objects of desire. But from these there now opened up an infinity of such objects, and he did not yet know how to choose between them. On the other hand, it was impossible for him to return to the state of servitude (i.e., subjection to instinct) from the state of freedom, once he had tasted the latter.

The first discovery of our humanity, or better, the discovery that constitutes our humanity, is a discovery about our sexual being (not, as others would say, about our mortality):

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves girdles. (3:7)

Human self-consciousness is radically sexual self-consciousness.³⁷ Moreover, the discovery of nakedness is made not indifferently but with passing judgment: nakedness is viewed as shameful (that is, bad, rather than good or neutral), and action is taken to cover it up and to keep it from being seen. Shame, a peculiarly human passion, expresses pain over the gap between our wished-for estimable or idealized self-image and the now discovered fact of our lowness or baseness. Shame presupposes a concern for self-esteem and the presence of pride: only a being concerned with self-esteem could have his pride wounded and experience shame.

The response to the discovery of shameful nakedness represents yet another important aspect of human reason: the disposition to art. The fig leaf, or rather the needle, is the first human invention.³⁸ Like all human craft and technology, it manifests both enterprise and cleverness. More important, like any invention, it tacitly asserts the insufficiency of the world and expresses the human urge to do something about it—what Rousseau would call "perfectibility." By taking up the needle, the human beings, whether they know it or not, are declaring the inadequacy of the Garden of Eden. By becoming artisans, they are voting for their expulsion from the garden; they are choosing civilization. Moreover, the needle symbolizes man's path of violent opposition to nature. Unlike weaving, which gently and harmoniously binds threads together without destroying anything, sewing invades and does violence to the elements it unites. The technological mentality and disposition emerge out of this very modest beginning.

Thanks to the needle, the girdle is produced. It may be flimsy, but its meaning is profound. Like all more sophisticated clothing, it provides protection, but more important, dissimulation, beautification, and adornment. Standing as an obstacle to the immediate gratification of sexual desire (as we will see in the next chapter), it represents the beginning of the rule of reason over desire. It therefore provides the space for the imagination to grow, transforming human lust into love and allowing room for courtship and intimacy. As an instance of enhancing self-esteem, it

³⁷ In the experienced psychic transformations accompanying puberty, each of us has access to the truth of this important claim. Self-consciousness before puberty is but childish, ignoring as it does the mystery of our sexually divided nature and its unavoidable link to our mortality. See Chapter Three.

³⁸ If we ignore the invention of language.

gives rise also to a concern with the beautiful; and it also represents and at the same time augments human *amour propre*. And as the first human transformation of the naturally given, the fig leaf girdle stands as the first mark of society and civilization; at one stroke, it manifests human reason's propensity to *techne*, custom, and law.

Learning the limits of reason: Civilization and its discontents

Yet human art does not sufficiently provide for human needs, not even for the needs of the body: fig leaf girdles are hardly adequate for protection or concealment. But human art is especially weak in addressing the needs of the soul once it knows about good and bad and assesses itself under these judgments. A being that experiences shame needs to know more than his own cleverness—and he knows it. Right after they make themselves girdles, the human beings show their first real openness to or awareness of the divine:

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the evening breeze; and the man and his woman hid from the Lord God in the midst of the trees of the garden. (3:8)

This is the first explicit mention that any human being really attended to or even noticed the divine presence. Only in recognizing our lowliness can we also discover what is truly high. The turn toward the divine is founded on our discovery of our own lack of divinity, indeed, of our ugliness.³⁹

It is a delicate moment: having followed eyes to alluring temptations, promising wisdom, human beings came to see, again through their eyes, their own insufficiency. Still trusting appearances but seeking next to beautify them, they set about adorning themselves, in order to find favor in the sight of the beloved. Lustful eyes gave way, speechlessly, to admiring ones, by means of intervening modesty and art. Yet sight and love do not alone fully disclose the truth of our human situation. Human beings must open their ears as well as their eyes, they must hearken to a calling for which sight and the beautiful beloved do not sufficiently prepare them. The prototypical human pair, opened by shamefaced love, was in fact able to hear the transcendent voice.

The ensuing conversation with this transcendent voice is, on its face, hardly encouraging: God conducts an inquest, extracts a confession, pronounces sentence. In the course of the examination, new uses of human speech emerge: rationalization, evasion of responsibility, and shifting of blame. New passions arise in the human soul, most notably a higher kind of shame⁴⁰, guilt, and that remarkable mixture of fear-and-reverence called awe. Shame reveals a peculiarly human concern with self-perfection, guilt the sense of personal responsibility, whereas awe recognizes powers not under human control and beyond human comprehension, before which

³⁹ It may be objected that man may have direct knowledge of God, founded, say, in God's beneficence and bounty. And the text does have God speaking to man well before the transgression gave birth to human shame and self-disgust. But man took no notice and showed no concern about the divine presence before the birth of shame. The situation is analogous to our knowledge of health and disease. Health (like God) is ontologically and logically prior, but its discovery by human beings comes usually, if not always, only through the experience of disease. When healthy we do not notice health; we know it and care for it only when we experience our lack of it.

⁴⁰ The shame before God seems to be different from the shame before each other. Before each other, man and woman hide only their genitalia. Before God, they seek to hide themselves completely. The first—what the Greeks call *aischynē*—is social shame, and bespeaks a concern with the beautiful or the noble (*kalon*), with looking good. The second—what the Greeks call *aidos*—is cosmic or ontological shame and bespeaks a concern with intrinsic worth under the aspect of the eternal and the divine.

we feel shamefully small. Clothing the body's visible nakedness cannot cover over these disturbing passions of the soul. Hearing an awesome voice, we duck for cover, hoping to make ourselves completely invisible.

To no avail. Man cannot escape from his deeds. The divine voice now interrogates him in a manner that will help him learn the meaning of his actions. God asks four simple questions, less to obtain information, more to induce a searching of the soul. Unlike the serpent's questions, which called into question God's goodness and veracity, God's questions—all put personally, using the second person singular—call the human addressees to account.

And the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where art thou?" And he said, "I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." (3:9–10)

The simple searching question—"Where are you?"—has psychic as well as physical meaning: asking not only about the man's bodily location, but also about the place of his soul, it calls for self-examination and self-assessment. Man's reply is, on the surface, largely evasive, with sort of an answer given only at the end ("I hid"). But the answer does reveal man's state of mind. Out of guilty fear, he explains where he is, beginning by blaming the sound of God's voice as the cause of his going into hiding; in so doing, man freely confesses his concern with the divine presence, even as he tries to rationalize his misconduct. Hearing God's voice made him afraid, and he was afraid (so he says) not because he disobeyed but because he was naked. Is man confessing shame at nakedness, or fear because of his use of art to cover it up?⁴¹ Or is he tacitly acknowledging that his crude art not only fails adequately to cover shameful body parts but, worse, cannot in principle cover his own painful awareness that he is, under it all, just a naked and vulnerable creature?

Perhaps because He has learned from man's speech enough about his state of soul, God does not press further the unanswered question "Where are you?" Instead, His next questions address the confessed discovery of nakedness and its connection to possible disobedience:

"Who told thee that thou wast naked? From the tree I commanded thee not to eat hast thou eaten?" And the man said, "The woman whom Thou gavest by me, she gave me from the tree, and I did eat." (3:11–12)

Once again, the man answers only at the end, prefacing his confession with his excuse. Before admitting to disobedience, he shifts blame, not only to the woman (who gave me from the tree) but also to God (who gave me the woman). We may smile at the man's attempt to avoid responsibility, but we must also acknowledge that he has a point: the woman, given as a remedy for aloneness that could keep him from pursuing forbidden knowledge, has in fact led him to it.

God, accepting the man's final confession ("I did eat"), offers no demurrer, but moves up the causal chain and puts a direct question to the woman:

"What is this thou hast done?" And the woman said, "The serpent beguiled me [*literally*, lifted me: *hishi'an*] and I did eat." (3:13)

The woman, like the man, knows how to pass the buck and evade responsibility, but she too confesses. God does not argue or attempt to refute either woman or man. Readers can see how they both use speech to try to escape censure, but God accepts their confessions and, at least in small part, their defense: in the so-called punishments that follow, God begins by cursing the

⁴¹ He claims he is naked and withholds the truth about sewing fig leaves. I owe this observation to Adam Davis, who argues that man fears God's wrath about his art, not his nakedness. But the sequel suggests that the issue is nakedness, or more precisely, knowledge of nakedness, which in turn means disobedience.

serpent. (Also, He does not curse the woman or the man, though He curses the ground for man's sake; 3:14-17.) Very likely, God has good reason to be satisfied with the inquest. For the all-too-human practice of shifting blame and denying responsibility for wrongdoing proclaims, despite itself, the existence of good and bad, right and wrong. Making excuses for oneself is, in fact, a concession that something needs to be excused. Neither man nor woman says, "I did it and I'm proud of it."⁴² Judgmental self-consciousness gives birth to conscience. Conscience, in turn, can face the music, to learn and live with the consequences of one's wrongful choice and deed.

And the Lord God said unto the serpent: "Because thou hast done this, cursed [*'arur*]⁴³ art thou from among all cattle and from among all beasts of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. Enmity will I set between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; and he shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel."

And unto the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy travail; in pain thou shalt bear children; and thy desire shall be to thy man, and he shall rule over thee."

And unto the man [*'adam*] He said: "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy woman and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee saying, 'Thou shalt not eat of it': Cursed be the ground for thy sake; in pains shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorn and thistle shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return." (3:14-19)

The inquest concluded (God does not interrogate the serpent), God pronounces sentence on the serpent, the woman, and the man, in three short speeches. We observe, in passing, the major features of the new human condition, announced and foretold in these divine remarks to the newly awakened pair, the condition within which the story of human life will hereafter—and irreversibly—unfold: (1) There is the (partial) estrangement of humankind from the world (or nature), evidenced by (a) enmity between serpent and woman (3:15); (b) partial alienation of man from the earth, upon which he must now toil for his food (3:17-19); and (c) pain of childbirth, implying conflict even within the (female) human body (3:16). (2) There is division of labor, defined relative to work: the one gives birth, the other tills. (3) There is the coming of the arts and crafts: no more just picking fruit and gathering nuts, but agriculture—the artful cultivation of the soil, the harvesting of grain, its transformation into flour, the making of bread, and eventually also astronomy (to know the seasons and to plan for sowing), metallurgy (to make the tools), the institution of property (to secure the fruits of one's labor), and religious sacrifices (to placate the powers above and to encourage rain). (4) And there is rule and authority (3:16).

To sum it up in one word: civilization. The "punishment" for trying to rise above childishness and animality is to be forced to live like a human being.

The so-called punishment seems to fit the so-called crime, in at least two ways. If the crime of transgression represents the human aspiration to self-sufficiency and godliness (free choice necessarily implying humanly grounded knowledge of good and bad), the so-called punishment thwarts that aspiration by opposition: human beings instead of self-sufficiency receive

⁴² Yuval Levin has made the case that the woman's speech, at least, is unrepentant. If one reads the verb *hishi'ani* literally, the woman is saying not, "The serpent beguiled me," but rather, "The serpent—or reason—lifted me up." "She may still think, indeed, that God is angry simply because He wants to keep her down. God, in the sentence he delivers to reason [the serpent], will be sure to point out that serpents are in no position to lift anything up."

⁴³ We note the pun on *'arum*, "cunning." Cleverness becomes a curse.

estrangement, dependence, division, and rule. Second, and more profound, the so-called punishment fits the crime simply by making clear the unanticipated meaning of the choice and desire implicit in the transgression itself. Like Midas with his wish for the golden touch, like Achilles with his desire for glory, the prototypical human being gets precisely what he reached for, only to discover that it is not exactly what he wanted. He learns, through the revealing conversation with God, that his choice for humanization, wisdom, knowledge of good and bad, or autonomy really means at the same time also estrangement from the world, self-division, division of labor, toil, fearful knowledge of death, and the institution of inequality, rule, and subservience. The highest principle of Being insists that, given who and what we humans are, we cannot have the former without the latter.

This analysis leads me to believe that the so-called punishment is not really a newly instituted condition introduced by a willful God against the human grain. It is rather a making clear of just what it means to have chosen enlightenment and freedom, just what it means to be a rational being. The punishment, if punishment it is, consists mainly in the acute foreknowledge of our natural destiny to live out our humanity under the human condition.

The story moves to its conclusion:

And the Lord God made for the man and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them. And the Lord God said, "*Behold, the man is become like one of us*, knowing good and bad; and now, he may reach out and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever." And so the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden to till the ground from which he had been taken. And He drove out the man, and He set up east of the Garden of Eden the cherubim and the flame of the whirling sword to guard the way to the tree of life. (3:21–24; emphasis added)

Before sending them out to their toilsome and mortal existence, God provides the human pair with clothing made from animal skins. This gift not only manifests God's solicitude for his needy creatures. As real clothing, it also represents a wry comment on the inferiority of the fig leaf girdle and, to generalize, on the insufficiency of human art altogether. At the same time, it makes clear that artfulness—and covering up—will be needed in the human world. Everything will depend on whether human artfulness—and human reason more generally—will recognize its limitations and its (our) dependence on a higher source.

But man is not just a needy creature. On the contrary, thanks to his transgression and his newly awakened mind, man has become god-like ("like one of us"): in the language of the first creation story, man is now an image of God. Indeed, we readers have it on the highest authority that we have witnessed not the fall but the rise of man, at least in terms of his mental powers.

Yet man's god-like mental powers, the text suggests, will focus on his mortality, a major preoccupation of the fully self-conscious human being. Equipped at last to make judgments of good and bad, man will now recoil from death and will seek its remedy, ultimately in bodily immortality. But, says God in so many words, it is not good for man that he should live forever. Man is not God, cannot become God, and should not imagine otherwise; the rational animal's search for deathless life on earth would prove a disaster. In truth, given his chosen life of sorrowful toil, artful striving, and judgmental self-consciousness, finitude provides man a release from his troubles. More important, awareness of mortality will eventually inspire him to seek what is true, just, and holy.

The end of the Garden of Eden story proclaims that living a human life means living with mortality. As we watch the human beings leave the world of childish innocence for the real world, we hear, as an echo behind them, the closing words: "the tree of life." With their path blocked to the tree of life, human beings—both the ones in the story and the readers—can turn their attention not to living forever but to living well.

The story of man in the Garden of Eden helps readers on their way to finding the path to a life well lived. For it enables us to reflect on our basic nature and to discover the perils inherent in our special gifts of speech, reason, self-consciousness, and freedom. In following the emergence of human reason and human speech, we have pondered their activity in naming, predicating, celebrating, self-naming, explaining names, asking, answering, conversing, questioning, calling into question, denying, mistaking, challenging, and shifting blame. We have considered the multiple manifestations of self-awareness and the emergence of passions to which self-awareness gives rise. We have examined the meaning of free choice and recognized its inherently disobedient character. We have seen the birth of craft, reason's prodigal son, as well as conscience, reason's judge, and awe, the seed of piety, reason's recognition of its own limits. And we have thought about all these matters not with neutral detachment but with judgmental engagement.

The early verdict on human reason and human freedom is, to say the least, mixed. The Bible agrees with Aristotle in holding that man alone among the animals has logos, thoughtful speech, but it takes a much less celebratory view of our distinctiveness.⁴⁴ Speech can be an instrument of mischief and error, deception and falsehood, pride and domination. Reason creates a divided consciousness and overstimulates the imagination. Free choice is not necessarily wise choice. Judgmental self-consciousness yields vanity, shame, and guilt. Artfulness separates man from nature and creates new needs and desires, without bringing contentment.

But human speech and reason, in the form of this remarkable story and our ability to ponder its meaning, hold out a redemptive possibility. The remedy begins with our being willing to recognize and acknowledge the follies of which we human beings are capable—indeed, precisely because of our special intellectual capacities. The ill-clad human protagonists in our story become aware of their own inadequacies from hearing and experiencing the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden. Similarly, thanks to the special kind of speech that we are reading, we psychically ill-clad human readers become aware of our own inadequacies from hearing and experiencing the voice of the text. The source of our troubles, dear reader, is not in our stars but in ourselves. Suitably humbled, we are prepared to be educated.

⁴⁴ To be fair to Aristotle, he too knew the dangers of human rationality. In the very passage that famously celebrates man as the rational animal, Aristotle notes that "just as man when he is perfected is the best of animals, so too separated from law and justice he is worst of all...Without virtue he is most unholy and savage, and worst in regard to sex and eating." (Politics 1253a31)